

Evan P. Bergman: Portfolio and Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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Abstract

A digital portfolio including filmed monologues and a teaching philosophy aimed to help with the transition into professional/educational theatre.

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Teaching Philosophy Statement

Teaching acting is teaching something in which every human being already has a foundation. We've all been acting since the beginning, because in its most basic form, it's playing along with something that doesn't exist in order to *make* it exist. A parent doesn't literally disappear while playing peek-a-boo but a child buys into the notion since the parent commits to the game.

My acting class is an opportunity for young adults to rediscover how to play. For me, it's an opportunity to disrupt their attempts at behaving "maturely." Undergraduates are justifiably preoccupied with the transition into adulthood, and so they may strive for "adult-like" behavior, but with this, a general censoring or blocking may occur. I believe a good undergraduate acting class is like a playground packed with pillows. "*He challenged all of us to go places that we would never go unless pushed to. He was always there encouraging and let us all know that it wasn't easy material, but we will all go on this journey together*" (UVa undergrad from my Acting 1 class). With a safe atmosphere, growth is possible.

In my acting class, I strive to strike a balance between highly physical *ensemble exercises* in conjunction with *partner work*. By definition, the ensemble work involves the whole class and aims to awaken group attentiveness, spatial awareness, playfulness, and the ability to act on group impulses. The partner work opens actors' hearts to one another, awakening each individual's curiosity about her/his partner and then strengthening the ability to pick up on, and have a strong point-of-view on human behavior.

I start with the physical. Undergrads are at times either tired or anxious because of new and big responsibilities. I know I must warm them to opening up to the partner work, but these initial physical exercises aren't merely preparation. The physical ensemble work helps the class bond and trains us to see what's happening everywhere in the room just as an athlete learns to see the entire field. Over the course of the semester a student learns that s/he can simultaneously take in her/his partner, the space, and be open to her/his own experience.

As I am foremost a Meisner trained actor (from which the partner work is derived), my teaching philosophy stems from a desire for genuine connection between actors. I don't hold back on expressing this need for true connection. I believe that by allowing myself to unabashedly share how meaningful this connection is to me as an actor, I help instill this desire for connection in my students. The bar is set high. I help my students develop an ear and eye for truthful acting. Of course, they need to *experience* living inside a moment on stage that is honest. One method I use is Meisner's three-moment-exercise as a way to catapult acting partners into a truthful exchange. It involves student "A" asking student "B" a provocative question. Student "B" repeats back the question. Student "A"

immediately shares with student “B” the behavior that came out as “B” was repeating back the question. I find the more provocative the question, the more truthful the behavior is that comes to the surface, because student “B” doesn’t have time to contrive *how* s/he repeats, because s/he is honestly processing the provocative question. I don’t do this exercise until we’re past the halfway mark in the semester. The classroom must be completely safe for effectively provocative and uncensored questions. At its most successful, this exercise whets a student’s appetite to live in the unpredictable and exhilarating state of truly listening and responding, and embracing the *not-knowing* of what’s coming next! Hopefully, when we transition into contextual scenes, a student’s desire to live in the rich experience of the unknown is heightened.

Articulation of how I want my students to approach acting, both big picture and day-to-day, is imperative if my students are going to be inclined to put in the work. By big picture, I mean frequently providing a way to look at where we’re heading in the work, and how what we’re doing *now* pertains. The partner work focuses on training the actor to work from unanticipated moment to unanticipated moment in the most open and responsive way possible. It’s critical that I relate the partner work to the eventual contextual scene work. When we discuss as a class what we feel good acting is, invariably someone will mention that it seems as though good actors aren’t “saying lines, but rather improvising.” So I focus on getting them excited by the fact that the partner work trains us to act *by* improvising; so that even when we have a script, we’re never working from line to line, but always working off our partner, moment to moment. We discuss that, in film, it’s often an actor’s *reaction* to something that’s given the most camera time. The partner works trains us to *have* these alive reactions, and we move from perhaps our pre-conceived notions of acting into simply being present by truly listening and responding.

The vast majority of the students I have taught are not going to be actors so there’s an even bigger picture that I appreciate and share with my classes. All of the skills my students learn pertain to life. I have found that it makes sense for my acting class to be a technology-free zone and students appreciate, even treasure this. With the absence of “screens,” they begin to prize the only other interaction available, interplay with fellow students who are actually in the same room. This communication takes more attentiveness, more patience, more courage; and of course the reward is greater because they’re sharing it in real space and time. It’s no secret that the more we text/email, the less we talk. It’s becoming harder to look each other in the eye and attempt spontaneous and meaningful communication. When we text or email, it’s a private activity that we can edit as much as we want. When we face each other, we can’t censure as easily. It’s fun to remind students of the practical benefits of being able to communicate well with those actually present; job interviews always resonates with them. By the end of the semester, I don’t have to justify the partner work. The partner work allows for connections they haven’t experienced in any other college class. It helps open the door to a truer and more playful connection with fellow human beings; an innate skill we are born with, but must champion now more than ever.

Journal of Process

The acting process for my thesis can be broken into three parts: Writing, rehearsal, and filming.

I wrote my own monologues because it seemed like the best option. It wasn't a decision made from creative yearning, where I just *had* to have the final product engendered from within. I wrote because I felt as though I could represent myself best this way. With present perspective, I cannot say that this was the right decision, nor am I bothered that I chose this method. I simply got tired of looking for short, published monologues that fit the bill. Videographer Michael Duni told us that thirty seconds was an ideal time to shoot for. And while it's a great exercise to find material that offers something meaty that fits within this parameter, there are other attributes that a short (audition) monologue for film must have.

Acting for film begs the actor to embody and share his/her own essence in a way that acting on stage doesn't. While understanding one's essence is crucial for any type of acting, the camera demands absolute authenticity. Unless of course, the monologues are being shot in such a way as to showcase stage acting. This type of filming for theatre was discussed as a group, but never truly explored or defined. So perhaps out of feeling daunted by the task of finding material that would act as a vehicle for sharing what I believe my essence to be, I wrote for myself.

Surprisingly, the writing flowed easily. This was a blessing and a curse. A blessing because it saved me time. A curse because it was deceiving; I naively figured that since the writing came from me, I understood it. I thought that simply speaking my own words ought to bring me to life. And sometimes I would come to life when rehearsing. Other times, I felt as though the words meant nothing. When I wrote these short pieces, I didn't sit and pine over what to write about. I started with a simple thought or idea, and then wrote with very few edits, at least initially. The words fell out. And as I read them back to myself, I was pleased.

Like so many rehearsal processes, I had this initial connection to the words (my own in this case), but I'm learning how elusive this type of connection is; it's founded on the sheer newness of speaking a particular strand of words. But words lose their potency if they're not endowed with a deeper personal meaning than the lovely but fickle first connection. Now here's the interesting thing: Some "strands of words" inspire me to search for a more personal meaning, others don't. And perhaps because my writing came so easily, I wasn't as invested. Unlike Eugene O'Neil writing *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, I hadn't thrown any typewriters. My writing hadn't cost me anything. So it figures that I'd struggle to have the burn to fill these words with something deeply personal. I became aware that I'd have to invent meaning for myself which can be exhausting...and of course, rewarding.

So I thought, "shit, what'd I get myself into? Why did I write for myself?" It was too

late to go back and find material, so I was stuck with myself so to speak. And these were my not-so-fun thoughts leading up to the week of filming.

I locked myself in the Caplin dressing room and started to ask myself the kinds of questions an actor needs to ask when he's desperate to find authenticity and specificity. I had to develop a relationship with my imaginary partner, knowing that I could transfer this found meaning onto whoever my partner was on the day of the shoot. I was pretty sure I could use Roger on the day, but I wasn't certain. And once this relationship started to have meaning, I searched for a moving target I could hunt for in my partner as I spoke; a target I could strive to hit, but couldn't actually hit. For example, as I spoke of my dead ex to her brother (Roger), my thoughts were: Will he ever believe that I really did love his sister? But I'll be damed if I'm going to *beg* him to believe me, even though I *need* him to believe his sister was loved—by *me*.

My acting goal was to create a psychological conundrum for myself in the scene, something that would activate me, so I'd be grounded with actual thoughts as supposed to *acting* as though I'm having thoughts. Slowly during the course of that evening in the dressing room, I was able to find a repeatable connection to both pieces. I know true spontaneity will happen only if a foundation is in place. In other words, an actor can rarely be better than his crafting. An interesting side note is that as I was able to get more inside the writing, changes to the writing were made. I had to keep reminding myself that there's no need to be beholden to my own writing. Actors have such respect (or we should) for the written word, that it feels blasphemous to make or suggest changes. And of course, unless it's public domain, or we have permission from the playwright, we *can't* touch the script. I guess this notion is ingrained, because I had to give myself permission to not be precious with my own writing.

I had arranged for us to shoot in a local Charlottesville restaurant, so we arrived when the prep cook did, around 9am. It took us an hour or so to set up the space for Alex's shoot. Her first monologue went quickly, and then we started to arrange the cameras for my first shot. I decided to play this guy as a bartender; I knew he had to be either coming off a task, or in the midst of a task. This monologue is very different from the one referred to above. In retrospect, I never made this piece personal enough. I became interested in finding the mask, a kind of blue-collar guy in an ordeal. Too general of course. I should have trusted that this guy was inside me and would come to the surface as needed. I particularized the story that he tells, but I never really found why he was telling it *now*, and why he was sharing with this particular person. We were ready to shoot before I actually *felt* ready, and I was never able to fully ground myself in that first monologue. It felt pushed, and I was aware of a lack of nuance in my acting. In retrospect, I should have taken five minutes to reacquaint myself with the imaginary circumstances that I *had* crafted. Later in the day I hadn't a clue how this first piece came off. I should have checked out one of the takes. Michael never offered and it didn't occur to me in the moment. I may have made adjustments. Or perhaps I would have been pleasantly surprised. Or maybe it would have gotten me in my head. Either way, Michael's final cut will be a surprise. I wanted this piece to have a robustness, a theatricality making it

markedly different from my second piece. But while I was shooting, I felt tight; I tried to accept this tension and allow it to inform my behavior. I just wasn't in love with how the experience felt. After having shot the second piece, with Richard Warner present, I realized how beneficial it would have been to have had him there for the first.

Both Roger and Alex (her second piece) shot next and I had some time to just sit and be. Richard was able to offer some advice for both of their monologues. He didn't over-coach, just little tidbits that seemed to help. I wasn't able to watch Roger's shoot because I was in the background. Alex's shot frustrated me a bit, because I saw her trapped in her choices, and it made me feel locked-up to watch. It probably reminded me of how I felt during my first shot. Alex may have felt nothing of the sort.

When the time came to shoot my second piece, I felt ready. I was primed, emotionally connected. And what I ran into during the first couple of takes was a desire to hold onto my emotion rather than allow it to ebb and flow. My second piece is short, at least as far as words, and I thought I needed to hold onto my emotional preparation in order for the piece to be interesting. I certainly know better, but relearning is part of the rehearsal process, even if it's the day of the shoot. We don't get to determine when our knowledge serves us, and when it eludes us. Richard expressed how it'd be more engaging for a casting director to see me start from a more casual place, and then allow the emotion to creep up on me. This made absolute sense, and I immediately felt engaged playing it this way. I started to enjoy the whole process, and of course I wanted to go back and take another crack at the first piece, but such is the learning curve. Another part of me was happy to be done. It felt like the end of a grad school chapter.

In retrospect, more camera time leading up to our filming is what would have made me feel prepared. To get used to my mug on a screen, for it had been quite some time. To deal with some of my habits. To relearn how little I have to do; simply have the thoughts. Often this is enough, cause the camera will track those thoughts. And by the same token, the camera will reveal the actor who is working too hard. So it's a different sort of story-telling than stage acting. It's one that invites the viewer in rather than actively sharing. It's not to say that one's acting for film isn't active; though it is trusting that the camera will help get the story across.

Monologues

1.

Bartender:

See that's what I'm trying to say. Everyone just assumes the man's gotta be the one to step up with her, like she'd never initiate...but: She took *me* is what I'm saying. (To an interrupting patron) Yeah I'll be with you in a second man. (Referring to that patron) Impatient prick, you believe this shit? (Back to the story at hand) She pounced on me like a panther. Shit scared me man. I saw a side of her I don't ever even wanna think about again. I'm like hurt. Physically. She like cracked my whole fucking rib cage up, my hip is not right.

Look honestly, if it wasn't *my* life, I'd think it was hot. But it fuckin *is* my life and now I gotta deal with this shit.

(Back to the interrupting patron) Yeah what do you want man?

2.

Patron:

Once we started really being together, we just stopped seeing other people. They just got in the way, of us.

I wish I could tell her certain things that I didn't. I don't know what to do about that.

Transcribed Interview

Hey, I'm Evan Bergman, one of the MFA actors at the University of Virginia, graduating in 2016.

I, as an audience member, truly think that theatre is often boring. And I think a lot of people think this. And we have to be honest about this, if we're going to do theatre for the rest of our lives. We can't compete with film, we can't compete with television. We have to get back to whatever makes theatre unique and vital. We're in a period right now when we have to rediscover theatre for a modern audience.

There's an opportunity to teach at UVa. I have found a love for teaching and it is so wonderfully reciprocal as far as what it begs of me to do as an actor. I really have to practice what I preach or I become the ultimate hypocrite. It (teaching) is a constant reminder of all the things I still need to work on and hopefully will continue to work on for the rest of my life.

Headshot



Evan Philip Bergman

Resume

Evan Bergman

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AEA

Theatre

Saturday, Sunday, Monday	<i>Roberto</i>	Virginia Rep., Dir. Carl Forsman
Peter and the Starcatcher	<i>Gremplin/Fighting Prawn</i>	Virginia Rep., Dir. Nathaniel Shaw
Luv	<i>Harry Berlin</i>	Heritage Theatre Festival
Wonderful Town	<i>The Wreck*</i>	Univ. of Virginia (MFA) Dir. Bob Chapel
A Midsummer Night's Dream	<i>Theseus/Oberon</i>	Univ. of Virginia (MFA) Dir. Colleen Kelly
Vodka Variations (Chekhov shorts)	<i>Various</i>	Univ. of Virginia (MFA) Dir. Marianne Kubik
Ellis Island; A Dream of America	<i>Various</i>	Lexington Philharmonic, Dir. Michael B. Dixon
The Odd Couple	<i>Oscar</i>	Woodford Theater
Big Love	<i>Constantine</i>	Project SEE Theatre, Dir. Sullivan C. White
A Streetcar Named Desire	<i>Stanley</i>	Kentucky (KCT) SummerFest
Burn This	<i>Pale</i>	Project SEE Theatre, Dir. Sullivan C. White
boom	<i>Jules</i>	Project SEE Theatre, Dir. Sullivan C. White
Glengarry Glen Ross	<i>Roma</i>	Actors Guild of Lexington
Merchant of Venice	<i>Gratiano</i>	Kentucky (KCT) SummerFest
Unthymely	<i>Cole</i>	Manhattan Repertory Theater
Security	<i>Zelly</i>	Where Eagles Dare, Adviser Israel Horovitz
Charlie's Ghost	<i>Steinbrenner</i>	The Abington, NYC
Genius Andronicus	<i>John</i>	Manhattan Theater Source
Gang Mills	<i>E.</i>	The Nest, DUMBO, NY
Winter's Tale	<i>The Clown</i>	Shakespeare in Delaware Park
Romeo and Juliet	<i>Benvolio</i>	Shakespeare in Delaware Park
Three Days of Rain	<i>Walker/Ned</i>	Old Fire House, Cape Cod
Hopscotch	<i>Will</i>	Old Fire House, Cape Cod
Mass Appeal	<i>Mark Dolson</i>	Curtain Call Productions
Chopper (reading)	<i>Fred</i>	New York Stage & Film

*Irene Ryan Nomination

Education

MFA Acting University of Virginia

The Maggie Flanigan Studio, NYC

Two year Meisner Conservatory Program, Lloyd Williamson movement technique

FSU in London, Drama-Literary Focus

BFA Theatre, University at Buffalo, Stephen McKinley Henderson

Special Skills

Accents: Russian, "New York", Italian. Guitar, period movement, various sports, grilling!

Bio

Evan was born and raised thirty minutes outside of Manhattan. From a young age, his parents brought him into the big city to see plays and musicals. Despite this formative experience, Evan entered undergrad with the intention of majoring in psychology. This plan was derailed during his freshman year as Evan discovered that studying human behavior is more fun on your feet. With friends from undergrad, and then later, with fellow graduates of the renowned Maggie Flanigan Studio, Evan started producing theatre in small venues around NYC. After almost a decade in New York, Evan met a special woman, also an actor, who invited him to Lexington, KY to help start a new theatre company, Project SEE Theatre. Over the next five years with SEE, Evan was able to act and direct in the most meaningful work for him to date. While in Lexington, Evan taught acting at Transylvania U and the University of Kentucky. As he wraps up his time at the University of Virginia, Evan feels blessed to have been in a program that stresses classical acting, as his inclinations typically lead him more toward new works. UVa has also enabled Evan to deepen his exploration as an acting instructor, an invaluable skill that he'll take into the future.

