Continual Transformation:
Refining and Deepening the Craft of Acting Through Education

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Introduction

As my graduate training draws to a close, and I begin to move into the realm of professional acting, I find myself reflecting on how my training has shaped my beliefs and approach to the craft of acting. Specifically, I am taking stock of the techniques which have advanced my understanding of the actor's process and strengthened my conviction that acting is a life-long journey of continual transformation.

In this thesis I will explore how each area of my training — character-based[1] acting, vocal, physical and teaching experience — have shaped my perception of the craft. I will discuss my journey in each of these training methods, both challenges and successes, highlighting techniques which strongly shaped my approach to process.

In later chapters I will discuss the development of my teaching methods and how experiences in the classroom paralleled my experiences with the acting process. I will examine how my training influenced my teaching methods and how both contributed to a deeper understanding of the techniques of acting.

Through this introspection of my development over the last three years of graduate school, I will be better able to identify how I have grown as a performer and how best to proceed in advancing my abilities as an actor.

[1] Character-based training are those acting techniques which focus on the internal motivations and objectives of the character. The emphasis is on the thought-process and psychology of the character.

Chapter I: Educating the Actor

When reflecting upon the character-based actor training I received in my MFA program, I realize how much it has changed my view of the craft of acting, process, and the actor's role.

When I began my graduate training, my acting process was limited. I had Stanislavsky-based training[2] from my undergraduate program, but, beyond that, I was not well-versed in other acting methods and techniques. It was due to this limited kit of techniques that I found myself with an inadequate process. I would begin by reading the play multiple times, first for story and then for character details. Next I did character paper work, including a character questionnaire and a large amount of backstory. The questionnaire included details about the character's objectives, obstacles, past experience, similarities and differences between myself and the character, etc. While doing my character research, I would work on memorizing lines and decide on tactics for each line. After this base work, I did not do much more. I would go to rehearsal, adjust as the director asked, and sometimes stumble upon an interesting and new choice. It is somewhat difficult to look back on my previous work and admit how menial my actor journey was, but I can now see clearly that it was. I did all my actor homework, but I never explored, or even recognized, the problem of how to bring that character work onto the stage.

I realized that my previous work was without growth. It is the nature of life to continue to shift and change. If the actor is meant to portray life, then, it is reasonable to believe that the actor must continue to shift and change. The actor must strive to find new

[2] Stanislavsky-based training is a system of actor training which draws from the theories and methods developed by Constantin Stanislavski which focus on the development of the internal life of the character.

details in every moment of a performance, a new choice, or deeper understanding of the character. This is what was missing from my approach. I would perform an exercise or a role, and, once I thought I had it right, I didn't leave room for growth.

I now believe that part of the actor's job is to leave room for possibilities. Even when a moment works perfectly, there should be room for exploration. I now strive to find variations of choices, investigate why a moment works or does not work, and search for new aspects in every game, role, and line. While I have continued some of the above practices of character research I do so with a new and expanded purpose. This is a major shift from my previous view of process. This shift was gradual and can be attributed to my training as a whole, but can be traced to a specific moment when the concepts introduced to me in training were illuminated. This moment occurred while reading Anne Bogart's book, *And Then, You Act*.

I was particularly struck with Bogart's philosophies on how an actor should approach the craft. The intention section of the book discussed the idea that any step in an actor's process should be an artistic creation. Bogart spoke about how "The actor's job in rehearsal can be to articulate rather than to please (Bogart 25)." Until this point in my life I had striven to do as the director wanted. What Bogart was emphasizing was that the director is a facilitator and a collaborator, and the actor must equally take ownership of the production and bring their artistry to the piece. This was what had been missing from my work. I was not bringing my artistry to it, but relying on the director to shape me as he wished. At all points in rehearsal I should be striving to create. On a daily basis, I should be creating within my process. I needed to play and explore throughout rehearsal. I needed to create more opportunities to ask questions about my character and choices.

This exploration would lead to more possibilities and, eventually, deeper refinement of my character. This is how I could bring my artistry to the work: by investigation and refinement.

How to go about this investigation was also discussed in Bogart's book. In the section regarding attention, Bogart discusses how actors must cultivate attention in a meditative-like manner. This section articulated the self-awareness an actor must have in order to explore in a rehearsal process. I needed to practice not only being able to recognize a moment, but to analyze the details of the moment. I needed to cultivate an attentiveness to my partner and the nuances of his behavior that might stimulate a response in my character. It is necessary to be aware of the process, as well: when a moment is working and when it is not, when to delve deeper into a choice and when to let it go. Bogart says, "Undergo often. The mass of a play contains complex situations, characters, and themes (Bogart 49)" and "The effort it takes to make the work is the point (Bogart 50)." The attention I give to my work and how I investigate the complexity is the point. It short changes the work if the actor is not attentive to the nuances of the piece. Furthermore, if a character seems simple, the actor is not paying enough attention. There is always something new to investigate; people are complicated, and life is not simple. Acting is a mirror of life and offers just as much to investigate.

With these concepts of attention and investigation securely planted in my mind, I began having new realizations about class exercises. One particular exercise that was directly benefited was a moment-to-moment exercise introduced by Colleen Kelly, Head of Acting for the University of Virginia Department of Drama. In the exercise, she asked me to experience fire. In class, I had reacted to seeing the fire and played the heat of the

fire, but I had not paid attention to the process. My choices were generalized and did not observe the ABCs of the moment. When I performed it a second time, Professor Kelly instructed me to go through the steps of experiencing fire and to use all my senses. The first step was to smell smoke. The next step was to inhale the smoke, feel heat, recognize the origin, and react to the fire while continuing to deal with the effects of said fire. I had missed a substantial amount of sensory details present when experiencing fire. In the course of this exercise I was able to discuss the work and make adjustments in my approach to said work. I had developed a vocabulary with my instructor through the experience of reading Bogart's book. The next time I worked on this scene, I was able to give more attention to the cause and effect within each moment.

Another experience that was aided by having read *And Then, You Act* was a "Circles of Attention"[3] exercise. This explored where I was focusing my attention in the course of a scene. My partner and I were looking at an object at a distance. My partner believes it to be a "beaver" and I believe it to be a "log." In the course of the scene, my instructor observed that I was playing my character's opinion instead of focusing and experiencing. I played the annoyance of having to stop making coffee, and that influenced my behavior when looking at the object. I did not actually look, I played irately looking. The next time, she asked me to have a strong image of where I was looking and experience what it is like when you cannot quite make out a shape in the distance. When I did this, another student observed that my physicality changed. My body stretched a bit more to peer out the imagined window and my tongue stuck out just a bit in the struggle. These were all bodily reactions that came from truly giving my focus

[3] Circle of Attention is a concept, developed by Stanislavsky, which highlights where an actor's attention is focused on stage via three levels of proximity: vast, immediate, and internal.

and paying attention to the details of the imagined world. It became a scene not about manufactured annoyance, but struggling to experience what my partner was experiencing: the beaver. If there was any annoyance, it emerged as a by-product of miscommunication between two characters instead of being forced upon the scene. This is more organic, as emotion manifests from experienced stimuli in life.

Another by-product of this exercise was my realization that I do not have to force my choices. My objective as an actor is to stay present and available to experiencing the circumstance of my character. The emotion manifested by that experience will arise organically. Previously, my tendency had been to layer on a bit more than was needed to ensure that the intention behind the behavior would not be missed. Using the strategy of "Circles of Attention" kept me from forcing my opinion, by way of my character, on the audience.

My physical and vocal courses, also, began to coalesce through this new-found attentiveness. I began making connections between what I was learning in my character-based courses and what was being taught in my physical and vocal courses. I noted that quickly shifting my tactical choices, through the use of Rasaboxes[4] or "slaloming,"[5] would immediately affect my vocal and physical choices. Similarly, I could make a physical and vocal choice that would affect my character's psychological state. I could tighten my chest and throat and my voice would tremble from the tension. If I add irregularity in my breathing, my body responds by feeling sad.

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[4] Rasaboxes is a psychophysical exercise, introduced by Jerzy Grotowski and further developed by Richard Schechner, in which points within a performance space are marked out and attributed with an emotional state. An actor is then asked to travel through each emotional state fully embodying each as they pass from box to box.

[5] Slaloming is a term used by Maria Aitken, in her teaching series *Acting for High Comedy*, which describes a rapid shift in tactic, tone, or emotional state.

Another connection a found between training modalities was that the moment to moment exercise could be applied to physical movement and gesture. By observing the mechanics of a physical moment, I became more attuned to the mechanics of a character-driven moment. Through these experiences I came to the belief that no matter how my process progressed, it had to end with clear physical behavior.

My current process utilizes aspects of all of my actor training and varies for each project. In the role of Mrs. Child in *Crazy for You*, University of Virginia, Fall 2013, my process began with investigating vocal choices, and the character's physicality developed from the influence of her accent. In my role for the film *Finding Alyce*, Ramer Productions, Richmond, VA Spring 2014, my process heavily utilized imagery and substitution. In this production my character-based choices had a strong influence on my physical choices. In my clown work, however, my process was reversed and the physicality of my character helped develop her psychology and voice. As these examples show I try to include facets from all three areas of training each time I develop a character. I find myself touching on each aspect of my training, in different degrees, during my process and pulling from exercises as the need arises. The result is a diverse array of acting choices.

I have been making use of the idea that there are multiple, viable choices for any given moment and have found that Rasaboxes work exceedingly well for finding vocal, physical, and tactical variety. They compel an immediate shift of all three by forcing the actor to snap into a new emotional shape. I often use Rasaboxes in my process, because they encourage variety and play. I endeavor, however, not to rely too heavily on any one acting tool and will opted for a new exercise if I have overused another.

The one constant I have employed in my process is to investigate a moment even after I think I have found the answer. In my scenes and exercises, my goal is to always find something new. If I learn how to identify my balancing point in an exercise, then, next time, I will search for the range of that balancing point. The time following, I will investigate how the physical exercise can be used in developing my character. After that, I will apply the exercise to a scene. If I am constantly striving to peel back the next layer of possibilities, then my performance will never stagnate but will always be present and alive with possibility. This same principal can be used in the whole of the acting process. If I regard the techniques and exercises I use in my creative process as just techniques and exercises, then that is all they will ever be. However, if I regard them as opportunities to delve into the details of how I work, using the process as a diagnostic for understanding myself as an artist, then I will continue to grow as an artist.

In the immediate future, I am encouraging my growth through exploring the application of my graduate training to film. I have observed that the film medium requires absolute focus. If I lose the character's thought process for even a second, the camera will capture it. If a step in the thought-process is skimmed over, the camera will see that too. The camera's eye requires that I develop a process that is detail oriented. I must cultivate my focus so I can experience my character's circumstances honestly and fully. In turn, my film work will help develop this same ability for detailed work on-stage. The cycle will expand my ability to make nuanced choices and stay in character for extended periods.

In this way, I will continue to refine the use of my graduate training through new and continual exploration that will further hone my process and understanding of the craft of acting.

Chapter II: The Choice in Voice

In the same way that acting training has changed my approach to process and character, so too has my vocal training. It has expanded my process through self-awareness and detailed technique that allow for clearer, more nuanced character choices and has furthered the development of my acting process.

Prior to beginning vocal training, I did not think about the voice. I would make character-based choices, and my voice would change based on that choice, but without specific thought given to vocal choices itself. I did not analyze the voice in detail nor did I consider how doing so could improve the quality of my acting choices. I did not have any comprehension of what vocal work was or what it could achieve. I was totally unaware of vocal habits that existed in my work, or how that was undermining many of my characters. It was not until I began exploring vocal training that my sensory awareness improved to a point where I could recognize my vocal tendencies and give thought to the importance of voice in process.

The initial introduction to vocal work was difficult for me. I had trouble hearing the differences in many of the vowel sounds. It seemed as if everyone else could hear the differences. Instead, I relied on feeling the changes within my head and face. I could feel vibrations in the bones of my face: the nasal cavity, cheek bones, and mandible. Different vowel sounds would change the strength of the vibrations in each part of the face and, based on these feelings, I could determine if I were generating the proper sound. In time, I was able to associate the feeling with the sound I was producing and hone my ear's ability to differentiate the vowel sounds, tone quality, and pitch.

I also found that I fought the idea that my vocal habits were detrimental to my performance and clung to the belief that they were part of the unique individuality I brought to the character. The tendency for me to say "git" rather than "get" or "in" instead of "N" was, in my mind, part of my history. I spoke with a rural sound because I grew up in a rural area.

In reality, what an actor brings to the character is artistry through individual artistic choices. If an actor is doing something habitually then it is not a choice. It took some time for me to recognize that the purpose of the work was not to strip me of my vocal personality, but to empower me to sculpt my own vocal persona. By becoming aware of my habits, I made them a choice. If my character was a rural character, I could infuse that character with my habitual twang. If, however, my character was metropolitan, I would have the ability to rid myself of the habit and make a new choice.

What shaped my understanding of my vocal tendencies was the detailed identification and exploration innate in Lessac work. The first few weeks of graduate vocal training focused on shaping and resonance. This fostered a strong technical understanding of my instrument, the voice, and how to properly use the facial mask and mouth to support the voice. Through producing "w" sounds in which I said "woo, woo, woo" many times, I began to find relaxed, but structured, shapes in my lips. This was important because it helped me to register my habit of speaking with a lateral mouth position. This lateral position had been causing a broad, flat tone in my words. Working on the long E vowel sound by intoning the word "bee" on various pitches caused me to recognize where I was holding tension when speaking. I found that, in order to control the flow of air, I would tense around my clavicle and throat. This tension made it more

difficult to vocalize and caused my voice to sound meek and high pitched. If, instead, I created forward placement in my facial mask while keeping my chest and neck relaxed, the sound would flow out fully. I became aware of the relationship between the effortless and continual flow of air which allows for release and support of maximal sounds with minimal effort.

After establishing the correct placement for speaking, it became easier to recognize my incorrect pronunciations. During the sections on vowels, I recognized I do not speak in Standard American English. I had a habit of confusing Lessac's 2nd and 3rd neutral vowels, "pen" versus "pin." Similarly, the short I sound would intrude on my short "E", "again" became "agin," and, "N" shifted to "in." I would weaken or strengthen the incorrect syllable, particularly in words ending with "ing." Words like "something" and "nothing" had a tendency to shift to "someth'n" and "noth'n". More habits became evident as the training moved into the consonant unit.

When working consonants I discovered that I rarely uttered all of the phonetic values in my words. For example, the word "wolf" became "woof." There was less "L" in the word or, maybe, none at all. I found while performing in *Vinegar Tom,* University of Virginia, Spring 2012, that some of my lines were being snipped short by an absence of sounded phonetic values. "Tempts" became the bane of my existence, for a time, while I struggled to hit the "m-p-ts" sounds. I found that many of my words had absent phonetic values but, through practice and awareness, I began to learn specific sounds in speech that I had never used. In some cases, however, I began to use sounds that were not needed and manifested a new vocal habit during consonant work.

I developed a tendency to drop and flick my tongue to punctuate sustainable consonants at the ends of words. I didn't notice it myself, but, when it was pointed out to me, I could feel what was occurring. There was a slight click sound at the finish of a words because my tongue was flicking off my teeth, as in "done- uh" or "room-uh." If I kept the blade of my tongue lightly sitting next to my upper teeth when releasing, the click vanished. The revelation of this habit came as a great surprise to me because it was rather prominent and, yet, I had not noticed it.

Each of the habits I discovered during training required the same treatment: recognition, adjustment, vigilance, and practice. My first step was recognizing the habit, through class instruction and my expanding knowledge of the training. I then implemented the adjustments accordingly, using the correct vowel sound, finishing the ends of words, using all phonetic sounds, and adjusting tongue placement. The next step was vigilance. I worked to accurately perceive my own speech. I became keenly aware of words I spoke incorrectly and often reacted with a hiss intake of air. After multiple weeks of frustration, I modified my behavior and began implementing a system in which I would restate an ill-spoken word a second time. The second time I would adjust and say it correctly. In time this tactic of practicing the correct sounds began to take root and my way of speaking started to change. I found that other areas of my voice were changing, as well.

My lower register was one of those changes. I found a connection to it and was able to utilize lower sounds to add maturity to my speaking. I also made progress on identifying and eliminating my long-lived habits, and I developed a degree of ease when speaking. I found these changes were marked by performance milestones.

One such milestone was during a note session after *Love's Labour's Lost,* a Shakespearean Acting Class project in Fall 2012. The notes I received were regarding stressing operative words in order to more clearly express the idea of the line. That was the essence of all of my notes. This was a new challenge, but it was a victory for me not to receive a single "long E", "ing," "N", or incorrect pronunciation note.

Another moment of progress occurred when we performed speeches in voice class. I performed Mary Schmichpart's graduation speech, in which she shared advice from her personal experiences. The major achievement in this speech was good lip shaping and resonance which produced strong, clear projection and diction. The relaxed quality of vocal structure allowed me to drop into the lower part of my register, which gave my voice a coloring of age and wisdom. I also continued to utilize the "Pen" words and "ing" endings in this speech and worked on other challenges like "because," which I had previously voiced as "becuz." In this performance I found that I was able to speak each of these words appropriately while still finding dynamic vocal character choices. These choices allowed me to connect to the piece viscerally and caused an emotional response within me. I was able to communicate with conviction and it registered for my audience. By the end of the speech, I knew my words had reached them.

Despite improvements, the process was often one step forward and two steps back. After the first summer away from training, I returned to find that many of the concepts I thought I had absorbed felt completely alien when applied to the new semester's material. I had worked all summer incorporating what I had learned, but, as soon as we applied it to the heightened language of Shakespeare, my technique fell apart.

Linking[6] became a huge challenge for me when it had previously made perfect sense. I found that I did not connect words when I read from a cold script,[7] and I would stumble over notated links. This destroyed the flow and musicality of my speech and was deeply upsetting after the previous semester's success; however, with continued vigilance and practice, it began to improve. I came to realize that this was the nature of the work: small amounts of growth followed by stasis, atrophy, and more growth.

My development continued as we began to investigate applications developed by Cicely Berry, Vocal Director at the Royal Shakespeare Company (1969 - current), and Andrew Wade, Head of Voice at the Royal Shakespeare Company (1990 - 2003). The first major aspects of this section were exercises that emphasized variation of vocal choice. In one exercise, the class was asked to build a line word by word, moving from one speaker to the next. Two discoveries emerged from this exercise. The first was that this exercise utilized aspects of the Meisner Technique[8], as it encouraged each speaker to adjust how a word was said based on how the previous word was said. This encourages the actor to truly use the text as a partner for stimulating reaction, making the vocal choices organic and honest. The second discovery was that the more times a text is spoken, the more it reveals itself. This it to say that, every time a word is spoken, my mind conjures an image in association. The more times I hear that word or line, the more specific the images become. I begin to unearth more facets of what the text could express, and, by extension, more possibilities for how that text might be performed.

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[6] Linking is an aspect of Lessac notation in which the end of one word is audibly connected to the beginning of another in order to creating flowing speech.

[7] A cold script is a script that is being performed without having ever been previously viewed by the performer.

[8] Meisner Technique is a style of training developed by Sanford Meisner derived from aspects of Stanislavsky Method, repetition being one of the prominent features.

Included with the active vocal exercises was understanding and investigating the text itself. I began this process with the Lessac notations: marking vowels, looking for tappable and sustainable consonants, and linking where possible. I was then introduced to exercises, developed by Kate Burke, Head of Voice for the University Of Virginia Department Of Drama, meant to illuminate the intent of the specific words and phrases. In one exercise, I was asked to highlight, in different colors, the positive and negative words within a piece of text. In doing this, my attention was drawn to the fact that I did not always use my voice in a way that denoted the positive or negative nature of certain words. My failure to note the dichotomy caused a flatness in my vocal choices, whereas, when I colored my vocal choices with the opinion that a word was either positive or negative, it made for a more dynamic vocal journey.

A similar exercise required me to mark primary and secondary subjects and verbs. This allowed me to parse out where emphasis should fall and how to frame the main subject in order to best serve the lines. I found this hugely beneficial in Shakespearean text because of the tendency toward long sentence structure and have found this technique equally successful when used in modern text. Many other exercises progressed in this same manner using specific filters to deepen my understanding of the text.

The exercises during our Shakespeare unit promoted possibilities and engaged my imagination. Whether I was highlighting text, whispering, shouting, or speaking while running, each new approach to the text revealed another avenue of investigation. Each of these approaches culminated in a series of revelations that occurred during master classes with Mr. Wade which elicited new epiphanies about how to approach voice work with regard to Shakespeare. In one of his classes we worked on one of

Brutus' speeches from William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. We began with many of the previously mentioned exercises introduced to us by Professor Burke; however, Mr. Wade introduced new variations of these exercises. In one variation, one speaker spoke the lines starting from the end of one punctuation mark and ending at the next. Then, another speaker read the next section of text from punctuation to punctuation, building the speech across multiple speakers. This was similar to the exercise in which the speech is built word-by-word by multiple speakers. The effect of this exercise was that Brutus' internal conflict was strongly highlighted through the use of multiple voices. Each voice emphasized a different idea that he was contemplating. The effect was a chorus of "senators" ringing in Brutus' ears. The exercise suggests that when a single actor performs this speech it is effective to vary the vocal choices in order to manifest the character's internal struggle.

The next exercise that was applied to the speech asked that each speaker say one full line beginning by repeating the last word of the last speaker. This introduced the thoughtful nature of Brutus' arguments. One thought led him organically into the next. That realization led me to a deeper revelation that Shakespeare's writing emulates a person's train of thought. What I have come to believe is that the architecture of Shakespeare's writing is deliberate, not for the sake of showing his skill, but for the benefit of the actor. He wrote with the actor in mind and gave clues as to how the character speaks: speed, tone, etc. This informs details of the character's wit, station, temperament, and other circumstances via the written structure. Even more important than informing an actor's choices, the writing patterns can trigger an actor's reactions.

The stimulus of the spoken word can elicit strong emotional reaction from a performer. Professor Burke once shared a story from her own life in regard to the voice and emotional response. She had been recruited for a study on pupil dilation in reaction to emotional stimuli. The participants were asked to manifest an emotional state while their pupils were measured. Burke shared that she spoke lines of text when she was asked to find the emotional state. She credits her relationship to text as the vehicle of her ability to quickly arrive at the desired emotion. Consequently, she had the fastest pupil dilation reactions in the study.

That Burke had the strongest reactions in the study does not surprise me. Spoken language triggers strong images and associations within the speaker which immediately affect the body: the speaker's breath, tension in the body, and physiological reactions. One experience in which I reacted very strongly to spoken text was during an audition for a new adaption of Anne Frank's, *The Diary of a Young Girl*. During a call back, I was asked to read a section of the play in which Anne Frank is describing how she is able to free her imagination and escape the confines of the attic. She speaks about how she can look up and see the moon through a small crack in the roof. The monologue continues with Anne's introspection and realization that she never appreciated the small details of life that she now cherishes.

As I read the beautifully crafted words on the page, I found that I was fully engaged in hearing them. Each word conjured specific imagery and sensory details, which made for a very visceral reaction when I arrived at the lines about fearing never feeling the wind on my skin. Speaking the words and taking the time to let them infuse my thoughts fed my choices. Speaking one line changed how I spoke the next, influenced

my breathing, and produced an organic emotional state within me. I began to feel vulnerable, and this influenced my physical choices. I curled in close to my core in a protective posture that added to the sense of vulnerability. In this way the vocal work shaped the rest of my acting process.

I experienced this vocal inspiration again during *Rhinoceros,* University of Virginia, Fall 2012. Each night of rehearsal I set out to create a variety of vocal choices. This was a good idea, but I did not take it as far as I could have. I played with the pitch, volume, and emphasis in each line but only until I found something that worked. After I found something that worked, I was stuck and didn't investigate any further. This became a bad habit, because vocal patterns began to emerge. Marianne Kubik, director of *Rhinoceros* and Head of Movement at the University of Virginia's Department of Drama, said she could not hear my lines due to my winded breathing. I was allowing my physical circumstances to override my vocal technique. Professor Burke suggested lowering my pitch in order to mediate the issue. Lowering the pitch of my voice not only helped me to project further into the space, but also helped to age the character of Mrs. Boeuf, a middle aged housewife whom has been chased by her husband in the form of a rhinoceros. After discovering that a lower vocal range was more natural for Mrs. Boeuf, I was able to explore other aspects of the character's speech. For example, the lower range encouraged slower speech, which helped moderate my breathing and allowed me to locate and emphasize key words within the lines. These details helped me differentiate Mrs. Boeuf's voice from the grocer's wife, another character I performed during the show.

Crazy for You is the best example of how my vocal work inspired my character choices. In the role of Mrs. Child, my process began with investigating vocal choices and

the character's physicality developed from the influence of the character voice. I worked to develop a Hampton accent and a lower pitch to establish my older age. The quality of the Hampton accent is elongated and grandiose, which informed my physical choices of large, theatrical gesture. Utilizing my lower pitch grounded me in a mature, commanding presence, which helped me to develop the physicality required for portraying a heavier, older woman. In this production, I feel that my vocal work truly advanced my holistic approach to acting by binding all elements of the character together through definitive vocal choice.

As I move into my post-graduate work and begin to focus my career toward film, I seek to continue my vocal trajectory by exploring the application of my vocal training to this new medium. I will utilize my vocal technique to hook into my character's emotional state quickly and fully, which will encourage spontaneous, nuanced physical and character-based choices. I will further investigate the technical aspects of translating my vocal training to film by exploring the vocal modulations that the use of microphones necessitate. Recent experiences in Professor Richard Warner's "Acting for the Camera" class have caused me to recognize that I must adjust my emphasis of plosive sounds. For example, a word starting with "P" like "pop" will cause an audio spike on the microphone if the speaker doesn't soften the plosive. Knowing this, I will actively investigate this and other sounds that may prove problematic when recorded. Finally, I foresee that I will need to continue my exploration of my lower vocal range. I have found that, on camera, any high pitch sounds register at an even higher quality when played back. This marks the character with an immature, and even annoying attribute. It would

better serve my performance to lower the timbre of my voice, indicating maturity of character.

Through the application of vocal techniques in my film work I will discover new and deeper revelations about vocal techniques in my stage work. My personal growth and process will be furthered by new challenges and applications which will continue to shape my perception of acting and the voice.

Chapter III: A Journey to Physical Awareness

As I move beyond academic training into professional work, there are specific methods from physical actor training that have deepened my understanding of acting with the body and serve to encourage my belief that the actor should never cease to evolve.

Physical actor training gave me the foundation for my own physical awareness. When I began this MFA acting program, I did not have the vaguest idea of how to fully use my body in my acting. I was not even aware that I was not really using my body. I did not make connections between my use of body and my stage presence. My mindset was, if I were playing the character, then the way my body behaved was part of that character. I did not take into account that much of that "behavior" had nothing to do with the character but was the habitual physicality of the actor. Even as this concept began to be expressed to me in class work, I did not have a true sense of when I was manifesting habit versus making strategic physical choices. It took nearly a year for me to have a genuine awareness of my body and physical habits. I was aided by my learning of foundational techniques that built upon one another, especially techniques like somatic exercises, alignment, core work and Biomechanics[9].

Somatic and alignment exercises, specifically from the Feldenkrais Method[10] and the Alexander Technique[11] allowed me to find more efficient ways to use my body while continuing to strengthen my awareness. Feldenkrais became a means for me to manually

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[9] Biomechanics is a system of actor training, developed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, which emphasizes physicality and external action and utilizes highly physical styles of performance inspired by aspects of mime, Commedia Dell'Arte, and acrobatics.

[10] Feldenkrais Method is a system developed by Moshe Feldenkrais which improves utilization of the body through exercises which increase flexibility, coordination, and range of motion.

[11] Alexander Technique was developed by F.M. Alexander and encourages an individual to more efficiently use the body by releasing unnecessary tension through a series of techniques which hone awareness and retrain habits.

manipulate my body's state. I was able to employ exercises which would relax me and prime my body for a task. The pelvic clock, an exercise in which the pelvis is rotated as if it where the hands of a clock, allowed me to free up my lower back, and the diagonal twist, an exercise where the leg or arm is stretched across the body, causing the spine to elongate and twist, helped the range of motion and flexibility in my shoulders. I was able to address injuries that had previously hindered my physical performance.

The Alexander Technique, by comparison, became a diagnostic tool. In this application, I strove more for mindful observation of how and why I moved in a specific way and did not attempt to manipulate my body's state. During a guided body scan I learned that I was holding tension in my neck. I traced the feeling of tension from my neck to my shoulder and imagined the muscles releasing. I would not force it to release but would think it and breathe. Often it would release. I then applied this same observation to movement. After multiple observation sessions, my body began to make the adjustments unconsciously. The body is designed to move effectively and knows how best to move effectively. The hindrance to a body's efficiency tends to be habits developed from years of misuse. For example, I injured my shoulder many years ago and, because of this, I unconsciously try to shelter it, which causes undue tension in my back, shoulder and neck. This reduces how efficiently I use my body. If, instead, I release that thought of sheltering my shoulder and allow my body to move as it was meant to, the tension would subside and my body experience greater economy of movement. Essentially, the combination of these two techniques led me to believe that the body has a knowledge that is separate from our thought processes. There is a kinesthetic intelligence that the body possesses that unconsciously informs our movement. The body can think.

This was the belief behind Biomechanics, a system of physical actor training designed to teach the body to think. The elements toward achieving this include strength, agility, coordination, balance, flexibility and endurance exercises. These exercises encouraged my development of improved kinesthetic awareness but, before that, they improved my understanding of movement. The first tool I utilized from Biomechanics is the ability to dissect and evaluate movement. I became aware of the process of movement: preparation, action, and completion. I began to investigate movement in a different manner. I dissected the movement of the leg when I walk. I looked at how I had to shift my weight back before beginning a move forward and how completing a step was not necessarily the completion of a movement, but could also be the impulse and preparation for another movement. Furthermore, any one movement could be broken down into smaller movements. A single step has multiple sets of preparation, action, completions. During a single step, the weight must first shift from being dispersed throughout the foot to the ball. This is one unit of action. The prep is the weight and energy shifting up through the leg, allowing the action – the rolling of the weight forward – to occur. This ends with the weight resting on the ball of the foot, which becomes the preparation for the next unit of action – the ball pushing off from the ground. This, in turn, engages the pulley system of the knee. In this way, one unit of action – walking – can be divided into multiple units of action by investigating the details of said action. It was this sort of investigation of physical movement that shaped my belief that all aspects of one's acting should be probed for new discoveries.

My comprehension of this probing process continued to be refined through other aspects of Biomechanics. In one exercise we were directed to catch and throw a ball, I

noted that I would take an extra step when catching or releasing the ball. It was an unnecessary unit of action, because I was not off balance nor did it contribute to the accuracy of my next toss. So, I moderated the behavior. Similarly, when the Biomechanics work focused on balance, I found that I would do more action than necessary. There is an exercise that I call ninja blocks, in which the actor runs as fast as they can, jumps, and lands on a box. This is repeated with multiple boxes throughout the room. I found that I would add steps, like a pause before jumping on the box. It was unnecessary, because the place where the body searched out balance was in the landing and not the launch. Adjusting the extra movement made for a more economical and smoother action. However, mastering the technique of a balanced execution was not the end of the exercise.

Gaining more from this and other balancing exercises required that I evolve my objective in playing the game. If my first objective was to land on the block and I accomplished that, then my next objective is to investigate how I landed on the block. I had to re-define what balance meant to me. This exercise became an investigation between balance and equilibrium. Balance is a state of rest; one is equally balanced between two opposing forces. However, equilibrium is a game of shifting in order to keep a multitude of dynamic possibilities in play. This became the investigation, and continues to be the investigation. I must explore ways to put myself into a dynamic state of play. While I have not yet exhausted my exploration of balance, I have made some discoveries. I found that the core is innately connected to equilibrium.

The core is connected to equilibrium, in that, the core initiates the adjustments for finding maximum expression. Furthermore, the state of imbalance can engage the core as

the body seeks to right itself. Discovering my core came through being in multiple states of imbalance. One skill that helped me find my core was chainé turns in ballet. The action of spinning throws the body into a state of imbalance; in response, the core engages to try to right itself. Similarly, the exercise of running until I was thoroughly fatigued and then requiring my body to run farther forced my body to engage the core. Through these, and similar exercises, I began to identify when my core was engaged and what that meant. Thus, I understood what moving from the core felt like before I knew how to move from the core.

Moving from the core means that one moves with their energy originating from a point between the xiphoid process and the naval. Physically, this means that the natural corset of the body is engaged. When there is an impulse for movement, energy begins at the center point, sometimes called the solar plexus, and expands around the corset through the abdominals and oblique. It then travels through the body in a constant stream, like a circuit, completing the movement. It is this traversing of energy in the body that manifests dynamic motion and leads to dynamic equilibrium.

After having recognized what moving from the core felt like, I had to discover how to intentionally manifest it, rather than just experience when it occurred. It was through stage combat that I was finally able to implement this ability. The key was intention. It is not enough to tighten the abs and corset and say that is moving from the core. One must allow the energy to move with intention, and that requires visualization. If I throw a punch but have no real intention of striking a target, the impulse will move from my arm. However, if I have a focused intention of striking a point with my energy, the impulse will begin in my core, traverse through my arm and land on the target. The

challenge in stage combat is to then reverse the intention at the last second, in a contact move, so you do not strike your partner with full force. In non-contact moves the same intention applies but is directed at an imagined target, near but a safe distance from the partner.

In martial arts the concept of the body's energy is referred to as Chi[12] and the channels of the body through which the Chi travels are the chakras[13]. The chakras must be aligned, and the body healthy, in order for the Chi to fluidly move. This is similar to the relaxed open state the body needs in order to utilize the core. All of the base work of Feldenkrais, Alexander, and Biomechanics enabled me to reach a state by which I could use my core. In turn, using my core allowed me to reach the next level of my physical examination. This was the base of my awareness, all of these techniques were necessary in order for me to build a sense of my physical self. I could now tell the difference between engaged or not engaged. I could identify the parts of an action or movement. I was able to identify neutrality from character. It was only at this point, after all the base work, that I could begin applying physical choices to my work in an effective manner. This was the second way that physical acting progressed my understanding. It gave me the knowledge to apply the technique to character choices and follow my physical impulses.

The revelation of the importance of the base work did not emerge until I studied mask work at Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theater[14], midway through my

[12] Chi is a term used in Chinese medicine which refers to universal energy.
[13] Chakras are a term used in Asian culture, originating from ancient Sanskrit text, which describe centers of energy that work like transistors in the body circulating energy.
[14] Dell'Arte International School of Physical Training is a physical actor training school which draws from the techniques of LeCoq, Commedia Dell'Arte, Alexander Technique, and acrobatics.

MFA training. While at Dell'Arte I was asked to explore the physical life of multiple characters, many of whom could only express themselves through their physicality because they were performed in closed mouth or full-body masks, which eliminates the ability to speak. While performing these characters, I was reminded of an observation I made my first year of the graduate program, that every action states a very specific message; the more aware I am of my body, the more accurate the message. This thought led to a realization that my graduate training had greatly improved my awareness and accuracy. I had developed the ability to interrogate these mask characters in a dynamic way. When performing as a bag creature, an exercise in which the actor's body is completely covered in a Lycra bag to create a non-humanoid character, I knew that if I tilted the head to the right the body would compensate on the left. In exploring full masks I was able to discover variations of physicality that effectively embodied the essence of the mask.

Furthermore, I felt I was working from impulse more frequently than I have in the past. All of the movement training was refining my kinesthetic awareness without my knowledge. My body had been learning, and I was able to react with a viable choice without deliberating on it. One exercise that made me conscious that my body was working on impulse was working with natural elements. The group was asked to embody various natural elements: a rock, fire, water, etc. At one point we were asked to embody trees. Everyone immediately put their hands above their head and stood tall. After we took our shapes the instructor pointed me out as an example of a good tree. He said I was rooted into the floor, but malleable in my leaves. It was not until after the exercise was completed that I contemplated why he selected me as a good example. I theorize that it is

because I engaged my core. I had an image of roots digging into the earth and I could feel the solidness of my trunk, my torso. However, I allowed my arms and fingers to very slightly shift in the wind. My image was not that the wind was so strong that it would pull the tree over, but enough to make the branches react. My tree had a solid base, but was still dynamic with energy. Without having thought about it, my first impulse was to engage my core and employ a dynamic element. I was following my impulses, and what was coming out of those impulses was working. Throughout my work at Dell'Arte I continued to endeavor to identify when my body was having a genuine, organic impulse and what elements were engaged during that impulse.

I was able to implement this idea of deeper analysis during a neutral walking exercise. The exercise required the actor to inhale, turn their head while holding their breath, and move from a walk to a near run while exhaling. The strategy at Dell'Arte is to never explain the purpose of an exercise, but always let the students investigate for themselves. My investigation led me to probe the exercise through breaking down my units of action. I began to think of the cycle of inhale, turn, and walk as sets of preparation, action, and completion, a concept I would not have known of without my graduate training in Biomechanics.

Another consequence of my physical actor training has been a change in my theory about process in relation to audience. I have come to believe that the only way an audience perceives a character's intention is via physicality. I include voice in this, as well, because it is a function of physicality. The voice changes in relation to the body's level of tension and is best used in tandem with a physical choice to emphasize a specific vocal choice. Basically, if the voice is meant to sound chipper, the body should also have

upbeat physicality. If the voice is meant to sound angry, the body should have the tensions of anger, or vice versa.

My theory is that character-based work, while of vast importance to the foundation of a character, if never manifested into physical action on stage, is all for naught. The audience does not have the benefit of voiceover by which they can hear the inner life of a character. The audience reads inner monologue through the subtext of voice and body. I applied this idea to my performance in *Crazy for You*. I searched out how to align my physicality to my character's journey. Mrs. Child had few lines but was present for the entirety of the scene. Examining my physicality was informative because it revealed that most of my transitions occurred when I was silent. For example, my first appearance had me entering a paragraph before I ever speak. Without speaking I was able to share with the audience my opinion of Bobby's speech. I found that this moment was effective because the audience always gave an audible response that let me know that they knew that Bobby was in big trouble with his momma. I also played with my physicality as an older, heavier set woman of high status. I did not impose a great struggle for movement onto this character but did add a level of tension and stiffness, associated with old age, to my movement. Again, I feel the choice was effective as many audience members I have spoken to since had no idea I was the actor who portrayed that character. I have had multiple people tell me they believed the actress was actually an elderly woman.

Even more recently, my work in film has furthered my belief that physicality must be the end result of an actor's process. The camera misses nothing, and every physical nuance changes the story. When acting for film, I must have isolated control over my

instrument. This is the trajectory for my future exploration of movement in acting. I intend to evolve my current process to include physical acting techniques for use in film.

This exploration will take place in two stages. The first I will apply concepts of Biomechanics to the moment-to-moment work on screen. I will use analysis of the physical moment, which I learned through Biomechanics exercise, to create a detailed movement score for my camera work. The second way I will progress my understanding of movement in film is by training in mime. The techniques present in mime training teach the performer to use the body very specifically and, often, in isolation. My current inability to move with isolations limit how minutely I can divide and analyze units of movement. If I train my body's ability to move in this manner, I can add more specificity to a choice on camera. If, for example, I am using an aggressive tactic but I desire the choice to read subtly, a physical choice I might make it to sit completely still except for the small movement of a muscle near my clavicle. This would denote underlying tension in the character. I cannot incorporate this detail, however, if I do not know how to control that single muscle. Mime work seems like an excellent modality for training muscles to perform in isolation.

Exploring the movement training I received in graduate school in application to film work will likely lead to more detailed physicality in my stage work, as well. I hypothesize that exploring these techniques through the lens of the film medium will lead to new insight about my training when used in stage performance. In this way, I will continue to encourage the transformation of my process and my artistic growth.

Chapter IV: Learning Through Teaching

Just as my training has lead me to believe that an actor is always evolving, so too has my teaching experience. I have come to believe that teaching acting is the art of instilling self-awareness and the ability to moderate performance choice in my students. The challenge, then, is how to give my students the tools to flexibly devise their processes, as well as encourage my own growth and discoveries of process as a performer and educator.

It often seems like the belief in academia is that the instructors have all the answers and the students strive to give the right ones. In acting, however, there is never one right answer; the intent in an acting class is for the student to investigate multiple solutions that could work and make the artistic choice that tells the story they desire to tell. I strive to express to my students that they should develop an individual acting process for themselves. This manifests in an on-going dialogue between myself and the students about which techniques work for them and how they processes the material. I continuously adapt the presentation of the material in order to serve the learning of each performer. An example is in-class scene work. If in the middle of a scene the student is having difficulty with a moment, I ask them, "What are you trying to do with this moment?" The actor responds with, "I'm trying to get answers from my partner." "Okay," I would say, "but how are you doing that? What is your tactic?" "I'm interrogating him seductively." "Great, but we aren't seeing seduction. So, how can you help us see that?" Often the actor has a strong, playable choice in mind but the execution is not reading. It is at this point that I open the dialogue up to the class for choices that will help clarify what the actor wants to convey.

The discussions are often technical and include observations about physicality and vocal features. Observations like “The line is a statement, and your vocal inflection goes up, making it sound like a question,” or “You say your character is angry, but your physical tension seems very relaxed.” After having shared what the class observed, the challenge for me is to translate which tool will best improve the clarity of the choice. If a student tends toward auditory learning, then I may have them try a vocal exercise. I may ask them to elongate all the vowels and or emphasize specific words. I’ll ask, “What is the most important word in that sentence? Can you highlight it?” Sometimes prompts of this nature are enough. If they are more of a physical learner, I will employ a different strategy. I might have one actor try to get an object from the other actor, because the scene is about wanting validation from the partner. The game being played is tag, but the physical responses that emerge from the game are immediately usable within the scene.

Sometimes a student does not bond with vocal or physical techniques, in which case the conversation becomes about the character’s internal thought-process. I ask them questions that stimulate the imagination about where they are, to whom they are speaking, and why they are speaking. I encourage them to use substitution, as described by Uta Hagen in her book *Respect for Acting*, to strengthen their connections to the circumstances. I also require that each student does character research in the form of a character analysis sheet. This sheet asks about the given circumstances of the script and the physicality, motivations, and similarities between character and performer. Most often it is combinations of character-based, physical, and vocal techniques that help refine the student’s choices. Through offering a multitude of techniques and approaches, I learn how to best aid my students’ process, and they begin to form ideas about his own

personal acting process. By adjusting my teaching process to the individual and allowing each of these variations to be viewed by the class, I encourage the evolution of the individual's own process.

Before the student can even begin to contemplate which techniques best work for them, they first must know about the options. A student should be educated in multiple acting modalities and should investigate them with vigor in order to discover which best serves their work. I supply my students with a brief introduction into multiple modalities with units that build upon themselves. These units touch on physical, vocal, and character-based methods.

The physical includes self-awareness techniques and diagnosis through Alexander Technique and neutral mask work. Both of these techniques encourage self-observation and identify possible habitual physicality within the performer. One exercise used during this unit is having the student don a neutral mask and asking the student to perform an activity while exhibiting neutrality toward the activity. For example, I would ask the student to walk on stage and imagine that there is a boat out in the distance. The student then watches the boat dock, watches the passengers disembark, and watches the boat leave.

It is a challenge to do all of this in a neutral manner, but some students accomplish it. Even those who do not accomplish neutrality gain personal knowledge from the activity. I have seen students discover that what they perceive as neutrality in their own body does not read as neutrality for the audience. Perhaps a student is unaware that they habitually shift their weight while attempting to stand still which changes how they are perceived by an audience. As the actor becomes aware of their habits, they can

move toward making them choices. They can choose to engage a habit that they feel works for a moment or eliminate it when it does not serve them.

Making a choice about habit is often dependent on one's character and how closely that character aligns with the actor. For that reason, the next methods we visit in class focus on how one can build character and story from gesture and movement. The student is asked to mindfully observe and perform using tools like body centers and Effort Shapes,[15] as described in Laban Movement Analysis,[16] as well as techniques like Biomechanics and Viewpoints.[17] One assignment that occurs during this section is creating an animal character. The students are asked to observe an animal and note its Effort Shape. They must then perform the animal and, while keeping the Effort Shape, develop a human character that has the essence of the animal.

In developing this character, they must also find a voice that grows out of the Effort Shape. This is where we begin to bridge the physical and vocal techniques through the use of Suzuki Acting Method[18] which, while highly physical, adds the concept of voice as an extension of the physical and Linklater Technique[19], which is a form of vocal training that is strongly based in physical exercises.

The character-based study for the class is primarily Stanislavsky-based and includes work about character relationship, obstacles, objectives, tactics, and behavior.

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[15] An Effort Shape is an element of Laban Movement Analysis used to describe a movement through weight, space, time, and flow.

[16] Laban Movement Analysis is a method, developed by Rudolf Laban, used to describe and notate human movement.

[17] Viewpoints is a technique, developed by Mary Overlie and expanded by Anne Bogart, which examines various elements of staging as part of the creative process.

[18] Suzuki Acting Method is a type of actor training, developed by Tadashi Suzuki, which focuses on physical awareness, improved commitment, and increased stamina and concentration to improve the actor's ability to clearly communicate.

[19] Linklater Technique is an approach to voice for actors, developed by Kristin Linklater, and influence by the Alexander Technique.

These concepts are introduced through improvisation games like Power Play, in which the goal is to steal the status from your opponent through a series of changes in physical relationship. This requires awareness of one's body in space and the use of tactical choices. Another game called Master and Marguerite is used to teach how relationship informs behavior. This game requires one actor to behave as the servant and the other as the master. The servant must clothe the master in a coat but must behave in a manner that aligns with the given circumstance of the relationship. The character-based study also delves into the techniques of Stanislavsky's successors — Adler, Strasberg, Meisner, and Hagen — and examines how these practitioners expanded on aspects of Stanislavsky's theories and how their techniques may benefit a student's process.

The three areas, vocal, physical, and character-based, coalesce through improv exercises, open and scripted scenes, and monologues. It is in these projects that the result of multi-method teaching becomes evident. The students begin to develop their own process. They start to work out scene problems by implementing techniques they learned in class and begin to find which exercises best progress their work. In the early stages of these projects, I often prompt or suggest exercises, but, by the last project, most of the students have a selection of techniques with which they have bonded with and find helpful in development.

By the end of the semester, a student has developed a level of self-awareness that allows them to recognize when there is a problem in the scene. Although some are slow to admit it, they can recognize that there is something "weird" about the scene. Few can pinpoint exactly what the issue is, but most recognize that it exists and that they have the tools to work through the issue.

It is my practice in instances such as these to ask, “What is the intention in that moment?” After the student answers, I ask what they could do vocally or physically that would better manifest this intention. It is in this moment that the student tends to utilize one of the techniques from the semester. They will solve the problem at hand with a change of gesture, adjusting vocal emphasis, or by strengthening a detail about the imagined other. By using any of these techniques, the student is beginning to form his/ her own process for addressing any problem that may arise in scene work.

Due to my belief in the perpetual transformation of process, I often ask for variety in a student’s choices. To encourage variety and exploration of tactics, I began implementing the concept of “do it wrong.” This game is used to express the idea that there is no “wrong” choice, although some choices are clearer than others.

In this game, I select a task for the student to do. For example, I ask the class to sit in their chairs. They usually sit as a person normally would. I then ask them to sit in the chair incorrectly. They may sit in it upside down, on the arm, or under it. I ask them to do it incorrectly multiple times. After the exercise we discuss, and many students observe that they know people who sit in chairs the “wrong” way. They realize that there are many choices that will work for a variety of characters and moments. When I apply this to a student’s performance work I will often say, “Okay, that moment doesn’t seem to be working for you. Can you come up with three completely different ways you can play that?” They do, and then I ask which felt best to them and which one best expresses the intention. They often select the clearest of the three.

Another tool that I will often use to explore choices with my students is Rasaboxes. In my class, I ask the student to embody each state while performing the lines

from their scene. I ask that they do not pre-plan their movement from box to box, but imbues the lines with whichever state they happen to find themselves. What often comes from this exercise is a new interpretation of a line. Where previously the actor thought the only playable choice for the line was anger, they now sees that humor or logic plays equally well.

The "do it wrong game" and Rasaboxes, become catalysts for playful exploration, and the student begins to recognize that all the techniques they have learned can be employed to create an endless variety of choices. Furthermore, I hope to guide the student in recognizing that one choice may be just as clear and viable as an opposing choice. What I have been trying to instill in my students is that they should start to do this in their work without my prompting. I want them to become more attuned to what works and what doesn't in their performance. I, too, would like to become more attuned to nuances in my own work. It is through teaching that I have come to hone my understanding of my craft and recognize my own shortcomings by observing them in other performers.

I postulate that an actor must continually evolve and study to be present and honest about where he/ she is in the moment. If I am espousing this belief to my students, it should only follow that I should practice the same. If I find that the experience of teaching also teaches me, I should then take time to explore how that changes my process. For example, observing the effectiveness of the "do it wrong game" in class, I began to incorporate it into my own process. I am able to pick out missed moments and choices that are not quite right in my students' work. I can quickly pinpoint what

adjustments would improve the work and come up with suggestions on how they can do this.

It has continued to be a challenge, however, to diagnose and treat these same issues in my own work. By incorporating “do it wrong,” I challenged myself to explore at least three possibilities for each moment. The result was the same in me as it was in my students. By forcing variation into my approach it made me investigate anew. I had to examine what other intentions and tactics might be possible in a specific moment. It wasn’t enough to go with my first attempt. Even if that first attempt were viable, there are more possibilities to be mined. I found myself frequently going back to the basics to investigate how to “do it wrong.” What happens if I emphasize this word or what happens if I change the level of tension in my body? What would happen if I tried this line while moving through emotional states like a Rasabox? I began to ask myself the same questions I ask my students, and it has improved the level of my work.

Whether through observation or application of my teaching methods to my own process, I have found that instructing others greatly impacted my education. The act of teaching has in many ways clarified the concepts I have learned in graduate school. The pairing of educating others while being educated has refined my understanding, deepened my appreciation for the craft, promoted my own personal investigation of process, and contributed to my continued transformation.

Conclusion

Throughout my time in the University of Virginia's MFA Acting Program, my views of acting have dramatically changed. I have completely redefined my belief about an actor's purpose, finding that an actor must use his/ her artistry to serve the performance through clear articulation of intention. My graduate experience has shifted my understanding of the acting process, by encouraging frequent re-evaluation of my methods and approach.

These tools and techniques will serve me by improving the quality of my process by providing me with more avenues of exploration. I will find new and more nuanced choices for my characters, because my training offers me more options for solving performance challenges, encouraging me to continue my transformation as a performer.

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Appendix A: Video Supplement

The purpose of this video supplement is to act as a theatrical audition tape that will demonstrate the various skills and acting techniques I have obtained through my MFA graduate training. Presented in this audition tape are four monologues: contemporary comedic, contemporary dramatic, classical comedic, and classical dramatic.

In the contemporary comedic monologue, Rachel from *One Man Two Guvnors* by Richard Bean, I explore the use of gesture, employing it to a comedic effect. In this same monologue I explore multiple vocal choices including dramatic changes in pitch, elongation of words, and rhythmic changes. The techniques utilized in my process for this monologue were Viewpoints for the gesture work and Lessac technique for the vocal work.

In the contemporary dramatic monologue, Reach from *Down the Road* by Lee Blessing, my exploration process focused primarily on the thought-process of the character. Using substitution, I was able to find images from my own life that I could relate to Reach's experiences. This required that I develop very strong and specific images for each of the moments described in the monologue. A large amount of the vocal choices developed out of the emotional stimuli of the string images. However, when I found I was struggling for a vocal variation, I employed exercises like "hot and cold," in which I select two extreme choices and alternate between the two. This led me to discover the moments when the character snaps from one extreme to another and when she slides into the next state.

The classic comedic piece, Celimene from *The Misanthrope* by Moliere, translated by Richard Wilbur, required me to utilize techniques ascertained from my Period Styles class. This manifested in my physical choice to use an upright and aligned posture which reflected the physicality necessary when wearing a corset. The constraints of a "corset" limited my physicality to hand gesture and facial expression. My hand choices were inspired by my knowledge of fan language utilized during the French Restoration. Vocally I utilized linking, from Lessac notation, to add to the natural flow of the piece. I searched moments by which I could vary rhythm for emphasis or comedic effect. This monologue required a clear image of to whom I was speaking and a strong prior moment. I incorporated the image of an actual person from my life as the other character and used the snarky delivery of a backhanded compliment from that other character as my moment before.

My last piece in the audition tape is my classic dramatic monologue, Joan of Arc from *Henry VI, Part I* by William Shakespeare. In this piece I applied character-based, physical, and vocal techniques. I begin the piece with a strong character-based gesture of being thrown to the floor by my captor. This helped to strengthen the image of the other character and my intention. I then mapped the large physical moments, finding places where the movement could enhance the lines. I chose five large adjustments; falling to the ground, animal-like stance on hands, sitting up, standing up, and a false exit. The vocal work was layered and included scansion, locating positive and negative works, play with rhythm, and volume dynamics.

Appendix B: Material Permission

Judy Boals Apr 2

Dear Whitney:

On behalf of Lee Blessing, you have the right to tape a monologue from his play, DOWN THE ROAD, for archival purposes only. You must not copy, sell and/or distribute such tape.

Sincerely, Judy Boals

Judy Boals, Inc.
307 West 38th St., #812
New York, NY 10018

212-500-1424

David Sofield	4/27/14

Dear Whitney Wegman,

I just talked with Dick Wilbur, mentioning your request that he allow you to use a monologue from his translation of *The Misanthrope.* He responded by saying that he was indeed contacted by Hope Denekamp. He gave her permission to give you permission; indeed, he was delighted to do so. Perhaps you have received the permission from H.D. in the last couple of days. If you haven't, Dick said that you may use this e-mail from me as representing his permission.

Best wishes,

David Sofield

PERMISSION FORM
AUTHOR: Richard Bean Playwright Ltd (fso Richard Bean)
PUBLISHER: Oberon Books Ltd
BOOK TITLE: One Man, Two Guvnors, first published 2011

DETAILS OF MATERIAL:

Extract for Performance:

Rachel: I'll do this once Charlie and only once. Identical twins, also known as monozygotic twins, develop when a single sperm fertilizes a single egg to form a single zygote, hence mono zygote, which then splits and forms two embryos which carry identical genetic material. Dizygotic twins, are formed when two separate eggs are fertilized by two separate sperm forming two separate zygotes. Twins of different sexes must be dizygotic , they cannot be monozygotic, identical twins, because they would have to be, by definition, of the same sex.

FEE:	Text Extract	$70.00	Plus VAT: N/A
	TOTAL PAYABLE	$70.00	

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