

The Philosophy and Practice of an Actor/Educator:
A Curated Collection

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Abstract

This document contains written material along with a digital portfolio of selected monologues and scenes. This material has been compiled for the completion of the Master of Fine Arts Degree in Drama from the University of Virginia and is intended to be a representation of the culmination of work leading to the transition from student to professional actor/educator.

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Chapter 1

Transcription of Filmed Introduction

Hi, I'm Cortney, and I'm an actor and an educator getting an MFA here at UVA. I have always been drawn to the power of human connection. Um...when I was nine, I saw *Les Mis* and I was transformed by the raw emotional bond the actors made with me that night, and I knew then that I had to be able to do THAT. So, I began studying and I realized how important *form* was to me as an artist. Th...the ability to integrate our physical, and our vocal, and our emotional communication into something that is replicable that speaks to an audience, that is what engenders honesty and honesty creates human connection and that is why *art works*. I don't know if it is my desire to perfect form or my constant striving for honesty um...but I know that having that ability time and again to give back that visceral experience is why I do this work.

And it's why I'm drawn to teaching. I see the classroom as this vessel of opportunity for students not only to absorb the material that they're being presented but to cultivate a passion for the exploration of this art form.

Uh...the work that I've put into my craft has helped make me a better human in my community and now I have the opportunity to give back that knowledge to the next generation of artists that are looking to define for themselves what truthful honest human connection is.

Artist Statement

I am an artist. I am fascinated with the study of the human experience and how we communicate and connect with other people. It is this fascination that drives my work. Through exploring questions such as How is my body telling this story? and What is this vocal placement conveying to an audience?, I tackle the complexities of authentic characterization. Sharing this characterization with scene partners allows us to experience honest, empathetic connection, which is the spark of communal storytelling. Whether in the classroom, in rehearsal, or with an audience, the sharing of human experience motivates me to keep learning and exploring who I am as an actor: physically, vocally, and collaboratively.

I am an actor. I relish getting lost in the grit of dramatic contemporary realism and delight in tumbling into the foolish humor of slapstick comedy. I believe in the importance of form. In order to realize this form, I cultivate nuance and specificity, which are discovered by exploring the farthest edges of artistic possibility. By approaching the work with both trust and abandon, I uncover the range and complexity available to me.

I am a mover. I explore the body in motion and investigate non-verbal storytelling. My studies in the practices of Jerzy Grotowski, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Rudolf Laban, and others have equipped me with a visceral awareness of the delicate specificity of information in a simple gesture or body position. The body has the capacity to elicit the emotional depths needed to bring to life complex characters. The body also has the power to create visual spectacle through feats of athleticism. To explore the potential of the human body in communication is a never-ending study.

I am a communicator. It is amazing to me how powerful the voice is in conveying information, not only with the words that we choose but also with the subtle tone shifts we make that alter the meaning of a phrase or even a word. It has taken me years to navigate the intricacies of the minuscule part of our anatomy that voice inhabits, and to build the skills to effectively place my vocal resonance to exemplify subtextual meaning. Because our voices, both technically and metaphorically, are very intimate and personal I

am continually challenging myself to be respectful of the investigation of the voice and avoid antiquated methods that impose a “correct” way of speaking.

I am a collaborator. I believe in the power of shared human experience and do not believe that theatre can be done in a bubble. I seek to find presence by observing the world and others around me. As a listener, I strive to maintain an openness for communication or what Patsy Rodenburg, in her investigation of presence, describes as second circle energy. I am forever seeking fellowship with my scene partners to chase the palpable energy created together in the work.

I am a lifelong learner. At the core of all my work is a love for understanding. I approach my artistic process with rigor and discipline, tools essential to the craft of acting. I nurture creative curiosity by learning how my body and voice communicate meaning to an audience. I embrace the spirit of the art of performing: the collaboration with both audience and artist. My work integrates movement, communication, collaboration, and learning about myself and the world around me in the pursuit of ultimately creating art. My work is my art. My art is me.

Teaching Statement

I stand in the empty classroom with syllabus and lesson plans, ready to start a new term. My heart races with anticipation and the knowledge that, the second the students walk through the door, everything changes. Each student brings their own unique needs and experiences. Some students may be nervous, not knowing what to expect from a performance-driven class, while others may be itching to dive into experiential learning. This diverse group of individuals will form the community sharing triumphs and setbacks throughout the semester. At this vital first meeting it is imperative that I begin to invite trust from my students to set the foundation for their success. To accomplish this, I foster an environment where the student has a stake in their education.

For my students to have a stake in their education I must first meet them where they are and build on their existing foundations. No matter what course I am teaching, I acknowledge and respect each student's uniqueness, considering their background, experience, and disposition. To address their diverse needs, I maintain a flexible teaching approach, constantly adapting to facilitate individual progress. When students are uncomfortable with in-person discussions, I pivot and offer an asynchronous platform like Flipgrid, where they can fully engage in constructive analyses of their work and the work of their peers with less anxiety. This invites stronger communication from every student and showcases the need for additional classroom activities to improve in-person dialogue skills. By providing options for students to access course objectives and responding to different learning styles, my syllabus becomes a living document that helps students forge pathways for growth.

To successfully meet students where they are, it is imperative they feel my acknowledgement of their agency and autonomy. Student success is driven by motivation, which emerges from having a say in their own education and contributing to a living syllabus. After the first few classes, students develop individual "manifestos" outlining their course goals and potential challenges. This assignment allows them to voice personal learning goals which I can then align with course objectives. Empowering students in this way has given rise to more dynamic group discussions and greater

enthusiasm and participation in classroom activities. When students are agents in their learning, they are more likely to take risks and try new experiences, leading to a more engaged and motivated learning environment. When an Ecuadorian student was struggling with the word “obsequious” in their scene, I encouraged them to use their native language to express what the character is feeling in that moment. After the presentation they observed they loved putting their culture in the scene and it made them feel more connected to the character they were portraying.

Autonomy affords a greater sense of self and can have an even greater impact when coupled with responsibility to others. By its very nature, theatre is personal, and exploring truthful connections requires individual vulnerability as well as collective support, which do not walk in the door on day one. Building this trust requires time and effort and is crucial for growth. In my classroom we end every session by sharing a word that describes our state of being. While some students are “hungry, tired, confused, and overwhelmed,” others are “intrigued, proud, excited, jazzed and bittersweet.” This ritual makes room for authentic expression and creates shared experiences among the ensemble. We conclude each class with a “unison clap,” employing no leader or group breath. Initially, this proves challenging; however, as the group bonds they find the necessary connection to succeed. The buzz in the room when it happens, the excitement on the students’ faces, and the celebration that ensues, are always beautiful to witness. By experiencing failure together at the beginning, they appreciate the power of collective learning and begin developing compassion in the classroom. Now we are ready to do the work.

The tools learned in my classroom enhance performance and life skills. My theater class, at its core, is the study of human behavior. By exploring this study physically and vocally, students build the strength and stamina needed to sustain the rigor of performance. Their understanding of their range increases, they refine the nuances of nonverbal communication, and they enhance their ability to tap into their emotional arsenal. These emotional intelligence skills lead to a more attuned awareness and a deeper understanding of what they are communicating to others. While my lessons in Laban’s Effort Drives can be initially met with shock and uncertainty, as students dive

deeper into the work, confusion changes to excitement while uncovering the power gained from understanding our relationship with Time, Weight, Space, and Flow. Students respond that once they incorporate Laban into their practice, things begin to click and they see the subtleties emerging in their work and in the work of others. Gaining confidence in understanding one's body and voice in communication, both in performance and in daily life, is an invaluable tool. Students often feel they have been gifted a magic trick to carry into other areas of their lives.

It's the last day of the term. Students' nerves have given way to joy and accomplishment. Aligned, focused, and energetic individuals are working together as a community of artists. As they revisit their "manifestos" they reflect on progress made. It is an honor to hear them recount their unexpected learning achievements while witnessing their pride in themselves and their classmates. Reluctant to leave, students linger after class, sharing the significance of their journeys. I stand again in an empty classroom, left with the echoes of a community of emerging artists. And I start again.

Chapter 2

Biography

Cortney grew up in the suburbs of Chicago. From the time she could drive she was making the 16-mile journey into the city to take acting classes. It was there that the spark for learning how to create truthful human connection on stage was ignited. She studied at 4 different colleges in her undergraduate years, settling at Loyola University of Chicago where she received her B.A. with a focus in Theatre. Once graduated, she found herself booking non-union storefront theatre jobs and spending her time in the exploration of human experiences captured in those intimate houses. In 2005, her passion for learning new forms of theater carried her to England to study for an M.A. in Performance at East 15 Acting School. There she expanded her knowledge of movement and voice techniques and discovered a passion for physical theater. After graduating in 2007, she traveled to Poland to investigate the rigor of Jerzy Grotowski's method of physical training. She returned to the US with a newfound passion for the physical approach to character development. In 2013 she and a collective of physical theatre artists embarked on a yearlong study of laboratory-style physical training resulting in a devised movement theater piece, *Core of the Pudel: Gutting the Legend of Faust*, which received a Joseph Jefferson Award nomination that year for best ensemble. Steadily her work increased in Chicago. She began partnering with Shattered Globe Theatre, developing and leading their annual Protégé Program, later joining the group as an ensemble member and having the privilege of performing in a number of their productions. In 2014 she became a member of SAG/AFTRA and began to grow her film/tv resume. During this time Cortney also cultivated her love for teaching. Having taught students of all ages in the Chicagoland area, in 2019 Cortney had the opportunity to teach Acting 1 at North Central College. In the fall of 2020, she embarked on a three-year M.F.A. program in Acting at the University of Virginia. She is expected to receive her degree in May of 2023. Although her formal training is coming to an end, she is reminded that learning is a lifelong adventure. She has discovered a newfound appreciation of the intricacies of

vocal technique. She continues to champion the power of movement to generate character, and she has fostered her passion for teaching at the college level. She is very excited to keep the journey going.

Cortney Lowinski

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SAG/AFTRA

REGIONAL PROFESSIONAL THEATRE

THE REALISTIC JONESES	Pony Jones	Wit/Shattered Globe - dir. Jeremy Wechsler
ANIMALS OUT OF PAPER	Ilana Andrews	Shattered Globe - dir. Devin De Mayo
HANNAH & MARTIN	Elfride Heidegger	Shattered Globe – dir. Lou Contey
HAPPY NOW?	Bea	Shattered Globe – Roger Smart
LOVE SONG	Molly	Buffalo Theatre Ensemble – Bryan Burke
RABBIT HOLE	Izzy	Night Blue Productions
DIARY OF ANNE FRANK	Miep	Metropolis Performing Arts Center
CORE OF THE PUDEL	Ensemble	Trap Door Theatre – ensemble devised
AN INSPECTOR CALLS	Shelia	New World Rep
ASSASSINS	Sarah Jane Moore	Wilmette Theatre – dir. Janey Louer
SONS OF LIBERTY	Tildy/Maria	Breadline Theatre
HUNCHBACK	Female U/S	Redmoon Theatre – dir. Leslie Danzig
BARB: A GIRL ON THE PIANO	Woman	Village Players
LOVERS	Mags	Organic Theatre Co.

EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

SENSE & SENSIBILITY	Mrs. Dashwood	UVA - dir. Marianne Kubik
16 WINTERS, OR THE BEAR'S TALE	Her	UVA - dir. Kate Eastwood Norris
WHEN THE RAIN STOPS FALLING	Elizabeth (older)	UVA - dir. Marianne Kubik
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	Helena/Snug	UVA - dir. Colleen Kelly
DEATH OF THE AUTHOR (stream)	Sarah	UVA - dir. Colleen Kelly/Denise Stewart

TELEVISION

UTOPIA	Teacher (Co-star)	Amazon Studios – dir. Susanna Fogel
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FILM

WIDOWS	Receptionist (supporting)	See-Saw Films/Steve McQueen
OLYMPIA	Nurse (supporting)	Line Film Co./30 Pictures/g. Dixon
FREUDIAN SLIP	Girl (supporting)	Big Toe Production

COMMERCIALS/INDUSTRIALS (available upon request)

EDUCATION/TRAINING

M.F.A. in Drama, Professional Actor Training Program – University of Virginia – Charlottesville, Virginia

M.A. in Acting - East 15 Drama School - University of Essex, England

B.A. – Loyola University Chicago – Chicago, Illinois

Additional Training: Grotowski Workshop (Poland) with Song of the Goat theatre company; Clown training (Chicago) with 500 Clown's Paul Kalina & Molly Brennan; Masterclasses (UVA) with Kathleen Turner; Arvold Casting Residency (UVA) with Erica Arvold & Richard Warner; Tectonic Theatre Residency (UVA) with Jeffrey LaHoste & Dimitri Joseph Moïse (feedback and Q&A with Moisés Kaufman)

AWARDS/CERTIFICATIONS

Joseph Jefferson Award nomination – Outstanding Ensemble for *Core of the Pudel*

Pass with recommendation in *Rapier & Dagger* by SAFD, 2022

SPECIAL SKILLS/INTERESTS

Physical Theatre: mask, clowning, puppetry, Laban, Meyerhold; Combat Training: unarmed, single sword, broadsword; Dance: ballet, jazz, contemporary (all intermediate); Dialects: RP, Estuary, Chicago; IPA competent; Other Interests: swimming, biking, hiking, whistling, Pilates



Chapter 3

Journal of Portfolio Creation

Embarking on another advanced degree in 2020 was a significant decision, and one I had contemplated for years. Having received an M.A. in 2007, I was prepared for the rigors of academia: the long hours, the endless reading, and the emotional exhaustion. What I hadn't expected when beginning this M.F.A. Acting Program at UVA was that I was going to uncover a new excitement for self-discovery regarding how I work as an actor. Through my movement studies in the program, I have been able to advance my knowledge of Rudolf Laban's Factors of Effort: Time, Weight, Space, and Flow (Adrian, 93). I have also developed an intuitive relationship with the vocabulary his work offers to define the human expressiveness of movement. As is reflected in the written analysis of the monologues and scene in this chapter, Laban's vocabulary of time, weight, space, and flow is a consistent component in my rehearsal process.

Additionally, in voice and acting classes, I discovered new ways to analyze text and cultivated a better understanding of how my vocal instrument works. These studies in movement, acting, and voice, coupled with the knowledge I brought with me into the program, have resulted in a personal practice deeply rooted in the uncovering of truthful connections through the exploration of a character's physical, vocal, and emotional life.

I set many challenges for myself over the last three years which have afforded me countless opportunities to grow as an artist. For this thesis project, I wanted to explore, in a laboratory setting, the strengths and weaknesses of my range. I chose monologues that covered a series of binary extremes, such as youth and age, comedy and tragedy, classical and contemporary, and realism and melodrama. I also chose a scene to investigate the relationship between two characters struggling to communicate. These filmed selections are not meant to represent the full scope of a character's journey, one which an audience would experience during a live performance, but rather are meant to document moments of my explorations and discoveries of the emotional complexities of these characters' lives.

The following analysis reflects my process and how I came to understand these characters' inner lives. For the monologues, I will specifically focus on the areas of text, style, and/or language, as well as the physical and vocal embodiment of each of the pieces. For the scene, I will focus on the creation of a fully realized relationship with another actor.

Monologue: Helena from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Helena is a multifaceted character. She is full of love, hope, fear, angst, defiance, confusion, indignation, and joy all in the twenty-six lines of her soliloquy. If tackling the sophistication of verse alongside her complex emotional range wasn't challenging enough, Helena also embodies a youthful energy, one that still resides in me but, as I mature as an actor, is less exercised in performance.

Shakespeare left a gold mine of clues on how to perform his words. Knowing how to capitalize on this information is a guide to revealing character and avoiding surface-level portrayals. Helena speaks in verse, predominantly iambic pentameter, riddled with imagery and rhymes. One challenge I initially faced was adhering to the structure of the rhyming scheme without producing a "sing-song" quality. I dug into the text and diligently researched the images, the language, and the rhythm.

Exploring Helena's physical and vocal composition uncovered the emotional dynamics needed for this monologue. This required patience and a lot of creative research. I started to play with her physicality being light and free. I discovered that if I placed her center of gravity forward and on the balls of her feet, there would be an imbalance that permitted a forward and upward flow of energy. This became crucial for the allowance of freedom needed to switch from one emotional extreme to the other within the lines of the piece. In practice, I discovered the buoyancy of her weight gave rise to an energetic yet exhaustive state that was needed for Helena.

I found a similar need for lightness in her vocal placement, so I played primarily with head resonance for vocal variety. It was important to me to try to find the balance of a light sound without becoming shrill and to allow for the weight of her emotions to exist without her voice becoming heavy or strong. Like her physicality, her voice needed to be

free to indirectly flow in space as she nimbly navigated one thought to another.

Allowing myself to examine Helena's lighter physical and vocal qualities gave me insight into her youthfulness and naivety, two qualities necessary for the portrayal of her hopefulness at the end of the soliloquy. Maintaining that levity when she was emotionally frustrated and defiant proved challenging but ultimately rewarding. It called for an exploration into the opposing Laban effort elements of weight. I scrutinized my work to be sure that I was adhering to a light physical and vocal quality while navigating a heavier emotional burden. Allowing myself the time to explore that opposition revealed a range of opportunities available in the construction of future roles.

Monologue: Hermione from William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*

In the third act of *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione's plight is fraught with uncompromising physical burden and resolute emotional depth (two qualities I knew would be challenging but was eager to explore). The gravity of the loss of her freedom, her family, and even the potential loss of her life was such an extreme contrast to the youthful energy I explored with Helena.

My text analysis with Hermione required the same discipline as Helena in order to uncover the intricacies within the severity of the circumstances. The discovery I found most revealing was punctuation. In the beginning of my research, I relied too much on the trappings of conversational speech to convey the feelings of the character which resulted in a surface-level exploration. It wasn't until I embraced the construction of the sentences, paying close attention to the punctuation—which dictated breath and length of thought—that I was able to find the full emotional range this speech demands in order to portray the cruelty of Hermione's situation.

Locking into a heavier weight, both physically and vocally, allowed me to access the emotional heaviness Hermione was experiencing in this piece. Finding that weight within a character who is physically unsteady was not easy. I met that challenge once I started pushing her center of gravity backward. This created a weighted instability I was able to fight against, resulting in a profound vulnerability appropriate for Hermione. It was exciting to discover the power of that small backward imbalance to provoke a raw

emotional connection to the story. The physicality also added a newfound connection to the physical limitations of a woman who had just given birth.

Unlike Helena who lives with her head in the clouds, Hermione resides in a guttural place of injustice and pain, having just given birth and losing everything she loves. I needed to explore a deeper placement and resonance for her voice. Focusing primarily on chest resonance and my lower register, I was able to tap into a richness in my vocal quality which led to an emotional depth for Hermione. This discovery catapulted a vocal complexity I was able to find in my work that I had not experienced before. This lower placement unlocked an emotional vulnerability that was rooted in strength which initially seemed like two opposing qualities but resulted in a balance needed to showcase the plight she was enduring.

I have great respect for the emotional journey Hermione faces in this piece. As I made room for this character to be fully exposed and vulnerable, I discovered how important my job was, as the voice for this character, to make space for her strength to shine rather than play the self-pity that may come from her situation. This discovery is invaluable to my work as I continue to have the privilege of playing characters with such richly weighted emotional lives.

Monologue: Wife (Irena) from Neil Simon's *The Good Doctor*

I chose *The Good Doctor* to investigate humor in contemporary “stylized” material. Neil Simon based this play on the short stories and writings of Anton Chekhov. It is represented in the style of Chekhovian comedy through the lens of contemporary language. What makes this piece so fun is the Chekhovian comedy butted against contemporary sensibility. Irena is an example of one way Chekhov portrayed comedic characters: having an air of self-indulgence. In this play, she is presented in a performative manner, like a character in a modern soap opera. This type of comedy demands heightened physicality and an embrace of an over-the-top expression of emotion.

The humor of the piece is based on two major aspects: timing and a character's broken expectations. Playing with time in physicality and voice naturally flowed into the

comedy of Simon's work. It required a pace that would hold the interest of both the audience and my silent partner, a pace that drove the passion of forbidden love and the guilt of adultery. Irena repeatedly shatters her own expectations of the meeting, leaving the audience racing to keep up with her changing mind. What will she expect of Peter, the object of her affection? She first must realize what she expects of herself, which comprises the action of the piece. The juxtaposition of the safety of married life and the romance of this stranger created for me a playground to allow an unrestrained, almost clownish physicality to emerge in the work.

This piece was surprisingly challenging for me. I struggled to maintain the balance I found between truthful representation with the exaggerated needs of the text. At first, I found myself making everything too subtle and serious. It wasn't until I used a sustained quality in my body and voice that I began to see how important it was to embrace the melodrama I needed to give this piece the humor it called for. Without finding that trust in the extreme with Irena, I don't think I would have been able to effectively present her complexity and humor.

Irena has a large presence and takes up a lot of space in the world. Her movements are exaggerated and expansive. She owns the space around her. Because of this presence, I looked less at her weight and focused more on how she moved in time. This pivot in exploration exposed an unexpected starting point for uncovering her emotional life. Investigating how long to sustain a movement or how quickly to snap into a new physical state became the road map to her passionate struggle with Peter. This also gave way to revealing her sensuality, which took an uninhibited trust to boldly explore. Sensuality has always been a personal challenge for me in performance, and I will continue growing in this area in order to access it more easily for a character's needs.

I also centered my investigation of her voice around Laban's effort factor of time. I played with elongating vowels to highlight the fluidity of her nature. I experimented with the clipping of consonant sounds to juxtapose her vowels. These binaries led to a volatile emotional state for the character, which is where Irena lives in this piece. This vocal exploration highlighted my insecurities as an actor in a similar way the extreme physicality did. This process revealed to me the importance of exploring in an

unrestrained way and afforded me invaluable lessons about my own roadblocks—roadblocks that I can now put definition to and begin to tear down. This melodramatic style granted me permission to create a character that loves the sound of her own voice and allowed me to capitalize on her passion without overacting.

Monologue: Renee from Melissa Ross's *Thinner Than Water*

Renee is a character rooted in realism and charged with the emotional extremes of anger and confined pain. This piece begins at a volatile tipping point and quickly explodes into a sea of emotional depth. It was important to me to explore the extreme of the emotions while at the same time playing with the confinement of her flow. Developing a specific emotional starting point, that had to be ready at the exact moment this monologue begins, was vital to the success of this piece. Balancing a fully developed prior moment while not allowing the emotions to run away was an exhilarating journey. In order to create the emotional depth of the prior moment without sacrificing the gravity of the scene, I explored the heights of the rage pulsing through Renee and then tempered that unrestrained feeling with a shaky lid, one ready to pop off the pot when it boiled over. In practice, I started by pacing the room and venting whatever came to my head, pushing my personal limit of anger and rage. From there, I compressed her flow and began to experience what that rage would feel like in a bound state. That became the starting point for the first line of the piece.

I do not like a lot of profanity on stage. In fact, I nearly did not work on this piece because of the number of times that Renee swears. However, exploring her uncontrolled, unconscious explosion of pent-up emotions helped me not only see how to use the profanity but to also embrace its importance.

Renee is emotionally and physically closed off and bound. Her relationship with her dying father is estranged. In this piece she is like a rubber band. She is trying to hold strong while fighting against the stretching of the circumstances of the moment. This leads to emotional tension, the result of which will either return her to stasis or cause her to snap. The more a character is closed off, the harder it is for me to access them physically. I began my process of finding her physicality by first allowing full freedom in

her body while working the emotional range the character was experiencing. In time, I began to contain that freedom and allow that emotional range to push against these new barriers which led to a precarious emotional life being held in an unstable container.

Rather than focusing on Renee's vocal range, I instead honed in on the implications of public versus private communication and how that impacts a character's vocal choices. With Renee, I recognized some expansive awareness in the beginning and end of the piece to hint at public listening. In the middle of the piece, I discovered an emotional freedom that concentrated more on a private experience, not letting outside influences stifle her.

When my work moves from rehearsal to performance, I strive to find flexibility within the established structure of a character. For Renee, I noticed that the span of that flexibility was wide. The sheer heat with which she responded produced inconsistencies that led to vastly different takes of the piece. Although her core physical, vocal, and emotional life was always present, *how* she communicates through intensity, volume, and spatial awareness varied in each run-through. As the actor, I am always intrigued by this unpredictability in performance and often have to remind myself to trust that the rehearsal work will lead to a fully invested representation of the complexity of a character like Renee.

Scene: Jess from Melissa Ross's *Of Good Stock*

Choosing to include a scene in my digital portfolio followed from my desire to investigate partner work. Jess and Fred are in the throes of disconnection. Jess's battle with cancer, and the impact it has on both characters, is brought to light in the four minutes of this last scene of the play.

The characters in this scene are experiencing a deep need from and for each other. During the rehearsal process, my scene partner James Stringer and I discovered that need opened a discussion of what we, the actors, also needed in that moment. One challenge we both faced in exploring this scene was our desire to help our scene partner. For me, I continually allowed James space where I should have pushed for connection. Often this resulted in a low-energy playing of the scene. Additionally, it was easy to fall into blame

or fight mode when it was imperative for Jess to constantly be seeking understanding from Fred. Once James and I found that shared drive to seek understanding from each other, our work began to expand. At this point, we realized that developing our needs as actors was the key to developing the objectives of the characters. It illuminated the parallel in the relationship of the actors and characters; my partner and I actually had to fight to understand each other's processes, which is what Jess and Fred are fighting so hard to accomplish. It was a long process, and the result was not as polished as we would have liked, but the lesson was clear: Jess and Fred, and Cortney and James, needed to achieve a give-and-take, a clear and generous awareness of the other. This action and reaction paved the way for a connection that finally revealed the love and pain of the characters and allowed us more freedom to live in the life of the scene.

Taking the time to investigate the power of a true and deliberate connection with a partner was an invaluable reminder of the importance of embodied listening. It is exhausting to focus fully on the gravity of connection with another person. It is a muscle that needs practice and patience. I find myself rediscovering that at the center of my craft is the exploration of connection; to myself, to others, and to the work. Whether a character is speaking to a person on stage or on the other side of a lens, investigating how a character communicates and why they need to communicate is the art.

Portfolio Materials

The following play script excerpts comprise the monologues and scenes which I prepared and performed as evidence of my academic creative research in Acting. Four monologues and one scene have been individually videotaped and archived with this thesis document.

Monologue: Helena from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare 2017, 136-138)

HELENA

How happy some o'er other some can be!
Through Athens I am thought as fair as she,
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so;
He will not know what all but he do know.
And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind,
And therefore is winged cupid painted blind.
Nor has loves mind of any judgment taste:
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste.
And therefore is love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.
As waggish boys in games themselves forswear,
So the boy Love is perjured everywhere.
For ere Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyne,
He hailed down oaths that he was only mine;
And when this hail some heat from Hermia felt,
So he dissolved, and showers of oath did melt.
I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight.

Then to the wood will he tomorrow night
 Pursue her; and for this intelligence
 If I have thanks, it is a dear expense.
 But herein mean I to enrich my pain,
 To have his sight thither and back again.

Monologue: Hermione from William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (Shakespeare 2010, 226-228)

HERMIONE

Sir, spare your threats:

The bug which you would fright me with I seek;
 To me can life be no commodity.
 The crown and comfort of my life, your favor,
 I do give lost, for I do feel it gone,
 But know not how it went. My second joy,
 And First-fruits of my body, from his presence
 I am barred like one infectious. My third comfort
 (Starred most unluckily) is from my breast,
 The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth,
 Haled out to murder; myself on every post
 Proclaimed a strumpet; with immodest hatred
 The childbed privilege denied, which 'longs
 To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried
 Here to this place, I'th' open air, before
 I have got strength of limit. Now, my Liege,
 Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
 That I should fear to die? Therefore proceed.
 But yet hear this – mistake me not: no life –
 I prize it not a straw – but for mine honor,
 Which I would free, if I shall be condemned
 Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else

But what your jealousies awake, I tell you
 'Tis rigor and not law. Your Honors all,
 I do refer me to the oracle.
 Apollo be my judge.

Monologue: Wife (Irena) from Neil Simon's *The Good Doctor* (Simon 1974, 45)

WIFE: *No!*... Not a word!... Not a sound!... Please... I couldn't bear it... Not until you've heard what's in my heart. (*She takes a moment to compose herself.*)... For weeks now I've been in torment... You've used my husband as a clever and devious device to arouse my passions... which I freely admit, have been lying dormant these past seven years... Whether you are sincere or not, you have awakened in me desires and longings I never dreamt were possible... You appeal to my vanity and I succumb. You bestir my thoughts of untold pleasures and I weaken. You attack my every vulnerability and I surrender. I am here, Peter Semyonich, if you want me. (*He starts to reach for her but she holds up her hand for him to stop.*) But let me add this. I love my husband dearly. He is not a passionate man, nor even remotely romantic. Our life together reaches neither the heights of ecstasy nor the depths of anguish. We have an *even* marriage. Moderate and comfortable... and in accepting this condition and the full measure of his devoted love, I have been happy... I come to you now knowing that once you take me in your arms, my marriage and my life with Nicky will be destroyed for all time... I am too weak and too selfish to make the choice... I rely on your strength of character... The option is yours, my dear Peter... Whichever one you choose will make me both miserable and eternally grateful... I beg of you not to use me as an amusement... although even with that knowledge, I would not refuse you. I am yours to do with as you will, Peter Semyonich... If you want me, open your arms now and I will come to you... If you love me, turn your back and I will leave, and never see or speak to you again... The choice, my dearest, sweetest, love of my life is yours... I await your decision.

Monologue: Renee from Melissa Ross's *Thinner Than Water* (Ross 2015, 39-40)

RENEE: Get to know his *grandchildren*??? Are you *high*??? Why should he be allowed to have that??? For a four dollar toy from the drug store? Is that what my kids are worth? What about when they were *born*? Where was he then with his fucking yo yo and his plastic watergun. Fuck that. Where was he when I got *married*? Or when I graduated from *high school*? Or when *I was in the fucking hospital*??? Fuck that. Fuck him. Look I'm sorry he was sad and sick and without. Medical marijuana. That really sucks for him. But there was no way in hell he was gonna get the chance to fuck my kids up like he fucked up me. And break their hearts and disappoint them and make them feel unloved and ugly and unwanted and broken into pieces. Because one day? If I had let him in? He would've fucked up. He would've fucked up huge. And he would've disappointed them. He would've broken a promise. Or disappeared. Or left them wondering what they did wrong. And *my kids*? Aren't worth the risk. So no. He doesn't. Didn't. Get the *privilege* of my children. You clearly aren't a parent. Or you would get that.

Scene: Jess from Melissa Ross's *Of Good Stock* (Ross unpublished, 142-146)

JESS. Last night I dreamed that I was big and full and. I had to go to the bathroom. And I kept saying "The baby is sitting on my bladder." And then I woke up and I had to pee but other than that I was/completely empty.

FRED. We couldn't have it. First trimester/they said.

JESS. I *know* I'm just saying./It *would've* been.

FRED. Don't do that to yourself.

JESS. You ever think sometimes god makes mistakes? Like. Maybe he forgot. Maybe after he said. Fuck! It wasn't Jess who was supposed to get pregnant – it was *Tess*. Jess was *only* supposed to get *cancer*. There was a memo. Well Holy Crap. What do I do now??? (*Beat.*) You think God says Fuck. And Holy Crap?

FRED. Probably. I would if I were God. I'd say whatever the fuck I want. (*Beat.*) We could still do it. Once you're through/with chemo.

JESS. I can't.

FRED. They said we could give it a try/if you.

JESS. What if it comes back?

FRED. That's not a reason to.

JESS. By the time I'm in the clear we won't exactly be in our. Optimal/childbearing years.

FRED. I'm just saying we can try! See/what happens!

JESS. Look *you* don't know what it's like to lose your mom as a kid. You don't. And while there's still a. Risk of that happening I. I can't do that/to somebody else.

FRED. OK OK.

JESS. I can't ignore that. Possibility. For my own selfish need to have a. To leave something behind if I. Fuck if I. If I *die*./I can't do that.

FRED. You're not going to die.

JESS. I might! I might still die! I'm not out of/the dark yet.

FRED. We can't go there.

JESS. If you want to talk about this??? If you *really* want to talk about it??? *Death* has to be a part of/the conversation!

FRED. That's not thinking positively!

JESS. I could die a month from now. I could die six months/from now.

FRED. So could I! Any of us could/die at any moment!

JESS. It is not the same! And how dare you pretend that it is! (*Pause*.) I can't be with you. Really truly present. With you. Again. Until you accept *that*/part of me.

FRED. That you are gonna die???

JESS. That I *could* die!

FRED. I don't I. (*Beat*.) I can't. (*Beat*.) I'm sorry/but I

JESS. Well then how can you ask me to share it with you? Huh? If you want to talk about it? Then you have to accept. All of it. And understand that. Some of it actually has nothing to do with you. Some of it. Some of it is *mine*. And I need you to understand/that if I.

FRED. I know that. I do.

JESS. That if I. Flinch when you touch me? It isn't because I don't *love* you. It isn't because I don't *want* you to touch me. It isn't about *you* at all. It's because. *(Beat.)* It's because. It's. When you touch me I'm. *(Beat.)* I am vividly reminded of what's. *Missing.*

FRED. *(Beat.)* There is absolutely nothing/missing.

JESS. There is *absolutely* something missing! And it's. It's. It's something that's *mine*. OK? It's a loss that's *mine*. And I'm sorry that it hurts you. Because you are the absolute last person I would ever want to hurt. And I'm sorry that you feel isolated from it. But. Sometimes? *I* feel isolated./And alone.

FRED. You don't have to be.

JESS. I *feel* like I'm. *(Beat.)* Like I'm. Something scarred./Something sick.

FRED. Honey.

JESS. Something. Something. Falling apart and. *Broken.* And and. *Fragile.* And. I *hate* feeling like that. And. *(Beat.)* And there is nothing you can say that will change it.

Or./Take it away.

FRED. I know that.

JESS. Do you? Because every time I look at your face. All I can see is your worry and. And your fear. And it's. Unbearable for me to see that. *(Beat.)* I don't want to see you see me like this.

FRED. Like what?

JESS. Like how I am now. I look like I've. Like I've been. Through a war. *(Beat.)* When you look at me? All I can think is how. Is how. *Guilty* I feel that you're/That you're.

FRED. Hey. Would you.

JESS. That you're stuck. With *me*.

FRED. *(Beat.)* Look at me.

JESS. *(Shakes her head no.)* I can't.

FRED. Come on. Jess. Look at me. *(She doesn't. Pause.)* All I see. When I look at you. Is a beautiful fifteen year old girl I knew. A long time ago *(Beat.)* and all I can think is. How lucky I am. That I somehow convinced the truly extraordinary Jess Stockton. To marry me. *(She looks at him. Really looks at him. She begins to quietly cry.)*

JESS. *(A confession.)* I'm not. I'm not ready. To die.

FRED. You're not/going to die.

JESS. Please don't.

FRED. You are not going to die. *Tomorrow*. OK? Will you just. Will you let me have.
That.

Chapter 4

Filmed Supplements

As a supplement to this written thesis, a filmed personal introduction as well as the following filmed monologues and scene are available for review.

Personal Introduction

Cortney Lowinski

Monologue

Renee, *Thinner Than Water* by Melissa Ross

Monologue

Wife, *The Good Doctor* by Neil Simon

Monologue

Hermione, *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare

Monologue

Helena, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare

Scene

Jess, *Of Good Stock* by Melissa Ross

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