

EXPLORING THE OPTIMAL STATE IN WILL ENO'S *MIDDLETOWN*

LUCAS CARRAVETTA

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Abstract

This document is an investigation of my artistic challenge while performing in Will Eno's *Middletown*. Through textual research and physical exploration in the studio, I have become aware of my habitual patterns which restrict access to my optimal state of performance. This state, or flow, feels effortless and encourages my commitment to the work with minimal awareness of self-conscious reactions. Thus my artistic challenge will be explored through research, studio rehearsal and performances of six characters in *Middletown*, which include: *Prologue, Male Tourist, Ground Control, Man, Male Doctor* and *Janitor*.

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Inner Critic and My Optimal State

Through abundant performance opportunities at York University in the 2017-2018 semesters, I became confronted with the presence of my inner-critic. This inner-critic would hinder my acting by shouting statements such as, “everyone thinks this is bad,” “you’re not good enough,” and “stop what you’re doing before you embarrass yourself.” These phrases would become more prevalent in scenes where costume, mask and/or body and voice features were minimized, or at times where I was unable to hide my authentic emotions behind fake or exaggerated ones. I struggled in scenes where I had to “play myself” or be someone with similar qualities, i.e. 20’s, white, male, North American, in a contemporary setting. In general, I feel a need to avoid this “neutral” circumstance for fear of being judged, labelled, and or isolated from my colleagues. Since I began self-observing more intently in my summer research, I have noticed certain habitual patterns when faced with this inner-critic, such as holding my breath, avoiding eye contact and over-using hand gestures to inform dialogue. I have labelled this my “restrictive state”. In this mode, my mind races and nervous energy increases to a point where I check-out of the scene, forget dialogue, judge my chosen intentions and indicate emotion. This “restrictive state” became apparent to me since I have been involved with performance in a calculative environment. My definition of a “calculative” acting environment includes any situation where hierarchy is present (i.e. teachers, casting directors, employers etc.) and any quantifying results are given to the actor (i.e. grades, employment offerings, etc.). Prior to performing in these environments, I would typically consider any performance opportunity as an expression designed to entertain a viewer. I wouldn’t feel judged, criticized or obsolete, but rather inclined and welcomed to “wow” an audience. This was translated to me in the form of laughter, applause or tears from my audience. This state of acting, which I call “free” acting,

resides on the opposite side of the spectrum of what I deemed “restrictive play”, and occurs predominantly in times where I perform broad, comedic scenes with abundant costume, caricatures, masks, voices and outlandish physical features. These performances included moments where I could woo an entire crowd and receive an abundance of validation, without any risk of loss or failure. In these environments I felt the absence of an inner-critic voice, and even sometimes heard an encouraging or positive inner voice presenting phrases such as: “this is great”, “keep going”, and “everyone loves you.” The only goal in my mind was to seek a physical response or emotion from the viewer (i.e. laughter, tears etc.).

During an interactive presentation at the 2018 Association for Theatre in Higher Education Conference, led by university professors Beliza Torres Narvaez and Jerome Yorke, a group of participants including myself were instructed to “creatively protest” a controversial world issue. After being divided into a group and choosing “child slavery” as our issue, we all began brainstorming the subject. I noticed how polite we all became, with each of us offering an intelligent or thought-provoking opinion about child slavery before actually practicalizing a “creative protest” for the task. Instructor Narvaez noticed our “calculative” approach to the task and insisted that the most important tool in creating our piece was the emotion we felt towards our intention. I was captivated by the flow of creativity our group experienced when told that our performance need not be correct, but simply passionate.

This is my optimal state, where I am uninvested in my inner-critic, feel as though I have permission to commit to the circumstances of the scene, and have access to my entire body. I plan to explore this state and craft an accessible set of tools for the upcoming studio performance of *Middletown* and hope to discover supporting textual and practical resources in the process.

Approaching the Optimal State

I must ask the question: how will I engrain this process into my body so it can be accessed more efficiently in uncontrolled environments, i.e. short rehearsal time, limited space, non-private workspaces, and with minimal judgement? Daniel Kahneman, a psychologist and author of *Thinking Fast and Slow*, studies human intuition and labels two “systems” of solving problems. System One being our immediate or intuitive responses (i.e. the fast), perhaps even those inherited biologically; and the second being our calculative analysis using functions we develop or learn over time (i.e. the slow) (Kahneman 21). System Two is more thorough and comprehensive, yet it requires a higher level of mental activity and attention, thus leaving more room for judgment and criticizing thoughts. This spawned the question: should I develop a technique to access my optimal performing environment on a level that is more “System 1”?

Kahneman discusses how these systems work in correlation with each other and can be married in regard to completing tasks. In fact, Kahneman argues that one should not fight against one system or simply adopt another, but one should become aware of the attention that they give to each system and share it equally for an optimal experience; instead of just feeling a “burden” from the brain activity associated with completing a difficult task (20). For example, as I eventually attempted in my rehearsal, I became more competent at recognizing my inner-critic as it appears during a performance, which operates under the modes of “System 1”, i.e. my “fast thinking”. Now I can try building an automatic “System 2” function to solve the problem which immediately begins following my “System 1” recognition. By focusing intently on another target and minimizing my emotional reaction to an inner-critic comment, I can remove my ego from the work and find a suitable solution to continue in the optimal experience.

My inner-critic and his negative comments can be compared to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's terminology, which describes blockages of our positive flow in a term called "psychic entropy". This term refers to an event in our consciousness that distracts us from carrying out existing intentions. According to Csikszentmihalyi we may experience this disorder in a variety of ways through pain, rage, anxiety or jealousy; and each time it will divert us to undesirable objects, leaving us unable to use our "conscious attention according to our preference" (36). I could immediately relate this to my "restrictive state," which at times feels like an unstoppable whirlwind. During calculative acting environments such as auditions or classroom presentations, where my inner-critic was present, my attention would focus on objects that screamed "awkward" or "incorrect" and thus hindered my original intention. In addition, the absence of laughter or physical validation from a viewer would worsen the effects and continue to divert my attention away from the preferred area of focus. As Csikszentmihalyi discusses "conscious attention", or simply anything that consciously activates our physical senses, I became curious to know if I have the ability to choose where to divert this information. According to Csikszentmihalyi, as the able-mind receives new information from the immediate present, we *can* direct this information and select whether or not it encourages our current wants or desires. While in this "optimal state" we are encouraged with metaphysical sensations such as "you are doing alright" (39).

Timothy Gallwey, author of *The Inner Game of Tennis*, also discusses the existence of an optimal state in sports such as tennis, which he describes as "playing out of your mind" (7). In this case he explains the following:

The athlete is not aware of giving himself a lot of instructions, thinking about how to hit the ball, how to correct past mistakes or how to repeat what he just did. He is conscious, but not thinking, not over-trying. A player in this state knows where he wants the ball to

go, but he doesn't have to try hard to send it there. It just seems to happen—and often with more accuracy than he could have hoped for. (Gallwey 7)

Gallwey also mentions the importance of developing “nonjudgmental awareness” when learning a new skill, which can be a more “natural process of learning and performing” (31).

This generated the question: how do I access this “free play” or “optimal experience”, especially through rehearsal and warm-up techniques? In order to try to answer this question, I created a series of studio-based investigations to work in the familiar “calculative” acting environments where I may receive negative information or simply subjective reactions from a viewer. These investigations are described in the following section. My journey continued by asking myself: can I “divert” incoming information from my “conscious attention” into a more positive area where I have permission to access my entire body, while focusing on a desired intention? My first step in addressing this question was to rehearse a simple line of dialogue and basic sequence of blocking in a neutral environment without judgement or self-criticism. I did this in an empty studio using a line with minimal risk, “now and again, I still think about sandwiches.” I repeated this line using a different approach each time, by changing my circumstances such as relationship (i.e. Who am I speaking to and what is my relationship to them?), my intention (i.e. What do I want from them?), my tactic (i.e. How will I get what I want?) and the physical environment (i.e. Where am I? Where am I coming from?) Then, after each delivery, I would subjectively establish that it was “correct” and then do it again with entirely new circumstances. The results were encouraging and offered to be a good experiment. Establishing that each choice was the “correct” version, I created a supporting and non-judgmental environment to explore and commit to the circumstances with less mental effort of trying to “get it right.” Eventually I was encouraged to increase the level of risk by replacing the

neutral line of a dialogue with a fully scripted scene. At times however, I found my performance too “rooted” and “safe”. Therefore, I established a unique warm-up to encourage more play and risk-taking. I did this by running around the room, crawling across the floor and screaming in short bursts. This was done to increase my heart rate, breath and blood flow, which offered more physical information and invited unique breathing patterns associated with different emotions. Not only did this open more doors of new circumstances, but also reinforced the conclusion that each choice was “compelling”. In fact, after several repetitions of this exercise, each choice became “perfect” or “the best one ever,” because I fully committed to them with minimal judgement. I was surprised at how quickly I was able to become comfortable doing this exercise. I imagined it taking me much longer to establish a relationship with the ground, my breath and actually feel like I was accomplishing something with my words, in regard to my intention. I attribute this to a decision made before stepping into the rehearsal room; that I was already proud of myself for entering the space and no matter what happens in the room, I’ve already accomplished my goal. I also believe that being alone offered quicker access to this comfortability, which may not always be the case but a useful observation nonetheless as it could be something to consider before entering the rehearsal room. More specifically, I believe that I require a warm-up that is non-judgemental, affirming, reinforcing and non-critical before encountering any colleagues.

Another version of this investigation involved looping pre-recorded affirmations from a speaker, while I performed the neutral line of dialogue. According to sociologist Kathryn J Lively, affirmations can be used as a psychological technique to “reprogram the subconscious mind.” She describes affirmations as “simple statements that are designed to create self-change in the individual using them” and “has the potential to promote positive and

sustained self-change” (Lively). Further, psychologist David K. Sherman discusses the effect of using self-affirmation in an article entitled *The Psychology of Self-Defense: Self-Affirmation Theory*. Here he says, “when self-affirmed, individuals feel as though the task of proving their worth, both to themselves and to others, is ‘settled’” and as a result “they can focus on other salient demands in the situation beyond ego protection” (Sherman and Cohen 11).

Therefore, I chose a series of affirmations which included phrases such as: “you are confident,” “you are humble,” “you are forgiving,” “you are daring,” and “you are tolerant.” With these phrases looping in the background, I could “tune-in” when I felt like my own affirmations were not satisfying enough and apply the pre-recorded phrases to my work. The results certainly directed my energies away from protecting my ego and offered more permission to explore without judgment. However, I noted that during these investigations I had a recurring habit to step forward or shake my arms after each delivery. Perhaps this was a coping mechanism, or a physical judgement of my previous delivery, i.e. I was attempting to “shake off” what I thought was an inadequate attempt and then put it “behind” me. Even with my pre-established rules of a “no judgement zone”, my body was still reacting to an inner-critic. An interesting solution was to take a step backward instead, smile, and then inhale and exhale after each delivery. I found that introducing this opposite gesture counteracted my inner-critic and re-established a non-judgmental playing space.

The Three Investigations

Next, I invited a colleague into the room and continued the previous investigations to deliver my dramatic scene with new circumstances. However I told the colleague to reiterate that each of my deliveries was “correct” or “perfect” out loud, thus having no need to rely on myself

or a pre-recorded loop. I really tried to invest into their response and *enjoy* their positive critique, even though it was premeditated. I found that hearing it said aloud by an individual, made a substantial difference in how uniquely I approached the next delivery. Eventually, I found myself entering a flow. Each delivery that was followed by a positive response from my colleague fueled my next one to be even better. It was fun. I worked hard to surprise them, hoping that an overacted or sarcastic take would make them say something else, but the re-affirmation of their positive critique gave me permission to do it even bigger and as a result I eventually settled into what felt like authentic deliveries. They felt authentic because I could try anything without fear or judgement, no matter what degree of risk they contained. I felt like I had full permission to offer a real version of myself, under no restrictions or directorial notes of course, but nonetheless a space of free play.

My next investigation would be the same exercise, however this time I asked the observer to offer their true criticism of my performance. These consisted of notes such as “not bad, but you were completely unaware of your surroundings,” or “I didn’t feel like you really meant that,” and other familiar critiques that I’ve heard in the “calculative” acting environment such as a classroom or audition. After completing this, I felt frustrated that I wasn’t satisfying or entertaining the viewer. However, I built a tolerance to this by re-stating my own affirmations, but slightly altered. After each delivery and proceeding “note” from the colleague, I would simply add it to my pre-established affirmation using the formula, “correct and [note].” Although this was a satisfying solution in the short-term, I still felt hints of frustration after each delivery when the notes were given. Especially having them given consecutively and none offering the satisfying response I sought, such as “I loved it” or “that was amazing!” This cycle created a sensation that I would differ from my previous inner-critic. This was a sensation which created

distance and forced me to “check-out” from the work. Thus, in these series of investigations with my colleague present, I noticed a decrease in my volume and energy after each take. While it still felt authentic, I became less and less aware of my body and the space around me. Here, I realized that I contain another habitual pattern which diverts my conscious information to a useless place and contains similar negative internal phrases such as “this is stupid,” “don’t listen to them,” or “forget what they’re saying, it doesn’t apply to you.” Realizing this was not a constructive state to reside in while working, I began to develop a practice to avoid it, which was similar to my previous solution. I would run around the room, do physical exercises to increase my heart rate and change distance between myself and the viewer. This offered a wider awareness of my surroundings and a stronger connection to my physical senses (i.e. blood, breath, gravity, taste, touch, smell, sight and sound). These senses reference the most insightful areas of my body which offer profound information that I can work to access while performing. Gaining stronger awareness of these senses has become an important step in my practice to avoid habitual patterns such as shaking my arms or attempting to step forward, which seems to encourage unwanted awareness and thus a more repetitive inner-critic.

For my next investigation, I became curious about the idea of inviting a stranger into the room, or an individual with no prior knowledge of my experiment and rehearsal process, and continuing the same exercise. After asking them to offer true criticism of my performance, I would attempt to cycle through my usual affirmation routine by adding “correct, and [note]” after each delivery. I surprisingly enjoyed this investigation, especially after my previous trials where the audience consisted of just myself or a colleague and both offered neutral reactions to my deliveries. However, while performing for a non-familiar viewer, I found myself less judgmental of the work and more engaged in their presence. I felt eager to coax them as I did to

my colleague in the second investigation. I also welcomed their notes after each delivery as they became less of a “critique” and more of an “idea.” It felt like we were both working to creatively improve a separate entity; something that required my skill set *and* their guidance. This dynamic began to create a welcoming and encouraging environment that I find myself experiencing when I am in the “optimal state” which usually contained extreme costumes, gestures and voices as previously mentioned. However, I have yet to discover useful tools to remove my ego from the work and genuinely consider someone else's opinion of my efforts. However the tools discovered here, including an immediate change of space and energy, offered a practical habit that I have begun to use in the rehearsal room.

Challenging My Investigations

Thus, I realized that my investigations must include the presence of a “director” or some sort of prior established circumstances that are subjected to the notes and personal opinion of a “critical” entity. However I believe this may be too early to investigate, as I have many preconceived external reactions to “calculative” environments involving directors or teachers. I have decided to continue this work in more useful settings, such as our fall semester classes and the rehearsals for *Middletown*. Another upcoming challenge is to remove any habitual gestures entirely and focus strictly on authentic reactions. This would allow me to listen more intently to my present body and gain access to the plethora of information that is available during heightened emotional states, such as the curriculum explored in Erika Batdorf's THEA 5031 Movement Course.

Another source of information regarding the integration of new practices with minimal effort comes from the research of Charles Duhigg in *The Power of Habit*. He explains how there

is a decrease in mental activity as we effectively create new habits (15). According to the example in Duhigg's chapter on *The Habit Loop*, at first, when learning new or unfamiliar skills, the body will "externalize" the efforts required to complete the task, which he illustrates with the intense sniffing and scratching of a rat who searches for chocolate in a maze. However, after repeating the maze over and over again, the rat is able to locate the chocolate faster than before; with less brain activity and less external motions such as sniffing and scratching. This part of our brain, which is responsible for storing habits, is called the "basal ganglia" and remains central in recalling patterns, even when the rest of our brain is less active (Duhigg 15). I believe that repetition and practice will serve my plan to enter the "optimal state" more readily and with less effort.

While I continue to explore these challenging theories, I revisited my three different investigations in regard to my solo-show. Here, I displayed an array of my personal talents and areas of my "optimal state," where I had full permission to entertain and seek validation from the audience without judgement of my "authentic self," such as dancing to music and performing improvisational banter with the audience. Then, I entered the provocative "restrictive state," where I recited a dramatic scene with a basic set of circumstances, but attempted to focus intently on the redirection of my "conscious attention" *away* from the inner-critic and *towards* a chosen intention. My goal was to grasp all "conscious attention," including any awkward, provocative and self-criticizing moments, and allow myself to sit in the "restrictive state" while feeling any sensations emitting from my body (i.e. blood, breath, gravity and spine). A paramount observation during my solo-show included a heavy awareness of my pelvis and feet. Focusing my "conscious attention" on these provocative areas allowed me to feel more accessible sensations which would feed the next take of my dramatic scene.

Another interesting discovery occurred during an interactive presentation at the 2018 conference for the Association of Theatre in Higher Education, by a university professor and improviser, Matt Fotis, who led an exercise to demonstrate how we can add authenticity and creativity to a self-conscious performance. The exercise involved two participants where Participant A was instructed to improvise a fictional story for Participant B. However, when Participant B felt that Participant A's story was becoming stagnant, uninteresting or disconnected from any real emotion, they were allocated to throw a "curveball" at Participant A. This idea encouraged further exploration in my rehearsal process and so I began to incorporate "curveballs" into my practice in order to encourage a more "authentic" performance. Examples of these "curveballs" involved the invitation of more colleagues into my rehearsal space and allowing them to offer a series of critiques after each performance sequence. I encouraged a mix of positive and demoralizing critiques that would clearly activate my inner-critic, then challenged myself to sit in the "restrictive state" that would be activated immediately upon receipt of such "calculative" statements. This certainly triggered my usual habits and allowed me to apply the cycle of *affirmation and solution*, which I practiced in the earlier investigations.

Thus I noticed the pattern of my investigations. There was a clear process which moved consecutively from working alone, to inviting a colleague who would offer interactions, then inviting an "unfamiliar" individual to offer "calculative" responses. Once again, I believe a final step to this process would involve a director or perhaps the "calculative operator" who is responsible for creating the familiar environment where I originally began feeling the presence of an inner-critic, and then consecutively step through my process as outlined above. However, the most important item of discovery during my studio work, is the presence of positive affirmations from either myself or a viewing individual.

Will Eno and Small Town America

“It’s a play about a small town [...] to metaphorically represent the world” (Eno 2015). This quote by Will Eno motivated me to consider whether or not his own upbringing impacted his vision of *Middletown*’s setting. I believe it will be useful to compile a brief background of Eno’s upbringing and explore the influence it may have on the circumstances of the play. The information gathered can offer mental images, physical shapes or specific ideologies to consider as I begin rehearsals.

Will Eno was born in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1965, but moved to the small town of Carlisle, just outside Lowell, when his father and mother had purchased a three hundred year old house (Lowell Sun 2014). At the time of Eno’s birth, Carlisle was populated by just 1,488 residents, mainly due to the construction of a new road which nearly doubled its inhabitants from 876. In 2010, Carlisle reached a population of 4,852, maintaining a small town identification even after fifty years (U.S. Census). It is possible to consider that Eno’s exposure to Carlisle during his childhood and teen years may have affected his interpretation of a small American town. However, while researching the urban layout of Carlisle in relationship to the locations listed in *Middletown*, such as a “Town Square,” “Hospital”, and “Library,” it seems that few of these locations actually reside in Carlisle, but rather are located outside of the city in different towns. Residents are required to travel five miles east to Bedford, M.A. in order to visit a hospital, for example. Therefore, Carlisle itself may be better suited for settings that involve residential homes and community centres, rather than settings with a public area (i.e. Town Square) or service centre (i.e. Hospital) (Google Maps 2018). The dispersed model of Carlisle therefore presents a unique layout to consider when reviewing the environment of *Middletown*, as residents may interact less often or solely while at work or while using the public services.

This could validate the consistent appearance of conversational dialogue throughout *Middletown* and allow my characters to utilize the stereotypical pleasantries of small town behaviour such as familial interactions, a sense of communal aid and expectations of hospitable banter. Within these interactions, I will be able to explore conflicting subtext and push the scene towards an active energy, rather than sit in the restraint of mundane dialogue.

Troubles of a Big City

Eno attended the University of Massachusetts Amherst for three years, but dropped out and moved to New York City, U.S.A. where he began his playwriting career (Wallenberg 2013). This drastic shift to a city with a population of over seven million since 1970 (U.S. Census) may have impacted his views of the world and influenced the eventual premiere of *Middletown*, which opened at the Vineyard theatre in New York City on November 3, 2010. The economic status of New York City prior to 2010, was volatile due to the financial crisis between 2007-2008. According to an article from *Time*, unemployment in New York City increased from 4.4% to 10.3%, which forced the application of an eleven million dollar "national emergency grant" to help laid-off employees transition into new jobs (Fitzpatrick 2010). Homelessness and depression increased drastically as well. According to a survey from the Coalition of the Homeless Advocacy Department, municipal shelter population in New York City increased from 30,000 to 63,000 since 2008; thousands of which sleep on the streets, in the subway system and other public spaces. According to a report by Mental Health America, 3.71% of New York City residents reported having serious thoughts of suicide and over sixty percent of the population who reported having a mental illness are living untreated (2017).

While the economic shifts in 2008 affected all major urban areas in America, especially those with larger population and employment opportunities, the reflection of unemployment would be more apparent and visually evident in New York City because of its architectural landscape consisting of a municipal homeless system and a twenty-four hour underground transit system, where heated trams provide unauthorized lodging. This layout is contrary to Eno's original residence of Carlisle due to its scarce population and dispersed layout. The influence of Eno's surroundings in New York City prior to 2010 is not visually represented in the play *Middletown*. This provides an interesting observation to consider as there may be lower expectations of suicide and homelessness among his characters, which could provide higher conflicting potential among those who do experience these misfortunes. Eno implemented these elements into his characters: *John Dodge* who attempts to kill himself, and *Mechanic* who lingers in the streets. Thus I believe it's important to consider the possibility of a common mentality towards those who experience thoughts related to suicide or who are homeless, especially as they exist in the play.

The Characters

“[Middletown] is populated with archetypal figures [...] 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” (Wallenberg 2013).

A challenge to perform as these characters written by Eno, is their lack of specificity and historical context. With such minimal historical context, I plan to create an extensive character background which will support the scene and offer an accessible and engaging acting environment. As explored in my artistic challenge, I'm interested in creating contrast in a scene,

exploring public and private moments of characters, and investigating moments of vulnerability, conflict and flow. Therefore, in order to identify with my character and create this active playing space during rehearsal, I will analyze the text of my scenes and use inner monologues as a tool to reference more dynamic and colorful backgrounds. Researching the trade or job of certain characters has also offered a better understanding of their background, as many of them perform specific jobs or activities on stage. However, while they reside within Eno's small American town, they lack any unique cultural or personal details apart from what I will create in rehearsal or within my inner monologues (i.e. family history, cultural background etc.); there are many interesting elements to their given circumstances which can be referenced during rehearsals.

In Act Two Scene Three, *Male Doctor* consults a woman in her upcoming birth and provides her with expectations of motherhood. There are two types of specialists who manage childbirth and female reproductive health in North America; an obstetrician and a gynecologist. Obstetrics deals specifically with pregnancy and birth, while gynecology involves care of the female reproductive system outside of pregnancy. Obstetricians guide their patients through the entire pregnancy (Stickler 2015). These doctors, OB-GYN's, are viewed as being the primary care physicians for women and engage in a wide variety of surgical procedures, according to a report by The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (Rayburn 2017). Thus, I am considering the intense workload an OB-GYN doctor undergoes; as well as the amount of educational background necessary to complete an array of tasks, while attending to the patient's medical needs. In the scene, there is a sense of confusion or distraction from *Male Doctor*, as he seems preoccupied while interacting with his current patient:

MALE DOCTOR. There's a problem — no, sorry, there's no problem. That's "Swenson." You're Swanson. Sorry. (52)

[...]

MALE DOCTOR. Now, I'm sorry, please, excuse me. I really have to return to this phone call. (56)

The same A.C.O.G. report confirms this behaviour as it illustrates the heavy workload of an OB-GYN and the stresses ensued from multitasking an overwhelming amount of information. This has led to degrees of physical and emotional exhaustion or lack of motivation for OB-GYN's to continue their practice in a proactive manner (Rayburn 2017). This information justifies the dismissive behaviour of *Male Doctor* in order to accommodate his heavy workload. The consultation process for mothers undergoing childbirth may include the compilation of a birth plan involving subjects such as: "pain relief during labor, delivery positions, assisted delivery preferences, timeline for holding the baby, and having the partner cut the umbilical cord" (Stickler 2015). These points are not mentioned in the scene, however *Male Doctor* does discuss the option of having a partner present; perhaps for the above mentioned birth plan of cutting the umbilical cord. This setting offers an active environment to consider while consulting *Mrs. Swanson* in her birth. Specifically loud noise coming from outside, or the overall presence of a busy hospital environment.

I have noted that *Male Doctor* is passionate in his work, well educated in his trade and has good intentions for his patients. He maintains high expectations for his reputation in the community and takes pride in his career. He carries a special responsibility to communicate large amounts of knowledge in a small period of time. Thus, he sees many patients in one day and uses selective hearing to function effectively in his fast-paced yet compassionate work environment. This is a mechanism used to cope with his habits as a multi-tasking doctor. He uses intellect and charisma to develop a personable relationship with his patients in a short period of time. He has

worked very hard on this routine, in order to successfully mix knowledge with compassion and maintain his high standard of patient care. This ability to balance a high volume of patients in a busy day, while also considering their questions and concerns, is reflected in the fast-pace dialogue and consistent changes of thought or action throughout the scene. Similarly, it is also noted in the scene description: “Male Doctor, though entirely compassionate, is also very busy, and he speaks quickly. He is periodically writing, filling out forms, and referring to notes throughout this scene” (52). Rather than merely sitting down and speaking to *Mrs. Swanson*, I believe *Male Doctor* should be active and mobile, especially while communicating a barrage of intellectual thoughts. I believe using the space and changing distance between *Mrs. Swanson* will help create specificity within each thought and satisfy his multi-tasking habits. His quick dismissiveness at the end of the scene is also another useful clue to the multi-tasking pattern of his thinking. This is specifically present in his pattern to transition from something personal (i.e. the details of *Mrs. Swanson*’s birth) to his inability to recognize the difference between *Swenson* and *Swanson*.

Male Doctor maintains strong authority throughout the scene. I will access this authority by utilizing the passion of his intellect and then connecting his dialogue about the process of childbirth, to my own extensive knowledge of a subject that I am intellectually comfortable to explicate. I can immediately access my own personal experiences of explaining complicated information to a keen listener. The process of gaining the listener’s approval invigorates my sense of worth and further validates my energy to maintain authority. The given circumstances of the text itself ensures that *Mrs. Swanson* is an active listener and eager to discover as much knowledge as possible from *Male Doctor*. This alone will activate an accessible playing environment in order for me to explore *Male Doctor*’s authority in the scene. It’s a place where I

become comfortable with my surroundings, compassionate towards my scene partner and confident with the dialogue. *Male Doctor's* compassion for *Mrs. Swanson* is informed by her innocent behaviour in the scene and her need for *Male Doctor's* assurance and protection. This assurance is an important tool for *Male Doctor* to utilize at his will, which can also fuel his authority.

I believe *Male Doctor* carries many vulnerabilities about his personal life which are referenced in the questions asked by *Mrs. Swanson*:

MRS. SWANSON. I'm glad. (*brief pause*) What about yours?

MALE DOCTOR. What, my own birth? Oh. I don't know. I'm sure it was fine.

MRS. SWANSON. Were you close to your mother?

MALE DOCTOR. I don't know, yeah, you know—just regular mother and son. She's still with us. Great lady. (*very brief pause*) (55)

These personal questions seem to throw him off-course from his well-rehearsed lecture and access a vulnerable moment in his life. They are followed by short, unspecific answers which seem to break his thought process. In this public environment, *Male Doctor* enters an emotionally private moment. He is self-conscious and protective of his own family and his relationships outside of work. Specifically the relationship with his mother, which is very important to consider as he refrains from adding detail to *Mrs. Swanson's* question. I believe this to be a deeply rooted and influential relationship. A relationship that has planted a seed for him to become the best obstetrician and completely delve into his work in order to prove something to himself and satisfy a void relating to his mother. Entering rehearsal with a strong image of *Male Doctor's* childhood will encourage my objectives to be very specific and justify the interchanging dialogue pattern. In order to exploit this moment in an accessible process, I have

written an inner monologue to reference a specific backstory about the relationship with his mother (see Appendix A).

In Act One Scene Seven, my role of *Ground Control* communicates with *Greg*, an astronaut, during a space mission. According to the following dialogue, *Greg* receives operating instructions from a control centre in Houston:

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

GREG. This is C-9. Copy. (32)

According to The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Ground Control refers to their Mission Control Centre in Houston which “has served as the home of Mission Control and the nation’s human spaceflight program for more than 40 years” (2010). The Mission Control Center is the hub of control that oversees the aspects of every U.S. human space flight. Workers spend abundant time training, planning, and organizing flight missions, especially since projects can run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (NASA 2010). The ground team specifically gathers data from the spacecraft and launch facilities, and the flight control team then analyzes that data to make decisions on how best to proceed (NASA 2010). William Foster, a current ground controller for NASA explains his working patterns in the Mission Control Centre:

As a team, we generate procedures, which are rules and conditions for response. We have generic procedures that are in place for every launch and mission-specific procedures that are tailored for a very specific situation. Every flight brings new situations, and sometimes we find we need to modify procedures that are already in place. It's always changing. (Foster 2009)

However, according to NASA, a Spacecraft Communicator or Capsule Communicator (Capcom) is the communication link between flight control and astronauts in orbit (2010). The Canadian Space Agency also defines Capcom as the chief role between Mission Control Centre and the astronaut in space, and they are typically astronauts themselves (2016). According to the Canadian Space Agency, Capcoms must deliver complex information in a clear and simple manner because of limited mission time and in the case of emergency situations where there is no room for error or interpretation. In this agency, becoming a Capcom takes three to six months of training and involves carrying out simulations in a mock control room with virtual teams representing Russia and Europe. These teams enact the worst-case scenarios that Capcoms may have to deal with and become familiar with the operations of real mission control centres around the world (2016). This generates an active workspace for my character and a high-stakes environment to consider while communicating with *Greg* during the flight mission. Training curriculums for ground controllers consider all possible scenarios and its operators must be attentive to any changes while operating a flight mission. NASA ground controller William Foster explains:

In order to be prepared to help astronauts in any situation that could arise, MCC workers go through simulations with the astronauts and the training team. During the simulations, where workers practice responses, an unexpected event might be thrown in to surprise everyone. This anomaly, called a simfault, requires fast thinking and logical responses. A simfault could be a malfunctioning piece of equipment or it could be a major disaster situation. The way the workers respond shows us how we need to prepare in case the real thing should ever happen. (2009)

While members of Mission Control are responsible for operating the flight mission and monitoring the astronauts safety, there are thousands of people all around the country supporting the astronauts. According to Foster, "Mission Control is the visible part, but it's less than one

percent of the support team. We're just the tip of the iceberg” (2009). This adds a layer of significance to my character’s purpose. Using this high-stake environment, I am considering the abundance of training and accountability held by *Ground Control*, and his relationship status with *Greg*. The responsibility to maintain the safety of *Greg* and the importance to communicate the correct operating instructions without errors or simfaults, influences my tactics to console or ease him without judgement or criticism during *Greg*’s existential dialogue:

GREG. [...] 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. (32)

[...]

GREG. [...] I’m thinking about people. I can’t tell you what this is like. Over.

GROUND CONTROL. Copy.

GREG. Maybe everybody knows what this is like.

GROUND CONTROL. Maybe they do. Wunderbar, Greg. Looking good. We have no abnormalities. Over.

GREG. Roger. Oxygen is good.

GROUND CONTROL. It sure is. All right, partner. Come home soon. (34)

As stated by Eno in the scene description, Ground Control is mainly “pre-occupied with computer figures and flight adjustments and not really interested in poetry or philosophy” (32). However, by allowing the conversation to appear normal or by simply supporting *Greg*’s observations, I am purposefully implementing my training to maintain a consistent status with the astronaut in order to complete the mission task. The absence of my character’s personal opinions on such topics mentioned by *Greg* signifies an important duty to the work, and also possibly a disconnect from *Greg*, to avoid any risk of increased tension. *Ground Control*’s inability to comprehend the astronaut’s view of Earth may jeopardize the mission and so Eno’s

intention to keep *Ground Control*'s opinions neutral, yet supportive, signifies the high-stake environment and will require a strong awareness to my character's training background.

Ground Control is struggling to maintain control of this high-stakes environment through an inconsistent communication pattern with *Greg*. According to the text, *Ground Control* is articulate with instructions but casual in his delivery in order to communicate effectively with *Greg*. This is important to keep the astronaut sane, present and calm. *Ground Control* uses the word "partner" to refer to *Greg*, which establishes a very specific relationship to consider while approaching the rehearsal between these characters. This relationship involves a strong friendship and professional work dynamic. They have shared many friendly experiences outside of work and are well aware of each other's goals and passions in life. Eno keeps *Ground Control*'s dialogue short and concise, which allows him to provide comfort for *Greg* but also keep the mission on track. *Ground Control* must be very aware of *Greg*'s tone, especially when he ventures off into mystical talk, and how much that talk will activate *Ground Control*'s training and expertise to keep *Greg* focused, sane and functional. This will also increase the dramatic shift in the scene and create an active and useful playing environment. I can access this optimal dynamic, by referring to my own personal experience of performing a high-stakes job with a close-friend. I have written an inner monologue to reference specific images while rehearsing this scene (see Appendix B). This background information will provide more contrast to encourage *Ground Control*'s responsibility to maintain duty and keep casual rapport with *Greg* at the same time.

In the text, *Ground Control* experiences an extreme moment of conflict when there is a miscommunication between him and *Greg*:

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

GREG. 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. (32)

This creates conflict for *Ground Control* who must perform his job according to a high standard and focus, while losing communication with his astronaut. This being the most important task under his title, I am interested in approaching this idea by creating an extremely contrasted expectation for *Ground Control* prior to the scene, to heighten these moments of miscommunication. Adding more accountability for my character will increase the stakes and offer more playing space during rehearsal. I have added details within the inner monologue of *Ground Control* to better access the inner-life of my character and create clearer images to reference while managing this conflict (see Appendix B).

Other moments of miscommunication or panic ensue when the characters hear an indistinct sound:

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. [...] (33)

This moment is very useful to note while preparing my approach to *Ground Control*. The presence of an *eerie* sound informs the need to establish exactly how much this will affect my expectations and tactics to solve the conflict. Also, it is important to decide whether *Ground Control's* uncertainty of hearing the sound comes from his communication tools or perhaps his own mind. Creating the inner monologue will allow me to answer this question and gain access to a larger playing space while rehearsing. As referenced in the text, *Ground Control* seems to disregard the sound. However I believe this presents an interesting opportunity to explore how

that sound makes *Ground Control* feel in the moment and how it will affect his reaction process. I will do this by utilizing the inner monologue created for *Ground Control*. Creating an availability to these inner monologues prior to rehearsal will escalate the dramatic structure of the scene and allow me to have more imaginative options of play and a clearer sense of the environment.

My role of *Male Tourist* in Act One Scene Four, requires past experiences of vacations as mentioned in the dialogue:

MALE TOURIST. We went to Rome last summer.

TOUR GUIDE. Oh. I bet you saw some serious monuments there.

MALE TOURIST. The whole place is history.

FEMALE TOURIST. We walked everywhere. We saw all the famous things [...].

[...]

MALE TOURIST. We went to Holland, two summers ago. Holland was a world power, a glorious empire, ruthless. (*brief pause*). We loved those “stroopwafels.” They’re, like, the local yummy snack. Ruthless empire; yummy snack. (21)

The detailed interests of this character while touring seems to add a layer of specificity to his experiences during travel. There is an eager ambition to experience all the sights, eat local food and share his specific opinions with others. Using a neurotic verbal pattern can translate his need for validation among cultured people, as he communicates with *Tour Guide* and documents an abundance of mundane details or takes an excessive number of photographs. The importance for him to experience everything and gain a plethora of cultured memories, reveals a thrifty sense of travel. The touring couple mentions this example of quantity over quality, in the excerpt:

FEMALE TOURIST. [...] If we go to the opera or something, sometimes we specially request Obstructed View seats. It somehow adds to the whole experience.

MALE TOURIST. And they’re cheaper.

FEMALE TOURIST. We love a bargain. You know the saying, “Politeness doesn’t cost you anything”? Sometimes, that’s what we’ll do for the weekend. Just go around being polite.

MALE TOURIST. We’ve saved a fortune. (22)

Maintaining a consistent fascination of every visual detail within the scene setting will be an important consideration as *Male Tourist* achieves his objective to capture every single moment while touring the monument in this scene.

Male Tourist actively pursues “perspective” as his main objective. He takes photographs of everything and utilizes the entire space. This is his optimal environment, where he fights to become educated and affected by new and exciting experiences. He is obsessed with seeing things from different views, hence his experience of booking opera seats with “obstructed views.” He proudly identifies as someone who is grateful to have an opportunity to see different things. He has attended many walking tours and thus holds *Tour Guide* to a high standard of knowledge and perspective. I believe this couple has travelled far to come to *Middletown*. They have seen all the popular tourist attractions in the world and therefore have become obsessed with discovering the unexploited sites such as *Middletown*’s central monument.

Male Tourist is energetic, active and upfront with people. His interest cannot be kept still for long. He requires stimulation and clearly gets it from his touring experiences. Thus creating a specific backstory of exciting trips completed in the past will be useful when approaching *Male Tourist*. I have created a travel blog specific to the backstory of *Male Tourist* to reference and utilize as an inner monologue to further demonstrate the importance of his visit to *Middletown* (see Appendix C). Thus, there is much at stake when they arrive at the *Middletown* monument, as he must add to his repertoire and satisfy his travel blog.

Male Tourist enters with an activated and mobile energy to interact with *Female Tourist* and *Tour Guide*. However he is faced with a contrasting reality to his expectations, due to a low energy from *Tour Guide*. This conflict allows for an opportunity to create subtext in order to heighten the stakes of the scene. According to the text, it is important that *Male Tourist* coaxes *Tour Guide* into supporting his objective of experiencing a unique perspective in *Middletown*. Especially as *Tour Guide* becomes flustered and almost gives up.

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.*)

TOUR GUIDE. Well, okay. Take the air [...]. (23)

They have to rile up *Tour Guide* to save their experience and take full advantage of this opportunity to see the different perspectives of *Middletown*. They depend on *Tour Guide* to give them a different experience than she planned. Again by referring to a specific backstory in a travel blog post, the stakes can be raised to create a strong tactic for *Male Tourist* to achieve a successful tour, as referenced.

Another interesting excerpt from the text, illustrates a moment where *Male Tourist* is extremely eager to share a personal experience:

MALE TOURIST. I used to gamble—the ponies, trotters. I kept scribbly notebooks and had big dark circles under my eyes. Lost my job, my previous wife—not a long story. But, anyway, yeah [...]. (22)

This expression of personal information creates an opportunity to explore another private moment in a public setting. I am interested by this contrast and will investigate a method to access these shared thoughts within the travel blog. The text insinuates an extreme shift in his life, which he owes to a newfound hobby with his partner. Contrary to his past miserable

situation, he is now very comfortable in this environment which gives him permission to act privately in a public space. In order to make this more interesting, I will include a specific backstory in the travel blog about how his gambling addiction was replaced by a travel addiction. By creating this backstory of *Male Tourist*, I can encourage an active playing environment and utilize his specific expectations to create a stronger relationship to *Tour Guide* in order to satisfy Eno's dialogue and increase dramatic opportunity.

Recently a character was added to my repertoire in *Middletown*. *Man* appears in Act One Scene Ten during the *Intermission* of the play and offers a new dimension for the audience to experience, as the characters chat and critique the play while sitting amongst the audience. Based on the dialogue, it is clear that *Man* is uneducated but tries hard to prove his intellect to his partner, *Woman*. It is an important time in his relationship with *Woman*, where judgement about one another's character is being formed and thus could affect the future of their relationship. They have increasing expectations of each other, especially as they attend theatre and interact with other audience members. I believe that *Woman* has high expectations for *Man* and thus he is trying hard to impress her during the intermission. It will prove whether or not he will be a suitable husband and father. He is oblivious to his lack of intelligence and uses the intermission conversation to demonstrate a likeable personality and what he believes is a notable intellect. He fails each time, but continues to offer new conversation topics; assuming he is making a positive impact on the discussion. He is not in his element and rarely attends theatre, however he is grasping at anything to join the insightful banter which occurs between the other audience members. He also fails to commit to ideas and is quickly shut down by *Woman*:

MAN. Relativity.

WOMAN. (*brief pause.*) Is that your contribution?

MAN. Yeah. Just, everything's all...I don't know—Sir Albert Einstein. (43)

It will be important to consider a strong backstory between *Man* and *Woman* for this scene and to create intimate details of their relationship. As a result, I have created an inner monologue to reference while approaching this scene during rehearsal (see Appendix D). This will include his objective to propose to his partner after the play and thus he'll have many challenging emotions to consider while interacting with the other characters. I believe *Man* had an entitled childhood. Specifically he succeeded in athletics which gave him permission to dismiss academics and thus formed low expectations for conversational skills. He was the defensive-tackle on his high school football team; bred for muscle and intimidation, rather than leadership and strategic thinking. Good reputation and popularity amongst his immediate surroundings will also be important factors to consider. Maintaining a female companion would also rank high in his priorities as it may affect his reputation otherwise. I will build a strong self-confidence for *Man*, which is clearly demonstrated in his relentless behaviour to be heard during intermission. Wearing loud clothing and expensive jewellery for example, will encourage unique physical choices which can influence a specific internal opinion about the world. Thus I will dedicate rehearsal time to explore externally and journal observations of how it will influence the dynamic of the scene and encourage specific views about the world as a high status character.

In Act Two Scene Fourteen, the role of *Janitor* briefly encounters *Mrs. Swanson* with her newborn baby. Again, due to minimal dialogue and historical context, I am considering the work environment, training history, and other occupational details regarding the role of a janitor to fill his physicality and how it can affect the scene. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics,

janitors and building cleaners keep office buildings, schools, hospitals, retail stores, hotels, and other places clean, sanitary, and in good condition. Some only clean, while others have a wide range of duties. Workers also monitor the building's heating and cooling system, ensuring that it functions properly. Janitors and building cleaners use many tools and equipment. Simple cleaning tools include mops, brooms, rakes, and shovels. Other tools may include snowblowers, floor buffers, and carpet extraction equipment (U.S. Department of Labor 2018).

In regards to training and education, janitors and building cleaners do not need any formal educational credential, as many can learn on the job. However, high school courses in shop can be helpful for jobs involving repair work. More specifically, this can involve mechanical skills, building operations, minor electrical knowledge, plumbing and routine repairs such as fixing leaky faucets. Although not required, professional associations offer certifications, licenses, and registrations which can demonstrate competence and may make applicants more appealing to employers. Important qualities to consider for janitors are interpersonal skills, which are illustrated in the scene text, as *Janitor* socially interacts with *Mrs. Swanson*. The Janitors and Building Cleaners section within the Bureau of Labor Statistics mentions that:

Janitors and building cleaners should get along well with their supervisors, other cleaners, and the people who live or work in the buildings they clean. Time-management skills. Janitors and building cleaners should be able to plan and complete tasks in a timely manner. (2018)

This complements the dialogue and actions in Scene Fourteen, as *Janitor* exchanges minimal but pleasant words with *Mrs. Swanson*, and then returns back to work in a timely manner. Other factors to consider for the role of a janitor or building cleaner include the physical stamina and strength required; as they spend most of their workday on their feet, operating cleaning equipment and lifting and moving supplies or tools. As a result, the work may be

strenuous on the back, arms, and legs, which should reinforce the importance of my character's physical stamina. According to the U.S. Department of Labor:

Janitors and building cleaners have a higher rate of injuries and illnesses than the national average. Workers sometime suffer minor cuts, bruises, and burns from machines, tools, and chemicals. As a result, workers are increasingly required to take safety training and ergonomics instruction. (2018)

Therefore, health, physical fitness and safe work practices must be highly considered when portraying *Janitor* and can be represented by offering my awareness to physical stretches or ergonomics practiced by janitors. This can also be achieved by referring to job safety resources such as the Workplace Safety Insurance Board, to gain awareness of the rights and privileges of a labour employee; or the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, to understand my responsibilities as a labour employee who may interact with chemicals or hazardous materials in a hospital.

Based on my interest of exploring the public and private lives of my characters, I am eager to explore how *Janitor* feels about *Mrs. Swanson* and the details behind his reaction to begin a conversation while performing janitorial tasks and his motivation to leave shortly after. An inner monologue can provide specific details to this reaction, which will provide insight to the dynamic shift and also raise the stakes of his responsibility to interact professionally while managing his own feelings towards *Mrs. Swanson* (see Appendix E). This will help justify the short appearance of *Janitor* and create room for an active relationship between him and *Mrs. Swanson* as he moves from a private to a public environment and can also create more dramatic opportunities.

Gaining access to these backstories will compliment the exploration of my artistic challenge by giving me physical and emotional images to reference. By discovering these

specifics beforehand, I won't feel vulnerable to explore them in front of colleagues or audience members. I will feel safe and prepared to explore a wider range of emotions assisted by the director; especially knowing that I will have access to clear images that connect to my own personal experiences, which will allow for easier access to my optimal acting environment.

In the Middle

In *Middletown*, there is a recurring importance surrounding the “middle” of life's moments, which I am considering within my artistic challenge. Specifically to raise awareness of the space between my entrance and exit, and allow the scene circumstances, topography and relationships to affect my intentions while in the middle of a scene. Thus, I am aware of a sub-textual challenge surrounding the idiosyncrasies of Eno's characters. Specifically, the consistent reference of thoughts surrounding life and death, which linger in the minds of his characters. In the final scene of the play, *Janitor* is pulled out of his daily duties to note the wonder of a baby.

JANITOR. Don't mind me. (*He empties the trash.*) Wow, is that a baby? (85)

He is faced with an unexpected reminder of life's beginning, which completely shifts his expectations upon entering the room during an everyday activity. My fears of addressing life's continuous trajectory towards death, often cause my relationships with new people to be dull or protective as I continue to seek answers for my purpose in the world. Similarly, Eno elaborates on this linear pattern of life in an interview for the Boston Globe:

We spend a lot of time thinking about the end and the beginning, in kind of self-aggrandizing ways. We talk about the miracle of birth and the mystery of death. But, by definition, all of our lives take place in the middle of those two sort of unknowable events, in this great and often unexamined middle. So I think 'Middletown' tries to look at the accumulation and effect of the tiny moments that make up our lives—and how we

are constantly vulnerable to these tiny moments, which may in fact change the angle of our entire life, or not. (2013)

I am interested in exploring my ability to truthfully address the “unexamined middle,” and allow it to affect my characters’ objectives while achieving an active performance state. Doug Lockwood, Director of a 2013 production of *Middletown*, also mentions the familiar presence of this duality in the same Boston Globe article: “The challenge for actors is to speak those lines in a simple, unadorned way and to balance letting the play breathe with keeping it in forward motion. The tempo is really important. If we aren’t careful, it can slip into a kind of ponderousness that could be deadly” (2013). Although this directorial note can be interpreted in several different ways, I will allow my private rehearsals to consider upbeat tempo as a useful tool to access forward motion, in order to avoid a constant repetition of pondering thought. I believe this will serve my artistic challenge by giving my role a purposeful task. Also, while my habit includes the conscious effort to play extreme or sarcastic interpretations of the scene, I am ensuring that my character research includes specific details regarding their background, overall objective and predominant obstacles. This will maintain a flexible sense of presence to the scene and allow my character to observe and accept offers presented by their scene partners which then can affect my relationship to “life’s unknown forces.” However, as Eno mentions our vulnerability to life’s “tiny moments,” I am eager to explore the depth of life’s everyday occurrences, i.e. how far I can let the “tiny moments” affect my character. I am especially curious to discover any physical sensations this exploration may produce. Keeping these questions present during rehearsals, I must be aware of all possible offers that my characters may encounter in their environment, no matter how mundane, and also recognize the difficulty of juggling them. By offering full attention to my own wandering thoughts of existence and

detecting their origins, while engaging my scene partner(s), I can allow for a realistic but comprehensive character journey. As Doug Lockwood mentions: “The characters [in Middletown] voice awkward, difficult things that many of us think but don’t necessarily say out loud. So it strikes this uncomfortable but funny chord. In rehearsal, all the actors keep talking about how there’s no lying in this play” (Boston Globe 2013). *Middletown* certainly delves into the familiarities of daily human interaction in urban small town North American society, much more than in the extremes of classical theatre or popular contemporary dramas, where high-stake environments reach a peak and then fall, through archetypical characters and their relationships in unusual circumstances. Thus, *Middletown*’s realism can create a path leading to an honest connection with its audience, if performed with the utmost respect and curiosity of one’s everyday thoughts. Eno discusses this relationship in the Boston Globe interview: “It’s hard to be a human being. It’s complicated—and complicated in ways we’ll probably never fully be able to see. [...] I wrote this play and mean it to be a kind of testament to the difficulty of consciousness, or a picture of the complications of the simplest life” (2013). This difficulty of consciousness and the many complications which surround a simple life, inherently reflects my artistic challenge. My fear of mediocrity is especially concerning when studying these characters. This will be a useful observation to consider when applying my preparation practice to the *Middletown* rehearsals. The challenge to broaden the characters and create a 360° view of their perspectives, then playing with their context in an array of spaces and different energies, will detach my ego from these normal or everyday exchanges written by Eno, and increase my confidence to sit in the middle.

Recognizing familiar thoughts in Eno’s observations regarding vulnerability in life’s “middle” moments, I can attest to holding this burden while performing. I am constantly in need

of a resolution or goal in order to succeed within the scene, rather than allowing myself to be affected by the scene. In particular within my Fall 2018 curriculum in THEA 6030: Grad Movement 2, I have noticed several patterns of performance during the Viewpoint exercises. When entering scenes without textual context, but strictly topographical context (i.e. distance and motion between shapes), I have tended to avoid sharing truthful intentions. This lack of specificity reflects my fear of working in the middle or the time between my entrance and exit of the scene. There, I was reluctant to make choices, not knowing where they would take me, and unsure if they would provide me with a successful or validating end. Therefore, in this class, I tended to manufacture a performance which seemed “right” or created shapes which indicated my “effort”, thus hoping to bypass any criticism of my honest intentions.

Also, I believe that using each character’s task, according to their scene’s circumstance, will provide an activated goal and allow me to explore Eno’s consistent mentioning of life and death within the play. I will allocate time during *Middletown* rehearsals to explore these considerations with the director and ensure compatibility with their vision to reference the ever-changing shape of the play from beginning to end. I believe it will be important to revisit these investigations of beginning, middle and end, throughout the entire production process. Especially as I continue to explore my own fear of the middle, and as these characters explore various aspects of middle-ness, it will directly serve as an opportunity to explore my artistic challenge.

Conclusion

The only obstacle I experienced during the run was my own fear of failure. However I utilized my positive affirmations to focus on the reality of the situation: that I was working in a supportive environment. Failure was not a possibility, but rather a personal defence mechanism. I

challenged myself from the beginning to welcome this feeling and note any interesting observations in my journals (see Appendix F). Nonetheless, I felt nervous entering the first week of rehearsals. In my course work prior to *Middletown*, I was expected to interpret the playwriting of scene assignments and monologues and then present my choices to the class. This constantly triggered my inner-critic and created insecurities of what others might think of my acting choices. However working with a director allowed me to investigate devised choices, the result being a product of our efforts rather than a judgement of my offerings. Specifically in the *Prologue*, the director offered a simple scenario to assist my insecurity of introducing the play: that I was in the dressing room rehearsing my introduction of every single person on earth. In this scenario, I took the liberty to improvise an entire scene where I was mumbling to myself over and over again. I wasn't thinking about my appearance, volume or intellect; simply just conversing with myself in an empty room. The director was elated with my ability to access internal thoughts so easily in this scenario. Between the director's patience in allowing me to explore in this scenario and the validation I received thereafter, I felt as though I accessed an optimal working environment that increased my confidence to explore deeper each time. I felt like this cohesive dynamic created an optimal working environment once I became more confident with line memorization.

Specifically regarding my artistic challenge, entering the rehearsal process required less affirmation work than expected. I felt an immediate comfortability while working in the familiar studio space with my colleagues. The director also created a welcoming and inclusive environment where I was able to offer concerns or suggestions regarding my process. This comfortability played a big part in accessing an optimal working space. My plan upon entering the studio for the first rehearsal was not to overwhelm myself with the amount of roles I was

playing, or the amount of lines to be memorized. Instead, I focused my attention on creating a positive connection for my characters and finding the love in my work. This has been a key catalyst in accessing my optimal state. However it took some time to discover an approachable system according to the details of the play. Regardless, I entered rehearsal with an open mindset to explore with the director and trust that she would accommodate my challenges. However there wasn't much time allocated to work on specifics or discuss character logistics within the schedule. In fact, only 3 one-hour rehearsals were allocated for each scene. However, through my studied practice and an inclusive work space, I was able to find unique pathways to approach an optimal working environment for each character.

In the first rehearsal for *Act Two, Scene 3*, I was instructed to play *Male Doctor* with a direct, robotic and emotionless personality to establish the overwhelming situation for *Mrs. Swanson*, then on my own time, explore moments of his human nature. I fell in love with this specific behaviour as a fast-talking intellectual genius. Establishing an enjoyable starting point was key in allowing me to access an optimal playing environment—although it felt absurd at first. I could hardly control my laughter during the first run with this in mind; however, the director stood by her decision to maintain this behaviour as the base for *Male Doctor*. This was certainly unexpected, as I had originally planned to use compassion, competence and inclusive communication tools in order to connect with *Mrs. Swanson*. The director's notes laid a framework for me to build a personal relationship with *Male Doctor* and gave me the permission to enjoy the process instead of trying to indicate a certain persona illustrated in my inner monologue.

This permission gave me confidence and accessibility to build *Male Doctor* even further. I contained the power to make the audience laugh and receive validation at will. However I

didn't feel obliged to take advantage of that power. It was a simple feeling that triggered an unlimited source of confidence to perform. I felt comfortable to play from then on, even with specific blocking added throughout technical rehearsals. I was not hindered by inner judgement, criticism or notes. I felt confident playing the part for each show and was eager to explore a new emotional range each time, specifically regarding the relationship with *Male Doctor's* mother as mentioned in the text.

I felt similar access while rehearsing the *Prologue* of the play. I was assigned this part after the second week of rehearsal and once again, I felt an overwhelmed rush of my inner-critic's emotions and expectations to be validated on stage. Thus, I was concerned with letting any judgement enter my practice. I felt like the opening had to be perfect, otherwise the audience and my colleagues would judge me for starting the play on a bad note. However the director worked closely with me to explore an engaging performance that calmed my anxieties around a need for perfection.

I was surprised by the director's choice to perform this play in the round. This seemed to offset my mental preparation as I assumed it would be a proscenium setup. Perhaps my expectations did not include an audience viewing me from all angles. I am not familiar with this setup and I immediately found myself entering into habitual patterns during our first blocking rehearsal. Specifically holding my breath, feeling insecure, and directing my thoughts towards my external appearance while standing on stage in front of my colleagues. I was also projecting my voice very loudly, expecting it was necessary to reach all audience members. This also seemed to activate several insecure feelings and inner questions such as, "Can the audience see you? Are you loud enough? What if someone doesn't understand what you're doing or what you're saying?" The absence of a backstage area or a private fourth wall created an unfamiliar

environment which I felt I needed some time to adjust to. However after sorting out blocking, transitions and entrances/exits, I felt more comfortable performing in the round and was able to play with its advantages, specifically, to acknowledge the energy from my castmates and the rhythm of play on the stage, which our director had instructed us to consider, and immersing myself into the play by watching each scene from the wings, instead of hiding in the corner.

I also imagined that I would have more one-on-one time with the director to analyze my characters, build up their backstories and seek plans of action to effectively create a workable scene. Now I understand the importance of research and entering rehearsal with specific character choices, in order to quickly access a dynamic for the director to manage. However I also discovered the importance of remaining unattached to my opinions of the play and a willingness to let go of any specific research that might not work in context—even if I found it compelling—in order to see all the possibilities which may serve the scene.

However, certain logistics of the play (i.e. lighting, wardrobe, transitions and props) were not fully completed until the opening show. Some of these elements would directly affect my character choices, specifically if *Ground Control* would have a modulated voice, or if the *Prologue* would involve interaction with other characters. This also put me in a certain state where I felt more focused on transitions, blocking and entrances, rather than gaining more comfortability to play each character. However the successful completion of each show established my confidence to perform the logistics such as transitions and blocking, while exploring the inner life of *Middletown* and the narrative of my characters. A longer run would have provided more information to analyze the effect of my process according to this particular play however, our four show run proved to be a very introspective learning experience where I was able to implement observations made from the night before and immediately apply them to

the next show. I felt eager to apply my own notes, knowing that I would be challenging myself to maintain the director's vision but also explore my permission to work within the optimal experience of each character.

The experimentations created while exploring my artistic challenge became a useful warm-up routine during the show run. I took my respective half-hour before each show to warm-up according to my experiments by exploring the space with my body and voice, then inviting colleagues to witness my practice so I could gain a wider range of access to any insecurities of the day. Specifically working in the round, I felt the need to have extra focus on my voice and body, in order to avoid extra tension while performing in a 360-degree environment. This practice helped immensely while rehearsing, however it took me several performances to be able to hear myself properly. During the opening night especially, I could not gauge my volume or presence within the theatre as much as I could on the closing night.

My entrances and exits for each scene became another unexpected challenge. Our director instructed us to consider our moments prior to each scene and then enter with a specific intention. This created an active energy and realistic presence for each character in *Middletown*. Considering the moment before each scene was a very important step during my rehearsal, in order to establish a specific energy, especially regarding *Male Tourist*, who I felt carried minimal energy and specificity during my first few rehearsals. However, by establishing a clear intention to enter the scene, I felt more access to an optimal playing environment as well as a specific relationship to *Female Tourist*, which also improved the scene dynamic. Our relationship was another element I should have explored more during my initial research of the text. However I found that my inner monologue created a positive environment for me to justify the expressive

dialogue where *Male Tourist* is eager to share personal thoughts and display public affection for his partner.

It would be beneficial to consider implementing exercises surrounding scene entrances into my daily warm-up. This would support my artistic challenge and develop tools to access specific and enjoyable playing spaces. However, in regards to entrances, costumes, props and other last minute logistics, I found them useful to create a unique moment for each performance. Similar to “curveballs” mentioned earlier in my research, they were fun to incorporate into the daily life of my character. I welcomed any small inconsistency in the wings of the playing space, as I specifically noted how different my costume felt that day, or by establishing a unique manipulation of my props depending on how my character was feeling during that particular run. However changing character wardrobe in the wings of the round was slightly distracting. I was in the sight lines of the audience and I felt insecure trying to make the change indiscreetly, specifically because I was trying not to be a distraction to the scene on stage. However as mentioned, I began enjoying these challenges by the last show, especially when *Janitor's* mop bucket malfunctioned and I was forced to spend a large portion of the scene repairing it on stage. This was an interesting experience however, because it solidified my character's happy mode as I calmly fixed the prop and continued my blocking.

Overall, I feel like I already had what was needed to perform alongside my artistic challenge. I didn't need to create an epic facade or perform tricks to access an optimal playing environment. I was validated and accepted from the beginning; I just needed to give myself permission to love what I was doing. Also, I found it important to communicate any issues with the director. Specifically in my rehearsal with the *Prologue*, I found myself constantly reminding the director that I carried habitual patterns and that I would need specific direction to work

around this in order to achieve her vision of the opening. She was patient and worked appropriately to help solve any restrictions in my process. This behaviour allowed me to enter an optimal working space and I was surprised at my own ability to access new playing spaces without fear of my inner-critic.

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Appendix A: *Male Doctor* Inner Monologue

My mother and I have always been emotionally distant. We got into lots of fights growing up and I felt like she was never impressed with my behaviour. She would yell at me if my grades weren't good enough and embarrass me in front of friends if I didn't clean up after myself. I got in trouble at the mall when I was eleven because I stole a chocolate bar from the candy store. Security staff caught me and kept me in their office. They called my mom to come pick me up, but she told them to leave me there because she didn't want a criminal in her house. My grandma eventually came to get me. I cried the whole ride home. I started to realize, my mom never had anyone important stick by her in her life and I could see her doing the same with me. As if she was throwing me in the jungle to grow up like an animal.

I became very resentful towards her after high school, and moved out to start university. I decided I wanted to become a doctor and I worked hard to get into medical school. I worked so hard to pay for tuition, that I barely had time to see friends and family. My relationship with my mother grew very distant and we barely spoke during my medical training. We've always had this weird unspoken resentment. It feels like she never really raised me in fact. I feel angry thinking about it. Especially when I hear other people talk about their relationships with their mother. It always seems so lovely and heartfelt, but I always feel cold and distant when I think about it. I want to be a better parent for my children, but it still makes me sad to think about how much I needed my mom growing up. I needed her to forgive me when I made mistakes and love me without having to earn her affection. As my mother aged, she developed cancer tumors and we've been struggling to keep her in remission. I became her caregiver and I have been supporting her ever since. Bringing her to appointments and sorting out treatment options with the specialists.

It's hard because I love her so much and care about her, but I also resent her for not working harder to raise me. As she gets older, she is immobile and confined to an assisted living facility. I see her as often as I can. Mostly weekends, however her treatments are becoming more painful and her recovery time is getting longer between surgeries. I watch her deteriorate and yet we've barely talked about our relationship.

Appendix B: *Ground Control* Inner Monologue

It sounded like a crying baby. I wasn't sure if I heard it through the intercom or it was just my imagination. My heart skipped a beat, because I thought Greg was having a breakdown or something. He has been acting weird since the last few days of his spaceflight. It makes me nervous. He has always been the anchor for our team, so I feel strange when he talks existentially. I don't see the same passion in his work anymore. He has been very dismissive of certain tasks and he argues with our supervisors for no reason.

Greg and I were buddies since the first day of training. We took our breaks together and made each other laugh. He always had an opinion about how NASA could be organized better. I looked up to that. Someone who was funny but worked hard to understand every detail of spaceflight. Once his team was assembled he became a leader. It was a natural place for him. People admired his charisma to maintain a cool head when training got intense and people became frustrated. He was the mediator for everything and was able to solve issues in the most efficient and thoughtful ways.

I love and hate working intercom on this mission. I'm worried that I won't be able to carry that same charisma as Greg. Especially now that I feel like he needs me to be the anchor. The NASA executive team has been enforcing that I implement psychological patterns. Basically, these are used to keep astronauts focused. I don't want to manipulate Greg, but I feel like he needs more from me. I am not allowed to socialize because it can put the astronaut into an emotional state, which may lead to stress or anxiety from being away from Earth or derail from mission tasks. Also, space time isn't cheap. It's frustrating to deal with the bureaucracy of this mission and I'm at the end of my rope.

The Obstructed View

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A travel blog to see the unseen


ABOUT

Who am I?

A changed man! I was addicted to gambling, lost all my money and my previous wife. Wandering around in tattered clothes, begging for money I found a disposable camera with a flash. I took photos of the flooded gutter to see if any lottery tickets were floating in the rainy night. With the last nickel in my pocket, I developed my photos at the local camera store. They were magnificent. The moonlight reflecting off the water illuminated a beautiful portrait of the night. I couldn't believe something this beautiful was waiting for me in the darkest day of my life. Now I see things from a different perspective. I got a job, met my sweetheart wife and now we travel every summer!

Why I do this?

I save every penny to travel the world. Rome, Holland, you name it! After a while, I was tired of following the norm and started taking the path less travelled. I found the most moving monuments in the smallest towns and started a blog to keep track of my findings and share photos along the way. Eventually, people became interested in my unique travel spots. So now I present: *The Obstructed View*. A place where I share the world's hidden treasures...From right under your nose! Visit here weekly to see what things look like from a different perspective and you might find what you've been missing your whole life!



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The Obstructed View

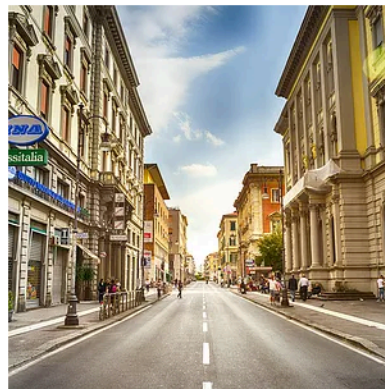
BLOG More

A travel blog to see the unseen

BLOG

Next Stop, Middletown!

We are super excited to arrive in Middletown tomorrow. It's been a long road trip through America's small towns and I've hardly got any good photos! According to our map, the Middletown monument is the perfect place to join a free walking tour. Of course, we always travel on a budget and have saved a fortune on this trip, because we don't believe in big spending to make a big change. We've been cooped up together in this tiny car all week and we've hardly seen a soul. Aren't small town people supposed to be friendly and talkative? I hope to capture the essence of Middletown's people; the way they live and the sights they see. I want to capture a different perspective of small town living. This trip will give *The Obstructed View* an entirely new market to expand and hopefully reach millions of travellers looking for that unique perspective.



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Appendix D: *Man Inner Monologue*

I'm really anxious. It's our four-year anniversary and I've decided to propose to Stacey tonight. I've been nervous all day. I have a good plan though. After the play we are going to take a walk by the lake. There's a ferris-wheel that lights up at night and it's the perfect place to pop the question. I even got a ring. It's in a little velvet pouch hidden in my shoe, because the box was too bulky to carry around and I don't want to leave it in the car. My heart is pounding like crazy but I'm trying to act natural. I keep going to the bathroom to check on the ring. I'm pretty sure she'll say yes, but we've been bickering a lot lately. I've been managing my dad's auto shop for the last two years and we're thinking about opening a new location. I've been working there on and off since I was sixteen. After high school, I went to college for a year on a football scholarship, but I injured my shoulder in the second game and dropped out because I couldn't play. Stacey wants me to go back to school and get a job working for a bigger company. Something with more benefits. She says that I'll have more options and work opportunities if I do more schooling. I'm not really the school type though. She thinks if I stay working at my dad's shop, I'll be stuck managing employees and dealing with customers forever. I'm not planning to stay there anyway, because I really want to get back into sports. That would be my dream.

Stacey is really smart. She is finishing up her last year of law school and is going to work at a firm downtown starting in the new year. She studies a lot gets really stressed about her grades. I can't really keep track of it all. We've talked about marriage, but she definitely isn't expecting anything like this until she's graduated and working. But now's the best time to propose because I think she'll be surprised and I want her to have something to look forward to while she finishes up the stressful school year.

Appendix E: Janitor Inner Monologue

I was in a really good mood all day. My boss said that I'll get priority shifts soon, and then I can start working days instead of the overnights. The hospital is super quiet most nights and I don't usually work in the emergency wing, so I'm allowed to play music or listen to the radio while doing my floor cleaning. I got excited tonight because the entire waiting room was mopped and buffed by the last shift janitor, so I'll get to finish early for the weekend. I was listening to this comedy podcast and started laughing until a few patients wondered past me for their midnight walk around the halls. I'm not supposed to interact with patients because some of them get anxious or ask for drugs and the nurses are the only ones trained to deal with that stuff. I felt really bad for this lady who gave birth today, Mary Swanson. The nurses were talking about how she checked in alone and her husband never showed up for the birth. I thought he would have come right after, so when I walked into the room to do the garbage bins, I was really shocked to see her alone. I felt like she needed someone and I felt really bad to just leave her there. She was smiling and it almost made me cry to think about what she went through today all alone. She didn't seem upset that her husband never came. I would have been really mad to do that alone, but she looked so happy with her baby I guess it didn't matter. I've been thinking about her a lot and I wonder if she'll be a single parent. It's so sad. I wish there was more I could do and I feel like she really wanted me to stay and make conversation, but they're very strict about rules here especially with pregnant patients. Some janitors get too comfortable with female patients and they get fired pretty quickly. It's not my business anyway. I wouldn't want to deal with staff traffic all night if I was stuck in a hospital for a week. I felt like I was rude to her and I just wish she had a friend or someone to keep her company. It must feel so overwhelming to take care of yourself and a baby all alone.

Appendix F: Journals

December 4

Rehearsals thus far have consisted of table reading and analyzing the text of *Middletown*. The director has encouraged our interpretations of Will Eno's writing, especially regarding gender and expectations regarding our character's sexual orientation, as some dialogue in the play mentions husband, and or wives. I found this useful to consider, specifically since I have several gender-specific characters according to their title (i.e. *Man*, *Male Tourist* and *Male Doctor*). My character *Male Doctor* mentions that he has a wife, and I presume that my character *Man* is partners with *Woman*. While I won't be delving into these particulars, as I plan to approach each relationship as a neutral-gender dynamic; I think it was something interesting to think about for my other characters such as *Ground Control*, as the gender is not necessarily specified. We also discussed the importance of where our characters sit in this world; specifically regarding our entrances. Seeing as *Middletown* shares the energy of its townspeople and the energy of our characters, the director wants us to consider where the characters are in their life and what specific energy they may bring into the scene, based on their reaction to the overall energy of *Middletown*. I found this useful when considering my role of *Janitor*, who can drastically change the scene dynamic based on how he enters. Without considering this, I fear I will just succumb to my actions of mopping the floor and not offer any emotional uniqueness to the scene.

December 7

I rehearsed *Male Doctor* for the first time today. I entered with a very specific expectation, based on my initial research and inner monologue. This included heavy focus on

spatial relationship (i.e. remaining distant) and extra attention to my dialogue in order to clearly communicate each detail to *Mrs. Swanson*. However, our director was very adamant on minimizing my movement in the scene. This restricted me slightly and put me into an insecure space, because I couldn't quite understand the point. However it made me notice how reliant I have become on movement. I also figured that it was the first time I was being directed in this play, and my most significant role; so I can understand my reaction to using my habitual patterns as a mechanism to cope with the slightly nervous circumstance. It became more difficult as the dialogue continued. I felt a need to engage with my scene partner and exaggerate the poignant moments of text. Specifically while speaking about the "wonders" of newly born children and the nobleness of it all. I felt a certain egotistical mood when reading the text initially; as if I needed to give it a certain justice. However the director's note was quite the opposite, as she stated that I should just stand still and deliver it; while not adding any emphasis to my or *Mrs. Swanson's* feelings. I struggled with this and felt slightly confused because it sounded hysterical. Almost like a malfunctioning robot spewing out medical jargon at high speed. However I do agree with the direction to not move unless I have a specific intention. This has been a note which I've heard many times before, and I tend to veer towards habitual body movements when I'm nervous. I certainly don't want that to be the focus of this scene.

I'd also need to mention the layout of the theatre. I have never been involved in the round; with the audience surrounding the stage from all angles. This also added to my insecurities during the first few rehearsals. Perhaps this is also why I felt eager to move so much. It created a sense that I should be serving all degrees around me, which put me into a self-conscious mode. However I trust the director's vision will place me in the character blocking where I don't feel as if I have to work so hard.

January 8

Today I rehearsed the opening prologue with our director. I was slightly intimidated working one-on-one for the first time, especially for the opening monologue of the play. I am not sure what the director's expectations would be for this monologue, but I'm excited to start working on the concept. However I also feel nervous to work with so much confusing dialogue. I work well with conversational dialogue, but this just seems like a list of random things. I'll have to make specific connections to each word and have clear images to associate. I feel like it's an important job to start the play and I expect to offer an active energy that will set the bar for my colleagues. In rehearsal, I noticed that my habitual patterns returned for the first run of the monologue. I was shouting loudly and presenting the dialogue in a public-speaking style performance, paying little attention to personal images and intention. I was upset that I didn't offer something more grounded and less self-conscious to begin with, however the director was very helpful in working towards a solution for my tendency to shout. She gave me a specific scenario where I would be "practicing" the monologue in the dressing room of the theatre, while my castmates prepare for the show. This immediately gave me permission to work more internally, rather than presenting a pre-meditated version of a showman, which was my initial impulse. Receiving validation for my internal image work, was a big encouragement. The director was fascinated at my ability to feel each word as it was an actual thought discovered, rather than a pre-meditated speech. I feel like I need this reinforcement every so often. It sheds light on the simplicities of acting and the importance of images, rather than external tools (such as a loud voice and confident physicality). After this rehearsal I felt like I could trust myself more and focus attention to my internal thoughts and images, rather than external actions. Story of my life, but it felt reassuring to hear feedback from the director, which validated my internal

exploration. I don't understand why I am consistently eager to perform with external tendencies, instead of starting from the inside and then working outward. Especially when I view other actors in plays or movies - I can immediately spot when they are working from real images rather than indicated reactions. Course Instructing for THEA 1520 as a Teaching Assistant has also opened my eyes to the difficulty of achieving an authentic acting state, while in front of others - especially peers. I can see the students struggle with their own habits and latch onto stereotypical reactions of generalized emotions. However when I instruct them to utilize personal images to fuel their dialogue, the difference is night and day. Therefore, I don't feel alone in this struggle to balance my habits when working in public environments and I will continue to trust my personal images for more specificity while achieving a scene objective.

January 12

I have noticed a very clear shift in my approach to *Male Doctor* since rehearsing this scene for the first time. My original intention involved a strong emphasis on his compassion of the patient and love for his craft. While that might be true, it is more helpful to focus on his energy and blunt behaviour. Using the image of a bulldozer entering the scene and spraying the room with knowledge and words, has offered a much more specific intention. That is to serve the entire scene by overwhelming *Mrs. Swanson* with the process of childbirth. It is such a paradoxical scene because *Male Doctor* is communicating valid medical information and compassionate behaviour towards *Mrs. Swanson*, but how compassionate can it really be, if it's delivered all at once with no prior relationship established? It's absolutely absurd to consider a medical professional attempting to relate to this frightened woman during an everyday work-task which involves something unexplainable and precious such as childbirth.

Our director suggested that I perform the entire scene fast and energetic with minimal emotion and a flat vocal tone. This was very contrary to my original intention to keep him engaged and compassionate towards *Mrs. Swanson*, however I pushed on. I couldn't stop laughing as I continued through the dialogue. I sounded like a robot cranked on turbo energy, spewing medical jargon. Looking around at my colleagues, everyone was laughing at the sight and I thought, "this is insane, how would anyone take this seriously? Could this be a real scenario?" An information spewing obstetrician who is on a strict timeline? Well of course! Taking a wider view of the dialogue, I now realize that *Male Doctor* is this good at his job. He has an intellectual answer for everything and can deliver it fast and furiously in order to receive his next patient in a busy schedule. I took the last week to process this and as I returned to the scene today, it was clear that *Male Doctor* must have this behaviour! It justifies *Mrs. Swanson's* dialogue and the reality of her overwhelming situation. It serves the scene. I was too concerned about compassion, but the reality is that "birth" itself, is a very overwhelming concept and *Male Doctor* has created a "logical" answer for it. In fact he has prepared an exact script to be regurgitated for every new patient.

While compassion certainly exists, it is clearer now that *Male Doctor* is using routine information to create the compassion. It's "built-in" to his speech. As I perfected this "robotic" direction, our director has advised me to start finding a way to make him more human, but to use this as a starting point. I now feel much more engaged and motivated to perform this scene, seeing as my intentions and energy is more specific. I have even started implementing my body into this character, I have comfortably established an active space for him to perform.

January 17

We are entering tech-week and I feel that I'm lacking different elements for each character. Playing six roles has overwhelmed my approach to creating a clear physicality for each of them. I have been discussing ideas with the director, which has helped, but I am still not fully convinced that each character has a unique shape. I will have to spend time working on this, because it's making me slightly self-conscious. Specifically for *Janitor*, as we haven't done much scene work. While the backstory from my inner-monologue has been helpful, I am lacking a specific relationship to the space and my scene partner, to activate a clear physical response; unlike the *Male Doctor*, which is becoming very clear and fun to play. *Male Tourist* is becoming more specific as we work on the scene and build my relationship with *Female Tourist*. A fun and "peppy" walk has encouraged a specific physical shape to play with and I am recalling my Mask work last year by experimenting with wardrobe to encourage clearer choices. While we still have not been fitted for our costumes, I plan to carry around a backpack, camera and a map, which will certainly inform my character's physicality. *Janitor* is involved with a shorter scene than my others, and I don't want to overwhelm myself with too much physicality, but with minimal dialogue I believe it's important to bring a physical uniqueness, which can also tell a story. Again I'm planning to take advantage of any props or blocking that may help me inform the character along with his backstory.

January 21

We completed our first technical run last night. It gave me a lot of new information to consider, specifically my relationship with my scene partners. I feel like I haven't worked enough to develop them. I feel like I'm acting in my own world and not listening enough to the other actors. However I am self-conscious that by doing so, I may derail from my original

character notes. I am working hard to implement the directors feedback, while maintaining my own process. However after last night, I am suddenly concerned that I have neglected to develop clear relationships with my scene partners. I felt like I am either bulldozing the scene, or playing alone. It feels unsatisfying if I play it safe and just worry about me, and it feels invasive if I try to play more to my scene partners.

January 24

Opening night went really well. I stuck to all my directions and nothing went wrong in terms of transitions, props/wardrobe or lines. However this was our first performance for an audience, which offered lots of unique information. I knew laughter would be a factor, especially in my scenes, however the audience's reaction didn't throw my performance at all. I expected much laughter during the *Male Doctor* scene since we began developing it from such an absurd place, but there was minimal reaction to certain lines of dialogue which I thought would be much bigger. I became aware of this and thought maybe I was speaking too quickly. Although it's a character choice, I feel as though I should consider a balance in order to be more comprehensible for the audience. I actually felt like I was neglecting the audience and I wonder if I can consider the audience more throughout the play. Especially during my opening Prologue. This is a time to engage with them, however I am also concerned about being thrown or distracted, which is why I felt that I should play it safe and pretend like no one was in the room, similar to our rehearsals. So, for the next show, I am allowing myself to see the audience a bit more and gain any useful information. Especially in terms of my flow, and whether or not it will be affected by using the audience more.

January 29

Yesterday was closing night and I was very happy with our last performance. I noticed an easy access to my flow of certain characters, such as the *Male Doctor* and *Male Tourist*. I felt very specific in my intentions which validated an upbeat energy throughout the scene. I felt comfortable accessing the nuances of both of these characters; i.e. the relationship established between *Male Tourist* and *Female Tourist*, and our eagerness to tour around *Middletown*. This was a very clear relationship which fueled my intentions and allowed me to play with an activated energy. As well as the *Male Doctor*, I felt comfortable and eager to communicate knowledge to *Mrs. Swanson*, with minimal self-consciousness about my “robotic” character choice. However in accessing these comfortable play environments, I felt like I was dominating the scene and not listening enough to my scene partner. My insecurity here was that I would lose my pace or flow within the character and default to a casual or low energy interaction. In agreeance with our director, I believe that energy in this play is important and therefore cues should be picked up quickly in order to avoid getting caught in some of the heavy dialogue (i.e. *John Dodge’s* conversations about death). So looking back I believe I should have spent more time rehearsing moments where I would allow my scene partners reaction to affect my intentions, but still keep up with the active paced energy of our scene dynamic. However in terms of flow and accessing these characters, I found it increasingly easier to enter them after each run.

Regarding my other characters, *Ground Control*, *Janitor* and *Man*, I felt difficulty in accessing their specific modes of play. I did not receive the same amount of rehearsal time for these characters and thus I chose my own approaches based on backstories and my interpretations of the scene dialogue. While working on *Ground Control*, I was able to access a

specific intention because of a clear relationship established with *Greg*, through extensive line work with my colleague. However while performing with minimal contact (i.e. speaking into a microphone and facing the wall), I felt like there was little connection between us during the performance. However, that was technically the point of the scene, so I used it to my advantage and allowed the dynamic to stem from my inability to fully comprehend *Greg* (i.e. his emotions or intentions). However once again, I felt as though it took several rehearsals before feeling comfortable to access this dynamic. In fact, it wasn't until our second run of the show, where I felt the importance between our relationship (i.e. how much *Greg* needed me). This offered another layer of useful information which fuelled my character to work even harder to maintain a status quo, interact with my friend, and complete the job at hand in a professional and timely manner.

I noticed a similar difficulty while performing as *Man* in the *Intermission* scene. I felt minimal connection to my scene partners, however once a clear relationship was established between *Man* and *Woman* during our second rehearsal, I felt more comfortable accessing this character. However I felt like I was playing very general at first, not sure exactly how I felt about myself in the moment. I may have misread the subtext regarding this relationship (prior to rehearsals). There was less love than I anticipated and I should have focused less energy in pleasing her and more towards my need for *status* in the relationship. Specifically to play with his need to be right and explore his own insecurities. I feel like that would also have given my scene partners a clearer character to work with.

Janitor was another role which I felt less access to a specific flow at first. I quickly latched on to a calming and even happy nature, as originally stated in the inner monologue, and I certainly accessed his specific external behaviours. I contribute this to my blocking with the mop

bucket. As stated in my artistic challenge, I feel less restricted when working with props. This external behaviour offered a clear likeness towards *Mrs. Swanson*, which eventually (after our first dress rehearsal) became more clear for me to access and gave me something more enjoyable to play. There was minimal rehearsal surrounding this scene, so I didn't have much time to experiment or receive notes from the director. As a result, I went with what I had planned and as mentioned, I settled into a specific flow after several dress runs.

Appendix G: Script Excerpts

* in the dressing room, practicing your intro

Enter corner #2

* Get lost in your words
* then return to your job

PROLOGUE

PUBLIC SPEAKER. Ladies and Gentlemen, Esteemed Colleagues, Members of the Board, Local Dignitaries, everyone really stockbrokers, dockworkers, celebrities, nobodies, Ladies, Gentlemen, all comers, newcomers, the newly departed the poorly depicted, people who are still teething, who are looking for a helping verb, the quote beautiful, the unquote unbeautiful, whose bones are just so, palter whose veins are just so, the drunk, the high, the blue, the down, *los pueblos, los animales*, foreigners, strangers, bookworms, those whose eyes are tired from trying to read something into everything, (those at a crossroads, in a crisis, a quandary, a velvety chair) the dirty, the hungry, yes, we the cranky, the thirsty, the furious, the happy, who are filled with life, bloated with it, gorged on words, and of course the bereaved, the bereft, and let's not forget the local merchants, the smiling faces, the placeholders, us, all we people slowly graying, slowly leaving, who make all this all possible, this activity, this festivity, this hope, this dream dreamt with open eyes, with closed eyes, friends of the deceased, the diseased, friends of the disowned, and of course also healthy friendly people with great skin and congenital heart defects, sports fans, sufferers of autism, down-and-outers, non-believers, animal lovers everywhere, real people people, with doubts, without certainty, with nothing else worth mentioning, the majority of us, silent, stifled, delinquent, in the background, barely hanging on, running out of time, hope, air, heart, nerves, chances, money, blood, friends, courage, faith, hair, time, teeth, time, time, health, hope, all of it, all of it, those *sans* everything, those *avec* nothing, who

license to go off!

Another license to sound out cool new words

start with downward inflection

entire new list

lighting change, maybe = actual presentation, but don't blow-up early

think of 1 specific person

have fun with velvety enjoy it

new list

go back down to start new list

Don't reach climax

because, no when to go after

Enter corner #2, After Taylor sits for few seconds in silence.

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MIDDLETOWN

Scene Three

(MALE DOCTOR's office. MRS. SWANSON and MALE DOCTOR. MRS. SWANSON is very pregnant. MALE DOCTOR, though entirely compassionate, is also very busy, and he speaks quickly. He is periodically writing, filling out forms, and referring to notes throughout this scene.) Be clear in your mistake

MALE DOCTOR. There's a problem - no, sorry, there's no problem. That's "Swenson." You're Swanson. Sorry. Now, we did some more tests on your little man. Everything looks very good. His Babinski Reflex, for example.

MRS. SWANSON. Is that where you - Continue w same energy

MALE DOCTOR. (interrupting, nodding) Right - that's where we stroke the foot to see if the toes curl. We do this with sound and tiny beams of light. We can do almost all these tests prior to the actual birth, now. It's incredible. In a few more years, people won't even have to be born. Anyway, he was magnificent. The first expressive gesture. From that little curl of the toes to all of the world's bibles and languages, it's just a matter of time. Everybody watched on the monitor. You probably heard a cheer go up from the other room. It's like a space launch. Long way away, but, he could be a tiny little Beethoven, your boy. Get him a fun little drum or a bell. Now, will the father be in the room with you?

MRS. SWANSON. He said he would, yes.

MALE DOCTOR. Good. It's good to have someone. This is literally going to be the first day of the rest of your baby's life. Linguistically, you'll want to start him out small. Simple words like hi and juice and tree and bye-bye. Say whatever you feel. Most of it happens on a vibrational level, anyway.

(A brief staticky buzz. A voice comes over the office intercom.)

Don't even look at/acknowledge receptionist.

Don't move unless your thought changes!

Be compassionate because it's your job!

Enter fast, make the realization, then continue same direct energy.

stay direct and specific

Actual medical question to move along the process.

Focus 100% on getting Mary out of the room.

I get these free. Isn't it great? Did you ever see a tinier hat? Anyway, don't worry, why worry, come on, it's life. It's just good old life, been going on for years. (brief pause) It's a lot, all at once, isn't it.

MRS. SWANSON. Well, it's just all sort of surreal.

MALE DOCTOR. It is. But it's also sort of real. But, you're right, it's strange. A little person inside you is going to come out of you. Maybe try to argue.

MRS. SWANSON. It's almost vaudevillian.

MALE DOCTOR. It is, yes. (He doesn't laugh.) That's very funny. But let's not overthink it. (This is one time it makes good sense to just sit back and breathe and try to believe in miracles.) Try to leave here.

MRS. SWANSON. All right, I will. (brief pause) What happens to you when you're born? (very brief pause) Does it hurt?

MALE DOCTOR. Okay. Distress is certainly the first event. I'm sure there's a lot of pain, maybe even infinite pain, seeing as all we've known before has been infinite warmth. Even the gentlest birth must feel like a car crash. We'll probably never know the full effect. It could be the full effect is our life, our personality. Then it's over. He'll fall asleep in your arms, on your chest. He'll grasp your finger, because that's what the deepest thing in him tells him to do. It's so beautiful, it's so mysterious. You won't believe it. We have three.

MRS. SWANSON. Congratulations. That must be great.

MALE DOCTOR. It is. They are. My wife - her name is Jen - she said she forgot the pain, the worry, everything, the second she saw our firstborn. And she suddenly understood this word she'd been hearing all her life - Love. I felt it, too. You can't really describe it.

[As for the actual birth, we were worried, too, but, no surprises.]

MRS. SWANSON. I'm glad. (brief pause) What about yours?

MALE DOCTOR. What, my own birth? Oh. I don't know. I'm sure it was fine.

MRS. SWANSON. Were you close to your mother?

walk away / back to distant spot

then give up / aka back to info spew

back to same fast energy / information spew!

pre-meditated compassion

- Then back to medical talk

ERROR! Does not compute! Access your vulnerable image.

Note: take your time to process the vulnerable questions. -> must let them throw you off your track.