

Mosaic Art: An Actor's Assemblage of Digital Content and Statement
of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis is submitted for the completion of a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Drama from the University of Virginia. It includes a digital portfolio comprised of a filmed introduction, a scene, and two monologues. The written component of this document contains a transcription of the filmed performances, an actor's head-shot, resume, biography, journal of process, and a statement of philosophy.

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Chapter 1

Transcription of Filmed Introduction

Hi, my name is Auntais Faulkner and I'm an actor and teaching artist here at UVA. One of the aspects of theater that I value most is community. I believe that Community plays an essential part in creating and sharing and observing the art of theater. Community has had such a huge impact on my life. [I] I mean when I was younger, I was lost; I had no drive, no Focus, no motivation. But then I began to find myself in a small community theater. I got to know a better version of who I was. I became a mentor and was able to use my past experiences to help others who had struggled just as I did. And thanks to the incredible and kind and supportive group of people in this community, I was able to find my purpose. I was able to find a focus, a new drive and motivation and all of that led me here.

Artistic Statement

I pay homage to my elders and ancestors, for it was because of their sacrifices that I am here.

The performing arts will always hold a special place in my heart. When I was six years old, I would reenact scenes or impersonate characters from my favorite movies for my family. At 11 years old, I knew I wanted to be a performer. I became more interested in the profession as I witnessed many staged plays throughout elementary and middle school. Those actors' visceral impact on my young mind and heart inspired me and left a lasting impression on me, which motivated my desire to become an actor. But, as my experience and knowledge of theatre grew, there felt like something was lacking. That something was a representation of Black people like me.

In retrospect, I realized that I rarely saw Black people, or their lives portrayed on television or stage, and it is crucial for any young person to see themselves represented in the world. I believe that where there is representation, there is inspiration. As a young Black aspiring actor, the lack of Black representation was discouraging. Instead of backing down, I resolved to be the representation I perceived lacking in the theatre, and my desire to be an actor expanded beyond performance. My new goal was to create works that speak genuinely about my Black experience and share stories that relate, impact, and inspire people of all backgrounds.

Community is at the heart of my work as a theatre artist. My first acting opportunity was at Duram Regional Theatre, a community theatre in my hometown. That is where I learned what it meant to be a part of an artistic community. I was new to acting and had no experience, yet I was welcomed in with open arms. I was enamored by the kindness and support I received from the members. That experience is what shaped who I am as an artist. I believe in collaborative teamwork, and I am continuously searching for new learning methods and opportunities to impart valuable insight. I am excited to collaborate with artists of all backgrounds who share my passion for storytelling and

creating important content that challenges the stereotypes of white theatre. Participating in projects that center social change excites me and pushes me to shift my thinking.

I have had the privilege of writing, directing, and acting in several new pieces centered on social change. For example, *Steps*, a play I wrote and produced, tackles racial and gender identity issues, mental health, and drug addiction. In addition, I was a writer and actor on the devised piece, *Soul'd: The Economics of Our Black Bodies*, created in cooperation with Vanport Mosaic, which addressed the injustices faced by Black people in America and how our Black contributions to the prosperity of the nation continue to be neglected. Seldom does my work revolve around the idea of creating art just to create it. I love to write and perform in pieces that speak tenaciously to the present time with a progressive vision for effective change. And I firmly believe that if a fundamental social revolution is required, I will use my artistic abilities to be a part of the change. My creative work reflects the values and lessons I have learned throughout my life so, I will continue to use my experiences to create artistic pieces that promote social change and inspire others.

Chapter 2

Biography

Biography #1

Auntais D. Faulkner is a classically trained actor who performed in the UVA Drama Department's productions of *God of Carnage* by Yazmina Reza, *16 Winter or The Bear's Tale* by Mary Hamilton, and *Sense and Sensibility* by Kate Hamill. He collaborated with Vanport Mosaics (OR) on the devised piece, *Soul'd: The Economics of Our Black Bodies*, Shaking the Tree Theatre (OR) *Antipodes* by Annie Baker, and with Portland Playhouse (Portland, OR) in *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Auntais is currently reading as Silas in *Silas the Uninvited* by Derek J. Snow and as the narrator in *The Burials of André Cailloux* at Live Arts (Charlottesville, VA). Auntais is expected to receive his MFA in Drama from the University of Virginia in May 2023.

Biography #2

Auntais has been doing dance numbers and reenacting moments from his favorite movies in front of his family since he was six years old. He realized he wanted to be a performer by the age of 11. With a deep passion for storytelling, he has sought to broaden his theatre knowledge over several years of college, including three years of graduate training in the MFA Professional Actor Training Program at the University of Virginia, where he played Michael in Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage* and Sir John Middleton in Kate Hamill's *Sense and Sensibility*.

He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina Greensboro, where he won first prize in the 2019 Carolyn & Norwood Thomas Undergraduate Research and Creativity Expo for his performance in Terrell Alvin McCraney's *The Brothers Size* as Elegba. Immediately after his undergraduate training, Auntais interned at the Portland Playhouse (OR), where he collaborated with Vanport Mosaics (OR) on his first professional writing and acting assignment, *Soul'd: The Economics on Our Black Bodies*.

Auntais enjoys writing plays about social issues centering on the experiences of Black and Brown communities. When he is not acting or indulging in other creative projects, he enjoys studying other languages. He has a basic understanding of Spanish and has learned to read and write the Korean and Hindi alphabets. He endeavors to bridge the gap between cultures and generations, and he aspires to leave a lasting impact on the world through his playwriting and success as an actor.

Auntais Faulkner

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Theatre

Silas The Uninvited	Silas	Live Arts (Dir. Clinton Johnston)
The Burials of Andre Cailloux	Narrator/Guard/Soldier	Live Arts (Dir. Andrew Bryce)
16 Winters or the Bear's Tale	Pol	UVA (Dir. Kate Eastwood Norris)
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Theseus/Oberon	UVA (Dir. Colleen Kelly)
Sense and Sensibility	John Middleton	UVA (Dir. Marianne Kubik)
God of Carnage	Michael	UVA (Dir. Colleen Kelly)
A Christmas Carol	Undertaker/Captain	Portland Playhouse (Dir. Bryan Weaver)
Pipeline	Omari	Portland Playhouse (Dir. Damaris Webb)
Soul'd	Man/Officer	Vanport Mosaic (Dir. Damaris Webb)
Antipodes	Adam	Shaking the Tree (Dir. Sam Van Der Mer)

Education

MFA in Drama, Professional Actor Training Program, University of Virginia
 Acting: Colleen Kelly, Audition Technique: Jenny Wales, Voice: Tovah Close, Movement: Marianne Kubik
 Bachelor of Arts, University of North Carolina Greensboro

Training

Moment Work	Tectonic Theater Project	Jeffrey LaHoste
BIPOC Writing Mentorship	Vanport Mosaic	Don Wilson Glenn
Master Class in Character	Portland Playhouse	Gretchen Corbett
On-Camera Acting	Erica Arvold Casting UVA	Erica Arvold and Richard Warner
Master Classes in Acting	Residency	Kathleen Turner

Skills

Contact improvisation, Playwriting, Advanced IPA, basic Spanish, elementary Korean, Recommended Pass in Rapier & Dagger by the SAFD, 2022 Accents: Eastern African, Cockney, Estuary, RP, Southern American



Chapter 3

Journal of Portfolio Creation

The monologue search is anything but simple. It takes time and effort to discover entertaining, moving, and stimulating pieces for an audition or performance. To challenge myself, I chose dramatic pieces with compelling lead characters navigating intense personal struggles and experiencing numerous emotional extremes throughout the performance. The three pieces I have chosen for this thesis all have narrative arcs that require close examination of a character's journey through a significant life moment in the play. In our training, we are expected to use the techniques we studied in each class to develop these moments carefully. My thesis focuses on techniques learned in my voice, movement, and acting classes that aided my exploration process and assisted in my growth as an actor. I discuss scansion, contextual research for voice, and kinesthetic applications in this document as applied to *Othello* by William Shakespeare (Shakespeare 2003, 43-44), *Fences* by August Wilson (Wilson 1991, 37-40) and *Navy Wife* by Jason Milligan (Lepidus 2002, 60).

Prior to our program, I had not done any previous work on Shakespeare outside of my first ever performance in a community theatre production of *As You Like It* where I played Corin. I was able to get on stage and recite the words, but I knew for certain that I didn't grasp the full understanding of the text. I faced a similar challenge with *Othello*. I overcame this obstacle through my study of scansion and rhetorical structures in both voice and acting classes. For this particular role, my focus was on gaining understanding of the text through rhythm. When I noticed that *Othello*'s soliloquy was in iambic pentameter, I began to use scansion to investigate the pattern of the text and how that might illuminate the character's emotional journey. I found instances where the tempo picked up as *Othello* swelled with rage, nervousness, and passion while contemplating murdering his wife. Also, in these moments, words became compressed, and the rate of

speech increased, mimicking the racing beats of a human heart. I found a genuinely fleshed-out character and numerous nuances in Othello's emotional state through aspects of rhythm which supported my interpretation of Shakespeare's text.

Like Shakespeare, August Wilson uses language to make distinctions between his characters' emotional states and place within a social hierarchy. With Wilson's *Fences*, I immediately found myself using my speech training to tackle Wilson's purposeful and specific colloquialism within the piece and to achieve an authentic dialect. In my second-year voice class, we strengthened our skills in acquiring dialects and accents by studying the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), breath control, and the “4 Ps” of Knight-Thompson Speechwork (Caban 2021, 2-25). The four Ps are prosody, oral posture, pronunciation, and people. These tools are essential for an actor when unraveling the mysteries of pronunciations, especially when establishing a character or analyzing plays that use a particular accent or dialect.

I have always found vocal exploration to be an essential tool in developing my characters. Emphasizing the importance of breath control, a vital skill for effective communication on stage, I incorporated breath exercises to help create organic sounds, allowing me to deliver my lines with ease, confidence, and clarity. I utilized these exercises along with exploration in tone and inflection to bring depth and dimension to my performances. For example, during moments Troy experienced anger or frustration, I used a harsher and more forceful tone, while softer and gentler tones were reserved for moments of vulnerability which seldom appeared in the scene. By experimenting with different tones and inflections, I was able to fully embody Troy and bring a unique perspective to his character. I discovered a distinct voice and vocal cadence for the character while staying true to Wilson's implied vision of the character.

In addition to the breath work and exploration of tone and inflection, Wilson's elevated language encouraged me to look beyond the perpetual stereotype of the vocalization of a 1950s Black man I perceived and find the genuine human essence of the character. Focusing on the research of people, one of the 4p's (Caban 2021, 2-25) mentioned above, I achieved an authentic dialect through in-depth research of the

character's background and the setting of the play. And by making these specific vocal choices, I was able to accurately convey Troy's age, background, and social status. The Knight-Thompson Speechwork has given me the ability to totally immerse myself in the character and connect with the audience on a deeper level, which strengthened my performance and allowed me to truly capture Troy and his emotional complexity as a character.

Although vocal exploration is my primary focus during character development, physicality is just as crucial to the story and is essential for developing a genuinely engaging character. Through intense physical training and studying Rudolph von Laban's System of Movement Analysis in my movement class, I discovered the impact of my body's physical habits, strengths, and weaknesses on a character. So, when preparing for each of these roles, I asked myself questions like: What is the character's posture? Where does tension live in their body? Where does their strength live? And where does their weakness live? I answered these questions by exploring Laban's principles of Weight, Time, Space, and Flow (von Laban, 1988, 52). For all three monologues, I primarily focused on the characters' heaviness and lightness—elements of Weight, as I found I have an aversion to characters with a heavy physicality.

Weight is applied to the character through the use of energy and tension used by the actor. By varying the use of energy and tension in the characters, I was able to find nuanced physicality's for each character. Othello, for example, is presented in the play's first act as an accomplished military leader but also faces discrimination because of the color of his skin. Despite this, Othello strides with purpose and conviction – encouraging me to explore lighter movements. Later in the play, he is burdened by his emotional doubts causing his movements to become heavier and more labored. In the scene with his wife, Desdemona, his movements become more intense and violent due to the weight of his jealousy and rage juxtapose his internal anguish that was expressed in slow, heavy motions.

Furthermore, I used Laban's idea of weight to investigate the power dynamic in the relationship between Troy and Cory from *Fences*. Troy had a troubled past that included time in prison and a poor relationship with his father. These occurrences added

to his emotional weight and altered his interactions with his son Cory. Throughout my investigation, I discovered that the concept of Laban's principle of weight in Troy manifested in both a physical and emotional way. His physical presence on stage is commanding, emphasizing his powerful build and the weight he carries. The way he moves echoes his emotional weight and reflects the energy he imposes on his surroundings as he attempts to keep control over his life. Using Laban's principle of weight in this way helped me find a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations, emotions, and relationships with each other which led to a more complex and nuanced physicality in each character.

I also found that each character's background significantly influenced his physical state. For instance, Othello and Jack (from *Navy Wife*) share a physical heaviness that stems from their military history. Whereas Troy in *Fences* carries an emotional heaviness as a father and husband burdened with numerous responsibilities and regrets due to his difficult upbringing and dysfunctional family dynamic. To truly embody the physicality of these characters, I needed to change my everyday physical activities. I began a physical training regimen by incorporating my class exercises, particularly those focused on core strengthening and balance, to gain the energy needed to maintain the character heaviness.

As a result, my personal stamina and endurance improved, allowing me to discover the following in each character's range within Laban's principle of weight: I discovered that Othello held tension in his chest—a tension that stemmed from the enormous weight of guilt expressed through his slouched posture. Jack's struggle with the burden of his relationship revealed itself in the character's free-moving upper body and heavy lower body, which kept him rooted to the ground. Due to the pressures of his age and demanding day job as a garbage man, Troy's ailing but sturdy body was represented through slow and short movements. Throughout this exploration, I challenged myself to retain physical and emotional heaviness for each character while also bringing conscious awareness of kinesthetic techniques to the forefront of my process.

Through my all-encompassing training in the MFA program, I have practiced and cultivated ways to improve the technical skills I learned in the classroom. Ultimately, the

comprehensive techniques I gained in my Voice, Acting, and Movement classes as part of my MFA training, helped me to develop an approach that is both versatile and effective in improving my performance. I can use any of the techniques to examine a character and embody them in order to fully and effectively convey their emotional journey on stage. These techniques challenge me to make strong links between my voice, body, and emotions while aiding me in the advancement of my work as a professional actor.

Portfolio Materials

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

Scene: Troy in *Fences* by August Wilson (Wilson 1991, 37-40)

Troy: Your mama told me you done got recruited by a college football team? Is that right?

Cory: Yeah, coach Zellman say the recruiter gonna be coming by to talk to you. Get you to sign the permission papers.

Troy: I thought you supposed to be working down at there at the A&P. Ain't you supposed to be working down there after school?

Cory: Mr. Stawicki say he gonna hold my job for me until after the football season. Say starting next week I can work weekends.

Troy: I thought we had an understanding about this football stuff? You supposed to keep up with your chores and hold that job down at the A&P. Ain't been around here all Saturday. Ain't none of your chores done... now you telling me you done quit your job.

Cory: I'm gonna be working weekends

Troy: You damn right you are! And ain't no need for nobody coming around here to talk to me about signing for nothing.

Cory: Hey pop... you can't do that. He coming all the way from North Carolina

Troy: I don't care where he coming from. The white man ain't gonna let you nowhere with that football noway. You go on and get your book-learning so you can work yourself up in that A&P or learn how to fix cars or build houses or something, get you a trade. That way you have something can't nobody take away from you. You go on and learn how to put your hands to some good use. Besides hauling peoples garbage.

Cory: I get good grades, Pop. That's why the recruiter wants to talk with you. You got to keep up your grades to get recruited. This way I'll be going to college. I'll get a chance.

Troy: First you gonna get your butt down there to the A&P and get your job back.

Cory: Mr Stawicki done already hired somebody else 'cause I told him I was playing football.

Troy: You a bigger fool than I thought... to let somebody take away your job away so you can play some football. Where you gonna get your money to take out your girlfriend and whatnot? What kind of foolishness is that to let somebody take away your job?

Cory: I'm still gonna be working weekends.

Troy: Naw... naw. You getting your butt out of here and finding another job.

Cory: Come on pop! I got to practice. I can't work after school and play football too. The team needs me that's what coach Zellman say...

Troy: I don't care what nobody else say, I'm the boss ... you understand you understand? I'm the boss around here. I do the only saying that counts.

Cory: Come on, Pop!

Troy: I asked you... did you understand?

Cory: Yessir.

Troy: You go on down there to that A&P and see if you can get your job back. If you can't do both... then you quit the football team. You've got to take the crooked with the straights.

Cory: Yessir. (Pause)...Can I ask you a question?

Troy: What the hell you wanna ask me? Mr. Stawicki the one you got the questions for.

Cory: How come you ain't never liked me?

Troy: Liked you? Who the hell say I got to like you? What law is there say I got to like you? Wanna stand up in my face and ask a damn fool ass question like that. Talking about liking somebody. Come here boy, when I talk to you. .. Straighten up dammit! I asked you a question... what law is there say I got to like you?

Cory: None.

Troy: Well, all right then! Don't you eat every day? (Pause) Answer me when I talk to you! Don't you eat every day?

Cory: Yeah

Troy: Nigga, as long as you in my house, you put that sir on the end of it when you talk to me!

Cory: Yes...sir

Troy: You eat every day.

Cory: Yessir!

Troy: You got clothes on your back.

Cory: Yessir.

Troy: Why you think that is?

Cory: Cause of you.

Troy: Ah, hell I know its cause of me... but why do you think that is?

Cory (hesitant): Cause you like me.

Troy: like you? I go out of here every morning... bust my butt putting up with them crackers everyday... 'cause I like you? You about the biggest fool I ever saw. (Pause)

It's my job, it's my responsibility! You understand that? A man got to take care of his family. You live in my house, sleep on my bedclothes, fill your belly up on my food... cause you my son. You my flesh and blood. Not cause I like you! Cause it's my duty to take care of you. I owe a responsibility to you! Let's get this straight here, before it go along any further... I ain't got to like you. Mr. Rand don't give me my money come payday 'cause he likes me. He gives me 'cause he owes me. I done given you everything I had to give you. I gave you your life! Me and your mama worked that out between us. And liking your black ass wasn't part of the bargain. Don't you try and go through life worrying about if somebody like you or not. You best be making sure they doing right by you. You understand what I'm saying boy?

Cory: Yessir

Monologue: Othello in *Othello* by William Shakespeare (Shakespeare, 1992 43-44)

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood;
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light:
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent me: but once put out thy light,
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again.
It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree.
Ah balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,
And love thee after. One more, and this the last:
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,
But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly;
It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.

Monologue: Jack in *Navy Wife* by Jason Milligan (Lepidus 2002, 60)

I don't know what to say to you anymore, Claire. I don't . . . Nothing seems to work when I'm home, not like it used to. Nothing . . . The only time I'm really alive . . . is when I'm up there. (Beat.) Just one sheet of glass between me and the whole sky and I'm up there, in the center of it all, blue all around me, blue in front of me, and I'm streaking through it so fast you can't hold me back. That's what it is, Claire, I've never tried to explain it to you before but it's the feeling — I'm up there and I'm in control and I'm miles above everything and I know nothing or no one can hold me back. Those are the moments I feel most alive. Those are the moments when —. But, you have to come back down. Sooner or later, you're back on the deck and you've lost some of that thrill and then you're drinking with the rest of the guys and you've lost even more of the thrill and then you're coming home and it — it's just gone. Sometimes that thrill feels like . . . all there is, and you wonder why you come home, and —I'm lost, Claire. I'm just really . . . lost. And I don't know how to find my way back home.

Chapter 4

Filmed Supplements

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

Personal Introduction

Auntais Faulkner

Monologue

Othello, *Othello* by William Shakespeare

Monologue

Jack, *Navy Wife* by Jason Milligan

Scene

Troy, *Fences* by August Wilson

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