

THE FREEDOM TO ACT:  
UNMASKING IDENTITY  
IN PERFORMANCE

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## Abstract

This multi-modal thesis proposes a methodology for addressing anxiety during performance. The methodology intends to create a foundation of relaxation and awareness, in order to more easily access creative impulses. This foundation will be carefully built through a daily practice of deep-breathing exercises, body-alignment exercises, daily physical activity, and recorded psychological awareness of the mind/body connection. Drawing from instruction and consultation within the MFA program at York and my own independently-led research, I developed this methodology in preparation of my chosen thesis role in the Theatre@ York musical, *Oh What a Lovely War!*, written by Joan Littlewood.

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## Introduction

Five years ago I began dealing with the physical and psychological manifestations of stress, fear, and anxiety. With their onset, I merely took note of their existence, and intellectually passed it off as a by-product of a busy and stressful schedule. Assuming blithely that the indicating negative symptoms would resolve as soon as my life calmed down, worry slowly set in as I realized that these symptoms were actually getting worse with time, with no indication of lessening. During this time period, I had been suffering with debilitating symptoms such as irrational worry and fear, overwhelming anxiety, mild social anxiety, hand tremors, skin rashes, arthritis, heart arrhythmia, irritable bowel syndrome, and countless other symptoms that would disappear as quickly as they appeared. The busy pace of my life had not slowed down, and I knew that in order to live a healthy life and continue performing, changes needed to be made immediately. I began addressing ways to confront these symptoms, or at the very least, ameliorate them. Over time, as I became better acquainted with my particular symptoms, which evolved continually, I discovered which activities and habits brought relief and which ones triggered negative symptoms.

This ongoing discovery of habitual patterns was intensified while studying acting in the graduate program at York University. As I started to become reacquainted with my body in the context of performance, the demands of acting elevated my level of anxiety so palpably that the physical signs were impossible to ignore, which only further exacerbated my stress and physical exhaustion. Through personal experience and my

professional practice, the scope of my personal challenge and my artistic challenge became clear to me. I needed to free my mind and body of extraneous tension in order to access ease of breath and stability, deeper relaxation and awareness, freedom of movement, creative impulse, and character truth. Having open access to each of these states can only serve me in my endeavor to set myself free as an actor, giving myself the opportunity to experience clear focus, joy, and satisfaction within my work.

My response to this primary artistic challenge is to create a foundation from which the freedom to act can stem and flow. Before I discovered and started to address my artistic challenge at York, I had previously been treating the physical and psychological manifestations of stress, fear, and anxiety intermittently, and without an established routine. I was remedying these manifestations through meditation, deep breathing, light exercise, and the inclusion of leisure activities. Because I was seeing some immediate and positive results, I continued treating these symptoms myself, albeit sporadically, assuming that it was sufficient. I was wrong. Much to my chagrin, my anxiety and its symptoms returned within the context of performance. I began, then, to understand that addressing stress and anxiety would take more commitment than I was allowing; it would be life-long and demand a rigorous daily routine if I were to be confident in my mind and body's capabilities. The foundation of my practice must be grounded in the physical realm, through daily exercise in deep breathing and stillness, meditation and prayer, body-alignment exercises, Restorative and Hatha yoga, daily physical activity, and recording psychological awareness of the mind/body connection through journaling.

As well, having purposeful awareness of balance with all things in my life and attending to the importance of work, rest, and play are essential.

Drawing from instruction and consultation with the M.F.A. program at York and my own independent research, I developed this methodology in preparation of my chosen thesis role in the Theatre@York musical, *Oh What a Lovely War*, written by Joan Littlewood. My acting challenge will be incorporated into the playing of the Master of Ceremonies, a strong multi-dimensional character who addresses and confronts the audience and other players throughout the play. Such a strong character countervails directly upon my anxiety, supporting my physical approach to address fear in performance. I will also investigate the traditional concerns of the actor: character development and research, the time period of the play, and the production history, including the earliest development by Joan Littlewood, Charles Chilton, Gerry Raffles, and the Theatre Workshop.

Supported by my daily methodology of mind/body connection, and drawing from the work of F.M. Alexander, Kristin Linklater, and Uta Hagen (among others), I hope to step gracefully into this thesis role as an actor who is breathing, relaxed, supple, aware, and available to creative impulses. These are the roots of a new practice that will allow me to unmask my own identity and overlay the character's multiple layers and truths. By embracing this, I hope to find focus, artistic satisfaction, and the freedom to act.

## **The Problem and its Roots**

Over the past year of study I have discovered the difficulties and challenges of dealing with stress, fear, and anxiety as it relates to acting and performance. For the last four years I have been struggling with the physical and psychological manifestations of stress and anxiety outside of the performing arts. Over time, as I became acquainted with my particular symptoms, which continually shifted and evolved, I discovered habitual patterns contributing to my condition. This discovery was intensified while studying in the M.F.A. program at York University, as I started to become reacquainted with my body in performance, which I had neglected for the past five years. This reacquaintance with myself as a performer was enlightening, frustrating, and challenging. I found myself delving into movement, voice, and acting with a voracious appetite, impatiently hungry for self-renewal and realization. My realizations came with this discovery: all the practice in the world will have little effect unless I am willing to practice with truth, the truth of who I am and where I am, physically and psychologically, every day.

I realize now that I spent years being 'busy', and not mindful to my physical and spiritual self, and in doing so, I realized I was denying who I was, which in turn made me lose faith in my abilities. Through daily psychological and physical practice, I am challenging my artistic identity to understand and face my fears and anxieties. By facing them I am acknowledging them without giving them the power to control and dominate my sense of self. In turn, I am challenging myself to find the joy and imagination in my work that I know already exist, but remain hidden beneath a layer of protection I have placed upon

myself. My professional career has not yet reached a full decade, but I have experienced what it is like to feel completely calm, focused, and 'in character' right before walking on stage to perform. I believe that this 'feeling' had a lot to do with the circumstances of my life at the time, along with habits that had not yet run too wide or too deep. I am asserting that since I experienced a positive feeling of calm before performing in the past, the state of being that allowed this freedom can happen again, consistently, with practice and dedication.

In 2008, after having just graduated with a Multidisciplinary B.F.A. from the University of Lethbridge, I immediately began an after-degree program in Education from the same institution. The challenge of doing a B.Ed. was significant. I found myself working long hours, teaching in difficult circumstances, and consistently being observed and judged by mentor-teachers. During my practicums, I found that teaching was much more daunting and nerve-wracking than anything else in my previous experience. I understood deeply the responsibilities and care that came with teaching, but the constant reminders that teaching required total dedication surrounded me in an overwhelming way. My life became very unbalanced and teaching became all-consuming. I began to experience fear and self-doubt and my self-esteem plummeted. Despite this, I, nonetheless, graduated with Great Distinction, and quickly received a good teaching position. The job required me to teach nine grades and all subjects, in one classroom on a Hutterite colony, and also act as administrator, taking care of the school budget and dealing with colony officials about school policies and procedures. Despite growing fond of the students and enjoying the challenge of the situation, the job



was physically and mentally exhausting. For the next three years, I stayed with this job, and began suffering from multiple health issues. Despite these issues, my job performance was unaffected, and I received positive feedback as well as my permanent teacher's certificate.

I soon noticed that I was becoming increasingly anxious. In the book, *Physical Activity and Psychological Well-Being*, a description of the spiral effect of anxiety that I was going through, is accurately described:

The emotional state, anxiety, reflects negative cognitive appraisal typified by worry, self-doubt, and apprehension (i.e. cognitive anxiety). State (situational) anxiety may also be accelerated due to increased awareness of physiological response to stress (i.e. somatic anxiety). (Biddle 11)

My symptoms became more serious when I began to suffer from somatic anxiety and heart arrhythmia, also known as heart palpitations. After a long series of tests, I was told I had an irregular heart beat, but that it was of no concern and that my heart was otherwise healthy. I was told that my lifestyle was not healthy, and if I were to continue living the way I had been, my heart condition could become chronic. I was given a stern lecture on stress and its effects, and was suggested a daily regimen to relieve these symptoms. I immediately changed my daily life in simple ways. I engaged in aerobic and anaerobic exercise, meditated twice a day using deep breathing techniques, kept a journal dedicated to positive purpose, and started paying very close attention to diet and nutrition. Alongside this I also made time for friends, family, fun, and relaxation. Within a week, my anxiety levels lowered significantly, and my arrhythmia practically

ceased. These results lifted my spirits, but an underlying worry remained due to unexplained health issues. In June 2014, after two years of persistent symptoms, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune Inflammatory Bowel Disease. Since this diagnosis, I have been on a daily quest for knowledge and healing. According to my doctor, we might never know why this has happened, but there is great possibility that the genome tied to this condition, lying dormant, might have been triggered by stress and anxiety. I am now treating my condition, under medical supervision, while continuing to seek greater knowledge of it.

Over the past year, I felt that I had the majority of the symptoms of anxiety under control. But I found that the symptoms were still present, and overwhelming my ability to act. This anxiety starts the day before a performance, marked by a mounting apprehension and the understanding that I cannot avoid it. In the hours leading up to a performance I begin to feel an overpowering sense of fear and dread: my palms and armpits sweat profusely, my mind begins to race, and my legs and hands tremble terrifically, making my condition even more visible. From the second I am onstage, I am frighteningly aware of my shaking limbs, assuming this is also apparent to everyone around me. I am most fearful of forgetting a line or never finding it in the first place. These feelings tend to follow me through the first quarter of a play, driving me away from being present to the action, and then, ever so slowly, I begin to calm down. Sometimes, this comes with complete exhaustion from the constant output of nervous energy. At some point in the wings, I'll wonder why I choose to act? Or why is this happening to me? I become exasperated at myself, or angry with my body for betraying

me. I spend the entire process of performance trying desperately to stop these psychological and physical manifestations and to 'pull myself together'. After much research I came to understand what was actually happening within my body. The stress response of the brain starts with the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) initiated by the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. This response releases adrenalin to stimulate the body to handle the stress, and cortisol to give the body energy to do so. If no physical activity occurs under stress, the sensations that are meant to help begin to back-fire causing shakiness, muscle weakness, increased heart rate, respiration, re-direction of blood flow, immune system exhaustion, and the depletion of neurotransmitters and neuron death. (Wehrenberg, 31-33) After coming to terms with this phenomenon, I realized that my life challenge and acting challenge went hand-in-hand. My challenge is to face my fears and anxieties, understand them through daily physical and psychological practice, and hopefully gain relaxation, awareness, focus, stability, enjoyment, and satisfaction.

### **Practical Research: Challenges and Outcomes**

The predominant approach to performance in the graduate program at York is physical – understanding the actor's process through somatic means. Through movement classes with Gwen Dobie, I discovered the usefulness of the principles of the F.M. Alexander Technique and Core Proprioceptive Training (CPT). This combined work involves dedicated observation of the body and kinesthetic awareness, in order to release tensions and habits to convey a character. "The Alexander Technique offers the means whereby acting students may prepare themselves to truthfully embody a

character and create authentic moments of action on the stage” (Potter, 65). This work begins with a base starting on the floor or any flat surface to lie upon in semi-supine position. This position involves lying down on a soft, flat surface with the back flat on the floor, and the head slightly supported underneath, facing upwards with no tension or strain, and knees raised with feet planted firmly on the ground. This position is held in stillness, and the knees may be lowered at will to a simple supine position. An alternate base position involves sitting erect on the sitz bones, also known as sitting bones, supporting underneath, with the legs crossed comfortably. This position involves having an awareness of the top of the head on top of the occipital joint with the postural system engaged, gravity doing its job travelling downward, and the ground doing its job by pushing up and supporting the skeletal system. Both of these positions release the head and entire body from tension, allowing deeper breath and freedom of movement in the diaphragm, and bringing clarity of mind, helping diagnose where my sensations are in a given moment. The transition then moves from floor work, to standing work, to moving about a space, and has helped me to treat myself with kindness, patience, and respect, and has in turn affirmed for me that a performance methodology must incorporate an intrinsic focus on deep relaxation and breath. I continue to do this work, modifying it at times, but always remembering to return to the Alexander base of a semi-supine position. These activities have become a part of my warm-up habits, as well as my exercise habits, reminding me that my body is a living, breathing organism that thrives on active, positive stimulation.

Through continued classes in movement with Michael Greyeyes, we were taught the beginning principles of the Suzuki Acting Method. The teachings in these classes were profound for me. At the time, I was still discovering how little faith I had within myself and my abilities, and was trying to become stronger and more trusting. This class focused on physical and emotional strength, as well as commitment and concentration. Every class I would begin with the hope that I would be able to make it through the physical demands. Not only did I surprise myself and make it through, but it gave me incredible amounts of courage and strength, realizing that my body and mind were stronger than I had previously thought, and that my fears had been controlling what my body could and could not do.

Through techniques that draw from the work of Kristin Linklater, and have their beginnings in studio-based voice classes with David Smukler, I developed my own daily voice and diagnostic practice. I first connect with re-training my habitual physical patterns, which include locking my knees, pushing out my pelvis, and holding my rib cage tight when in an upright position. I therefore focus on softening of my knees, straightening the alignment of my body, loosening of my rib case, and connecting all of this to breath. While this activity might seem simple, it is in fact quite challenging for me and feels awkward. This re-alignment of the entire skeletal/postural system is intended to create an open channel for breath, voice, and body to move as one. Taking time to breathe deeply with an awareness of air moving throughout my body, I then engage in very simple vocal exercises in order to feel the core connected to the breath and the voice. The breath is very important for me, since I have discovered that I habitually hold

my breath, or engage in shallow breathing. This habit was formed by emotions of fear and anxiety, which then created physical tensions of holding and locking. I have discovered that the practice of meditation and deep breathing allow my body to release these habits and free my mind of negative or unnecessary thoughts. Kristin Linklater asserts:

If you are committed to the truth of the thought/feeling that is to be communicated, if you have a real desire to share that thought/feeling, and if there are no blocks or tensions in the breathing and vocal musculature, the voice will carry the thought/feeling content from deep inside to the front of your mouth and out to the audience. (258)

Focusing on my breath and its movement throughout my body (all the way to the tips of fingers and toes), gives me stillness and focus while I face the rest of my day. I also engage in a daily exercise regimen that increases my heart rate, allowing oxygen to replenish my system, thus supporting the body's need for oxygen while in stasis. This deep concentration on breath is important and vital to my life as an active artist, capable of being present and alive in the moment.

As a performer, my body is the house where the actor lives, and I need to trust the house. This is the only way to let the audience in. My goal is transparency and truth. This truth begins with my own knowledge of myself. I cannot use a character in order to hide from myself. As Uta Hagen states in her book, *Respect for Acting*: "Remember that what makes you an artist is your private domain" (211). The benefits of implementing a

daily practice for the purposes of physical and psychological diagnosis and care also aids the mechanism by freeing the body of unnecessary tension so it is free to act. The audience yearns to see the actor's truth, and only then can the audience find the truth that lies within themselves. To share a truth is to invite a truth. At the basis of this truth is breath.

On a weekly basis, I read aloud and take my breath all the way to the end of a thought. I do not hold onto the breath and always take a breath when needed, but I make sure to use that breath and let it spring me into action, rather than hold onto the breath in dramatic desperation. This practice has made me see that I must use my breath to benefit my voice and to release it. The breath gives excitement to words and phrases while allowing the actor to make strong choices, moment to moment. Stephen Aaron suggests this very thing in his book, *Stage Fright: Its Role In Acting*:

The gifted actor can be defined as one who has the capacity to make use of himself in the most personal way while, at the same time never losing touch with the formal demands of the text. In other words, he can turn his private dreams into public realities. (130)

Avoiding aimless objectives and physicality, this activity cements my belief that you can only play one thing at a time. Trying to play more than one thing leads to confusion and frustration. Through this daily practice of attention to the mind and body, I have created and implemented a methodology that is working for me. I am challenging myself daily to check in with my conscious and unconscious self in order to attain unconscious

competence and take risks without making a decision to ‘take a risk’, but to be so informed through my history and identity that it comes through the act of being truthful. I am striving to be kind to myself and to remember to play, finding joy in the work.

### **Scholarly Research: Challenges and Outcomes**

Through written documentation in the form of personal journaling, I have discovered that I am benefitting as a performing artist from my daily psychological and physical practices. I have found new tools to address my fears and anxieties as they relate to performance. In Uta Hagen’s *Respect for Acting*, she states: “First, you must learn to know who you are. You must find your own sense of identity, enlarge this sense of self, and learn to see how that knowledge can be put to use in the characters you will portray on stage” (22). When I first read this I realized that I had been doing the exact opposite. I was running from my sense of identity by hiding myself in whatever I was playing. I was self-conscious and scared of being seen, and only too eager to mask what was going on inside. My own selfishness and demons were preventing me from revealing the truth. Hagen describes it succinctly: “To seem to want a mask often comes from a distrust in ourselves” (27). I could not trust myself, but am slowly realizing that trust comes only with practice. Before I can act I must address the different parts of my instrument, integral to the music that I make through it. With a dedicated daily practice in movement, voice, and acting, I am developing a strong technique for exploration. The actor’s tool is her body: without fine-tuning, we cannot expect to overcome challenges that will come up within the work. Daily journaling keeps me in touch with my inner voices, and allows me to explore avenues that I would not have necessarily gone down



had I not started writing in the first place. I've also confirmed through practice the importance of a disciplined daily methodology and its absolute necessity.

In my ongoing quest for answers and techniques concerning my health and well-being, my beliefs were confirmed and my physical and psychological symptoms were described in David Pargman's book, *Managing Performance Stress: Models and Methods*. He succinctly describes the two elements, which work together in the body to keep things running smoothly:

The nervous system may be thought of in terms of two separate portions: The sensory portion and the motor portion. The brain processes the information about change in the environmental conditions (stimuli) that is brought to it by the sensory mechanisms. (Pargman 69)

This description reminds me of the one that my doctor gave me when she was describing the problem of stress. She told me that I had to re-teach my body and mind to understand the difference between natural stress and unnatural stress informed through habit. Because of the constant stressful environmental conditions I had placed myself under, my physiological system could no longer get itself out of stress mode on its own. My body needed my help to calm down and de-stress in active forms.

Within Pargman's book he also describes coping strategies, some of which I found I already used. These strategies I have re-phrased and reduced as follows:

- Reframing: Taking a negative situation and making it positive.

- Thought Stopping: Stopping negative thoughts by using the word 'Stop' aloud.
- Rational Thinking: Changing negative thoughts by rationalizing their invalidity.
- Participant Modeling: Learning or copying others' behaviour.
- Imagery: Using positive images to create positive feelings. (145-153)

Pargman also describes three relaxation techniques: meditation, yoga, and exercise. I have taken up all three on a daily basis. I exercise everyday for at least thirty minutes. I find that this activity has a significant effect of lowering any feeling of stress or anxiety. It also has the effect of clearing my mind and opening it up creatively.

Pargman states:

Elevated aerobic fitness secured through regular exercise may promote a transferable readiness to cope with the physiological correlates of stress reactivity that are problematic. Since regular, sustained rigorous physical activity tends to strengthen physiological mechanisms, regular exercise may be helpful in preparing your body to respond with less severity. (211)

I had only experimented in yoga, but now currently use it daily to aid in relaxation, breathing, and flexibility to contribute to an overall sense of well-being. I purposefully engage in Hatha Yoga, "Hatha is the foundation of many yoga styles. It incorporates poses, pranayama (breathing techniques), and meditation to cultivate an even state of mind, a well body, and reduced stress" (Herrington, 20). I engage daily in a yoga practice, doing ten to fifteen different poses, that I keep simple and low impact in order to calm the mind and body. What results for me is a sense of feeling strong, emotionally and physically, and a pure clarity of focus to face the challenges in my day. "Yoga

exercises can help a person to take the steps needed to dramatically alter the brain's stress response, changing the mind-body balance for more comfortable coping" (Simpkins, 10).

Through the methodologies of daily psychological and physical practice, I have challenged my artistic self and gained a clearer understanding of the fears and anxieties that plague me during performance. With this understanding I am excited to reveal the truth that lies within each fragment of this stillness. I have a great passion for truth in storytelling, and seek this through a concentrated and daily commitment to artistic discipline. Hagen describes my goal: "Armed with a passion for self-expression, with a point of view about his world and a specific goal to reach for, the actor must acquire a mastery of his craft – or all the talent and goodwill in the world will count for nothing" (Challenge 35).

### ***Oh What a Lovely War***

I will be addressing my acting challenge through the play *Oh What a Lovely War*, created by Joan Littlewood and her Theatre Workshop. I had not heard of this particular play before the M.F.A. directing candidate Autumn Smith announced it as her thesis choice at York University. It is a seminal work of theatre that deserves attention for many reasons. First of all, *Lovely War* is a piece of theatre that involved numerous facets, including modern approaches toward rehearsal, collective creation, improvisation, set and lighting design, musicals, satires, documentary, comedy, and drama. It is a multi-layered musical satire about the First World War, with each part relying heavily upon the layering of another, and could be described as a drama or a

comedy. The musical was created and performed by the Theatre Workshop Company at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, in London, England. The creation and rehearsal period of the play began in November 1962, and it premiered on March 19, 1963 to huge success.

*Oh What a Lovely War* was first inspired by BBC radio presenter Charles Cilton and his radio show creation, *The Long, Long Trail*, broadcast in 1961. The show featured soldiers' testimonies and songs from WWI. The songs were satirical in nature and contrasted with the soldiers' stories. Many people in Britain, including soldiers, sang these songs throughout the duration of the war, between 1914 and 1918. Cilton's idea for the show came from his own personal journey of discovery to find out what happened to the father he never knew, who died in the First World War. An excerpt from an article written by Matthew Sweet of the Telegraph, UK, gives an idea of the irony of the broadcast:

Using a band of BBC musicians and firsthand testimony from veterans, he crafted a powerful hour of radio. Home Service listeners heard songs of Home Front blackmail – "We don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go" – and little-aired details about life in the trenches: the regular "Morning Hate" of indiscriminate gunfire; the joy that accompanied the "ticket to paradise" of a non-fatal wound; the sweepstakes in which soldiers placed bets on which of their comrades would survive the night. (2014)

Theatre Royal manager, Gerry Raffles, heard the broadcast and approached Joan

Littlewood with the idea of adapting the radio show into a staged theatrical show. At that time, Littlewood was in her tenth year as artistic director of Theatre Royal which she had helped build with her husband and partner, Ewan MacColl. Littlewood agreed with Raffles, so they commissioned an adapted script of Chilton's radio show, but Littlewood was not impressed with the script except the title, *Oh What a Lovely War*, suggested by Ted Allen. Back to square one, Littlewood and Ewan MacColl assembled their cast and began rehearsal by asking the cast to do research on the First World War, and bring back anything that might be useful. What ensued was a rehearsal process that became a collective creation with an improvised approach.

Littlewood's procedure was inherently collaborative. She and a group of actors, including Brian Murphy, George Sewell, Avis Bunnage, Victor Spinetti, Murray Melvin and Griffith Davies, researched the material that Chilton's songs implied, often in Chilton's archive, and then improvised 'scenes' in whatever style seemed appropriate for the content. (Leach 161)

The group began to physicalize the information and stories that they had discovered, either through first-hand accounts from relatives or friends, or from books or documentaries. The actors played soldiers, sang songs, played games, and told jokes. They used whatever information was at their disposal and brought it forward in rehearsal; ideas either worked or didn't work, with Littlewood, as director, approving or disapproving. Joan Littlewood, began with a few rules for this new piece of theatre, although the content would be about war, she wanted the piece to be uplifting somehow, so she did away with traditional images of war, such as death, weaponry and army fatigues or khaki, and then she came up with the idea of using the pierrot

clown.(Sweet, 2014) Here she describes the pierrot:

Pierrots were all the go in those days. They'd perform on a platform set up on the beach, seats 3d, and 6d. Little red and blue bulbs would light up for the evening show. Their costumes were white with black bobbles and ruffs. Each costume was different to suit the style of the performer. And they could all sing and dance and make you laugh. They were the great joy of the seaside. (Littlewood, qtd. in Theatre Workshop ix)

Pierrots were inspired originally by ancient Greek theatre and its use of the stock character, a character which, through particular physicality and personality, would be easily recognizable from play to play. The pierrot came from a stock character in pantomime at the Commedia dell'Arte. Created around the late seventeenth century, this character became known through a combination of characteristics: part sad clown, part naïve fool. Littlewood's choice of the pierrot was a brilliant one. She was decidedly juxtaposing the light, comedic flare of the pierrot with the devastatingly horrific matter of the First World War. The contrast showed how glaringly asinine and ridiculous the war was. Robert Leach states: "Audiences were confronted not with performers-pretending-to-be-people, but with performers-pretending-to-be-pierrots-pretending-to-be-people" (Leach 185). What developed was a kind of theatre that made a spectator want to laugh and cry at the same time. This satirical theme was further pushed through the use of what became essential technical elements: a large screen was hung at the back of the stage, in order to project photographs taken during the war; as well, there was a news panel that would crisscross the stage bearing disturbing facts and figures about the war. All of these technical aspects were magnified with the use of very modern

techniques in lighting and design. Robert Leach offers a sense of the theatricality of the set that was created by John Bury: “He created an entirely electrical set, with fairy lights, the electric newspanel, and slide projections. In this production there were no fewer than 324 light cues, as well as 110 sound cues, employing four synchronized tape recorders” (195). Littlewood’s *Oh What a Lovely War* implemented the use of Bertolt Brecht’s Epic Theatre techniques, ensuring the audience always understood that they were watching a theatricalized event through direct audience address, simplified set design, the use of pierrot costumes, and breaking up the action of the play through music hall style performance songs. In combination, these techniques set Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop in another dimension of theatre. Robert Leach explains this, as well as other newly staged ideas that became a part of *Lovely War*:

Theatre Workshop introduced what are now accepted as modern forms of stage design and lighting, and the modern use of the open stage, often attributed to Brecht, was actually pioneered in Britain by Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl. The notion of ‘theatre of synthesis’ was theirs, too, as was the method of structuring a play by montage techniques. (209)

This exciting new territory made *Oh What a Lovely War* an instant hit as, “audiences were absorbed, not as with a thriller to find out what would happen next, but by the presentation of the material” (Leach 162).

### **Success: West End, Broadway and More**

*Oh What a Lovely War* received mixed reviews, but its popularity could not be denied. One reason for this was of course the play's subject matter and the fact that it was opening in London, England, a place so deeply rooted in the WWI. Robert Leach aptly states: "*Oh What a Lovely War* owes part of its success to the fact that the subject matter of the piece taps into something deep within the British psyche and 'race memory'." (160) The events of World War One are still documented and still very fresh in the minds of those who experienced it first hand, or those who had the experience passed down to them, through family, friends, or education. The devastation and outcome of WWI lives today and the legacy of such an event will continue on. The success of the play, and of Joan Littlewood and her Theatre Workshop, moved the show to the West End. The show also returned to its inspiring birthplace of the BBC radio and was adapted many times over. The play's success continued, opening on Broadway on September 30, 1964, and closing on January 16, 1965. The play went on to be nominated for four Tony awards, and was eventually made into a movie in 1969, directed by Richard Attenborough, with an all-star cast that included Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Corin Redgrave, Vanessa Redgrave, and Maggie Smith. The play and the film are quite different; Attenborough kept the songs and the farcical manner with which WWI was used, but discarded the rest. The huge success of the play owes much to the people of Britain and all who were affected by the First World War or any war, for that matter. It resonates with people in ways that might never be explained, but here is an account of just how it impacted one spectator:

Joan Littlewood's production made me understand. The slide projections



depicting the reality of trench warfare in all its grotesque and horrid waste of human life, juxtaposed to scenes in which upper-class twits, aggrandized with military titles, flounder in incompetence, and fat-cat industrialists rub their hands with glee at their growing bank balances, finally made sense of a war that sacrificed the working-classes of all nationalities for the benefit of the status quo. The text projected . . . pushed the sheer scale of the atrocity, the utter insanity of the military strategy, home. And yet I was uplifted. I came out singing the songs, delighted with the physicality of the performances.

(Leach 162 – 163)

I believe that the play today still holds the same truths, and we remain haunted by it still. We live in a world where no one is free from the horrors of war. We all live haunted by wars that preceded us and wars that surround us today. Tragically, war exists for everyone, and Littlewood acknowledges this in *Oh What a Lovely War*.

### **Role & Research**

Music Hall was popularized in Britain through the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It was a mixture of a variety of different acts presenting themselves as comedians, magicians, singers, dancers, jugglers, or anything else considered remotely entertaining. Entertainers involved in the business were either brought up around it as children or were drawn to it through personal desire. The life of a music hall or vaudeville entertainer was not easy and required determination, and maybe even a little bit of talent. Not to say that these entertainers were not talented, quite the opposite, but sometimes an act would work for no other reason than because they were simply very

likable on stage. Audiences knew an entertainer when they saw one. It was also very difficult to be a performer because of the long hours of work that were required, and oftentimes the money did not follow, with only a marquee player earning substantial amounts. As such, the role on which I am basing my thesis requires respect and an internal awareness of music hall tradition, but even more importantly, verve. Because of the nature of music hall entertainment, a performer had to be ready and present at the 'drop of a hat', but it is also what Littlewood would require of her actors in the Theatre Workshop company. She expected her actors to be present and to stand and deliver in the moment. Robert Leach describes this requirement:

Theatre Workshop actors 'performed' character, thereby putting power into the hands of the spectator and undermining accepted readings and traditional 'business'. Her actors, too, were expected to act 'in the present', to listen to their partners on the stage and to react honestly to what those partners said or did. Never was a Theatre Workshop actor to serve up memories of rehearsals. This was epic acting in the proper sense, not 'representationalism'. (209)

As Littlewood expected her actors to remain fluid with the production in rehearsals in order to keep things alive and fresh, so too was the reality of a music hall entertainer. The rationale may be different, but the outcome is still the same. In music hall, an entertainer needed to listen to the audience, and what worked once may not have worked the same way again. The keys are focus and listening, being fully present and

at ease, and unabashedly engaged. These free up creative impulses to be used at will, in the moment. This is my goal for my performance in *Lovely War*.

The structure of *Oh What a Lovely War* allows many great roles within it, but each role does not necessarily have a traditional character arc throughout the play. Instead, each role is given a specific time and space, dictated by news panels, in order to deliver the appropriate political message and atmosphere. My role as Master of ceremonies will be created one rehearsal at a time, investigating the action of each scene and discovering how that action affects my character's 'state of being'. I will be onstage for the entire duration of the play, and I must be confident in my intentions, tactics, and actions at each moment. My role as an actor is to convey my character's message and add to the body of the piece. *Oh What a Lovely War* is first and foremost an ensemble piece and I am excited to take my place within it.vg

In director Autumn Smith's original conception of the play, I was given five different roles throughout: Master of Ceremonies, German Herald, Music Hall Singer, Nurse, and 1<sup>st</sup> Officer. On the first day of rehearsal I was made aware of the changes to my role as Master of Ceremonies. Instead of playing five characters I would be playing one, the Master of Ceremonies, but the script would be cut in such a way that would allow my one character to encompass the German Herald and the Music Hall Singer as well. For the purposes of this role within the play, the Master of Ceremonies character is performed within a music hall or cabaret style. The Master of Ceremonies is traditionally and historically the person in control of a formal celebration or show. This important role

includes many different duties, such as: welcoming the audience, introducing the event and key players involved, keeping track of the time, and having an awareness of the space. The M.C. is also traditionally warm, relaxed, entertaining, and witty. The M.C. that Autumn Smith has transformed in *Lovely War* is a puppet master, pulling the strings and controlling the events, dialogue, and songs that happen in the play. The M.C. will also be separated from the other player's or 'worker's' in the play, positioned on top of a six foot scaffold that overlooks the playing space. The M.C.'s goal is to use the 'worker's' to dictate my character's version of the war. The M.C. does this through the use of whistles, news panels, and songs, acting as a symbolic machine of war, keeping it going indefinitely.

This M.C. is responsible for getting the audience's attention, introducing songs, taking charge of the players onstage, keeping track of what is to come next, and making jokes when necessary or as the mood strikes. The music hall M.C. is more interested in timing and pacing where action is applauded and lulled breaks are not. The M.C. is unafraid of reprimanding anyone in the space who does not seem to be following an internal sense of show rhythm and pace. The M.C. sets the entire tone within which the play and its actors may perform.

The Master of Ceremonies begins the first and second act of the play announcing the performance of the 'war game', but as each act gets under way, especially in the second, the M.C.'s game is forgotten, as the reality of war takes its hold on the workers. Here is where the dualism between tyranny and satire in the M.C.'s character become

more evident as the single-minded quest to keep the war going is all that matters. Here is an example of these juxtaposing qualities at work:

**M.C.** (type's news panel) "All Quiet on the Western Front . . . Allies Lose 850,000 Men in 1914 . . . Half British Expeditionary Force Wiped Out."

**M.C.** (sings) Brother Bertie went away

To do his bit the other day

With a smile on his lips and his

Lieutenant's pips upon his shoulder bright and gay.

As the train moved out he said, 'Remember me to all the birds.'

And then he wagg'd his paw and went away to war

Shouting out these pathetic words:

Goodbye-ee, goodbye-ee

Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee,

Tho' it's hard to part I know, I'll be tickled to death to go.

Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee, there's a silver lining in the sky-ee,

Bonsoir, old thing, cheer-i-o, chin, chin,

Na-poo, toodle-oo, Goodbye-ee. (Theatre, 37)

(Excerpt of the song, "Goodbye-ee")

This song has the M.C. proposing war, rather than opposing it, an interesting move on Littlewood's part to change the traditional role of a cabaret star. Cabaret was a place to oppose war, and not enforce it. The other character's in *Lovely War* also sing songs

and give examples of the cabaret form throughout. Lisa Appignanesi describes this traditional type of song or *chanson* and how it was applied in her book, *The Cabaret*, stating:

The *chanson* was one of the few means by which the people could record their daily history and publicly voice their reactions to contemporary events. A people's version of the newspaper, passed on orally in streets, café's, meetings and taverns, the song could spoof or ridicule authority, target hypocritical sexual mores, and act as a rallying call. Thus it came to serve as a democratic tool, a satirical weapon for criticism and protest. (2)

The M.C.'s role in the play remains aligned with Littlewood's original use of humour in order to juxtapose and magnify the tragedy of the war. The machinery of the play, the projections, the news panel, the songs, and the dictating M.C. cannot be stopped, mirroring the truth of the First World War.

The M.C.'s character must be confident and persuasive to the factory workers and the audience. One of my challenges as an actor will be to find how I can incorporate the entertainer and the dictator within the M.C. character. The song, "I'll Make a Man of You", must be delivered with a balance of comedic flair, warm entertainment, and authoritative business. Through the lyrics this dichotomy of the character is exposed. Here is a song that includes all three aspects.

The Army and the Navy need attention,

The outlook isn't healthy you'll admit,  
But I've got a perfect dream of a new recruiting scheme,  
Which I think is absolutely it.  
If only other girls would do as I do  
I believe that we could manage it alone,  
For I turn all suitors from me but the sailor and the  
Tommy,  
I've an army and a navy of my own.

On Sunday I walk out with a Soldier,  
On Monday I'm taken by a Tar,  
On Tuesday I'm out with a baby Boy Scout,  
On Wednesday a Hussar;  
On Thursday a gang oot wi' a Scottie,  
On Friday, the Captain of the crew;  
But on Saturday I'm willing, if you'll only take the  
shilling,  
To make a man of any one of you.

(Excerpt of the song "I'll Make a Man of You")

Richard Anthony Baker gives a description of the popular music hall singer, Florrie Forde, in his book, *British Music Hall: An Illustrated History*. His description immediately brought to mind the *Lovely War* character: "On stage, Florrie dressed elaborately in jewels and furs and carrying a pompadour stick, she paraded up and down as if she were instructing her audiences in the lyrics of her songs" (125). The music hall character in *Lovely War* could have easily been modeled on Forde. Baker's description of Forde, and other images of Music Hall stars, like Harry Roy, and Albert Whelan, helped me shape the M.C., making dressing, and the way one appears, to be very important. He also mentions that she gave instructions to her audience. This informed me that my character could use physical habits that stemmed from a meticulousness of appearance and a determination to be heard and obeyed. I also got some clues from Oliver Double's book, *Britain Had Talent*, where he describes the requisites to being a

successful stage performer: personality, warmth, energy, and skill. (118) This description fed my characterization of the M.C.'s entertaining side.

### **Role and Artistic Challenge**

Through my research of this role and the discovery of this character, I have become more focused and assured about my work in rehearsal, and I am hopeful and excited that my daily methodology will serve me in the run of the show. My methodology can be separated into two streams: Taking care of my health through mind/body connections, and my daily artistic practice. This practice has come to include a vocal warm-up, a physical warm-up, going through the entire script, focusing on meditation and breath, and taking the time to find moments to be alone and quiet. As I adhere to this regimen I am realizing how much more confident and focused I feel, and I hope to take this into the performances. And lastly, but importantly, I remind myself daily that this play is about something much greater than me alone. The play's theme of war and its atrocities helps me stay focused on my character and my job as an actor.

The Master of Ceremonies role will be particularly challenging because playing such a strong character that addresses and confronts the other players and audience members takes great focus and character immersion, which is exactly the state I am striving for and requires me to be fully prepared mentally and physically. Also, this role works essentially all alone, powerful, but alone, with few exchanges with other characters. My character does not belong to any group, unlike the rest of the cast, who are more interconnected. These characteristics within the role support my physical approach to



address fear in performance. This fact became an important clue to developing my role, making me contemplate what characteristics emerge from such a purposefully alone existence. I was interested with the traits that emerged: power, greed, selfishness, arrogance, jealousy, sadness, annoyance, loneliness, megalomania, and treachery. I realized I could play all of these characteristics at some point in the play, and make it work. I also realized that these characteristics could contribute to my character's story, and feed my need for clear purpose, intentions, and actions. This dynamic will aid my embodied research as an actor, helping to modify my approaches that address my artistic challenge. My overall daily methodology will continue, and my on-going research has only reinforced my attention to it. The role that I will play demands great efficiency and discipline in the way that I address my challenge through the day, because it is upon this methodology that my whole being as an actor relies. My role is mentally and physically challenging, and my attention on stage must be constant and clear, as I am responsible for the majority of the cues in the show, whether they are whistles, steam whistles, songs, news panels, gramophone cues, or vocal interruptions, which all keep the action of the play moving.

My journey with character development has been interesting. I started with five characters and three songs, and then ended up with one character and eight songs. I began my process researching World War One, Music Hall, and Cabaret, finding Music Hall examples, such as: Florrie Forde, Harry Roy, and Albert Whelan. I also researched P.T. Barnum, since he created big shows, circuses and freak shows. While researching WWI, I focused on dictators, besides being an entertainer; my character is also a stern dictator, so I studied well-known ones such as: Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong,

Robert Mugabe, Kim Jong Il, Saddam Hussein, Poi Pot, and many others. I quickly discovered that many dictators share common traits, which ended up being very helpful with building my character. These people were single-minded in their goals and beliefs, driven by ambition; they were hardworking, holding the belief that some people must suffer or die in order for their idea of a perfect world to occur. They also believed that ideas are more powerful than weapons.

I took this into the rehearsal for my character work. Since I will be portraying the tireless M.C. who is generating this seemingly endless showcase of war, I needed to research and understand these traits. I then began researching the 1927 German expressionist film, *Metropolis*, by Fritz Lang, as Autumn Smith mentioned it inspired her view of the play. The film is about urban dystopia at a factory where the division between the classes is the focus. I studied the character and images of Maria, the worker who is turned into an evil robot. Maria, the human, is a gentle and compassionate person and her robot is basically her evil twin dressed in metal. This began my journey to give my character two distinct and opposing traits and physicality's: One of warm entertainer, and the other of harsh dictator. Physically I made the entertaining part of my character smooth, casual, and relaxed in movements (good Maria), and stiff, jerky, repetitive nervous movements (evil Maria). I also wanted my hair and make-up to be like Maria's: pale face, distinct eyebrows, eyes and mouth, and hair pulled back. This will be a mask for the actor in me. I also researched the 1972 film, *Cabaret*, with the actor Joel Grey as the M.C., as well as the Sam Mendes directed Broadway version with Alan Cumming as the M.C. I realized that my character could only be part Cabaret-like, since the dictator

part of me would go against everything that a Cabaret stood for, political and artistic opposition to war.

I am now aware that the physical or psychological manifestations of fear and anxiety that I had experienced in the past are not necessarily gone. Nor should I believe that the symptoms are gone completely. The body must be re-trained, and given chances to practice and experience facing stressful situations because stressful situations are impossible to avoid. I am not expressing this in order to aggravate or frighten myself, but to remind myself that the body is a strong and delicate instrument all at once. It can fail me or lift me up depending on how I choose to treat it. I am aware that these symptoms do not simply vanish, but are dependent upon my own actions and activities. My work around this has changed my life for the better in every sense of the word, not only through performance, but also outside of it. Every once in a while, I will still feel what I will call 'tremors' within my physical and mental self; small, sometimes barely perceptible manifestations of anxiety: physical or psychological. These tremors always indicate to me that I need to examine myself: Did something happen today? Did I need to meditate longer? Did I not nourish myself sufficiently? I continue to ask myself questions, and 99.9% of the time, I will know almost immediately why. This has been one of the most exciting outcomes of my daily-embodied methodology: my ability to understand myself better. Because of this, and because of the overall improvement of my mind/body connection, I can take pleasure in doing so.

My daily practice is implemented in two ways: daily disciplined activities that I attend to regardless of schedule and activities that appear depending upon the importance of my

immediate needs. More than anything, these activities focus on listening to my body.

My current daily regimen includes:

1. Deep breathing and stillness exercise: morning and evening, to begin and finish my day, for at least ten minutes each time.
2. Meditation and prayer: This goes hand in hand with the deep breathing, for an additional ten minutes.
3. Yoga: Restorative and Hatha, in the morning or evening, and sometimes both.
4. Body Alignment Exercises: morning or evening, or sometimes throughout my day.
5. Daily Physical Activity: thirty minutes of exercise, whether it is walking, jogging, going up or down stairs, dancing, or strength training.
6. Daily Journal: recorded awareness of where I am, how I feel, or what is inspiring me.
7. Daily Awareness of Life Balance: Because I lived for at least five years in a very unbalanced, all-work-and-no-play sort of lifestyle, I am very disciplined with my life balance. I prioritize my time specifically so that leisure time or enjoyment is purposefully planned. I have a positive outlook as it is, but if there is one thing I have realized, it is that life is much too short, and above all things, it should be enjoyed. All of these activities are implemented daily, and purposefully, motivating my work and infusing it with a sense of gratefulness and joy. The only modifications I make in these daily activities, is the type of daily physical activity and the time of day the activity is carried out. The intended outcomes I expect from these activities involve freeing my mind and body of extraneous tension,

while finding ease and open access to all senses in order access creative impulses.

### **Deep Breathing and Meditation in Rehearsal**

Your breath constantly reflects your relationship to the world. It is through the breath that you literally bring the outside world into your body and then expel it again; the way you feel about your world is expressed in the way you breathe it in and breathe it out. This is why your natural voice, which is profoundly affected by your breath, is so expressive of your inner state. You can see sobbing, laughing, gasping, sighing, and all the other forms of breathing as reflections of your relationship to the world. (Benedetti 10)

This description of breath by Robert Benedetti aptly defines the profound importance of breath as it relates to the actor. Breath is at the center of all life, and as such, it needs to be recognized and treated with attention and care before walking onto a stage. For my purposes through the rehearsal process, deep breathing will be integral in the discovery and portrayal of my character's life. As an actor, I know that breath goes hand in hand with relaxation, well-being, healing, and awareness. Breathing happens automatically, but with attention and focus one can use their breathing to aid them when they most need an immediate and calming stabilizer. My acting role will need my breath to serve it in every aspect, but most specifically in addressing the audience and other actors forcefully, and to provide vocal support during the singing.

In my personal practice, I use deep breathing and meditation together, twice daily, morning and evening. In other words, I deep breathe while I meditate. I will keep up the same practice through rehearsal. This is my practice: I find a comfortable place to either lie down with legs along the ground or in semi-supine position, or I sit on my pelvis, and make sure my spine is aligned and strong, yet relaxed. I have an application on my phone that I set for ten minutes or more called *Simply Being*, and I set it to guide myself through it. I have the option of different calming nature sounds, and I always use the audio sound "Stream". I usually close my eyes, unless I have something very calming to observe. I practice deep breathing anytime throughout a day and have become aware of its presence or non-presence. Meditation is a bit different during the day, as it is more difficult to find peace or quiet, so I modify it by either finding a relatively quiet place where I can be alone, or I put my headphones on and listen to calming music or sounds. Here is a description of what I feel happening during meditation:

Meditation trains you to become more conscious of what's happening in your body and mind, and teaches you to be aware of life in the present moment. Meditation helps you to witness and identify thought patterns that contribute to anxiety, and because meditation orients you to the present moment, it nourishes and comforts you as only being in the now can do. So that you can observe your mind and avoid getting lost in the past or future, meditation practices give your attention something to focus on. And, in the moments when your mind is quiet, you're aware of stillness, and experience inner peace. (NurrieStearns, Digital File)

## **Body Alignment and Yoga**

When I first began the M.F.A. acting program at York University, I quickly became aware, through classes in voice and movement, of my body alignment and how it was affecting my overall ability to communicate. During this studio practice, I realized that I had a habitual tendency of standing with my legs straight and my knees locked while pushing out my stomach, therefore declining my hips back and holding my rib cage tight. This description sounds extreme, but the adjustment to correct it is slight. My focus has been to allow my knees and rib case to soften, pulling my stomach in and allowing my hips to come forward and sit above my legs, thus straightening the overall alignment of my skeleton. In addition, this adjustment allows for the integral connection of the body to breath. This activity appears simple, but it is quite challenging for me, and feels unnatural. I practice this stance in order to create an open channel for breath, voice, and body to move as one. Because of the sometimes difficult daily journey to finding proper alignment, since it does not come naturally yet, I practice simple body alignment exercises as well as Restorative and Hatha Yoga to help aid the process. My body alignment exercises, which I learned through voice and movement class, inspired by F.M. Alexander and Kristin Linklater, require a comfortable and warm place to lie down, with legs along the ground or in semi-supine position, letting the ground hold me, while I purposefully lengthen and widen my spine. I then take this practice slowly into a standing position, trying to maintain the same awareness of the spine and alignment. Both Restorative and Hatha Yoga are very gentle and focus on deep breathing, and require only very simple movements and slow poses, aimed to restore and deliver relaxation and focus. I practice only a handful of very simple poses that I feel are

helpful. I go through ten to fifteen different poses, and they take me from floor work, to sitting work, to standing work. I focus on deep breathing throughout. I practice both body alignment and yoga exercises once a day for about twenty minutes or more. These exercises improve my overall well-being that leads into every facet of my life.

### **Daily Physical Exercise**

To play my role in *Oh What a Lovely War*, I must have physical and psychological strength, and as an entertainer I must also connect with the audience with humour, energy, and endurance. In order to meet these demands, I exercise for at least twenty minutes everyday. These exercises change with my mood, but alternate between walking, jogging, dancing, climbing stairs, and strength training. It is very simple, and I try to keep it enjoyable because it is not the easiest activity to get myself into. This description below, from *Yoga and Anxiety*, talks to the benefits of exercise in the body”

Physical exercise enhances the growth of new brain cells in the hippocampus, which, as mentioned earlier, is the part of the brain that’s essential for learning and remembering. This means that exercising, walking, and practicing the physical postures of yoga daily not only work off accumulated stress in your body but also help your brain. (NurrieStearns, Digital File)

Physical exercise also increases the amount of oxygen that is entering the lungs and bloodstream, refreshing the system. With practice, the heart and mind can be retrained to understand that a healthy, fast-beating heart happens during physical exercise, and that a racing heart due to stress and anxiety on a regular basis is neither normal nor



healthy. This is the reason I adhere closely to my daily methodology, to heal myself, mind and body, which is the base for the focus and confidence I need as an actor. I must trust my mind/body connections in order to place myself into my character's hands.

### **Preparation for *Lovely War***

I have kept a daily personal journal since I was twelve years old. I have been so committed to it for many reasons. It has become a self-comforting ritual that feels very special, almost indulgent, because it is all about being in the moment and taking that moment in. I will even sometimes light a candle, sit in a place that is comfortable and soothing, and have a fresh cup of hot tea close by. It is a time where I am able to be silent and still, acknowledging my thoughts, positive and negative, and writing them down. The practice of writing expels these thoughts from my mind to the blank page, and they end up being the pages' property. As soon I write anything, my thoughts become very clear about any particular situation that I am writing about, and I organize possible disjointed thoughts or judgments into a more coherent framework of beliefs or perspectives. I usually write until I feel content and satisfied or have discovered something new or interesting that I can come back to after more reflection. This practice has become both a joy and a relief. It places me in the present, where I need to be as an actor. Throughout the rehearsal process I will also be keeping a rehearsal journal about my thoughts as they pertain to my artistic challenge.

I am also dedicated to monitoring my daily and weekly life balance, which includes nutrition, rest, relaxation activities, other creative endeavors, and connecting with family

and friends. Without my connection to family and friends my life stressors become more apparent. I have always known this, but I have learned to be hyperaware of this basic need, as it is a part of my life-blood.

Rehearsals for *Oh What a Lovely War* began on November 11<sup>th</sup>, Remembrance Day in Canada. I will do my own personal warm-up before each rehearsal. We rehearse from Tuesday to Thursday, 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.; then on Friday 2:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.; on Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; and we have Sunday and Monday off. The schedule will change a bit when classes officially end in December, giving the company day rehearsals rather than in the evening. During classes, on Tuesday and Thursday, I will commit to a fifteen-minute warm-up before rehearsal that includes deep breathing, meditation, and body alignment exercises, as well as attending to any particular mind/body needs. On the other days of the week, I will commit to a thirty-minute personal warm-up. I will follow with the same practices of deep breathing, meditation, and body alignment, and I will add to that movement on the floor, including simple standing work, grid work, dance work, and character work. I will attend to these in search of creative impulse, and character pace and rhythm.

## Conclusion

Almost two years ago I began a journey to complete an M.F.A. in Acting in the Theatre Department at York University. I am now at a point where I can see and feel the end approaching, and I am almost in disbelief about where I find myself now in comparison to two years ago. I came into this program with a willingness to learn, transform myself, and become a healthier more focused individual. I attended interesting and challenging classes, and performed in a number of theatrical productions, but more importantly I also went on a fascinating journey of self-discovery through the process of researching and writing this thesis. Through all of my activities, research, writings I have discovered what is most important to me and what I would like to take with me into the future. I have discovered that my acting challenge was also my life challenge. I wanted to become a stronger more truthful person and actor, and I wanted to free myself from my own theoretical identity that I had of myself as a person and as an actor, which I have been addressing in numerous and frankly life-altering methods.

I became reacquainted with my body and mind on a whole new level through the teachings of everyone around me, starting with myself. In classes, in rehearsals, and at home, I spent a lot of time with my psychological and physical self. I have taken the time to learn the importance of a balanced lifestyle that begins and ends with breath. In order to free myself from extraneous tension and access relaxation and awareness, I had to be very truthful with myself every day, and be compassionate to my needs in any given moment. I discovered that this gentleness of care toward myself helped me in the classroom and rehearsal hall to become a more creative, giving, and truthful actor. I took respite through activities that I put diligently into place to recover from years of

stress and anxiety. These activities became my methodology and have also become my life. I have realized that the mind and body work hand-in-hand if I can listen to them fully.

My current foundation for performance is focused on breath, meditation, yoga, mind/body awareness, daily physical and psychological activity through the daily use of journals. While at the same time, I have also been keenly aware of life balance, keeping friends and family close, and making rest, play, and fun essential.

Through the role of Master of Ceremonies in *Oh, What a Lovely War*, I focused my energies into this acting challenge and character portrayal and I feel as though I met my acting challenge in a ways that I did not always expect, but I ended up creating a role that was multi-dimensional, strong, vulnerable, and true. I depended upon my search for my truth as well as my character's to keep me creative, honest, and free in my performance. I always started with the deep importance of breath and listening, creating a foundation from which my freedom to act could stem and flow, and I am very proud to state that I faced my challenge fully. Taking everything that I have learned over the last two years and organizing it into a functioning and active methodological practice has served me very well during the process of *Oh What a Lovely War*. I began this past two years willing and searching for a positive and enlightening change that could serve me for the better, now discovering a path forward through performance.

I have learned the importance of daily movement activities to bring me face to face with my life and all the insecurities that I might be feeling. I have discovered that the pain that I have gone through and will possible suffer through yet, will only make me stronger physically and psychologically if I keep listening and breathing. Whatever physical

activity I do throughout the day that feels annoying or difficult, can be a useful exercise in breathing, focus, and trust; trusting and being grateful for the situation that I find myself in. Trusting the moment wherever I can helps me respond to living on a kinesthetic and spiritual level that brings with it a sense of peace, dispelling any need for judgment.

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## Appendix A: Selected Journal Entries

### **Daily Methodology**

My daily methodology has become a staple in my life. It is actually the one thing that I feel I can count on, even if I am tired, or cranky. Whatever happens during the day or at rehearsal I know that I can always come back to square one with my body and mind, and start fresh. Each day starts with yoga, meditation and deep breathing. If I had to take one over the others it would be meditation. Meditation has become the activity that brings clarity and peace. It calms my thoughts and focuses my attention to what is important and removes what is unnecessary. It actually encourages a balanced lifestyle, letting me know naturally if something is worth my time and attention or not. I meditate in the morning when I wake up and in the evening before I sleep. At school I meditate if needed before rehearsal. It is preferable to find a place to be alone, but if I can't, I just sit and meditate with my headphones on. The difference I have noticed is that my body and mind have become very aware of negative sensations. I observe them but do not let them take over. I no longer ignore it. This has helped immensely through the rehearsal process, by giving me clear objectives and thoughts to focus on. It has also helped me stay in the present moment, not wanting to rush out of it and into something else. It has, in a sense, slowed time down. I continue to also exercise whenever I can. I don't set specific times to exercise during rehearsal since I have prioritized rest over exercise. I incorporate exercise everyday somewhere in my day. I find this way more exciting and motivating. For example, I will go to rehearsal early or stay after and dance or move around the space for 30 minutes. I also often find the long way home or to school, taking alternate or interesting routes. I weight train or stretch at



home, since it's really the only form of exercise I can do when I am there. Exercise also clears my mind and helps me feel energized. These activities combined with journal writing, using coping strategies and taking care of myself contribute to my overall health and well-being and I am excited and feel fortunate to know what I need to do to take complete care of myself. I am excited for what the next day will bring and how I will approach my daily methodology. It is my journey.

### **Preview One – January 18<sup>th</sup>**

I was quite nervous before the show tonight. Mostly it presented itself in the form of sweating and a sense of foreboding. I didn't feel prepared and I was worried that I wouldn't remember to do everything that was expected of me. A couple of things contributed to this: knowing that there were a lot of people waiting to see how the show will turn out, and knowing that I was responsible for so many parts of it. I just trusted and went with it, and almost as soon as the show started, I felt planted within my character and I had fun! I still feel like I am getting used to all of my responsibilities. I have many cues that help the rest of the cast know what is happening and when. I do not feel completely solid in everything that I am doing, and I also have a few places where I am struggling to understand what my character is going through.

### **Preview Two – Before - January 19<sup>th</sup>**

This week has been extremely transformative for me through the development of character. Because of all the constant changes made and our lack of time doing runs of the show, I felt quite unable, until very recently, to begin exploring my character and making solid choices about her. Today I met with Autumn and for the first time we went

through the script together to go through intentions and tactics. Up until now, I have only received direction from Autumn about what I do and when, and not about what my character's intentions or tactics will be. I have made my own assumptions and deduced characteristics and traits on my own. The meeting helped immensely, there were only about three places in the script in which our ideas about the scene were quite different, and it was a relief to get some clarity.

### **Preview Two – After- January 19<sup>th</sup>**

Tonight's show was all about rounding out my character and making her multi-dimensional and human. This came about completely organically, and was never decided upon. I found many moments throughout the play where I followed my instincts to fully engage with a 'state of being' and found exactly why that 'state of being' should occur, thus, giving my character a formed arc. I also discovered that because of the arc, my character goes full-circle. She begins and ends in the same place, but by the end my character feels much more flawed and human and almost exposed. My arc goes like this:

1. Begin show with excitement and willingness to share my war story and in complete control.
2. Throughout show, especially in the second Act, explore the breakdown of the War Game and character. She never breaks, but she has moments where she falters: in sadness, loneliness and jealousy (the Christmas truce), and in anger, annoyance and frustration, when the workers are not listening to her.

I realized she has a past and a future full of trials and triumphs, and I chose to have these emotions and memories come flooding back to her throughout the play.

3. By the end, she has worked hard to keep her factory and workers moving smoothly, and she prides herself in their complete dedication to her and her doctrine.

My character is a showman one minute, a child the next and a dictator the next. She evolves through the story and this all came from having, finally, a sense of freedom that only comes from enough rehearsal and assuredness of the technical and directorial requirements.

### **Opening Night: Before Show – January 20<sup>th</sup>**

My daily methodology and routine has been so very worthwhile and is something that keeps me calm and hopeful throughout the day. It feels very good! My fully developed routine outside of theatre and rehearsal contributes to my overall sense of well-being and focus. It is such a relief to be able to depend upon something so easy and so in my control. This methodology has crossed over naturally into my mind/body, physical/vocal acting routine. I have really developed my own pre-rehearsal, pre-run, pre-show routine.

The routine goes like this:

- body/mind - physical warm-up:
  - o Well rested, nourished, and watered before going to rehearsal and show.
  - o Semi-supine position, listen to enjoyable music on my iPod that is either uplifting and fun or calming. Do stretches, Yoga, moving from floor to standing to moving about a space. Focus is on releasing tension in all muscles.

- Vocal warm-up: loosening and releasing tension in face, neck, jaw and head, touch-of-sound, humming, use images while I vocalize, go through vowels sounds in octaves.
- Sing through all of the songs in the show. Speak all of my lines
- Allow ample time (so I am not stressed or rushing) to do make-up, hair, clothes go on ten minutes before show starts – it just feels right!
- A moment of complete solace and alone time before I go onstage – to get centered and calm. The silence is powerful. I also go over the first bit of my first scene onstage. Luckily I can be alone right before I enter, since I am not a part of the worker group and can find my character’s aloneness.

Tonight I feel ready, but also feel as though my character could use some more specificity overall through vocals, physicality and whistles. On preview night two, I felt as though my character was getting a little crazy, and I felt like I was going way overboard. Tonight I want my performance to be tighter – playing all the nuances I feel she needs and finding the character’s stillness. I am feeling very grateful for the two previews, without them, I would not feel prepared for opening night, which would have made me quite nervous, and possibly scared, and I would have been bummed not to be at this place where I feel like I can really have fun with my character. I feel like I was able to work out all of the uncertainties about my character, and go through trial and error to explore what I felt worked and didn’t work. I have also been able to create a real arc to my character, which I really appreciate. Because I am onstage through the entire show, I need to find intention and motivation for every second of it. For me that meant a lot of particular and idiosyncratic work – to be very sure what I was doing.

## **Opening Night: After Show – January 20<sup>th</sup>**

Everything went well. I am so thrilled and relieved. It was so fun, and the audience was really spectacular. What a treat. I will now go home and rest. Rest will be a very big priority right now. I can feel that my voice is a little strained and tired. I think it is because we have rehearsed so very much, without a break. I warm up every day and try to take care of my voice, and I guess that is all I can do. I have to keep the faith that it will be there for me. I will keep going and doing everything that I can to take care of myself. Tonight I felt fully into my character, and I felt good about all of my responsibilities. All-in-all it was a great show. I think there was possibly a missed cue, and my steam whistle didn't work at one point, but I rolled with it. I am so thankful and grateful for this learning experience.

## **Character Body and Voice,**

When working on character development, I spent quite a lot of time researching, and exploring how I would use my body playing the M.C. I researched dictators, music hall stars, cabaret stars, and characters from film, such as Maria, in the movie, 'Metropolis', and the M.C. in the movie, 'Cabaret'. I spent time during rehearsal thinking about their combined traits and began acting on them. I knew early on that my character needed to have very two very strong opposing sides. I chose, simply, an evil side and a good side, which many villains within popular culture have. My two sides would be decidedly different, with one being: casual, laid-back, and smooth, juxtaposing with the other, which would be: stiff, jerky and sharp. It took me a quite a while to develop physical characteristics, since I did not have many props, and my lines and duties were often

changing, and I was unable to wear my costume or be on top of my scaffold, so I spent the early rehearsals focusing on my voice.

My beginning work was a solid vocal warm-up to keep my voice in shape, since the role requires a lot of raised voicing and singing. I focus on physical awareness, relaxation, opening the channel, aligning and waking up my spine, vibrating the resonators, and making sure that my sound goes up and over. I also spend time loosening my jaw, throat, mouth and tongue to make sure sound comes out unforced. I then go through images while moving and activating my sacrum and spine. I practice the songs from the play every day. I then focus my time keeping my body, face, throat, jaw and head tension-free and relaxed, so to not cause any strain. My dialect is Received Pronunciation, and for the majority of the time I find it very easy. However, I still need to pay attention to my vowels, the crisp consonants, and the light L's. Other than that it feels really good. If I feel any strain, I rest and take care of myself, and hum a lot, according to Kristin Linklater, this is supposed to soothe the vocal folds. Once we got into the actually playing space in the theatre, and I was able to wear my jacket, and be atop of the scaffold, so many physical changes started naturally taking place, and I simply took note of them. Here is a list I made to keep track of the character body that was developing:

- Leading my body: from the hips and the stomach
- Feet: wide-stance with feet out-turned (used for the majority of the time, when my character wants to be heard and obeyed), or standing with majority of weight on one leg (used when my character is listening or enjoying something in a casual-manner).

- Strong, yet relaxed shoulders, tilted slightly back.
- Chest forward
- Straight and tall neck: Two types: Neck movement changing between slow, twisting and creepy (I took my inspiration from the alien, in the film, 'Alien'.), to fast, twitchy, and jerky movements.
- Sitting in chair: legs wide apart or resting on stop of my desk
- Hands and Arms:
  - o Smoothing hair back with one hand or two
  - o Leaning right arm on desk, with left splayed across the other side
  - o Brushing fingers across the underside of my chin – petting myself
  - o In pockets when standing relaxed
  - o Adjusting cuff links or collar
  - o Flipping back jacket before sitting or standing in front of chair
- Habits: a little obsessive compulsive – straightening things up repeatedly, and mouthing the lines or lyrics of other characters, being specific about which lines I wanted them to say, or controlling them and what they would say.

## **Changes**

From the first day of rehearsal there have been numerous and consistent changes made to the script and to directions given. I have basically been rolling with it, just trusting the director and her vision, and often reminding myself that she is trying her best and learning along the way. I began the writing process of my thesis in the spring of 2014 with the knowledge that I would be playing 5 characters and singing three songs: Master of Ceremonies, Music Hall Singer, German Herald, 1<sup>st</sup> Officer, and the

Nurse. And singing: "I'll Make a Man of You", "Goodbye-ee", and "Belgium put the Kibosh on the Kaiser". When we began rehearsing on Dec. 11, I was told that I would play one character, the Master of Ceremonies, and I was to play the character on top of a six foot scaffold and never come down, so the possibility of playing the other characters would not be so. I went with it; a little confused at first, but thought that things would become clearer. Numerous other things changed, all throughout rehearsal: what lines I had, what songs I would sing or not sing, and what props I would use. Throughout this rehearsal process I have had to consciously decide to not get worried or frightened that the script was being changed daily. Lines for my character are often cut, added to, or altered on a daily basis. Many of my sound cues, such as whistles, bells, steam whistles, gramophone cues, and typewriting cues, are also often changed, and this makes it impossible to work without my script sitting in front of me. We also rehearse scenes out of order, which makes it very hard for me to know what I am doing when, since a lot of my cues are either at the beginning of a scene or at the end. This makes it very hard and awkward to feel like I am ever going to be ready for the role. I keep waiting for the changes to just stop. I was also told throughout the majority of rehearsals that I wouldn't actually be speaking the news panels, instead they would appear and I would type them. Well, everyone got used to the sound cue of my voice, so my voice stayed. All of these constant changes made it very hard for me work on my character. In the end I got to play a glorious character, using 26 props, and singing eight songs. I still marvel at how it all worked out. My daily mind/body methodology never wavered through the process and I believe it kept me afloat and ready for each rehearsal, no matter what it was going to bring. I was also spurred on by the excitement



I felt growing with my character in the show, and the responsibility I felt to the other cast members and Autumn only gave me good feelings because I knew I played a key part and I could play it well. I was also grateful for the trust that Autumn had in me from day one. Her faith in me never flinched and I could feel that. The other big change I have had to make is to my Thesis. That has been a lot of work. I have had to negotiate what to delete and where to add changes and what is important and what is now not so important. Throughout this crazy rehearsal full of so many changes, I realized that I could do it, and without too much bother, but I would also never want to do another play with this many changes again. It kind of took a lot of the fun out of the process, and saved it all for the end, and also made it difficult to dig deep into character development. I also often felt like every day was day one of rehearsal, never really able to really sink myself into character and script work. All's well that ends well.

### **Closing Night – January 24<sup>th</sup>**

I am relieved. I felt that the run of the show went very well. I am so glad, considering there were times I thought that I wouldn't have enough rehearsal time to work on my character and my many cues. I am also so relieved to be writing that I was able to get through each rehearsal and show without any anxiety. Preview one night was the only night where I was more nervous to go on stage than the rest, but it wasn't overbearing and I was able to quickly find my stage legs. This has been quite the ride. I am actually amazed that we had quite a successful show considering all of the changes that were made until the last minute. I am proud that I was able to be an actor and technician and make the two parts of my acting job become my full character. I was a bit nervous in the middle of the run in the week because my voice seemed to be becoming more and

more weak. During the evening show on Friday, I lost my voice during a song. I suddenly couldn't sing, it was just gone, and it took me a few beats to clear my throat. It felt like a weird dream, and time slowed down to a snail's pace, and for a minute I thought that my voice might not come back. But I hoped and had faith ready for the next verse, and my voice was right there, ready to go again, so relieved. And my family from Kitchener came tonight, and I was feeling immediately kind of upset that that had to happen when they were there. But as soon as the moment passed, so did those feelings. I was mostly just irritated with my voice, but we talked it through and all is well! ☺ My voice was in good shape this afternoon. I hummed and drank copious amounts of water and I just trusted and warmed-up very gingerly and carefully. I am so grateful for everything that I have learned through this process.

Appendix B:

Challenge: Direct Audience Address.  
Never knowing how the audience will react to my character.

Goal: Make audience laugh or make them uneasy.

Tactics: laugh at my own jokes.  
find the audience absurd for not understanding me or being impressed. Pure confidence/eccentric.  
Be smooth/casual/entertaining

Act One 3

M.C.: Good! (relieved) (audience like or hated) (laughing or treat audience like children) (Frustrated/annoyed w/ audience I don't get jokes.)

M.C.: STEAM WHISTLE (Get workers into place)

M.C.: Turn on Gramophone

M.C.: Milords, ladies & gentlemen, we will now perform for you the ever-popular War Game!

- La Belle France
- Upright, steadfast Germany.
- Industrious Britain & her black sheep Ireland.
- Austere Austria/Hungary
- Rousing Russia
- Suspicious Serbia
- And the ever absent America.

Workers get into place  
Intention generate excitement  
Tactic 316 Moves enjoy game

M.C. the first part of the game is called, 'Find the Thief'.

M.C. WHISTLE (To start game) (Enjoy Game: move wildly to the music) (Almost a sick over-exaggerated enthusiasm)

M.C.: WHISTLE (To stop game and point to Neil to say his lines) → he begins

padding, you see; they were down at Southend and in the water, when one General looked at the other General and said, 'Good God, Reggie, your feet are filthy!' 'Damn it all, man,' said the other General, 'I wasn't here last year...'  
[You see he couldn't get the soap...] Oh, never mind. [You ready now?]

Pierrots Yes!

M.C. Good, Milords, ladies and gentlemen, we will now perform for you the ever-popular War Game!

Band MARCH OF THE GLADIATORS

Circus Parade: it is led by a Pierrot, cartwheeling. France wears an officer's cap, a sexy woman either side of him; Germany, a helmet and leather belt beside him; Austria, a girl with two yellow plaits hanging from her hat; Ireland leads the British group, wearing a green wrap-over skirt. She ties along. Great Britain, wearing a tin helmet, rides on a pig's back. A character in a turban holds a square, tasselled sunshade over him. Two Russians, wearing fur hats, dance along. The parade must keep moving and not stop to let the performers declaim.

Newspanel TROOPS FIRE ON DUBLIN CROWD - AUG. 1. BRITISH CABINET VOTE AGAINST HELPING FRANCE IF WAR COMES. LIBERALS VOTE FOR NEUTRALITY UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES - GERMANY SENDS 40,000 RIFLES TO ULSTER.

M.C. (as the nations pass) La Belle France - Upright, steadfast Germany - Good morning, sir - (The first part of the game is called 'Find the Thief'.')

Band A PHRASE OF LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY

Britain Look here, we own 30 million square miles of colonies. The British Empire is the most magnificent example of working democracy the world has ever seen.

Voice Hear absolutely hear.

M.C. And the lady on my right.

Woot  
Baaaa