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Learning to Act: The Politics, Pedagogy, and Possibilities of Contemporary Actor Training in the U.S.

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Learning To Act: The Politics, Pedagogy, and Possibilities of Contemporary Actor Training in the U.S.

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Learning To Act: The Politics, Pedagogy, and Possibilities of Contemporary Actor Training in the U.S.

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This dissertation is a critical and comparative examination of late twentieth century and early twenty-first century actor training practices in the United States. It looks specifically at: Viewpoints training as developed by Anne Bogart; Meisner technique; and the physical theatre training at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre. I examine the ways in which theories about the actor, including ideas about the actor's mind and body, the actor's creativity, and the actor's agency and authority, are embodied in classroom practices. Through the combined study of primary sources such as acting manuals, theories about embodiment and creativity, ethnographic participant-observation accounts from classrooms, interviews with teachers, and a phenomenological approach to describing my experience, I attempt to analyze what it means *to be an actor* in three different realms of training.

The first chapter introduces my critical approaches, including my approach to ideas of embodiment, creativity, ethnography, phenomenology, and pedagogy. In chapter two, I focus on how ideas about reality and relationships are embedded in Meisner training and conduct a case study by observing a class called Acting Realism at Texas State University. In chapter three, I argue that Viewpoints, through an emphasis on deconstructing theatrical hierarchies, offers possibilities for actors to shift the balance of agency. I also conduct a case study based on my participation in a two-week workshop with artists from Bogart's SITI Company held at Links Hall in Chicago in the summer of 2008. In chapter four, I examine the generative pedagogical strategies at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, incorporating my experience as a student in the school's 2009 summer intensive. Throughout, I suggest that conceptual ideas about the actor's body-mind, creativity, and idealized role have an embodied effect on the degree of agency the actor experiences in the classroom. I conclude by suggesting ways to approach actor training in the future that can create more context and agency for actors.

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Chapter One

Actor Training, Embodiment and Creativity, Pedagogy

"Practice is functional and contextual; therefore it can hold apparently contradictory principles to be equally true."

-Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 9

"Art cannot be mastered merely through the conceptual understanding, but must be acquired, as it were, through one's body. In other words, it is a bodily acquisition by means of a long, cumulative, difficult training."

-Yasuo Yuasa, *The Body,* 104-105

I approached my college acting teacher's office door with trepidation. The year was 1998. It was my mid-semester meeting with her, and I knew that she was not pleased with my most recent performance, a scene from *The Cherry Orchard*. She had proclaimed in class that she didn't think I had "gotten" the scene and was concerned that I just was not "getting it" in general. Exactly what I had not "gotten" was never made clear. In that meeting, my teacher expressed concern about my choice to pursue acting. She did not think I was single-mindedly dedicated to acting, which, she stressed, was essential. She also thought that I was "too creative" and "too smart" to be an actor, and she said that she saw me as "more of an artist than an actor."[1] She warned me that the

[1] Surprisingly, there is not much documentation about the frequency of this experience, but there is considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that being called "too smart" is a familiar trope for many female acting students. For one such example, see the introduction to Amy Steiger's *Actors as Embodied Public Intellectuals*, diss. U of Texas, 2006.

business of acting was ruthless and image-based, and she did not see me fitting in with this world.

Although I left this meeting in tears, I now see it as a moment that crystallizes important questions about the pedagogy of actor training, questions that I hope will productively haunt this dissertation. What did it mean to this teacher to be *an actor* in a contemporary U.S. context? What kind of vision did this teacher have of actors when she expressed her belief that they were not smart or creative (or at least, not *excessively* smart or creative)? When she said I was more *artist* than actor, was she implying that actors were not, themselves, artists, and by extension, not creative? What does it mean that she stressed the economic and commercial aspects of acting? How would all of these ideas about acting change if, perhaps, I had been a student in a program with a different approach to acting? How did this teacher's theories (perhaps unconscious) of what an actor *should be* affect her pedagogical choices?

As an undergraduate, I did not really question the way my acting teachers taught; to a certain extent I accepted that their ideas about actors were true, a statement of "the way things were." However, when I entered the graduate program in Performance as Public Practice, I began to see that every practice, including acting, enacts a theory. I learned that one can (and *should*) approach actor training in a critical way. I learned about pedagogy, and read critical works about how to teach acting, such as Cláudia Nascimento's article "Burning the (Monologue) Book," which critiques the gender politics of using monologues in the acting classroom. I found writers who specifically called for expanded models of teaching acting, such as Anna Deavere Smith, who, in

"Not So Special Vehicles," calls for acting to be a tool for researching communication skills and argues that the artist needs to learn about the world *outside* rather than just the world *inside*. In *Geographies of Learning*, Jill Dolan argues that theatre departments should train their students to be artists capable of working in a diverse range of settings rather than training them narrowly to fit into the mold of celebrity culture (63), an argument that rang true for me.

Reading these smart, feminist critiques of actor training helped me develop a more critical lens to examine my own past experiences of training. Many issues with my training—a lack of context about what kinds of techniques we were learning, an overwhelming emphasis on appearance and commercial "type," a model in which the teacher is the ultimate authority on a student's performance—were symptomatic of a larger problem: the fact that actors had little agency and power over their own work. As an undergraduate actor in my department, particularly a female actor, I often felt that I was at the mercy of teachers, directors, and producers. They held the power, and we acting students (over four hundred of us in the department) auditioned over and over, hoping to fit into the vision they had of a particular role. It was, all in all, a disempowering experience. But what if actor training had been approached differently? What if we had known that we were learning a *specific kind* of acting, and that there were many *other* ways to learn acting that highlighted different skills? What if we had known that the guru model employed at our university was one kind of pedagogical strategy, but that there were other models? What if we actors were encouraged to create our own work? What if we had been taught that intellect was an essential part of creativity? What

if we were taught to think of ourselves as collaborative creative artists rather than individuals on track to become famous?

I begin with these personal anecdotes and inspirations to frame the key issues that I explore in this dissertation. Specifically, I conduct a critical and comparative examination of late twentieth century and early twenty-first century actor training practices in the United States. I examine the ways in which theories about the actor, particularly ideas about the actor's mind and body, the actor's creativity, and the actor's agency and authority, are embodied in classroom practices. I look at three contemporary (and very different) methods of actor training in the United States: Viewpoints training as developed by Anne Bogart; Meisner technique; and the physical theatre training at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre. Through the combined study of primary sources such as acting manuals, theories about embodiment and creativity, ethnographic participant-observation accounts from classrooms, interviews with teachers, and a phenomenological approach to describing my experience, I attempt to analyze what it means *to be an actor* in three different realms of training.

A case study approach allows me to look at training techniques that stem from very different histories and vary in scope and dispersal. I begin each case study by historically situating the development of each training technique. I then examine the training according to several key topics: how training is sequenced, how the actor's body-mind is engaged, the role of the actor's creativity, the "ideal" actor, and the role of authority, among other categories. Through case studies, in which I observe or participate in a training experience, I also explore how theories about the actor are enacted within

actual sites of training and embodied specifically in the bodies of participants. I analyze the specific pedagogy of each technique and conduct interviews with the instructors to better understand their approaches.

In this chapter I introduce my critical approach and methodology. First, I situate this project within the field of critical studies of actor training. Next, I articulate the theoretical frameworks around issues of embodiment, creativity, pedagogy, and phenomenology that my project uses. Finally, I detail my research questions and methodology and offer a chapter outline. I believe that my dissertation, by closely analyzing conceptual and embodied practices of actor training, will provide a starting point for other artist-scholars who hope to re-think and re-imagine the practice of actor training.

Critical Approaches to Actor Training

In acting classrooms across the country, students are instructed to do things like "listen with your entire body," or "respond in the moment," or "show, don't tell." But where do these phrases come from and what do they really mean? What can they tell us about the larger ideas about acting at play in the classroom? In *Acting (Re)Considered*, theatre scholar Phillip Zarrilli argues that "too often, when we think and talk about acting, we do not examine either our language or the assumptions that lie behind it" (8). Actor training, like any artistic practice, does not exist outside of ideology or culture. Artistic practices always reflect larger cultural ideas and concepts, but as Zarrilli notes, we are not always aware of what these ideas are. The activities that acting students engage in, and the language used to describe them, can reveal important social and cultural concepts that

shape the practice, such as how different acting methods view the relationship between body and mind, the role of the actor's creativity, and the idea of what an ideal actor is. My project closely examines actor training, in an attempt to bridge the persistent gap between artistic theory and practice, and to offer new models for how to critically analyze acting practice. Zarrilli's call to challenge the view of "acting as a truth (that is, one system, discourse, or practice)," and instead promote awareness of acting as "a pro-active, processual approach which cultivates a critical awareness of acting as multiple and always changing" provides one of the main jumping off points for my scholarship (*Acting* 3).

In pursuing a critical approach to actor training, it is crucial to note that the very notion of "training" is a culturally specific and historically contingent idea. In *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, Alison Hodge explains that the very concept of Western "actor training" is a modern one, inspired by the systematic traditions of actor training in Eastern performance cultures such as Japanese Noh theatre and Indian Kathakali dance-theatre. Systems of actor training became popular in the West partly because practitioners became aware of these vast Eastern performance traditions and also as ideas about objective scientific research began to spread at the turn of the century (Hodge 2). The organized training of actors within Western culture is a twentieth-century development, as previous models of learning how to act relied on apprenticing with more experienced performers and learning through direct experience of performing in a show. While Hodge traces modern actor training systems at least in part back to Denis Diderot's philosophical musings about the actor's process in *Le Paradoxe sur le comedian* (1830),

Russian theatre director Konstantin Stanislavsky is widely considered to be one of the first European artists to investigate the process of learning to act, and to attempt to communicate his ideas about the actor's process in a systematic way in the late 1800s.[2]

In the nineteenth century United States, actor training was also informal and based on a system of apprenticeship, though by the end of the century, directors had become a more dominant force than actors. The first American school for actor training was the Lyceum Theatre School, established in 1884 and modeled after the techniques of French artist Francois Delsarte (Bartow xviii).[3] This particular strand of training was based on techniques of "elocution and declamation" (Watson 64). Acting departments were introduced into universities in 1906, but "it was not until conservatory-style preparation was introduced into universities in the 1960s that such programs became major training grounds for professional actors," a development linked to the rise of the regional theatre movement (Bartow xix, xxv). Stanislavsky's ideas about training hit the U.S. with force in the early 1920s, with the American Laboratory Theatre in New York emerging as the first place to learn the realist acting techniques of the Moscow Art Theatre under the guidance of former Stanislavksy pupils Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya. Sharon Marie Carnicke has written extensively about the development of

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[2] It is important to note that Stanislavsky's methods, as well as all of the techniques of training I look at, have roots or connections (often obscured) that stretch back globally and inter-culturally. For example, see Sharon Marie Carnicke's discussion of Stanislavsky's interest in yoga in *Stanislavsky in Focus* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998).

[3] Ian Watson cites the 1871 St. James Theatre School as the first professional academy in the U.S., also based on the techniques of Delsarte. See *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures,* (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2001). 61-81.

Stanislavsky's work, and in *Stanislavsky in Focus*, she points out that crucial issues of linguistic and cultural translation were at play as his ideas migrated into an American cultural landscape. Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler studied at the American Laboratory Theatre and they would eventually go on to become members of the influential Group Theatre, an ensemble theatre dedicated to realistic acting (1931-1940). From the Group Theatre emerged several major American acting teachers—Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner—who each emphasized a different part of Stanislavsky's system[4], and whose American adaptations (known as "The Method") continue to be the dominant trend in American actor training, particularly in university theatre departments.[5]

In the field of theatre studies, several excellent historical and literary studies examine ideas about the actor, which provide the critical basis of this dissertation. Joseph Roach has contributed several works that examine acting from a critical, and largely historical, perspective. In *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, Roach argues that "conceptions of the human body drawn from physiology and psychology have dominated theories of acting from antiquity to the present" (11). Roach looks at acting styles from the seventeenth-century through the late eighteenth-century, and makes the compelling argument that ideas about the actor change throughout time, in part due to shifting scientific ideas about the human body. In other work, Roach explicitly takes up the

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[4] See Arthur Bartow's Introduction to *Training of the American Actor* (New York: TCG, 2006), xxiv.

[5] Several scholars have made compelling arguments about how the U.S.'s embracing of Method Acting in the 1950s is linked to Cold War ideology and capitalism. See, for example, Bruce McConachie's *American Theatre in the Culture of the Cold War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003) and Amy Steiger's *Actors as Embodied Public Intellectuals*, diss. U of Texas, 2006.

theories of Michel Foucault to analyze actor training. In the essay "Power's Body: The Inscription of Morality as Style," Roach uses Foucault's idea that "power touches people's lives through social and cultural practices more than through centralized state organizations or systems of beliefs" to argue that particular performance styles and conventions (specifically, the eighteenth-century practices of castrating male opera singers and the specific notations of the theatrical Passions) were ways of subjecting people to certain expected social behaviors (101). In both works, Roach makes clear that ideas about the actor are contextual, transient, and culturally specific, a starting point for my project.

In "Theatre and the Civilizing Process: An Approach to the History of Acting," another historical account of actor training, Erika Fischer-Lichte reminds us that "acting is taught and learned in primarily physical ways" (21) and that "actors' bodies, as presented onstage, are likewise culturally conditioned in accordance with the actual state of the civilizing process" (23). Fischer-Lichte analyzes the ways that three styles of acting: Baroque, illusionistic eighteenth-century acting, and early twentieth-century avant-garde acting reflect social behaviors of the time. She selects metaphors for each particular style: the body as a 'text' composed of artificial signs (23); the body as a 'text' composed in the 'natural language of the emotions' (26); and the body as raw material for sign processes (29). Although I do not explicitly address the way that acting techniques address social behaviors of the time, I find Fischer-Lichte's use of metaphor instructive as well as her reminder that acting is an embodied learning process.

Ideas about who an actor is and what she or he does are also historically and culturally constructed. In *The Idea of the Actor,* W.B. Worthen looks at "the idea of the actor" in three specific time periods, through three different theaters. Worthen discusses the way major theorists of acting (Stanislavsky, Artaud, Grotowski, Brecht) conceive of the actor differently, through an analysis of their critical and theoretical writings. He also looks at major acting textbooks and specific plays of the time to see how these ideas play out. Although I take up a similar theme (the idea of the actor), Worthen's work is specifically focused on texts and plays, and my work incorporates ethnographic case studies in order to more fully integrate theory with practice.

Despite the presence of these excellent historical and critical studies, actor training as a whole remains under-theorized. There are many "how to" manuals that cover the practical steps of learning a technique. But there are few works that attempt to combine a critical lens with an embodied experience of training. This is the gap my work fills. By putting my body on the line to train in different techniques, I offer a subjective experience of how theory translates into practice, and how the practice of training can help to expand or clarify theory. I hope my work will offer a structured approach to analyzing actor training, and open the door for more critical and embodied accounts of what it means to learn how to act.

EMBODIMENT

Embodiment is a central issue in theatre and performance studies, and several foundational cultural theorists have offered theories about the body that influence a performance studies approach to embodiment. In *The Logic of Practice,* Pierre Bourdieu

proposes the notion of *habitus,* or the idea that social norms and values become embodied in daily habit and activity. In the essay "Body Techniques," French anthropologist Marcel Mauss argues that many bodily activities that we consider to be natural (walking, running, giving birth) are in fact what he calls *body techniques*. Mauss argues that "These 'habits' do not vary just with individuals and their imitations; they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties" (39). Both of these theorists point toward the foundational idea that a body's movement is not just natural movement, but a kind of learned technique influenced by societal and cultural norms.

Michel Foucault's work on bodies has also been foundational to a performance studies approach. Foucault was fundamentally interested in looking at how knowledge and power come together to objectify, or discipline, the body. In *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow explains Foucault's argument that "The aim of disciplinary technology, whatever its institutional form . . . is to forge 'a docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved'" (17). This disciplinary process can be achieved through drills and training of the body; in this way, actor training can be read as a discipline of the body. However, feminists critique Foucault for describing the way that bodies are inscribed with power relations but denying agency and subjectivity to participating bodies. My project incorporates this feminist critique of Foucault, as I acknowledge the

agency of people participating in actor training and focus on the subjective experience of learning the technique from within my own specific body.[6]

The work of contemporary scholars in several fields, including cognitive science, dance, and theatre studies, have contributed to my approach toward embodiment and the framework I use to analyze ideas about the actor's body-mind. First, I begin with the assumption—drawn from fields as diverse as neuroscience and philosophy—that body and mind are inseparable, and make up an integrated whole. Though I work from this assumption, in my project I closely analyze the specific rhetoric of how the actor's body and mind are theorized in each method of actor training, and how the language used to refer to the body and the intellect reveals these theories.

Western culture has inherited the idea that mind and body are separate from the philosopher René Descartes, who imagined that thinking was a process that separated, or elevated, a person from the body. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio argues in *Descartes' Error* that a more accurate way of thinking about body and mind is to use to the term *embodied mind* (252). He argues that body and mind are inseparable: "When I say that the body and brain form an indissociable organism, I am not exaggerating. In fact, I am oversimplifying. Consider that the brain receives signals not only from the body but, in some of its sectors, from parts of itself that receive signals from the body!" (Damasio 88). In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, cognitive and linguistic scientists Mark Johnson and George

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[6] Feminist scholars have made important contributions to body studies in such works as Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and The Body* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993) and Rebecca Schneider's *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London/New York: Routledge 1997). These works, while not explicitly addressed in my project, have nevertheless been influential to the field in how they explore cultural constructions of the body and the body in performance.

Lakoff also offer an impassioned argument for the unified nature of body and mind. In fact, they make the compelling claim that "because our conceptual systems grow out of our bodies, meaning is grounded in and through our bodies" (6). They show that many of our conceptions about the mind are actually based in bodily processes and experiences, for example, we call fully comprehending an idea "digesting" it (240).

These core ideas from cognitive science are especially useful when examining actor training because they frequently challenge received wisdom about the actor's process. Theatre scholars, such as Rhonda Blair and Bruce McConachie, have productively applied principles from cognitive studies and neuroscience to bring new insight into the field of actor training. In "The Method and the Computational Theory of Mind," Blair agues that the core principles of Method Acting embody some of the major theories of cognitive science, and that Method Acting should be reconsidered in light of these connections. Her recent book *The Actor, Image, and Action* also explores these connections at length, but my project has been most influenced by hearing Blair critique the way that acting teachers often reinscribe body-mind divisions by making abstract (and scientifically impossible) statements such as "Get out of your head." Blair proposed the following questions to help teachers rethink the way we talk about body and mind in actor training: *How does our language serve us and how does it not? Is your language as helpful as possible in describing what you're asking a student to do? Instead of saying 'get out of your head' could we ask the student instead "where is your attention, or your*

point of focus?" How can we move beyond these body-mind binaries?[7] I found Blair's questions to be incredibly provocative, and I use them to frame the way I analyze how acting teachers talk about the body-mind connection in my case studies.

Phillip Zarrilli's *Psychophysical Acting* is the latest book to critically examine conceptions of body and mind in actor training. Zarrilli attempts to answer the question: "Is it possible to develop a language and theory of acting which do not fall prey to our inherent Western mind-body dualism?" (18) through proposing his own system of training that draws on Asian martial and meditation arts. Zarrilli carefully parses out the language used to describe body and mind in certain acting techniques and makes a compelling argument that actor training should be *psychophysical,* a term he uses to mean practices that cultivate an awareness of the integrated nature of body and mind. Zarrilli's primary argument is that one can de-condition a tendency towards a dualistic relationship through psychophysical training.

New conceptual ways of framing the connection between body and mind might help intervene in the persistent tendency towards dualism. For example, Zarrilli proposes different modes of bodymind awareness, adapted from the work of phenomenologist David Edward Shaner (32). In this formulation, body and mind are always integrated, but an actor moves through states in which the primary point of focus shifts between being weighted toward bodily awareness or reflexive, discursive awareness (32-33). Even

[7] Blair made these comments at a symposium held at New York University in March 2009 called The Performing Body in Theory and Practice. After a movement workshop conducted by NYU faculty member Paul Langland, Blair spoke about the ways principles of cognitive science might add to our understanding of acting techniques.

though mind and body are always one, actors are conscious of the unity in different ways; sometimes the body recedes in our consciousness and we experience them as separate. This idea that the point of focus shifts in different directions is key to the way I write about the actor's body-mind during training. Another useful conceptual frame is that the actor has both an "aesthetic inner bodymind" (associated with long term practice of psychophysical training) and an "aesthetic outer body" (what the audience sees) (Zarrilli, *Psychophysical* 55-58).[8] I find the idea of the actor's dual body—both the one that she experiences as she moves through it and the one that the audience sees as aesthetic images—to be useful and one that I employ in the way that I write about my own bodily experience as well as what I read onto other people's bodies as an observer.

As with my project, Zarrilli attempts to write about acting from the inside, focusing on the "actor's mode of embodiment, perception, and experience" (45). Like Zarilli's other work, this book represents an example of a critical and contextualized perspective on training. Zarrilli explicitly states his ideas about what actors can do and shapes the skills differently toward different tasks; this type of writing is important and helps work against the idea that "acting" by default means realist acting. Our overlapping ideas and methodologies suggest that this is a critical moment in which theatre scholars are searching for different ways to think and write about the practice of acting. Like Zarrilli, I also focus on the experience of training from the actor's perspective, which is a striking departure from many other accounts of acting, but I take my overall project in a different direction. While Zarrilli goes on to propose a new system of actor training and

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[8] Zarrilli's framework here is drawn from the work of phenomenologist Drew Leder.

to elucidate specific exercises in his proposed training methodology, I apply my lens to a comparative selection of methods, with the overall goal of finding new ways to examine acting pedagogy. My project denaturalizes acting practices to pave the way for new theories like Zarilli's to emerge.

Dance scholars, such as Susan Leigh Foster, have helped me think more closely about the ways in which acting practices instruct and discipline the body, and the ways that classroom practices can be analyzed for the larger structures they reflect. Foster's work provides me with the clearest scholarly model of how to write about bodies and expressive selves as they play out in classrooms where participants acquire specific performance techniques. In *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*, Foster compares the style of several choreographers, and looks at the meaning of art; the choreographer's mission; the purpose of dance technique; the concept of expression; the dancer's body; the dancer's subject; and the viewer's response (42-43). I found this structure clear and useful, and adapted several of these categories for my study.

In her essay "Dancing Bodies," Foster, acknowledging the influences of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault but also signaling a departure from their work, calls for what she calls "a more meat-and-bones approach to the body based on an analysis of discourses of practices that *instruct* it" (235, emphasis hers). Analyzing language that describes the body is important because each body that participates in a structuring practice is a "body-of-ideas" (236) and metaphor becomes especially important to any kind of discipline that instructs the body (including actor training). Foster argues that:

> Each discipline refers to [the body] using select metaphors and other tropes that make it over. These tropes may be drawn from anatomical discourse or the science of kinesiology; or they may liken the body to a machine, an animal, or any other worldly object or event. They may be articulated as verbal descriptions of the body and its actions, or as physical actions that show it how to behave. Whether worded or enacted, these tropes change its meaning by re-presenting it. (*Dancing* 236)

Language that describes the body is not neutral, but is in fact specific and influential. Following from this idea, I look closely at the discourse of each training technique to analyze what kind of actor this language creates and describes.

Foster goes on to detail the ways in which dancers' bodies and expressive selves are shaped and instructed through several different versions of dance technique: ballet, Martha Graham technique, Isadora Duncan technique, Merce Cunningham technique, and contact improvisation. She bases her analysis on critical writings about these techniques as well as her own observations and/or participation in these types of classes, and attempts to describe the techniques "in order to suggest possible relationships between body and self that result from instructing the body in a given dance technique" (241). Foster describes the way that classroom practices instruct the body in close, ethnographic detail, while at the same time linking these practices to larger themes. Things such as the sequence of class events, the ways bodies move, and the kinds of exercises dancers engage in all reflect larger concepts about the body and self embedded in each dance technique. Inspired by this work, I adapted Foster's model of analyzing dance technique

classes for acting classrooms, in order to better understand the dynamics and implicit structures of classroom contexts.

Though I adapt her model of analyzing dance technique, my project also departs from Foster's because of differences between dance and acting techniques. According to Foster, training in one dance technique constructs such a specific dancing body that "the style and skills it imparts can be transferred only partially to another technique" (*Dancing Bodies* 241). In actor training, many actors train in a variety of techniques, which transfer in idiosyncratic ways. Though I think each method of actor training I have chosen does construct a specific version of the actor's body and self, there are usually more overlaps between acting techniques, and actors often use techniques for different purposes.

I do not want to assume that actor training, though it is a practice that "disciplines" the body, denies agency to its participants. Judith Hamera helpfully takes up this exact issue in *Dancing Communities* by suggesting that dance technique creates common vocabularies for dancers, which facilitates the development of communities of dancers. According to Hamera,

> Technique inserts its object-bodies into language, offering a common idiom through which these bodies are examined, described, and remade . . . Thus, technique is, simultaneously, a lexicon, a grammar of/or affiliation—even a rhetoric—in motion. It facilitates interpersonal and social relations as it shapes bodies. (5)

In Hamera's formulation, the shared language and metaphors of dance technique contribute to forming communities and strengthening interpersonal relationships.

Learning technique involves the creation of a common language that goes beyond disciplining the body and in fact creates a certain agency for participants. Hamera's work also serves as a model for my own scholarship, as she analyzes practices in several kinds of "dancing communities," among them Pilates, ballet, and butoh, with an emphasis on what happens in classrooms. As additional models of writing about practice, Cynthia Novack's analysis of contact improvisation in *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* and Randy Martin's ethnography of a dance technique class in *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* are useful.

Finally, in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor argues that the archive is that which exists as concrete materials such as texts, letters, and video, whereas the repertoire "enacts embodied memory" and includes performance, gesture, dance and other practices thought to be ephemeral but actually serving as modes of knowledge creation and transmission (19-20). My project, through working with knowledge from both the archive and the repertoire, attempts to reconcile these two types of knowledge to produce a more integrated account of acting practice.

CREATIVITY

Creativity is a word used frequently in theatre, but an idea that is often mystified. Part of the mystification stems from the fact that there is no *one* definition of creativity; creativity in fact varies in historical and cultural contexts.[9] Noted psychology professor

[9] Ideas about creativity are specific to different cultures. For an excellent selection of essays about creativity in cross-cultural contexts, see the anthology *Creativity/Anthropology*, Eds. Smadar Lavie, Kirin Narayan, and Renato Rosaldo (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) or *The International Handbook of*

and creativity researcher Mihály Csikszentmihályi, who began by theorizing that creativity was an individual personality trait, now argues that creativity cannot be looked at separately from its specific domain (*Domain of Creativity* 192). As he notes, "It is impossible to define *creativity* independently of a judgment based on criteria that change from domain to domain and across time" (emphasis in original, *Domain* 198). In *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, Csikszentmihályi introduces the idea of a *flow* state in creative work, drawn from interviews with hundreds of individuals in creative professions. A state of flow is a peak or optimal state of being that creative engagement can engender. In this flow state, one loses track of time, feels engaged in body and mind in the activity, and loses a sense of self-consciousness, among other things (111-112). These kinds of specific ideas about creativity are embedded in the context of each actor training method, and part of my project is to try to uncover exactly what those ideas are.

Modern Western ideas about the artist are a product of time, place, and economic and social developments. For example, nineteenth century European Romanticism "was the birth of contemporary notions of creativity—the idea that the poet or artist has a privileged status as the epitome of the human spirit" (Sawyer 16). In contrast, postmodern art tends to deconstruct many of our culture's notions of creativity by challenging ideas about originality and individual genius (Sawyer 17). In *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*, R. Keith Sawyer, a leading creativity

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Creativity, Eds. James A. Kaufman and Robert J. Sternberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

theorist, offers a general definition of creativity in a contemporary U.S. context as involving novelty and being appropriate to a certain domain (121). Sawyer uses scientific research about creativity to debunk what he considers to be our culture's myths about creativity. For example, he argues that the myth that creativity comes from the unconscious can be debunked because scientific research shows that "the explanation of creativity lies in hard work and everyday mental processes" (19). He also takes issue with the idea that creativity is spontaneous inspiration, noting that "formal training and conscious deliberation are essential to creativity" (21). Importantly, his work challenges the mystification of creative processes.

Sawyer offers a model of different stages of creativity, though he notes that the process is actually far less linear and much more cyclical than this model suggests. Still, I find the stages useful in thinking about how the cycle of an actor training program is constructed to deal with these stages. The first stage is preparation, or any kind of formal schooling or training that introduces a person to the codes of their field. The second stage is incubation, during which things need to be put aside and not directly thought about. This period involves associations, cross-fertilizations, and cognitive structures. The third stage is insight, though it may take the form of many small insights, not necessarily one big "flashbulb" moment. Finally there is the phase of verification, which involves evaluation and elaboration. After your good idea, you evaluate it consciously to think about whether it will work.[10] A cycle of the entire creative process might look like this:

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[10] These stages are described in R. Keith Sawyer's *Explaining Creativity*, pp. 60-68.

> Instead of a single, glorious moment, creators experience small insights throughout a day's work, with each small insight followed by a period of conscious elaboration; these mini-insights only gradually accumulate to result in a finished work, as a result of a process of hard work and intellectual labor of the creator. (Sawyer 72)

What is useful about this description of the creative process is that it acknowledges intellectual labor as an integral part of creativity and challenges the myth that creative bursts come out of nowhere and do not involve the conscious mind or intellect.

In the United States today, creativity is linked to spontaneity, an idea that is central to many methods of actor training. Contemporary U.S. culture values the idea of spontaneous art creation whereas in other places and times, diligent preparation was emphasized, for example, eighteenth-century European painters were expected to be extremely prepared before they placed brush to canvas (Sawyer 73). In the United States, creativity is also embedded in a culture of individualism. In this kind of individualist society, "The functions of art are largely to support the individual, and to reward and acknowledge individuality," whereas artists in collectivist cultures emphasize the ways in which their work is not different from others, but fits into a lineage of tradition and aesthetics (Sawyer 140-141). Many of our beliefs about creativity come from an individualist perspective:

> In our individualist culture, we think that creativity is the expression of a unique individual. We believe that there are individual differences in talent that are probably innate. We believe that a created work is invested with the unique

emotional and personal experience of the creator. And above all, we value innovation and breaking conventions. (Sawyer 147)

I think it is important to denaturalize these cultural ideas about creativity so their socially constructed nature becomes visible.

Although U.S. culture values individual creativity, actual creative production in the U.S. is often collective and institutional.[11] Most research on creativity has focused on the "high arts" and ignored what Sawyer calls *performance creativity*, which almost always involves improvisation, collaboration, and communication (7).[12] Contrary to popular conception, Sawyer argues that the actor's creativity is, essentially, collective and improvisational. My project intends to explore this idea further by asking: How exactly is the actor's creativity engaged in the methods I study, both in theory and in practice? How are conceptions about the actor's creativity influenced by our own cultural myths about individual artistic production? And how do the pedagogical techniques in the classroom facilitate the development of specific modes of creativity?

This dissertation demystifies the actor's creativity and challenges the popular idea that the actor is an *individual artist* whose creativity is applied in the interpretation of a character. Usually, when an actor is admired as an artist, he or she is seen as a lone genius, or a "star." But in fact, all of the methods I study involve creativity that is invested in improvisation and relationships with others. However, although the

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[11] Sawyer makes this argument via the work of M. Garber (119).

[12] The creation of jazz music is often cited an as example of collaborative and improvisational creativity. Joni Jones/Omi Osun Olomo's current book project explores this kind of "jazz aesthetic" in theatrical performance.

underlying ideas about creativity reflect a collaborative, improvisational philosophy, the pedagogy of these methods—how they are taught—sometimes gets surprisingly caught up in the individualistic model that they actually are inherently challenging. By unpacking the actual creative practices in which actors engage, I hope not only to promote the notion that actors are creative artists in collaboration with others but also to call for a revision of acting pedagogy that fully reckons with this idea.

PEDAGOGY

My dissertation, through its close analysis of classroom practices, is deeply invested in pedagogy. Pedagogy is always an embodied process, but it is especially so in the field of acting, which relies on body-to-body transmission of knowledge. In the article "Critical Performative Pedagogy," Elyse Lamm Pineau points to embodiment's role in teaching, and proposes "methods of detailed observation of physical bodies in action within particular classrooms and critical analyses of the social codes articulated by those bodies" (46). I was influenced by Pineau's call to look closely at classroom bodies (in this case, bodies in acting classrooms) in order to analyze what kind of knowledge is being experienced by those bodies and selves.

Judith Hamera, in "Performance Studies, Pedagogy, and Bodies in/as the Classroom" asks, "How is the classroom body, the performed body, the body-in-literature, framed and disciplined? Why?" (126). Hamera uses three ethnographic contexts to talk about the way bodies perform in the classroom. She frames her project by saying "I've trained, or attempted to train in each of these three areas—the enabling fiction that establishes my ethnographic authority is physical—and this training has both

directly or indirectly funded my sense of what it is to perform in bodies" (122). My attempt to train in three acting methods similarly functions as my "enabling fiction." Hamera argues that performance training (which in some ways 'disciplines' the body) also offers spaces and opportunities for resistance (126). She suggests that we rethink the relationship between "myth, technique, body and text in the classroom" using Foucault's idea of technologies of the self (126-127). According to Foucault, technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness" (qtd. in Hamera 127). An analysis of classroom dynamics must take into account the way actors use these techniques for their own purposes.

The field of educational theory known as critical pedagogy has also been influential to my classroom analysis. The critical pedagogy movement began with Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, who argued in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* against a "banking model" of education in which the teacher deposits information to the student and withdraws it later, and *for* a pedagogy that raises critical consciousness and works to resist oppression. In "Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of Possibility," Peter McLaren argues that "Freire's pedagogy was anti-authoritarian, dialogical, and interactive, and put power into the hands of students and workers" (7).[13] One of the overall goals is transforming the classroom power hierarchies in order to shift larger societal power structures. Another

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[13] For more perspective on how critical pedagogy has been elaborated on in a North American context, see works such as Henry Giroux's *The Giroux Reader*, Ed. Christopher G. Robbins (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006) and bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*, (New York: Routledge, 1994).

goal is to focus pedagogy on student-driven knowledges, or as Stacy Wolf puts it, "Critical pedagogy is a radically progressive project, where the classroom is not a place where knowledges are dispensed by teachers and consumed by students, but rather a site for the production of new knowledges grounded in students' practices" (84). I use the lens of critical pedagogy in my dissertation through my analysis of authority and agency in the classroom.

This project links acting pedagogy and critical pedagogy by looking closely at the role of power in the classroom and asking whether there any methods of acting pedagogy that work in a progressive way but perhaps do not articulate their work in the language of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is important to my project because I want to ultimately argue for a shift in classroom power relations that can transform the actor's role in the larger culture. I hope that my dissertation will contribute to future pedagogical interventions in actor training, because ultimately, my interest is in how acting is *taught*. I want to re-theorize and revitalize the way acting is taught by looking for models that open up possibilities for the actor to experience greater agency in the creative process.

PHENOMENOLOGY

In analyzing my experience participating in actor training workshops, I use an approach influenced by phenomenology. Phenomenology began with philosopher Edmund Husserl's assertion that it was possible to "bracket" assumptions about an object in order to experience it through an encounter with the senses (Reinelt and Roach, *Second Edition* 9-10). This initial idea was expanded upon by thinkers such as Maurice Merlau-Ponty, who insisted "on the materiality of the body and the lived experience of being

implicated in a body" (Reinelt and Roach, *Second Edition* 10). In recent years, performance scholars such as Stanton Garner and Bert O. States have offered persuasive ways to integrate phenomenology and performance, and my approach has been most influenced by their work. In *Bodied Spaces*, Garner argues that there are many different types of phenomenologies, but all are joined by aims

> To redirect attention from the world as it is conceived by the abstract "scientific" gaze (the objective world) to the world as it appears or discloses itself to the perceiving subject (the phenomenal world); to pursue the thing as it is given to consciousness in direct experience; to return perception to the fullness of its encounter with its environment. (2)

Garner argues that phenomenology is uniquely suited to the study of performance because it allows for an exploration of the objectified, scenic space of performance as well as the subjectified space inhabited by the performers themselves (4). In "The Phenomenological Attitude," Bert O. States argues that phenomenological criticism can be equated with impressionism (26), and is less a specific movement than a "mode of thought and expression the mind naturally adopts when questions relating to our awareness of being and appearance arise" (35). He calls it both metaphorical and personal, and argues that it is a "useful counterbalance to the increasingly impersonal methodology in so much of today's criticism" (States 27).

Phenomenology has been critiqued for being ahistorical and universalizing, but my approach, like that of other feminist phenomenologists, does not attempt to understand the stable "essence" of something, but rather to understand my own subjective

experience of it, through my own bodily engagement. I look at the idea of experiencing each technique from a phenomenological perspective—that is, I write about my experience of each technique as "showing itself from a limited aspect to an embodied subject who is itself constituted through its bodily orientation and its spatial, sensory, and perceptual orientation to the stimulus in question" (Reinelt and Roach, *Second Edition* 10). Phenomenology, in this study, makes specific something that is otherwise generalizable: "Though it is concerned with the structure of such phenomena as perception, corporeality, and imagination, the phenomenological attitude chooses the perspectival over the universal; it seeks to ground the general in the local instance" (Garner 5). Rather than attempting to write my experience as the ultimate example, I acknowledge the specificity of my experiencing body, which is raced as white, gendered as female, and already inscribed with previous acting experiences. These markings all filter into my experience of each technique. I hope my embodied perspective will be useful, but I do not claim that my experience represents the experience of all others; in fact it is unmistakably and specifically different. Through this dissertation, I offer an experience of subjectivity as a way to examine theories about acting in three contemporary methods.

RESEARCH METHODS AND QUESTIONS

My dissertation follows a case study approach, organized around the three training methods. I begin each case study by situating the method of training within its historical and cultural context. To do this, I draw on primary texts from the methods' developers themselves (such as Mary Overlie and Anne Bogart), as well as scholarly

analyses of these methods. I conduct a discursive analysis of major texts and writings on the method, looking closely at how language is used to describe and construct ideas about "the actor." I apply the following research questions to each method of actor training I examine: What is the historical context of this type of training? What is the sequence in which students learn skills? How is the actor's creativity conceptualized? How is the actor's body-mind constructed? What constitutes the ideal actor in this method? By what criteria is excellence/success evaluated? What is the relationship between body, mind, and expressive self? Toward what kind of performance is this training directed? What does a typical class conducted in this method look like? What is the role of the teacher? What is the structure of authority in this method of training?

In order to write about how these ideas are enacted and embodied in acting classrooms, each case study includes a participant-observation component, in which I observed and/or participated in a class, workshop, or training conducted in this method. Some of my research questions for the classroom component include: How is the classroom space laid out? What is the structure of the class? How do exercises progress? What kind of activities and exercises do the actors do? What kind of vocabulary do the teachers and students use to refer to acting? How does the teacher offer corrections? As part of these case studies, I conducted interviews with the instructors, in order to gain a larger perspective on their pedagogy.

Although this work is not an ethnography, I adapt ethnography's technique of participant-observation as one of my primary research methods. I use participant-observation because it is an *embodied* method of cultural research and exchange. As

Dwight Conquergood notes, "Ethnography's distinctive research method, participant-observation fieldwork, privileges the body as a site of knowing" (180). In this way, my own embodied workshop experiences are a form of autoethnography, which Norman Denzin says "reflexively inserts the researcher's biographical experiences" into the particular project (33). I apply performance ethnography's concepts of self-reflexivity and positionality to my own work, in the ways articulated by scholars such as Joni L. Jones (Omi Osun Olomo), D. Soyini Madison, and Della Pollock.[14] In writing from an embodied perspective, my project embraces feminist scholar Donna Haraway's idea of "the view from a body," which she argues is "always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (589).

Finally, my project is implicitly related to feminism. Though I don't look specifically at gender, I do examine power relations, and my "experiencing body" that participates in each technique is a female body. As Reinelt and Roach remind us, feminism "is simultaneously theory and practice; to be a feminist scholar is to practice political resistance to tradition, to dominance, to patriarchy" (*First Edition* 225). By looking at how the actor experiences agency in contemporary acting practices, this project hopes to intervene into the traditional hierarchies of actor training.

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[14] Each of these scholars has written about the importance of situating oneself as a particular, self-reflexive subject and not as an ultimate authority. For examples, see Joni Jones' "Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity," (*Theatre Topics* 12.1, 2002); D. Soyini Madison's *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2005); and Della Pollock's "Marking New Directions in Performance Ethnography," (*Text and Performance Quarterly* 26.4, October 2006).

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In Chapter Two, "Artists of the Interpersonal: Reality and Relationships in Meisner Training," I situate Meisner training (as developed by actor-teacher Sanford Meisner) as a twentieth century American adaptation of Russian theatre artist Konstantin Stanislavsky's system of actor training developed at the end of the eighteenth century. I examine the writings and teachings of Sanford Meisner as well as those of other teachers who have adapted his methods through the years. I conduct my case study by observing a class called Acting Realism at Texas State University. In this chapter, I investigate how the Meisner trained actor becomes specialized at reading behavior and engaging in interpersonal communication, and I suggest the implications this kind of focus has on the actor's agency in the classroom and rehearsal space.

In Chapter Three, "From the Vertical to the Horizontal: Shifting the Balance of the Actor's Agency in Viewpoints Training," I analyze Viewpoints training. I begin by situating Viewpoints within its historical emergence in the late 1970s, particularly as it relates to postmodern dance. I then focus on examining the writings of Viewpoints' developers Mary Overlie and Anne Bogart as well as scholarly analyses of Viewpoints. Next, I conduct a case study based on my participation in a two-week workshop with artists from Bogart's SITI Company held at Links Hall in Chicago in the summer of 2008. In this chapter, I am especially interested in how the actor emerges during Viewpoints training as a collaborative creative artist whose energies are directed outward rather than inward, and how this presents an opportunity to revision the role of the actor in theatrical production.

In Chapter Four, "Towards a Pedagogy of Generative Creativity: Actor-Creators at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre," I situate the training at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre as part of a lineage of physical theatre traditions that includes mime and commedia dell'arte. I conduct my case study by attending the four-week summer Dell'Arte Intensive in Blue Lake, California during the summer of 2009. This chapter focuses on how the pedagogical strategies at Dell'Arte are intended to create actors who generate new material and can perform across a wide variety of styles.

In Chapter Five, "A Call for Transparency, Conscious Hybridity, and Collaborative Creativity," I synthesize the entire project and discuss its possible pedagogical implications. I review the findings from my dissertation and then offer ideas on how to shift the practices of actor training in ways that create greater agency for actors.

Chapter Two

Artists of the Interpersonal: Reality and Relationships in Meisner Training

"If you do something, you really do it! Did you walk up the steps to this classroom this morning? You didn't jump up? You didn't skip up, right? You didn't do a ballet pirouette? You really walked up those steps."

-Sanford Meisner, *On Acting,* 17

"Don't act. Don't fake. Don't pretend. Don't anticipate."

-Sanford Meisner, *Sanford Meisner: The Theatre's Best Kept Secret*

PRELUDE

In the first year of my college acting training, the professor emphasized a variety of core principles, including listening and responding to your partner and spontaneity. When we began to perform scene work from Tennessee Williams' *Camino Real,* Sam Shepard's *True West,* and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, she coached us to listen to our partners, react in the moment, and put our attention on the other person. This emphasis on playing off the other person felt revolutionary to me as a performer. No longer was I completely self-absorbed while performing, worrying about how I was saying my lines or what I was doing with my body. Instead I was learning to engage with a partner and actively communicate with him or her. Although I didn't know exactly where these acting principles came from, I felt grateful to be learning them.

There were whispers, though, about what was happening in other acting classes. One class was said to be working exclusively on celebrated acting teacher Sanford

Meisner's repetition exercises. We heard rumors that in these Meisner sessions, people were crying and experiencing intense interpersonal revelations. There were people in my class who wanted to try this kind of approach, and so they asked our professor, "When are we going to learn Meisner?" She replied with an emphatic tone, "We *are* learning Meisner. We've been doing Meisner this whole time—listening and responding, spontaneity. That's Meisner!"

More recently, I had another experience that made me question what it means to learn Meisner technique. On January 24, 2009, I attended a Meisner workshop for high school teachers at the Texas Educational Theatre Association Conference in Houston. Workshop leader Larry Silverberg, a former student of Sanford Meisner's, asked the group of high school teachers how many of them used Meisner training in their classes. Not one person raised her hand confidently. Instead they all shook their hands from side to side to indicate "kind of." While some teachers said they were trying repetition exercises in their classes, they seemed to question whether they were teaching it "right." The purpose of the workshop, then, was to help teachers learn the "right" way to teach the Meisner repetition exercises, a process that Silverberg then took us through step by step. Silverberg's approach represents a more rigid take on Meisner training, while my college teacher's approach represents a more casual engagement with the technique.

I begin with these anecdotes because I believe they raise important questions. First, what exactly *is* Meisner training? Is it the step-by-step process of repetition outlined by Meisner himself and practiced by those who have trained with him? Or can it be distilled into the principles of spontaneity, listening, and responding, as dispersed and

taught in so many acting classes without reference to Meisner? What does it mean to "kind of" teach Meisner? Is there one "right" way to do it? What does the process of dispersal mean for how pedagogy is handed down? It is with these questions that I begin my examination of Meisner technique.

UNTANGLING HISTORY

Meisner technique is a popular method of actor training in the United States that is based on two main principles. The first is that the basis of acting is in the "reality of doing" (Meisner and Longwell 16) which means that the actor should be physically and mentally engaged in actual actions, or doings, onstage. The second principle is an emphasis on spontaneity and impulse, which is practiced through exercises that engage the actor in verbal repetition with a partner, in order to cultivate listening skills and impulsive responses to behavior. Sanford Meisner, an actor and former member of The Group Theatre, began teaching in the 1930s and continued teaching for many decades at New York's Neighborhood Playhouse. Through teaching, Meisner refined an approach to acting that he found to be effective in creating communication between scene partners. His system of training, along with many other widely practiced methods of actor training in the United States, is fundamentally rooted in the system of actor training articulated by Russian theatre artist Konstantin Stanislavsky.

Before delving into the specifics of Meisner training, it is important to historicize its development and to understand the seismic shift that occurred when Stanislavsky's ideas about acting migrated to the United States. Tracing histories, especially histories of embodied practices, is never a simple process. As Michel Foucault writes, "The world we

know is not this ultimately simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. On the contrary, it is a profusion of entangled events" (*Neitzsche* 89). Despite the difficulties of writing a historical narrative, I hope to untangle some of the threads that led to the development of Meisner technique as a popular way to train actors in the mid-late twentieth and early twenty-first century United States.[15]

UNCOVERING FOUNDATIONS: STANISLAVSKY'S SYSTEM

In 1897, Stanislavsky, along with theatre critic and director Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, founded the Moscow Art Theatre. The mission of the MAT was to create a new kind of theatre, one that Stanislavsky claimed would rebel against overacting, theatricality, the promotion of stars over the ensemble, and unserious subject matter (Carnicke 23). While working with the MAT, Stanislavsky, an actor himself, began to search for a new way to think about acting and posed the questions: "How can an actor maintain spontaneity in performances repeated time and time again? How can one harness at will the illusive moment of inspiration? How can one control a creative mood?" (Carnicke 26). He wanted to create a system that actors could use to develop their skills and work toward the ultimate goal of "creating the life of the human spirit of the role" (Carnicke 112).

Stanislavsky's burgeoning desire to systematize the process of actor training was influenced by external developments taking place in art, science, and psychology around

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[15] Meisner technique is frequently included in anthologies about actor training, suggesting its enduring popularity. See, for example, chapters in Arthur Bartow's *Training of the American Actor* (New York: TCG, 2006) and Alison Hodge's *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (London: Routledge, 2000).

the turn of the century. For example, his work coincided with the development of realism as a theatrical style, as well as new developments in the scientific method and Freud's experiments with human psychology. Stanislavsky was not alone in his desire to systematize actor training. Roach argues that "the search for a physical system of actor training, a process, a technique, a discipline, whereby the body may be reliably mastered, characterizes the best thinking about the art of acting in the twentieth century" (*Player's Passion* 194), and indeed other artists (for example, Vsevolod Meyerhold), have developed their own systematic forms of training. Stanislavsky's, however, is the most widely dispersed system in the United States.[16] In the early 1900s, Stanislavsky began to put his new system into practice by teaching his techniques to actors at the Moscow Art Theatre.

Stanislavsky's system is complex, contradictory, and often misunderstood. There are three main ideas in his system that have greatly affected American acting: actor training can be systematic; emotion and action are discrete and important concepts; the actor is a creative artist. The idea that actor training can be systematic and happen through specific steps is one of Stanislavsky's key concepts. Stanislavsky's system can be broken down into two parts: work on the self and preparation for a role. In the first phase, the actor develops personal skills such as concentration, imagination, and relaxation. In the second phase, the actor applies these skills to a role in a specific play.

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[16] In "The Teaching of Acting in American Colleges and Universities, 1920-1960," Patti Gillespie and Kenneth Cameron suggest that by 1960, acting classes were common in universities, and a majority were based on the theories of Stanislavsky, as they still are. The essay appears in *Teaching Theatre Today*, Eds. Fliotsos and Medford (New York: Palgrave, 2004). pp. 51-63.

Preparation for a role may include activities such as play analysis, choosing an action, and improvising the text.

Stanislavsky called his ideal kind of acting *experiencing,* a process "in which the actor creates the role anew at every performance in full view of the audience . . . Such acting, however well planned and well rehearsed, maintains an essentially active and improvisatory nature" (Carnicke 173). Experiencing essentially boils down to the idea that the *process of performing* itself demands concentration, improvisation, and flexibility in the moment, and that in the moment of performance, the actor achieves his or her most creative state. The precise term "experiencing" is unfamiliar to many American practitioners because it was never accurately translated (Carnicke 109), but the idea that an actor should be open and aware during performance shows up in many strands of American actor training, including Meisner technique.

One of the other main goals of Stanislavskian acting is to connect the actor's self with the fiction of the given circumstances. As Stanislavsky argued of the actor,

> His job is not to present merely the external life of his character. He must fit his own human qualities to the life of this other person, and pour into it all of his own soul. The fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and its expression in an artistic form. (*An Actor Prepares* 15)

Contrary to popular belief that the actor "becomes" the character, Stanislavsky understood that the actor always remains himself while performing: "Never lose yourself on the stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist. You can never get away from

yourself. The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part and the beginning of exaggerated false acting" (*An Actor Prepares* 192).

Stanislavsky's treatment of the concepts of action and emotion remain at the center of heated debates about the system. Stanislavsky saw emotion as a central component of successful acting, but he viewed it as something integrated into all the work, not as a specific state to achieve. Stanislavsky believed that an actor *might* be able to re-experience an emotion through calling up a memory (a process he called affective memory, taken from the work of psychologist Théodule Ribot), but by no means was the pursuit of emotion through technique central to his system. In fact, he argued that, "*On the stage there cannot be, under any circumstances, action which is directed immediately at the arousing of a feeling for its own sake*. To ignore this rule results only in the most disgusting artificiality. *When you are choosing some bit of action leave feeling and spiritual content alone*" (emphasis in original, *An Actor Prepares*, 43). However, he goes on to offer seemingly contradictory advice to the actor: "*All such feelings are the result of something that has gone before. Of the thing that goes before you should think as hard as you can. As for the result, it will produce itself*" (emphasis in original, *An Actor Prepares* 43). These two seemingly opposing ideas reveal the enduring complexity of the concept of emotion in acting. While Stanislavsky saw emotion as inseparable from action, practitioners in America have tended to emphasize emotion while in Russia, artists centered their work on action. In America, the pursuit of "real" emotion onstage became the central goal of certain acting techniques, particularly Lee Strasberg's Method Acting.

Action, which became key to the work of Russian theatre artists, translated to a lesser extent in an American context. In Stanislavsky's system, an action is "what the actor does to solve the problem or fulfill the task set before his or her character by the play" (Carnicke 189). One of his main ideas about action was that "physical action triggers an experiencing of the play, and that the text presents the actor not only with words but also with a structure of actions" (Carnicke 154). Certain aspects of his later work on actions, including improvising with the text, sequencing physical activities, and scoring the play's actions became known as the Method of Physical Actions (Carnicke 156). In the U.S., the idea of an action is often translated as an "objective" or a "goal" which are not quite the same; Stanislavsky intended for the action to be the way the actor attempts to solve the character's problem in the play (Carnicke 85).

In important ways, Stanislavsky's system can be seen as a way to empower actors by giving them concrete ways to hone their skills. Carnicke argues that Stanislavsky wholeheartedly promoted a vision of the actor as a creative artist in her own right. She writes that:

> Everything in Stanislavsky's last experiments throws greater and greater responsibility onto the shoulders of actors. Physical actions make them aware of how their bodies create characters. Improvisations ensure that they encounter the play experientially. Asking actors to "list" and "score" their characters' actions and the play's episodic sequences enforces their direct interaction with the structure of the play. (162)

Stanislavsky's desire to name mystified notions can be read as a desire to give more agency to the actors, by giving them something doable to work on and particular tasks to be responsible for. Because theorizing practice can be slippery territory, however, many of Stanislavsky's concepts have remained mystified and unclear in practice.

THE GROUP THEATRE: TRANSFORMING STANISLAVSKY IN AMERICA

In 1923, Stanislavsky's ideas about acting were introduced into the United States, and they would eventually widen in scope and dominate American actor training. That year, the Moscow Art Theatre toured the United States performing several Chekhov plays and audiences marveled at the company's fresh, realistic acting style. After the company's enthusiastic reception, two actors who had worked with Stanislavsky in Russia, Richard Boleslavksy and Maria Ouspenskaya, started the American Laboratory Theatre in New York City as a place to teach Stanislavksy's techniques to American actors. Issues of translation emerged from the beginning, as Boleslavksy and Ouspenskaya "communicated in an acquired language and thus began the process of linguistic and cultural transformation of the System into the Method" (Carnicke 56).[17] Among other students in the ALT classes were Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg, who went on to start a company called The Group Theatre in 1931, along with Cheryl Crawford.

[17] There are other issues at play in the Method's dispersal. In her 2006 dissertation *Actors as Embodied Public Intellectuals,* Amy Steiger suggests that capitalism and the commodification of actor training are part of what drove certain aspects of Stanislavsky's system to be emphasized in the United States over others.

The Group Theatre had two main goals: to produce work by American playwrights that explored social issues of the day, and to create an ensemble-based acting company where actors could develop their art through learning new techniques, especially those of Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre. Clurman had a vision for "a new kind of theatre: an ensemble of artists who would create, out of common beliefs and technique, dramatic productions that spoke to an equally committed audience about the essential social and moral issues of their times" (Smith 3). This vision was very much a reflection of the times they were living in, and in many ways was characteristic of the era: "It weighed the boisterous individualism of the twenties and found it lacking; it asserted that any art worthy of the name must have a living connection to the world around it" (Smith 9).

The Group Theatre's founders wanted to create an alternative to the commercialism of Broadway theatre and to create a space for actors to truly practice their art. The company was also especially interested in creating a group of actors that emphasized the ensemble over the individual. Smith argues that "The theatre [Strasberg] and Clurman dreamed of would commit itself to a permanent company of actors, then weld them together through a common technique that would enable them to bring the reality of life onto the stage" (9). They planned to use techniques based on Stanislavsky's teachings in order to create vivid, realistic acting. The experimental nature of their work is worth highlighting; although today we think of Stanislavsky-based training as linked to

commercial theatre[18], the Group Theatre wanted to use Stanislavsky's techniques as a way to get deeper into their work, to allow more active exploration than the constraints of commercial theatre would typically allow. Throughout their time together, the actors in The Group Theatre experimented with a wide variety of performance techniques, including movement training, performing poems in a different context, gibberish improvisation, and animal improvisations, but it was ideas drawn from Stanislavsky's system that made up the bulk of their training (Smith 93). The ensemble environment provided the context for experimentation and a space for the actors to truly explore new methods.

Eventually, a variety of problems led to the Group Theatre's demise. Members argued over the proper interpretation of Stanislavsky's ideas, and the company faced a host of other troubles as well, including leadership debates, political controversy, and difficult economic times. They found themselves unable to sustain the kind of work they wanted to produce, and in 1941, the Group Theatre was officially disbanded.

The company's impact on American acting cannot be overstated. Group Theatre members Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner would go on to become highly influential acting teachers whose techniques would become widely dispersed throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The styles of these three teachers form the foundation of most of the Americanized Stanislavsky training in the United

[18] Ian Watson, for example, suggests that the proliferation of U.S. training that focuses on inner motivation and emotion (such as Stanislavsky's) is "further encouraged by the nature of the acting profession," where the most money lies in television and film acting. See Watson's "Actor Training in the United States: Past, Present, and Future(?)" in *Performer Training: Developments Across Cultures,* Ed. Watson, (Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2001.) pp. 78-79.

States today. Smith notes that perhaps their turn toward teaching represented a desire to continue to develop their art in a space free from commercial concerns: "If so many Group actors turned to teaching . . . it was partly due to their sense that the kind of acting they cared about was simply impossible in the commercial theatre" (421). It is worth parsing out the differences between their techniques; because the methods of these three teachers have indeed become widely dispersed, sometimes the distinct history of each technique is obscured.[19]

Lee Strasberg: Affective Memory and The Method

In the Group Theatre, Lee Strasberg was one of the main directors and lead acting coach. From the beginning, Strasberg was drawn to the idea that actors could use personal memories to evoke emotions that would be useful for a play. Strasberg took Stanislavsky's concept of affective memory and developed specific exercises intended to evoke emotion. In these exercises:

> The actor didn't try to recall the feeling directly, but rather to reexperience the sensory impressions surrounding it: the size of the room it happened in, the color of the walls, the fabric on the furniture, the time of day, how the people there were dressed, what they looked like, and so on. Then the actor went over the exact sequence of events, concentrating on re-creating as precisely as possible the physical reality of the moment. When done

[19] David Krasner argues that Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner all make up different components of Method Acting (*I Hate Strasberg* 6). However, I have chosen to use the term "The Method" only to apply to Strasberg; I see Adler's and Meisner's techniques as being different enough from Strasberg's to warrant different terminology.

> properly with a strong situation, the exercise almost invariably brought the emotion flooding back in the present. The actor could then play the scene with the appropriate feeling. (Smith 38)

After the Group Theatre disbanded, Lee Strasberg went on to teach at The Actor's Studio, founded by fellow alumns Elia Kazan, Bobby Lewis, and Cheryl Crawford. He became the artistic director in 1951 and his particular way of teaching became known as "The Method." Strasberg emphasized three main elements in his teaching: relaxation, concentration, and affective memory (Krasner, *Strasberg* 134). The overall goal of the actor is to become emotionally expressive and to connect their personal storehouse of memories to the role in order to be more believable.

There is a key difference in interpretation between the way Stanislavsky envisioned affective memory and the way Strasberg implemented it. Instead of using Stanislavsky's idea of the 'magic if,' (how would you do things *if* you were the character?), Strasberg used an adaptation by Stanislavsky's pupil Euvgeny Vakhtangov. In Vakhtangov's form, "the circumstances of the scene indicate that the character must behave in a particular way; *what would motivate you, the actor, to behave in that particular way*?" (emphasis mine, Strasberg 85). While Stanislavsky would suggest that the actor imagine how they might behave or feel *if* they were in the character's situation, Strasberg would ask the actor to remember an event in their own life that produced an emotion *analogous* to what the character experiences in the scene, and to use their own memories to evoke the emotion. In Strasberg's method, the actor can use any logic he or she wants to come up with the emotion in the scene (usually thinking of a personal

circumstance), but in the System, Stanislavsky wants the actor to think specifically about how the character would be feeling because of his or her given circumstances.

A major critique of Strasberg's advocacy for private adjustments in scene work is that it moves the actor more toward themselves and away from the character and larger play. Smith argues that Strasberg's work "shifted the emphasis from the character's emotions within the play to an actor's internal work on a part, encouraging an introspection that often shut out the other people in a scene" (142). This was also a fear of Stanislavsky's. Carnicke argues that "Stanislavsky worried that personal associations could threaten the actor's focus on the play and confuse acting with self-expression, a criticism often leveled at the First Studio's actors as well as those of the Method" (*Focus* 129). Indeed, actors who trained in The Method were known for performances that were "moody, introspective, neurotic, withdrawn, yet seething with internal emotions that burst to the surface in moments of cathartic power" (Smith 418). Another major critique is that this technique borders on therapy and can be emotionally damaging to actors. Smith describes the way that the process affected some members of The Group Theatre:

> The affective memory exercises, which probed the actor's most intimate and disturbing emotions, could be agonizing. On occasion people were so shattered by the feelings the exercises aroused that they couldn't speak for hours. Many in the Group eventually came to reject Strasberg's emphasis on true emotion, arguing that it damaged actors psychologically and inhibited them as performers. (40)

Strasberg's Method Acting became extremely popular in the 1950s, which many scholars suggest was not coincidental. Louis Scheeder argues that Strasberg's style of acting "was reflective of the concerns and anxieties that coursed through postwar America" (5) and suggests that "his Method was predominant in a period when America turned away from social concerns and immersed itself in 'private life and personal preoccupations'" (6). This acting style came to represent our cultural notions about artistic freedom that were part of larger discourses of freedom and repression. In a Cold War climate, "The Method actor became a symbol of freedom and independence by creating from the self, from the interior" (Scheeder 8). In "Method Acting and the Cold War," Bruce McConachie similarly argues that "In response to the fear of simulation, 'the Method' helped American actors to construct an authentic essence for themselves that they believed could anchor their performances in truthful representation" (N. Page). Though some argue that the actor's creativity in Method Acting comes from the actor's ability to use their own experiences in performance, ultimately I believe it encourages a narrow, narcissistic focus on self that does not serve the play or the ensemble of other actors. McConachie extends this idea abut interiority to comment on the way Method Acting becomes divorced from history: "Whereas Stanislavski understood dramatic characters as a part of a history, Strasberg placed characters within a spatial metaphor that de-emphasized their relation to historical processes and grounded them in projections from the actor's self" (N. page). Despite these astute critiques, the idea and mystique of "The Method" has seeped into the discourse of popular culture and still inspires fascination in actors and non-actors alike.

Stella Adler: Action and Imagination

Stella Adler, who began as an actor, was one of the members who took issue with Strasberg's use of affective memory. Smith writes that "Adler had found her own acting tense and joyless because of the system. She felt herself caught between two worlds: dissatisfied with the superficiality of traditional acting, yet unable to achieve the relaxation and concentration that were supposed to go hand in hand with true emotion onstage" (179). While on a trip to Paris with her husband Harold Clurman in 1934, Adler met Stanislavsky himself, and asked him directly about how to use his method. During this meeting, Stanislavsky

> Turned her attention to the throughline of action that should inform her entire performance and the various tasks she had to perform in order to create that line. Truth onstage was still the goal, but Stanislavsky emphasized finding that truth within the given circumstances of the play, not in the actor's personal history. (Smith 179-180)

When Adler returned, she gave lectures to the Group about what she had learned from Stanislavsky, and argued that the character's overall action in the play was more important than affective memory. Strasberg did not like this challenge to his authority, and famously said in response, "We don't use the Stanislavsky system; we use the Strasberg method" (Smith 181). Many of the actors, though, including Sanford Meisner, were excited by what they saw as Adler's revelations about the technique. After the Group Theatre disbanded, Adler started her own acting school in 1949 and became a renowned teacher.

In Adler's technique, the "primary source for one's acting is the imagination" (Oppenheim 32). Adler gave much weight to the given circumstances of the play, but encouraged actors to use their imagination within those circumstances. Based on what she learned after meeting with Stanislavsky, she taught that script analysis and choosing an action were extremely important skills for actors. In a clear break from emotional memory and the use of private adjustments, "Adler asks performers to concentrate on their creative imagination rather than their conscious past" (Krasner, *Strasberg* 140). Like Stanislavsky, Adler chose to emphasize action over emotion:

> In teaching I do not require a student ever to go to the emotion itself or ask the student to use emotion as a source. As a teacher I discourage the student from reaching out for any emotion, conscious or unconscious. If a student needs to use his conscious memory it is only as a frame or reference for the action itself. All the emotion is contained in the action. The action can be a personal or an imaginative one. (Adler, *Reality of Doing* 143)

Adler's important adaptations and teaching style influenced other actors in The Group Theatre, including Sanford Meisner.

SANFORD MEISNER: SPONTANEITY AND THE REALITY OF DOING

Sanford Meisner, while an actor with the Group Theatre, performed critically acclaimed roles in many productions, including Clifford Odet's *Awake and Sing!* and *Paradise Lost*. During his time with the Group, Meisner also had issues with Strasberg and the emotional memory exercises, and allied himself with Stella Adler after the rift.

According to Carnicke, "When Sanford Meisner resisted performing an affective memory exercise in preparation for a role, Strasberg told him that he would be left 'without total emotion,' and snidely added, 'if you want to settle for that, that's fine'" (*Focus* 128). Meisner's main critique of Strasberg's techniques was that they drew the actor's attention towards the self. He said, "I think that the way acting was approached in the Group Theatre was extremely introverted. The Group took introverted people and intensified their introversion . . . the result was that many, many young actors in the Group were damaged by the approach" (Meisner, *Looking Back* 504).

In 1935 he started teaching classes at a private acting studio in New York called the Neighborhood Playhouse and eventually became its director. He briefly left the Playhouse to explore acting in Los Angeles, but returned permanently in 1964. Meisner first began teaching according to many of the Stanislavsky-based principles he had learned with the Group Theatre, but began to develop his repetition exercises as he worked with students. In the 1950s and 60s his repetition exercises took their current form, and Meisner believed they created something unique in the actor. He said, "I found out by working here at school and in my private classes that it produced the kind of life that had nothing to do with introverting you" (*On Acting* 183). Meisner saw teaching as an art form in its own right and believed each teacher should find his or her own approach: "The creative teacher in America finds his own style, that is to say his own method, as indeed every artist must. Otherwise he is a copyist. Copyists and creators are mutually exclusive" (*Reality of Doing* 140). As he developed his approach through teaching students in the two-year acting program at the Neighborhood Playhouse,

Meisner emphasized several key components: doing (or actions), spontaneity, and relationship.

DEFINING MEISNER TECHNIQUE

Now that I have historicized the development of Meisner technique and located its practice in a larger context of Americanized Stanislavsky training, I will combine analysis of major texts on Meisner as well as my own experience observing a Meisner class to explore how the actor's body, mind and expressive self are conceptualized in this training, and how these ideas relate to larger issues of pedagogy and artistic agency. I pay special attention to the many contradictions between theory and practice found here, in order to suggest ways that revising pedagogy may actually lead to different kinds of potential for the technique. I draw heavily on Meisner's book *On Acting* (co-written with Dennis Longwell), primarily because the book is written as a case study of Meisner's teaching, as well as the writings of renowned Meisner teachers William Esper and Victoria Hart.

Meisner technique is a form of actor training, derived from the two-part approach of Stanislavsky, in which the actors first work on listening and responding spontaneously to another person, and then apply these principles to character and text work, with the goal of maintaining fresh, spontaneous responses and infusing the performance of a character with the life and emotion of the performer. One of the main goals is for the actor to be "in the moment" and "alive" onstage. Meisner defines two key principles of his technique: "*Don't do anything unless something happens to make you do it . . . What you do doesn't depend on you; it depends on the other fellow*" (emphasis in original, *On*

Acting 34). These principles reflect Meisner's commitment to turning the actor away from interiority and towards connection with another performer. Other major emphases of the training include a focus on using imagination to connect to emotions and finding a personal connection between the self and the character.

SEQUENCE OF TRAINING

Meisner's techniques, like many strands of Americanized Stanislavsky training, are extremely dispersed and taught in classrooms of many levels around the country, sometimes acknowledged as specifically Meisner-based but sometimes just called "acting." For example, *The Practical Handbook for the Actor,* a popular textbook used in the Fundamentals of Acting for Non-Majors class at the University of Texas at Austin, does not specifically claim to teach Meisner technique but many of its principles (such as playing "the truth of the moment" and playing off the other person) are derived from Meisner. In fact, a closer look at the book reveals that its authors studied acting with playwright David Mamet, who studied acting with Sanford Meisner. I mention this in order to acknowledge that one might encounter Meisner technique in a variety of ways and sometimes not even be aware of it.

There are several settings where students can learn the technique in a way that remains close to what Meisner taught. One is New York's Neighborhood Playhouse, a professional training studio that still enrolls students in a two-year Meisner program, and another setting is the Meisner Studio at New York University. There are other professional training programs across the country that specialize in Meisner technique, such as the William Esper Studio in New York City and the True Acting Institute with

Larry Silverberg. Another way to encounter Meisner-based training is in the context of a university acting classroom, which is the setting I chose for my case study.

I noticed something very interesting when looking for a Meisner case study. I found several Austin-based university professors who use Meisner-based techniques in their classrooms, but many of them told me that their class would not be an appropriate case study because they are not teaching the technique precisely as laid out by Meisner, or did not study directly with someone who studied with Meisner. This shows that many teachers are adapting and using Meisner's principles in their own way, but the term "Meisner technique" conjures up a very specific picture that they do not feel they adhere to.

In the fall of 2009, I attended several sessions of a class called Acting Realism at Texas State University taught by Professor Michael Costello.[20] Costello, who describes his background as eclectic and broad, has trained in many kinds of physical theatre as well as in Meisner technique. Before coming to Texas State, he taught at Florida State University, in what was at the time an entirely Meisner-based program. The Theatre Department at Texas State, a large public university, is relatively large, with three hundred majors and fourteen full-time faculty members. Costello notes that many teachers specialize, particularly those who teach Meisner, but when you teach in a university, often you end up having to diversify what you teach (Personal Interview 2009). His course syllabus says that one of the course goals is to "utilize the training

20 This class spanned the fall 2009 semester. I attended classes between September 2 and September 16, 2009.

methods and techniques developed by Sanford Meisner based on Stanislavsky's theories." The course is well-contextualized; Costello does not claim to be teaching a general kind of "acting" but specifically, techniques useful when acting in scene work from late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century realist drama (including the work of Chekhov, Ibsen, Miller, Williams, and Mamet.) Around fifteen theatre majors and non-majors, more men than women, were enrolled in the class.

The sequence of Meisner training varies according to the context. I will outline a fairly comprehensive sequence, a model that would allow a student to learn the technique over a longer period of time. I base my discussion of sequence on Meisner's *On Acting,* Victoria Hart's curriculum at NYU's Meisner Studio, and William Esper's description of the first year of Meisner training at his studio in *The Actor's Art and Craft*, as well as my own workshop experience. On the most general level, Meisner technique follows the basic sequence that Stanislavsky articulated—first, the actor works on the self, and then the actor prepares for a role. In the period of time when the actor works on the self, the major skills to learn include working from impulse, working as the self in imaginary circumstances, and using the imagination to connect to emotion.

Meisner technique begins with repetition exercises, the exercises most closely identified with this method. Students learn principles while exploring repetition—listening, observing, and responding to a partner's behavior—that form the basis of the rest of the work, but by no means is repetition the beginning and end of Meisner technique. It is, however, considered the foundation of the method. A repetition exercise begins with a very simple premise. Two students sit across from one another and observe

each other. One person vocalizes a specific physical observation about the other person, for example, "You have brown hair." The other partner repeats exactly what they just heard, "You have brown hair." They continue to repeat these exact same lines until the teacher stops the exercise. The repetition may last for a short time (a minute or so in the beginning) or for a longer time as the work becomes more advanced and students gain the ability to change the lines. As Meisner watches his students do the beginning repetition exercises, he expresses what they must be feeling: "It's empty, it's inhuman, right? But it has something in it. It has connection. Aren't they listening to each other? That's the connection. It's a connection which comes from listening to each other, but it has no human quality—yet" (*On Acting* 22).

Next, students continue the repetition exercise, only now they repeat from their own point of view. If the first student observes, "*You* have brown hair," the second student repeats "*I* have brown hair." Hart explains that the exercise is designed to create connection between partners: "The rapid fire repetition creates a current between the two actors that generates spontaneous and authentic impulses in both" (55). It is also designed to move so quickly that it doesn't allow for conscious reflection before response, which promotes the reaction based on immediate impulse.

In the next stage, participants can change the dialogue of the repetition based on their impulses. Meisner explains:

> There comes a point when one of you has to pick up what the repetition is doing to you. I don't care what it is. Are you bored with the repetition? Then that could be the change. Or maybe your partner sounds a little

> annoyed at you; from that fact could come the change 'You're angry at me.' In other words, your instinct picks up the change in his behavior and the dialogue changes too. I'm talking about instinct. (*On Acting* 30)

At Texas State, Costello explains that Meisner technique starts with repetition, which involves listening and repeating what you hear from the other person. Costello argues that this work helps actors hone skills such as concentration, listening to another person, connecting, and specificity. He explains that the repetition is meant to function as a practice:

> It's experiential. You can say 'listen to the other person' and you can think that you're listening, but when you have to repeat what that other person says, exactly what they said, then the listening is being put into practice. Also, with repetition you don't have to be clever. You don't have to make anything up. It starts with an observation, then that observation is repeated until something happens to change that. All you're doing is identifying what really happened. (Personal Interview 2009)

Costello focuses on repetition but doesn't teach the whole range of Meisner work because, he says, there is not time to do that in the constraints of the university semester system. In describing the arc of the specific class I observed, he said, " I do preliminary repetition, then take it into repetition with text and dialogue. I have found that to be, in itself [very valuable]. By the end of the semester, students have gotten out of pre-planning what it is that they're going to do, even though they do a thorough scene analysis as part of the process." As Costello acknowledges, his course encompasses just

these first few phases of Meisner training—repetition, repetition with text, and repetition with activities.

In the subsequent phase, students put the repetition exercise together with an independent activity. One partner chooses a difficult task and creates a reason that they really need to do the task (for example, completing a puzzle in order to win a monetary prize or attempting to forge a perfect signature in order to avoid eviction). While explaining this next phase, Meisner says:

> I want you all to choose something to do which is above all difficult, if not almost impossible. This is very important. You have to have a reason why you want to do it. You must have a reason why you want to do it, because that's the source of your concentration and eventually of your emotion, which comes by itself. (*On Acting* 39)

Then the other partner enters the scene and the two actors begin the repetition exercise, but with one partner motivated to complete his or her task. Linking the repetition with activity is meant to lead to more impulses and more surprises in the improvisation. As Hart argues, "The struggle to do the activity and the need to answer the repetition cause the actor to come to life and create his behavior" (57). Esper says, "Once an actor places the totality of his concentration on the accomplishment of some concrete, specific, and truthful goal, he cannot help but react truthfully, from the core of his self and experience" (71).

Next, students learn the concept of emotional preparation. Meisner explains, "Preparation is that device which permits you to start your scene or play in a condition of

emotional aliveness" (*On Acting* 78). According to Meisner, *preparation* means that an actor should come to the beginning of a scene with a certain emotional state that they have worked up through their imagination (not through the recollection of personal memories, pace Lee Strasberg). Significantly, although Meisner encourages this private emotional work before a scene starts, once a scene begins the actor is expected to respond in the moment and let go of the preparation. The concept of preparation is one of the most slippery and vexing concepts in Meisner technique, and I will explore it in more detail later.

The second year of Meisner training involves applying the skills of listening, spontaneity, concentration, and emotional preparation to working on a dramatic role. I've condensed and paraphrased the processes described in both Meisner's *On Acting* and Hart's "Meisner Technique" essay to outline the steps as follows: The process begins with analytical work, including trying to understand the character's psychology, and breaking the scene down into 'beats,' or specific units of action. Students then begin to play the scene with their partner, using scripts but focusing on making contact with their partner and following their impulses (not necessarily trying to play out what they see as their *characters'* impulses). Next, the actors try to articulate what they see as the character's overall *point of view* (how they feel about what they say and do). An actor then moves into a process of particularization, or using an *as if* to connect to the scene. Particularizations are "emotional metaphors that help us to understand something in the script we do not personally identify with, respond to, or know much about" (Hart 80). To create a particularization, the actor thinks about how the character feels in the scene (for

example, angry at an estranged parent) and then imagines what might make him feel the same way, a process that mimics Vakhtangov's adaptation of Stanislavsky's *magic if*. The actor may not have an estranged parent, but he might decide that the scene is *as if* he were in an argument with a brother he is especially distanced from. As scene work becomes more advanced, actors begin to look for the character's *objective* (what he or she wants) and decide what *action* the character would take to get what he or she wants. The actor also tries to personalize the text by improvising the scene, using his own words. The challenge in the second phase of training is to retain spontaneity and freshness while also preparing for a specific, particular role.

ACTOR'S BODY AND MIND IN MEISNER TECHNIQUE

Meisner technique is historically rooted in the Stanislavsky system, and Stanislavsky saw the body and mind as interconnected. Though in some ways he could not get away from Western dualism, nevertheless Stanislavsky insisted that "In every physical action there is something psychological, and in the psychological, something physical" (Carnicke 139). On first glance, Meisner technique ascribes to a very polarized separation of mind and body, with a heavy distinction between *thinking* (not preferred) and *doing* (preferred). However, contradictions abound when looking at how the actor's body and mind are conceptualized and engaged in practice through Meisner technique. I explore these contradictions not to indict Meisner for a lack of theoretical rigor, but to show how the contradictions make visible the complexity of important issues concerning embodiment.

Though the technique is not explicitly physical, the body is seen as the source of instinct and impulse, which are heralded in Meisner technique as the sources of “truth” and good acting. The emphasis on doing in this technique can also be seen as a way of privileging the body. Meisner emphasizes that an actor should really do the things they are supposed to be doing onstage, which involves actual physical investment and focused bodily concentration. The actor trains in the repetition exercise to rewire the bodily instincts, so that the actor is free to respond spontaneously. Through the repetition exercises, the actor is encouraged to disengage from the conscious mind and react based on impulse. In this case, an impulse is a reaction to stimuli that happens quickly, presumably so fast that the mind doesn’t have time to think about the response. Responding to one’s impulses is meant to create acting that appears “natural” and spontaneous rather than affected or pre-planned. As Patrice Pavis reminds us though, what counts as “natural” is culturally and historically specific: “ To advocate the natural, the spontaneous and the instinctive is only to produce natural effects, governed by an ideological code that determines, at a particular historical time and for a given audience, what is natural and believable and what is declamatory and theatrical” (qtd. in Murray and Keefe 20).

My experience with the idea of “responding based on impulse” in Meisner training revealed that this idea is not as simple as it sounds. On the first day I attended the Acting Realism class at Texas State, students were engaged in the basic repetition

exercise, which they had learned in a previous class.[21] The class met in a black box studio theatre, and began without a warm-up. An air of serious concentration pervaded the classroom. Students were making a simple observation about the physical appearance of their partner (for example, you have brown hair) and the partner repeated exactly what he or she heard. A male student began by observing about his partner: “You’re wearing a navy blue t-shirt.” The students started to mirror or mimic each other’s tones and body language. Costello coached that the exercise is *not* about physical mimicry. The focus is on verbal repetition, not physical mimicry. In this moment, the idea of instinct seemed complicated to me—what if a student feels the impulse in that moment to mirror her partner? If she denies this impulse, isn’t she denying her instinct? In adjustment to the comment *not* to mimic each other’s bodies, the students became stiff and robotic. Costello coached them to engage their bodies: “You’re not mimicking, but your bodies are open. Listen and repeat what you hear, but the body is not dead. Your body is alive and not robotic. Be open and available. Act on what you hear. You’re jumping into your head instead of following your instinct.”

When I did this exercise, I was partnered with a male student who first observed, “You have highlights.” I felt like he was complimenting me and I accepted the compliment, leading to what felt like a conversational connection. As we continued, I got bored with the repetition and tried to create interest through changing my tone or inflection, which I was coached not to do. The actor is not supposed to try to make anything happen in the repetition exercise, she is only supposed to react when she notices

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[21] September 2, 2009.

that something has changed. This is quite different from improvisational training (as taught by people such as Viola Spolin or Keith Johnstone), in which you try to make new verbal or physical offers to your partner to move the scene along. The repetition exercise goes against my instincts from previous training, which would have allowed me to make changes initiated from the self in order to move the scene forward. In this way, I felt I was struggling *against* my instincts, which were to initiate conversation or make a change when bored. (Costello would argue in a subsequent class that repetition works against the habit of making acting about *yourself* and not about the other person.) Costello kept asking both of us, "What's the *feeling* you're getting from the other person?" which suggests that a large part of the task is about attempting to determine how your partner is feeling. Although I did not know my partner at all, I felt comfortable participating in this exercise with him. However, I feel that the set-up of commenting on the other person's physical appearance could create the potential for a lot of discomfort.

Though the body is seen as the source of one's truth and instinct, the technique is not explicitly physical. In fact, at the Neighborhood Playhouse and NYU programs, actors take movement or dance classes meant to supplement the acting technique, but the Meisner classes themselves don't feature a lot of movement exercises or ways to create from and activate the body. In the class I observed, students' bodies during the repetition exercise were basically still. Partners made intense eye contact and clearly focused on one another, but their bodies often appeared awkward or disengaged. If someone's arms were crossed or they took a specific posture, Costello coached that this seemed closed off, and encouraged them to show openness and relaxation through their bodies. In our

interview, Costello noted, “I do think that the downside of the Meisner work is that though it is organic and is meant to get the actors out of their heads, it does not get them into their bodies. The actor does not become physically articulate” (Personal Interview 2009).

In Meisner technique, the conscious mind is viewed as a hindrance to true creativity, an impediment that prevents the actor from responding spontaneously. The literature describing this technique is, in fact, heartily anti-intellectual. On many occasions, Sanford Meisner has professed a bias against the intellect:

> I’m a very nonintellectual teacher of acting. My approach is based on bringing the actor back to his emotional impulses and to acting that is firmly rooted in the instinctive. It is based on the fact that all good acting comes from the heart, as it were, and that there’s no mentality in it. (*On Acting* 37)

The *heart* (and by extension, the *body* that encloses it) is the source of an actor’s power, and the mind is assumed to get in the way of the body’s instincts. William Esper continues Meisner’s tradition of anti-intellectualism when he claims “I’m not saying you have to be stupid to be an actor, nor should you be. I’m just saying that your intellect shouldn’t be brought to work with you. Leave it at home where it belongs” (Esper and DiMarco 41).

Meisner frames the repetition exercises as being a way to circumvent the analytical mind. He argues that:

> I decided I wanted an exercise for actors where there is no intellectuality. I wanted to eliminate all that 'head' work, to take away all the mental manipulation and get to where the impulses come from. And I began with the premise that if I repeat what I hear you saying, my head is not working. I'm listening, and there is an absolute elimination of the brain. If you say 'Your glasses are dirty,' and I say 'My glasses are dirty,' and you say 'Yes, your glasses are dirty,' there is no intellectuality in that. (*On Acting* 36)

The logic here is somewhat confusing. Meisner assumes that one can listen and speak without engaging the brain, which is certainly not true. In fact, Damasio argues that what seem like body-based impulses actually originate in the brain: "Not all actions commanded by a brain are caused by deliberation. On the contrary, it is a fair assumption that most so-called brain-caused actions being taken at this very moment in the world are not deliberated at all. They are simple responses of which a reflex is an example: a stimulus conveyed by one neuron leading another neuron" (89).

In one class I attended, I noticed that Costello also used rhetoric that separates intellect from instinct though he has a more nuanced approach than Meisner.[22] He argued that repetition doesn't work if you're always in your conscious mind, trying to control and make decisions, and that the subconscious mind holds the higher creative self. A student said, "But the conscious mind won't shut up. The part that analyzes is still there." Costello responded that of course the conscious mind is a part of this, because the actor

[22] September 9, 2009.

makes technical, conscious decisions. But, he cautioned, we don't want the conscious mind to be controlling everything. We want to be working from the highest creative self with the conscious mind kicking in occasionally. He told students that part of their task is learning to 'read' someone, and suggested that the actor keep shifting the focus back to the other when the conscious mind keeps kicking in with judgment. I found Costello's specific instruction to place focused attention on the other person to be an intervention into the more general statement of "get out of your head."

Despite the fact that Meisner technique eschews the analytical mind, the intellect is actually an integral part of the training, particularly in the later stages that involve text. For example, when actors participate in the scenes where they come up with an activity and justification for that activity: "The actor must invent a circumstance that is *simple, specific, personal,* and *imaginary* that justifies doing this activity, and which he can personally accept as his reality" (Hart 57). The process of justifying one's activity most certainly engages the analytical mind. Once an actor begins to approach a text, the analytical mind is even more explicitly engaged. The actor performs activities such as analyzing the script and breaking it into beats, identifying the character's point of view, and creating an "as if" for their scene, all of which certainly involve intellect.

In Meisner training, language is often used in a way that separates body from mind and reifies a kind of anti-intellectual "impulse." However, if we unpack some of Meisner's ideas further, there are useful ideas hidden behind this troubling language. Rhonda Blair agrees that terminology that separates instinct from intellect is problematic, but offers a useful translation of Meisner's ideas:

> He distinguishes between 'instinct' (the source of good acting) and 'the head' (the source of bad acting), constantly reiterating 'Don't think—do'. . . . This 'doing' equates 'thinking/the head' with conscious, planned analysis and 'instinct' with impulses/intuition, in essence splitting emotion from thought; this emphasis has led to valid criticisms of his method as anti-intellectual. However, if we understand Meisner as saying that, *in the moment of performance,* we must give priority to action, given circumstances and responsiveness rather than to planning (and this is, in fact, what he is saying), then the psychophysical rightness of his method becomes obvious. (*Method* 215)

I appreciate Blair's analysis because it suggests that while we must analyze Meisner's rhetoric and metaphors closely, we must also look specifically at what happens in practice and try to then revise the language in a productive way. I think the idea of not pre-planning and opening oneself to what is *actually* happening in the moment of performance is an incredibly useful idea for the actor, and not one that should be thrown out, despite the difficulty of describing it.

While the mind and body are theoretically separate in this technique, then, in practice they are far more intertwined—this is a psychophysical technique just like any other. In fact, the contradictions between theory and practice reveal the interrelated nature of body and mind. For example, in practice, the actor holistically engages body-mind through activities in which both are actively functioning (for example, the repetition may engage bodily impulse but it also includes verbalizing and language; the conscious mind

is engaged as the actor improvises a scene with their own words, but the body, too responds and engages this improvisation). The rhetoric of the technique claims a neat distinction between the two and privileges anything which does not involve conscious thought or thinking, yet the rhetoric does not fully explain what is happening in practice. If Meisner teachers were to more fully investigate the interrelated nature of body and mind (as Costello begins to do), there might be greater potential to intervene in the pedagogy of anti-intellectualism passed down from Meisner to his students.

TEXT AND EMOTION

Text and emotion are inextricably intertwined in Meisner training. Although text is not used at the beginning of Meisner training, the training is bound up in the idea of a strong relationship between acting and text. Scene work, using the text of a finished play, is the culmination of Meisner training, much as it was in Stanislavsky training. In his Russian work, Stanislavsky had the cast improvise many aspects of the play, even those not in the script. Actors would improvise a scene using their own words, finding the essential dynamic of the scene through actions. They would continue this process until "Finally the cast needs the written text to get any more accurate a performance than they have achieved through paraphrase" (Carnicke 158). Meisner training follows this same general outline.

Although text is not used at first, actors assume that the later phases of training will include working with text. In the early phases of Meisner's teaching, a student questions how the repetition will serve him in the future when he works with text: "I don't know how I'm going to listen and answer truthfully, moment to moment, when I

get a script" (*On Acting* 58). Meisner's response is to encourage the student to be patient, as he will eventually learn this. When text is first introduced, it is in a somewhat abstracted way. As Meisner introduces scene work, he says, "I want you to take your script and learn it without meaning, without readings, without interpretation, without anything. Just learn the lines by rote, mechanically" (*On Acting* 67). His rationale here is that the actor should not pre-plan emotional states or line readings before he or she has experimented with playing the scene along with a scene partner. Many key components of Meisner training relate specifically to texts and indeed presume the centrality of text: ideas of justification (ensuring that anything the actor does makes sense for the character), finding a playable action, improvising with the text, and personalizing the text.

If text is one of the bedrocks of the technique, it is also inseparable from the idea of emotion. "The text is like a canoe," Meisner says,

> And the river on which it sits is the emotion. The text floats on the river. If the water of the river is turbulent, the words will come out like a canoe on a rough river. It all depends on the flow of the river which is your emotion. The text takes on the character of your emotion. (*On Acting* 113)

In addition to revealing the relationship Meisner envisions between text and emotion, this quote also reveals the *centrality* of emotion to the training. Esper echoes this idea when he claims that the actor's "emotional core" is the most important skill (7).

Emotion was a central feature of the repetition exercises I observed at Texas State. After the phase in which people begin repeating from their point of view, students

move into a phase where they begin a repetition exercise by provoking an emotional response from their partner. It began with pairs of students standing to face each other. One student said something provocative to the other person, something intended to get a rise out of them. The other person then repeats the statement from their point of view. The initiator tries to gauge what happened when the person reacted to their statement, and in this way changes the repetition. Participants are supposed to be open and available, to allow the other person to have an affect. Both people are expected to look very closely at body language and try to figure out what's being communicated. Part of the goal is for the actor to become attuned to his own emotional reactions to things and attuned to reading the emotions of others. There is an assumption that a true self is buried under layers of self-censorship and that exercises like this can release the actor from the pressure to conform to social expectations.

In the initial pairs of students that I watched, the provocative comments tended toward insults such as "Your haircut looks stupid" or "Your breath smells rotten." I asked Costello if the provocation had to be an insult and he said no, it can be anything that's intended to cause a reaction. The idea is to kick things off with a strong emotional response. He demonstrated this by coming up very close to me and pointing as though I had something on my face, which made me back up and widen my eyes in discomfort. I wondered whether the goal, then, is to somehow make the other person uncomfortable.

Two women went next. Their voices sounded extremely frustrated because not much was happening, but this frustration was not expressed in their bodies, which remained still and constrained. Costello noticed this and told the students to let the

emotion be expressed through the body. He also suggested they be present to each other and stop being nice. It did seem like the partners were experiencing frustration with each other but the students didn't feel comfortable expressing that out loud. One came close when she suggested to the other one, "You don't give a damn" about what's going on. The coaching in Meisner is geared toward encouraging people to express what they are really feeling rather than censoring their reactions. The exercise brought up several points of confusion for me. If someone is saying something insulting but they don't really mean it, it's not "true" of the moment in the first place. But if they do mean it, it means people are being given license to openly insult each other in a classroom, which makes me uncomfortable. I know this is not Costello's intention; he said in an interview that he does not agree with Meisner teachers who encourage students to be cruel to each other in order to stimulate emotion.

I actually passed on doing this exercise. I found myself getting anxious while watching it and thinking about how I did not want to do it. It just felt too vulnerable, too exposed for me, and I was not comfortable enough with the people in the class to try this exercise. While theoretically there are many emotions students might access during the exercise, it seemed like fear and anger were popping up the most. I was disturbed by the same issues when reading Esper's book on the Meisner technique. On the idea that you may say something that hurts someone's feelings, Esper says, "Every time you try to conform to someone else's opinion of what's nice and what's not, you corrupt your acting instrument" (86). This idea comes from the assumption that all speech is equal, when it's really not. It ignores issues of power, white privilege, and male privilege; it

does not question who can feel free to speak freely and who cannot. Where do you draw the line in terms of what is permissible to express?

Though Meisner's approach to emotion is certainly different from the approach he learned from Strasberg at the Group Theatre, there are more similarities than expected. The concept of emotion in Meisner training is complicated, and at times, troubling. The conventional wisdom about Meisner technique states that the process emphasizes action over emotion, and Meisner says many times that an actor should not work to produce an emotional state onstage; instead they should play their action and be open to the behavior of their partner. Meisner was critical of the way that Strasberg's techniques of affective memory (trying to recall the details of one's past experiences in order to stir emotion) tended to introvert actors and turn them away from interaction with their partners. So instead he developed a technique that emphasizes actions and relationship with a partner. One tenet of the training is that the actor should always be *doing* something onstage, and that emotion will come from a deep engagement with doing. This idea may be confirmed by thinkers in cognitive science—Damasio explains that a study conducted by psychologist Paul Ekman "suggests either that a fragment of the body pattern characteristic of an emotional state is enough to produce a feeling of the same signal, or that the fragment subsequently triggers the rest of the body state and that leads to the feeling" (148). In practice, however, emotion is more central to the technique than it seems, and the process of accessing emotion is more mystified than I think Meisner would have liked.

I see two different and somewhat contradictory applications of the idea of emotion occurring in Meisner training. While *in the middle of the scene*, emotion is indeed thought to come from deep engagement in activity and circumstances, emotion *before the scene* is thought to be best induced through a process called emotional preparation. Meisner defines preparation as "that device which permits you to start your scene or play in a condition of emotional aliveness" (*On Acting* 78). It refers to a private daydream that the actor engages in before the scene starts in order to help himself reach an emotional state analogous to what his character is experiencing. Emotional preparation involves the imagination, not the memory, and it has to be personally meaningful to the actor. It does not necessarily have to correlate with the character's circumstances in the play, although the goal is to create an experience of emotion similar to what the character would be feeling. Significantly, Meisner believed that the actor should emotionally prepare for the first moment of the scene, but once the actor enters he should once again be open to spontaneity and the behavior of his partner. Meisner saw the concept of emotional preparation as significantly different from Strasberg's affective memory exercises because emotional preparation does not rely on dredging up memories from the past. Meisner prefers to think of emotional preparation as a form of imagination or fantasy:

> It is a form of daydreaming too, but on an essential theme extracted from the text—a kind of auto-suggestion, if you will. I prefer this approach rather than the more direct probing into our life experiences. The

> inventions in fantasy, if they are truly stimulating, have been selected because they already mean something to the actor. (*Reality of Doing* 144)

His ideas are actually in line with thinkers like Damasio, who might also challenge Strasberg's idea that one can remember an emotion through recalling details of the scene. Damasio notes, "We all have direct evidence that whenever we recall a given object, or face, or scene, we do not get an exact reproduction but rather an interpretation, a newly reconstructed version of the original" (100). Performance studies scholar Phillip Auslander, citing Derrida's reading of Freud, also argues that "the making conscious of unconscious materials is a process of creation, not retrieval . . . The unconscious is not a source of originary truth—like language, it is subject to the vagaries of mediation" (31).

Still, I see Meisner's process of emotional preparation as having much more in common with Strasberg's exercises than previously thought. Although the process of using one's imagination to induce emotion is not the same as recalling personal memories to induce emotion, is the effect so drastically different? Even if an actor does not use personal experiences but fantasies to get herself into a certain emotional state, is this not potentially damaging as well? The actor still engages her psyche in a private process of mental engagement in order to work herself into an emotional state.

The process of emotional preparation is also mystified—unlike other clearly defined concepts, there is a noticeable lack of information about how an actor should get herself into the desired emotional state. Meisner plays up the mystery when he says, "The fantasy of the daydream is the most personal, most secret of the acting values" (*On Acting* 85). In one example from his book, Meisner explains to a student that he wants

him to be crying, emotionally breaking down before the beginning of the scene, but he offers no guidance or thought on how the actor should get to this state (93). Understandably, Meisner's students have trouble with the preparation exercise. Meisner tries to explain: "I think that one of the problems that you all have with preparation . . . is that you try to make it too big. It isn't enough to be in good spirits; you have to be hysterical with pleasure. That's too much. One of the things about emotion is that it has a way of coloring your behavior and that you can't hide it" (*On Acting* 120). He seems to be guiding students to find subtle ways of expressing their emotional preparation but does not offer specific ways for them to work on this problem. The mystified nature of the emotional preparation can be confusing and frustrating for the actor (as evidenced by the reactions of Meisner's students in *On Acting*), and serves to reinforce the teacher's power and increase the actor's vulnerability. If a teacher can tell a student her emotional preparation is not full enough, but cannot tell her how to improve, this reinforces the idea that acting talent is innate, which undermines the experience of taking an acting class.

The technique involves contradictions on the idea of emotion as well. On the one hand, Meisner encourages this process of private emotional preparation to stimulate emotion in a scene. On the other hand, he finds emotion dangerous and believes you can't force it:

> The problem of the deliberate stimulation of emotion is to me the most delicate and dangerous element in the actor's craft. Emotion, without which a performance can be effective but not affective, is a most elusive element. It works best when it is permitted to come into play spontaneously, and has

> a perverse inclination to slither away when consciously wooed. (*Reality of Doing* 144)

Contradictions and paradoxes are part of theatrical practice, but in this case I think that the contradictions highlight the slipperiness of the concept of emotion and the difficulty in pinning it down to specific practices.

CHARACTER

The idea of character in Meisner training goes through two distinct phases. In the first phase, which correlates to the early training, actors are encouraged not to play a character, but to engage in activities and respond as themselves. In the film *Sanford Meisner: The Theatre's Best Kept Secret*, Meisner begins class with an activity in which he asks students to listen to the sounds outside the window and count the cars. Then he asks them if they are listening *as a character* or *as themselves*. He makes the point that as an actor you should always be actually *doing* whatever you are doing onstage, not just *pretending* to do it as a character. In the second phase, the idea of playing a character from a play becomes more central, and much of the training revolves around the creation of character. Meisner's approach to character is based on the idea that people reveal themselves through their actions and in how they go about doing their actions. Meisner clearly states that "Character comes from *how you do what you do*." (*On Acting* 156).

Most crucially, an actor is expected to find ways to connect their own life experiences and emotions with those of the character, to *personalize* the role. Meisner advises: "The first thing you have to do when you read a text is to find yourself—*really* find yourself. First find yourself, then you find a way of doing the part which strikes you

as being in character. Then, based on that reality, you have the nucleus of the role" (*On Acting* 178). The actor is expected to find a way to identify with the character's experiences and emotions. Hart puts it this way: "The actor's empathetic response to a character's plight will never be as deep and specific as the material that comes out of the actor's own psyche" (69).

Larry Silverberg's Meisner-based teaching manual *The Sanford Meisner Approach: Workbook Four, Playing the Part* provides a thorough map of the process of personalization. He states the goal of personalization as "*taking on the point of view of the character in an authentic and personal way*" (emphasis in original, 110). In his model, first the actor begins by identifying key facts about the character and trying to figure out the character's relationship to the key facts. Then the actor does a free association writing assignment based on some of the key facts, trying to find a personal connection to the material that comes from their own thoughts and imagination. Silverberg argues that every key word or idea should have a personal association for the actor. For example, if the character has a relationship to her grandmother, every time the actor says "grandmother" she should have a clear picture of the grandmother in her mind, based on the free association writing she did, or other such work.

Silverberg then models how to personalize a specific piece of text, using a fictionalized classroom moment. He asks a student to take a couple lines from the script and then lie down and relax as she says the words to herself. The student starts crying. He asks her to tell the class what she's feeling right now, and she responds by talking about personal associations with the lines. Then Silverberg tells her to say the actual lines.

Silverberg then asks her to come up with a preparation based on the meaning she has discovered for herself with those specific lines (143-148). This exercise seems to me to be dangerously close to psychoanalysis or therapy, which Meisner is specifically against in the classroom.

In the next phase, the student begins to tell her own story about the association to a partner, switching back and forth between her own words and the actual text (Silverberg 155-162). This kind of alternation between improvisation and text is an important feature of the Meisner approach to text, and it illustrates how the actor is expected to find personal connections and associations with the themes and emotions of the scene in order to be able to connect with the character. One of Meisner's students describes this process by saying:

> The thing that's coming home to me is how you make this material your own. If we do it first in our own words and are fully prepared, then it's an easier jump to the actual words of the piece. And when we make the jump, the words of the text are like our own and we're less hampered by them. They come from *us*. (*On Acting* 160)

The Meisner approach to character is in strong contrast to say, a Brechtian approach, which assumes that the actor remains alienated from the role he embodies. Instead, the actor tries to find ways to connect his or her own life experiences with those of the character.

However, there are contradicting aspects to the actor–character relationship in Meisner technique, which once again point to the complex interaction between theory

and practice. Despite the heavy emphasis on personalization, in certain moments Meisner advocates for critical distance between actor and character, such as when he says: "The inability to distinguish between one's personal life and the life of the character can have serious negative results. Life is life, and the play is *theatrical* life" (*Reality of Doing* 149). Also, Meisner has said you can't play character, but things the character does and says *reveal* their character, which also suggests a more external approach. Once again, ruptures in theory and practice become visible and are hard to reconcile. I would conclude that despite some of Meisner's statements about remaining conscious of the difference between self and character, the way character is approached in practice seems to stem more from the idea of connecting self and character rather than from the idea of critically distancing self from character. These moments of rupture between theory and practice do highlight the fact that though Meisner may have intended for his work to promote a certain distance between actor and character, the practice of his techniques can lead to ways of working that encourage using personal emotional investments to connect to character.

ACTOR'S CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSIVE SELF

In Meisner technique, the actor's creativity is conceptualized as being instinctual/spontaneous, connected to the imagination and emotion, and in relationship to others. Through the training, the actor learns to access her creativity through reconnecting with her impulses and then applies those impulses along with her creative imagination to creating detailed characters. The fundamental expressive task for the actor is to express a character in a connected, emotional way so that the behavior reads to the audience as

"true." The actor is seen as a creative artist whose talents are ultimately serving a playwright's vision.

Meisner envisions the actor as an artist who works from herself and her instincts. He explicitly sees creativity as a function of impulse: "Look, I'll tell you why the repetition exercise, in essence, is not boring: it plays on the source of all organic creativity, which is the inner impulses" (*On Acting* 37). In this technique, the actor's creative self is only considered to be free and alive when the actor is working spontaneously from impulse. Meisner's language reveals an assumption that the actor cannot be truly in touch with her creativity if her impulses are blocked by conditioned responses, defensiveness, or self-censorship, a view which is common to contemporary actor training. Roach writes of many current training techniques:

> We believe that spontaneous feelings, if they can be located and identified, must be extracted with difficulty from beneath the layers of inhibition that time and habit have deposited over our natural selves, selves that lie repressed under the rigidifying sediment of stress, trauma, and shame. (*Player's Passion* 219)

To extract these feelings, repetition is intended to reconnect the actor with her spontaneous reactions and teach her not to hold back her responses because of fear or social conditioning. In performance as well, the actor is assumed to be creative in his ability to react spontaneously in the moment rather than executing pre-planned behavior.

The actor's creativity in Meisner training is also emphatically linked to imagination and emotion, which are interrelated in this technique. The actor's

imagination, or her ability to create fantasies and stories in her mind, is a large part of the actor's creative task. Like Stella Adler, Meisner believes that the ability to engage the imagination is more important than the ability to recall one's personal memories. In this technique, actors regularly use their imaginations to create emotional preparations for a scene. Meisner explains, "preparation is a kind of daydreaming. It *is* daydreaming. It's daydreaming which causes a transformation in your inner life, so that you are not what you actually were five minutes ago, because your fantasy is working on you" (*On Acting* 84). Part of the actor's expressive task is to use her imagination to create a story that affects her emotional life so that she may enter a scene with an emotion analogous to what the character is experiencing. The ability to use one's imagination to create a story is only one aspect; the actor must also allow their daydream to affect them emotionally.

The actor's creativity is engaged, importantly, through relationship with another actor. In particular, the actor is expected to become good at "reading" another person's behavior and then reacting to that, creating intense interpersonal improvisations. Meisner's emphasis on playing off the other person is quite distinct within the realm of Americanized Stanislavsky training. Even once the actor has engaged her imagination and become emotionally prepared, she still needs to be open to what comes from her scene partner(s). The repetition exercises, while working to engage the actor's impulses, are also about "placing yourself in contact, in order to experience moment to moment how the other person is making you feel" (Hart 62). Scene work also emphasizes playing off of the other person, "suggesting that it is the other person who is the source of the actor's inspiration and stimulus in performance" (Pope 148). The idea that you don't do

something until the other person makes you do it is quite unique to Meisner and it suggests that being in relationship with another person is fundamental to the actor's creativity, a challenge to what Sawyer describes in *Explaining Creativity* as our culture's myths about individual creativity. Although the idea of relationship and communication is central to the actor's creativity in Meisner training, it does not have quite the same emphasis on group collaboration as in other techniques such as Viewpoints; the collaboration here is more of a give-and-take with a partner, a duet of sorts.

In the class at Texas State, this aspect of communicating with a partner became more obvious when we moved into the phase of repetition where you can change the line if you perceive that something has changed *with your partner*. You cannot change the line just because you are bored or have noticed a change *in yourself*.[23] In this phase, which still begins with a physical observation, partners continue to speak the truth of the moment from their point of view, but if something changes in one person, the other person can comment and thus change the repetition. Costello coached, "You don't have to do anything but repeat and identify when there's a change in the other person." What I noticed while I watched students do this was that one person very closely observes the other's behavior, which I think is kind of an uncomfortable position to be in. Students commented on small behavioral changes, such as, "You nodded your head. You just laughed. You fumbled your words." It is as though a person narrates her perception of her

[23] This is not necessarily true of all Meisner training. William Esper, for example, tends to allow actors to express their own point of view about someone, rather than just noticing changes in the other person. See Esper and DiMarco's *The Actor's Art and Craft* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), pp. 51-52.

partner's outward behavior, and then interprets how her partner might be feeling based on her outward behavior ("You look angry.")

When I did this exercise, I again felt frustrated. There were moments when I felt like my partner and I were communicating, but as Costello said to us, it became a little "tit for tat," as we kept saying things like "You just blinked. No, *you* just blinked." I was very closely observing my partner, especially his face, for any signs of change or emotion, but the verbal repetition was happening so fast that I felt I could not really get a grasp on what was happening. Plus, there were many moments where my reading of him was wrong, or his reading of me was wrong—for example, I might say "You seem frustrated," only to have him say "I'm not frustrated." I felt very much like a novice while doing the repetition, and wondered if I would understand it better or become more comfortable with it through practice. At times, I could feel myself just zoning out and becoming robotic, which was clearly not the goal.

At the end of this session, Costello asked the class what they were learning. Students responded that they were noticing how to truly listen and observe, be available to a partner, focus, and react "truthfully." Costello said that the repetition awakens us to others, to how they feel and express themselves. This exercise, for me, brought out a key component of Meisner training, which is that acting is primarily about interpersonal communication and behavior. The actor becomes quite skilled at "reading" his or her partner and being able to improvise based on that behavior. But, notably, it is not about the larger tools of theatre. This method of acting can tend to emphasize interpersonal relationships at the expense of engaging the actor's creativity in terms of the larger play.

This vision of acting becomes about two people communicating (or attempting to communicate) rather than artists creating a theatrical version of the world.

Finally, the actor's creativity in Meisner training is engaged in service of connecting to a character and playing a specific role. Hart argues that after students learn the skills of listening and spontaneity in their first year of training, they "begin the slow process of applying them to their real purpose—serving the playwright's vision and his words, and the director's intentions to communicate a specific experience to an audience" (75). The vision of the actor at play here is as a creative artist who channels his or her experiences and skills into *a specific role*, serving the author's ultimate vision of the character. Towards this goal, the actor is expected to personalize the role by finding ways to creatively connect their own experiences and fantasies to the character. Costello describes the actor as being creative in relation to bringing their own experiences and imagination to creating the life of a character:

> It's something I call harvesting. The actor knows the given circumstances, reads the play and begins to make sense of it, and then they respond through their own life experience, which may be observations, their own experiences, or their imaginations. They harvest from those areas—from the given circumstances, from life observations, experiences, and their imagination, and they begin to understand the character's experience as defined by the playwright. (Personal Interview 2009)

There are several ways of interpreting these ideas in terms of the actor's agency. Some, like Hart, see the actor's creative expression of a character as a rich and important

task. Others, like Carnicke, see this vision as somewhat limiting for the actor. She argues that, "The Method, in contrast to the System, absolves actors from responsibility for the final artistic interpretation of the play. The actor remains accountable for the creation of an inner life, but the director answers for the elucidation of the play's dynamics" (*Focus* 164). Limiting the actor's creative task to work on character reinscribes specific, historically rooted hierarchies of power that place the actor in a less powerful role than that of the director and playwright. This narrow vision of the actor's task depends on a particular playwright-actor-director dynamic that J. Ellen Gainor claims emerged during the early days of the Actor's Studio. In her article "Rethinking Feminism, Stanislavsky, and Performance," Gainor explains that within this dynamic, the playwright and directors were often men, and the (often female) actors ended up with the least amount of power in this relationship. She argues that, "The power and inseparability of this matrix of scripts, directors, and Method actors was such, I think, that early feminist theatre practitioners rejected the grid as a totality" (Gainor 167).

I agree with Carnicke and Gainor that Meisner training has the potential to replicate power dynamics that place the actor in a position of diminished authority. Specific pedagogical choices (such as a tendency toward misogyny) handed down by Meisner can also reinforce this dynamic.[24] But Gainor argues that it might be productive to untangle ideas about practice from the historicized, embodied ways they have been handed down, and I agree. I think there is potential to re-think how the actor's creativity

[24] For further discussion of the misogyny embedded in acting pedagogy, see Rosemary Malague's *Getting At "The Truth:" A Feminist Consideration of American Actor Training* (Diss, CUNY, 2001).

is expressed in Meisner technique. While Meisner technique has roots in the male-dominated acting methods of the Group Theatre and the playwright-director-actor dynamic that continued this domination of the actor, I think there could be more progressive potential for Meisner technique, because of its unique emphasis on interpersonal communication and relationship, to develop into a training style that allows actors to move beyond character and into more nuanced and collaborative ensemble work. This potential, however, is hampered by the fact that the structure of Meisner training does not require the actor to take responsibility for the larger vision of the play.

Cultivating the Ideal Actor

Meisner training, like all other forms of actor training, cultivates its own unique version of the idealized actor, a standard of excellence that actors are encouraged to strive toward. Though I have already discussed many skills a "good" Meisner-trained actor is expected to have (such as being emotionally available and connecting with a partner), one key quality is an ability to create "truthful" behavior by responding in the moment.

While Meisner defines good acting as "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (*On Acting* 15), the term "truthfully" is obviously open to interpretation. Rhonda Blair, in writing about the techniques of Stanislavsky, Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner, writes:

> While we have a sense of what these teachers mean by 'truth,' the term is so subjective as to be highly suspect and subject to criticism. Nonetheless, these four masters devised ways of manipulating principles of acting,

> imagination, attention, emotion, and sense memory to help the actor reach what Stanislavsky called the *inner creative state,* a complete engagement with the work. (*Method* 204)

For Meisner, a complete engagement with the work (or to use his term, *living truthfully*) means that the actor should respond from her own human instincts in the moment rather than enacting pre-planned behavior. While there are many ways in which the Meisner trained actor does, in fact, *prepare* for performance (including detailed text analysis and personalization of the role), a key principle of the technique is the ability to allow oneself to be spontaneous and available *in the moment of performance*. The ideal actor prepares and personalizes, but then plays the moment. Esper, too, teaches that the actor must have a sense of mindfulness to the moment: "The actor trains himself to pay attention to all moments, and to live each one as if each moment were his last. He learns to live mindfully, beholden only to his sense of truth, without anticipation, without fear" (31).

The ideal Meisner-trained actor also works to listen and respond to his scene partner, a principle that is connected to the idea of being spontaneous in the moment. The ideal actor observes the behavior of her scene partner and responds *specifically* to that behavior, not to what she thought her partner was going to do, or what her partner has done in past performances. Meisner believed that this kind of close observation of and spontaneous reaction to a partner leads to fresh performances and more "truthful" behavior. The goal of all of this training in responding in the moment is to create communication between partners that reads to the audience as "believable." This of

course reveals a strong connection between Meisner training and the performance style of realism. In a class at Texas State, Costello explained why Meisner technique is particularly applicable to realism, a genre in which an actor usually gets handed a script with specific lines:

> There seems to be nothing spontaneous about it, but if you are listening specifically to what you're getting and reacting to that, that's always improvisational, and therefore as close as we get to the 'reality' of what life is. In real life we never know what's coming next. We have a living moment, a collaboration between actors. If you're not listening, you have in mind how you're going to play something. Then it becomes disconnected, and there is no sense of people living in a world together.[25]

The idea that truthfulness or believability is important in performance is, of course, an idea that comes out of the standards and expectations of realism.[26] Plays used in the early stages of Meisner classes tend to be American realist plays and while I wouldn't say the training's applications are *limited* to these kinds of texts, they are certainly emphasized.[27]

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[25] Costello made this comment in class on September 9, 2009.

[26] In their survey of American university curricula, Jessica Tomell-Presto and Nathan Stucky show that a realistic acting style is privileged by most university programs. See "Acting and Movement Training as a Pedagogy of the Body," in *Teaching Theatre Today*, Eds. Fliotsos and Medford, (New York, Palgrave, 2004). pp.103-124.

[27] For example, in *The Actor's Art and Craft*, William Esper has students work with realist plays such as Michael Weller's *Loose Ends* (p.262). In "Meisner Technique" Victoria Hart uses William Inge's *Picnic* as material for early scene work (p. 73), though students will later do "style" scenes that move away from realism.

ROLE OF AUTHORITY

Meisner training, because of its reliance on a playwright-director-actor triangulation, is in some ways invested in traditional models of artistic hierarchy, in which the playwright and director have more power than the actor in the overall vision of the show. The performance dynamic is then replicated in the classroom dynamic. While I base my discussion primarily on how teachers of Meisner technique describe their work as well as what I observed, it is important to note that the role of authority in the classroom might vary from teacher to teacher.

Meisner held the belief that students, in theory, shouldn't blindly submit to the authority of their acting teachers. On describing his experience in the Group Theatre, he said:

> The older actors who came to the Group Theatre, those who had some practical experience and practical knowledge, they flourished. They knew what to pick and they knew what to choose. Stella, who was a brilliant actress when she came to the Group Theatre, could pick and choose and evaluate . . . The younger people, who were full of dedication and commitment and rather thoughtless, they gave themselves over to the authority. (*Looking Back* 504)

This statement shows that Meisner thought actors should have some kind of agency to pick and choose which techniques worked for them and which did not. However, Meisner's book *On Acting* reveals a teaching style that is more authoritative. Meisner, as the teacher, maintains an intact sense of authority. He is the master teacher and the

students are there to learn from him specifically. Ray, a student in his class, shows this when he says "half the people teaching acting don't know what good acting is. What drives me forward in the class is my belief that you know what you're looking at, and that it means a great deal to me if you say I'm going in the right or the wrong direction" (*On Acting* 186). When students work with scenes, Meisner is the expert on the scene, and the actors defer to his judgment and play it the way he advises. Meisner asks the actors to think, using questions such as "What is this scene about?" but if he disagrees with the student, his opinion on the scene takes precedence.

The account of Meisner's teaching from *On Acting* reveals troubling moments where female students are sexualized and the teaching itself seems to prescribe gender roles. For example, to demonstrate the idea that an actor should react based on instinct, Meisner asks a female student "Will you come to my house tonight?" When she says no, he says, "You're a professional virgin!" (*On Acting* 28). This moment highlights the female student's gender identity and places judgment on her response. In another highly gendered moment, Meisner teaches the principle of *don't do anything till something happens to make you do it*. When he demonstrates this with a male student, he pinches the student in the back, but with a female student, he puts his hand under her blouse. When she giggles and draws away, he replies "You see how true that acting is, how full emotionally?" (*On Acting* 35). Esper's book on Meisner technique also includes misogynist moments, such as when he suggests that a student might fantasize about having sex with Cameron Diaz in order to access a victorious feeling (208). Meisner's training was embedded with misogyny, and since pedagogy relies on body-to-body

transmission, much of this misogyny has been handed down to other teachers. Importantly, Costello's teaching that I observed at Texas State was not misogynist, suggesting that it need not be passed on even though it is part of the training's history.

An aspect of power in the classroom that Meisner specifically addresses is the idea that an acting teacher should not attempt to play therapist for his or her students. He explicitly argues that "It is not in the province of the acting teacher nor in his capabilities to attempt to penetrate into the hidden, untamperable regions of the actor's personality" (*Reality of Doing* 148). He is against the practice of psychoanalysis in the classroom:

> The practitioners of the 'modern' approach have taken it upon themselves not only to teach acting. But in order better to help the actor get to the more inaccessible reaches of himself, to help him deepen himself, as it were, have added to their normal burden the new role of psychoanalyst. This service is thrown in free. It doesn't make it any more desirable. (*Reality of Doing* 148)

These statements reveal a certain consciousness about pedagogy and awareness of how power might be operating in the classroom, whereas at other moments Meisner seems much less aware of power dynamics.

I want to acknowledge that I am writing about Meisner's teaching style based on reading his book, and without experiencing it, my claims are only partial. Some of Meisner's students have expressed opinions about his teaching that take issue with some of my ideas about authority. For example, in the film *Sanford Meisner: The Theatre's Best Kept Secret*, actress Lee Grant comments that:

> An acting teacher is God to the students. There is a tremendous tendency on the part of some of the more recent teachers to use their god position to tie people to them, to cripple them almost, so they're afraid to take a step without the approval of the teacher. Sandy sets you free. Like a good parent, he'd say go out in the world and do it. It's tough out there. He didn't say 'don't do it without me.'

This comment shows some of the complexities of analyzing Meisner's teaching—while Grant found Meisner's class "freeing," she also describes his teaching style with the word "parent" which show an embedded and possibly unconscious investment in authoritarian power structures.

Costello, though, expresses a different vision of how the teacher functions in Meisner training:

> What I do, and what I think Meisner did as well, is that you put actors within structures. They're not really learning anything when I say, 'This should happen, and this should happen.' The learning is through the systematic structures that are set up. The teacher is defining and redefining those structures, because it's through experience, and then building on that experience, that the actor really changes . . . As a teacher, I tend to help them to learn for themselves, because often they'll say 'What am I going to do without you?' And I don't want that. I want them to be able to start moving away from me and using whatever principles I'm teaching so that they can always go back and work on those principles. I want them to be

> able to articulate what they're learning. By being able to articulate the work that we're doing, I know that they're really understanding it. (Personal Interview 2009)

Costello's comments show that he is invested in the idea that students learn best through their own experience, and the way he describes the teacher's role is less authoritarian and more student-centered, showing that one can choose to teach Meisner's techniques in a variety of ways that redefine power relationships.

While many moments in accounts of Meisner training reveal a lack of agency for the actor, I don't believe that all of the exercises and structures of Meisner training *necessarily* rely on replicating this dynamic. Hierarchical ideas about power and authority have been transmitted through a direct handing down of his techniques, passed on from person to person, body to body. If we are able to separate the techniques from the teacher (as Gainor suggests), power dynamics might become more fluid and adaptable. While some aspects of the training do rely on an expert-apprentice model (for example, students need an outside eye watching them try the repetition exercises in order to coach them to improve), other aspects might be more adaptable to student expertise (for example, when students personalize a role, their creative imagination is the guiding force and the teacher's guidance is less important). The gendered teaching dynamics I critiqued in Meisner's teaching are also not inherent in the exercises and could be challenged by individual instructors. If we allow the techniques to become detached from Meisner himself and encourage new teachers to adapt his style, the technique might become less authoritarian and create more room for the actor's creative agency.

Chapter Three

From the Vertical to the Horizontal: Shifting the Balance of Agency in Viewpoints Training

"Listen. Pay attention. Be Open. Change. Respond. Surprise yourself. Use accidents. Work with fearlessness and abandon and an open heart."

–Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints Handbook,* 204

"Actors love Anne Bogart, even the most suspicious and hidebound. She puts them back in charge of their own process and instantly defines them as collaborators. They find themselves more creative, less frightened and still served well by the traditional craft they had honed before she came into their lives."

–Jon Jory, "Foreword," *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints*, xvi

PRELUDE

My first introduction to Viewpoints was in a college acting class in 1997. The professor, an expert in Shakespearean performance, told us she had recently attended a workshop where she learned a new technique called Viewpoints, and she wanted us to try out some of its principles. She asked us to visualize the stage as a grid, and to only walk in straight lines that made up the grid. We were to use "soft focus" with our eyes and notice people around us with our peripheral vision. My first fleeting impression of Viewpoints was that it involved moving through space with that soft focus, noticing my perceptions and increasing my awareness of space. It was abstract to me though, an interesting experiment, but not something I could see applying to my work as a performer.

The next time I encountered Viewpoints was as an audience member. In 2002, at the Magic Theater in San Francisco, I saw a production called *Room*. *Room,* a one-person show about Virginia Woolf, was produced by the SITI Company and starred company member Ellen Lauren. Watching Lauren perform was a revelation—her movements were so precise, so striking. She repeated particular abstract gestures throughout the performance that highlighted or contradicted her words in the most fascinating of ways. *SF Weekly's* theatre critic described the unique rhythm of the performance and power of Lauren's physical presence: "Movements and poses she's established during the lecture return like motifs in a symphony. Using methods that belong to music or dance, *Room* builds both a portrait of a woman burning under layers of Edwardian convention and an impression of artistic flow" (Moore 2002). Knowing that Lauren was a SITI Company member and that Viewpoints and Suzuki were the primary methods the company members trained in, I realized that I was watching Viewpoints in action. What I saw spoke to me in a visceral way. This theater was so alive, so visually compelling, so highly theatrical. Though I still could not define it, my interest in Viewpoints was piqued.

VIEWPOINTS, AN ORIGIN STORY

Viewpoints is a method of actor training in which actors engage with deconstructed theatrical elements. They explore these elements through physical movement, working on their own perceptual abilities, their ability to collaborate with a group, and their ability to respond fully in the moment. The most basic story of the history of Viewpoints begins with the experiments of The Judson Dance Theatre, a group of postmodern choreographers working in the early 1960s, and reaches its peak when

Mary Overlie, a postmodern choreographer influenced by Judson, creates the original Six Viewpoints (space, shape, time, emotion, movement, and story) in the late 1970s while working at New York University's Experimental Theatre Wing. The story continues to develop when theatre artists Anne Bogart and Tina Landau realize that the Six Viewpoints hold great potential for theatre artists. They expand Overlie's original Six Viewpoints into nine physical and five vocal Viewpoints and popularize the method as a way of training actors (Bogart and Landau 5-11).[28]

Recounting this brief origin story is certainly a useful way to begin looking at the development of Viewpoints. But if we look at this history through Diana Taylor's concept of the archive and the repertoire, it begins to expand. In Taylor's formulation, "The archive includes, but is not limited to, written texts. The repertoire contains verbal performances—songs, prayers, speeches—as well as nonverbal practices" (24). Although what we might call the *archival* history of Viewpoints begins with Overlie's systemization of movement elements, in the realm of embodied practices (the *repertoire*), many people, particularly dancers and choreographers, had been experimenting with similar physical acts for years before Overlie named these acts the Six Viewpoints.

As I attempt to further examine the history of Viewpoints, I will look at how the work of earlier dance and theatre artists influenced the artists commonly associated with the development of Viewpoints. It is important to historicize Viewpoints as part of a

[28] Bogart has published books and essays on the topic of Viewpoints, including (with Tina Landau) *The Viewpoints Handbook*, (New York: TCG, 2005), while Overlie has published much less. This imbalance, in addition to the fact that Bogart's SITI Company runs the annual summer workshop at Saratoga Springs, suggests that Bogart has become more linked to the popularization of Viewpoints than Overlie.

series of interconnected developments in the art world, partly because acting practice is so often evacuated of its history, and partly to counteract the distinctly American rhetoric of "newness" that so often surrounds Viewpoints, a rhetoric that makes it seem as though these practices appeared out of nowhere, disconnected from both history and culture.[29]

THE MODERN DANCE REBELLION AND THE DOMINANCE OF THE CHOREOGRAPHER

The history of Viewpoints is embedded in a context of choreographic experiments taking place in U.S. dance in the late 1950s and early 1960s that have been termed "postmodern dance." I am using the term 'postmodern' in this context to signify artistic movements in dance that sought to break from earlier conventions and challenged ideas about what dance was, who could make it, and how it could be made.[30] To understand the development of Viewpoints, it's important to look at the ways in which postmodern dance was a rebellion against modern or expressionist dance, forms which were themselves rebellions against ballet.

By the end of the nineteenth-century, ballet was the dominant Western dance tradition. In the early 1900s, dancers such as Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis created new works that challenged the rigid technique of ballet and instead emphasized "freedom of movement and the solo form" (Banes, *Terpsichore* 1-2). Susan Leigh Foster calls the work of these dancers the "expressionist aesthetic," and notes that

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[29] For a discussion of the "American aesthetics" of Viewpoints, see Julia Whitworth's "'The Culture is the Body': Suzuki Training and 'American Aesthetics' of Anne Bogart's SITI Company," *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 14.2 (Winter 2002), 12-24.

[30] For a more thorough discussion of postmodernism in relationship to artistic movements and 'pastiche,' historical narrative, and capitalism, see Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

although all of these choreographic pioneers created work that was extremely different from one another, their work shared the common trait of being focused on the expression of human feeling in an archetypal, often universalizing way (*Reading* 148-149).

In the 1920s and 30s, a new generation of modern dance choreographers emerged, including Martha Graham, Mary Wigman, and Doris Humphrey. For these choreographers, dance was "an expression of the relationship between movement and a full range of psychological events, including those attributed to the unconscious" (Foster, *Reading* 152). In contrast to the ballet form, which emphasized "virtuoso performance and visual spectacle as much as or more than it explored dramatic characters in depth" (Foster, *Reading* 145), these modern choreographers' work reflected the idea that movement could reflect an inner psychology, an idea that was foreshadowed by the work of earlier theorists who explored the relationship between movement and emotion, such as French rhetorician François Delsarte and early twentieth century movement theorist Rudolph Laban.

The early twentieth-century shift toward the idea that dance might express genuine internal emotions coincided with similar developments in acting. In the late 1890s and into the 1920s, Russian theatre artist Konstantin Stanislavsky was working on systematizing his theories of acting, which included the idea that the actor should work to cultivate an active internal life. Foster notes the relationship between modern dance and the new theories of acting, writing that

> Stanislavsky only confirmed what dancers had already apprehended about the new dance: it was not enough to execute the movements of

> astonishment, anger, or rapture perfectly. Rather, dancers had to feel these things fully during the performance, or, more precisely, bring a full psychological involvement with the dance to each performance. (*Reading* 166)

The idea that it was necessary for an actor to *feel* his or her character's emotions during the performance is more in line with the Americanization of Stanislavsky's ideas, as they were transformed by American artists like Lee Strasberg into Method acting. Just as American adapters of Stanislavsky's theories emphasized emotion over action, American modern dance tended to also place an "emphasis on the personal" (Banes, *Terpsichore* 5).

Though emotional expression took on a new role in modern dance, it was the choreographer's project of self-expression that took precedence over the individual dancer's, an idea that was paralleled in the growing dominance of directors in theatrical production. Martha Graham was one of the most influential of this new generation of modern dance choreographers, and her work exemplified this connection between emotional expression and the dominance of the choreographer. Graham's principal concern was to express, through dance, "the essential dynamics of the human condition" (Foster, *Reading* 23). As Banes notes, much of modern dance, including Graham's work, involved "individual quests for movement styles that would express not only the physicality of the choreographer, but also his or her thematic concerns and theories of movement" *(Terpsichore* 5). Though Graham's dances did not attempt to create realistic stories, she considered every choreographic choice carefully to determine whether each movement "accurately expresses the internal motivation she associates with the dance's

theme" (Foster, *Reading* 43). A new generation of dancers, whose work would eventually lead into the development of Viewpoints, would soon challenge the idea that dances should be based on a choreographer's project of self-expression.

POSTMODERN STIRRINGS

In the 1950s, Merce Cunningham, one of Martha Graham's pupils, began to test the conventions of modern dance with his own choreographic theories and experiments. According to Banes, Cunningham made the following new claims about movement:

> 1) any movement can be material for a dance; 2) any procedure can be a valid compositional method; 3) any part or parts of the body can be used (subject to nature's limitations); 4) music, costume, décor, lighting, and dancing have their own separate logics and identities; 5) any dancer in the company might be a soloist; 6) any space might be danced in; 7) dancing can be about anything, but is fundamentally and primarily about the human body and its movements, beginning with walking. (*Terpsichore* 6)

These claims, particularly the idea that dance could be fundamentally about pure movement, were revolutionary at the time.

Like avant-garde artists working in a variety of art forms at the same time, Cunningham also liked to experiment, using chance procedures to create dance. A Cunningham dance might leave a great number of elements up to chance, including: "the movements themselves, their order, their spatial path or direction, their duration; the number of dancers, entrances, and exits; the length and the order of sections of a dance" (Foster, *Reading* 37). As evidenced by this quote, far before Overlie created the Six

Viewpoints, choreographers such as Cunningham were experimenting with deconstructing movement into separate pieces that could be manipulated and played with individually.

Another key component of the postmodern dance movement was to rethink preconceptions about who could make art, and to challenge the choreographer's singular genius. While Graham and many other choreographers saw dance as an elite calling, Cunningham (along with the postmodern choreographers to follow him), had "more democratic conceptions of art and artist" (Foster, *Reading* 48). The idea that art should be democratized and opened up to collaboration influenced Overlie and the eventual development of Viewpoints.

DIVERSE INFLUENCES—OTHER THREADS

These postmodern stirrings—an interest in chance, democratizing the art-making process, experimenting with form and structure—were also happening in other art forms at the same time, and in many ways all of these changes reflected a changing American culture. For example, Happenings, which emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, involved some of the same elements of postmodern dance, particularly an interest in deconstruction of elements and an emphasis on spontaneity and chance. Michael Kirby defines Happenings as "a purposefully composed form of theatre in which diverse alogical elements, including nonmatrixed performing, are organized in a compartmental structure" (21). Happenings were hybrid art forms that could include music, poetry, theatre, sculpture, and philosophy (Kaye 106). Many of the original creators of Happenings were visual artists, influenced by painting, collage, environment, Dadaism,

and Surrealism, but the form itself was partly theatrical (Kirby 22-41). Avant-garde composer John Cage (one of Cunningham's collaborators) was one of the pioneers of Happenings and championed the use of chance methods to create art. Rather than having a linear plot, events and images in a Happening may occur in separate environments and only add up to a whole when considered together. One of the main objectives in creating Happenings was to break "the barrier between art and life" (Kaprow 238). Like Viewpoints, the early Happenings fostered awareness of the present moment and emphasized the spontaneous creation of art.

The work of experimental and feminist theatre artists of the 1960s also reflected some of the same concerns as postmodern dance and influenced the development of Viewpoints. In the same way that postmodern dancers were rebelling against the dominance of choreographers and previous dance traditions, experimental theatre artists in the 1960s were similarly rebelling against hierarchy and the dominant forms of acting and theatre. As Charlotte Canning notes, "Experimental theater provided a venue not merely for theater artists to create and perform their way out of the confines of realism and 'The Method' but for people to create and perform away from the oppression they experienced in society at large" (52). Many experimental and feminist theatres emphasized collaboration and collective creation. Canning notes that among these groups, "A strong emphasis was placed on a community of theater people working together over a long period of time to create theater pieces. Collaboration created new kinds of texts that relied upon improvisation, experience, and discussion, making the input of all members vital to the creation of works" (47). The Viewpoints work, as it has

evolved through Anne Bogart's collaborative, ensemble-based SITI Company, can certainly be seen as a direct descendant of this kind of experimental and feminist work.

The Judson Dance Theatre

In this climate of artistic experimentation, a new aesthetic began to crystallize and flourish. Robert Dunn, a choreographer who had taken music classes with John Cage, began to teach composition classes at Cunningham's studio in 1960, and these classes became a place where dancers explored and created what would become known as a postmodern dance aesthetic. According to dancers in the workshop, Dunn taught in a way that was non-authoritarian and placed the tools of creating dances with the dancers themselves (Banes, *Democracy's Body* 25). In a marked contrast to the dominance of the choreographer in modern dance, dancers became the choreographers of their own work. In these classes, Dunn also asked dancers to closely consider structural elements, as they frequently "experimented with a variety of choreographic procedures ranging from chance to mathematical formulas to game structure and bricolage" (Foster, *Reading* 169). The act of placing the tools of artistic creation with the participants seemed to be intertwined with an emphasis on deconstructing structural elements.

On July 6, 1962, the dancers in Dunn's workshop presented a dance concert at the Judson Church in New York City. This moment marked the beginning of the Judson Dance Theatre, a group of choreographers whose experiments would truly change the form. The group, which included a variety of dancers and choreographers, such as Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, David Gordon, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Robert Morris, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Robert Rauschenberg, defined some of the characteristics of

a postmodern dance aesthetic. Like Cunningham, many of these choreographers were interested in the role of chance and spontaneity in the composition of dance. Rather than viewing a dance as the product of a choreographer's need for internal expression, the structure of a dance might be created from the combination of a variety of chance elements. Postmodern choreographers were particularly interested in exposing the way their dances were created. As Banes describes,

> Whether the prevailing structure is a mathematical system for using space, time, or the body; or arbitrary assemblage; or fragmentation, juxtaposition, the deliberate avoidance of structure by improvisation; or the constant shifting of structures by chance methods, there is always the possibility, in post-modern dance, that the underlying form will be bared. (*Terpsichore* 16)

Some of the main preoccupations of dancers in the Judson Dance Theatre were "the perception of time, of space, and of the workings of the body" (Banes, *Democracy's Body* 21). For example, dancer Ruth Emerson created a score for a dance that separately notated the elements of dancer, time, space, speed, and absolute time and which also seemed to use the architecture of the space (Banes, *Democracy's Body* 26). Indeed, many of the dancers at Judson Church experimented with deconstructing the elements of dance and then reassembling them, certainly a direct precursor to the Viewpoints work. The way that Foster describes Trisha Brown's process also sounds remarkably similar to Viewpoints. Foster notes that "In some of her early pieces, Brown converted measurements of distances and objects in a room into directions for a dance, deriving

floor patterns, vocabularies, and lengths of phrases from the geometry of a given environment" (*Reading* 95).

The practice of deconstructing movement into different elements and the idea that one can arrive at art by "chance" combinations are both concepts which clearly influenced Mary Overlie's development of the Six Viewpoints and Anne Bogart's use of composition techniques to create theatrical staging. Other characteristics of postmodern dance that continue to resonate in the current practices of Viewpoints are an interest in process over product and a desire to create a more collaborative, democratic art-making process. It is important to foreground the dance roots of Viewpoints, as this history is very often obscured when one encounters Viewpoints as a way of actor training or rehearsing a theatrical production. It also allows us to see that developments in actor training are always embedded in a specific and tangled artistic and cultural context that influences the specific pedagogies of technique.

MARY OVERLIE AND THE SIX VIEWPOINTS

Though it is clear that many artists, especially those working in the postmodern dance world, were creating work that isolated particular elements of movement as part of an experimental choreographic process, choreographer Mary Overlie was the first person to systematize these elements into what she called the Six Viewpoints. Overlie herself links the experimental nature of Viewpoints to similar artistic developments in other forms. She points to such diverse artists as the postmodern choreographers at Judson Church, Richard Serra the sculptor, the musicians John Cage and Phillip Glass, and theatre artists Elizabeth LeCompte (of the Wooster Group) and Lee Breuer, tying them all

together as “the physical embodiment of a new philosophical step, called postmodernism” (191-192).

Overlie has a diverse background that combines dance and theatre. She studied Cunningham technique at the Margaret Jenkins studio and worked with the San Francisco Mime Troupe before moving to New York in 1970. There she danced in an improvisational dance company, performed at Judson Church, and created her own dance company, called the Mary Overlie Dance Company. She considers herself part of a community of deconstructionists, “artists working with mechanics rather than expression” (Overlie 187). Her work consistently challenges the boundaries between theatre and dance, particularly because of her “interest in improvisation, her use of quotidian as well as virtuosic movement, and the incorporation of text into choreography” (Cummings 111). As a choreographer, one major characteristic of her style is a “creative mobility” that sets each dance dramatically apart from the next (Sommer 50).

Overlie began developing the Viewpoints in 1976, and began using them in her work as a professor at New York University’s Experimental Theatre Wing in 1978 (Overlie 220). She defines the Six Viewpoints as space, shape (design), time, emotion, movement, and story (logic) (192). Overlie’s philosophy is based around the idea that Viewpoints is a tool for artists to work on their own creativity. As she puts it, “Viewpoints is designed to help artists develop their own aesthetic perceptions by isolating six basic theatrical materials, so that each can be explored while the artists focus on developing their perceptual and interactive abilities” (190).

ANNE BOGART AND THE POPULARIZATION OF VIEWPOINTS

Theatre artist Anne Bogart is widely credited with popularizing Viewpoints for the theatre, though she credits the influences of other artists, especially Mary Overlie, The Judson Church, and her composition classes with Aileen Passloff at Bard College. Bogart got her MFA from New York University in 1977 and began to teach in the Experimental Theatre Wing in 1979. During the next years, Bogart worked as a director in New York and was particularly interested in avant-garde and site-specific performance. Bogart learned the Viewpoints while she was a colleague of Mary Overlie's at NYU, and director Tina Landau later learned them from Bogart. Bogart and Landau write that "it was instantly clear that Mary's approach to generating movement for the stage was applicable to creating viscerally dynamic moments of theater with actors and other collaborators" (5). Because Bogart eventually became more associated with Viewpoints than Overlie, there is an element of controversy over who "owns" the Viewpoints. Bogart and Landau allude to this when they write:

> Mary's approach to the Six Viewpoints was and continues to be absolute. She is adamant about their purity. To her chagrin and delight, her students and colleagues, recognizing the genius of her innovations and their immediate relevance to the theater, have extrapolated and expanded her Viewpoints for their own uses. (5)

In the late 1980s, Bogart and Landau did just that—they expanded Overlie's Six Viewpoints into nine Physical Viewpoints and five Vocal Viewpoints. In 1992 Bogart established a new theatre company, the SITI Company, and a summer training institute in

collaboration with Japanese theatre artist Tadashi Suzuki. The goals of Bogart and Suzuki's new company were: "(1) to create, perform and tour new productions; (2) to provide ongoing training for young theatre artists; and (3) to foster opportunities for cultural exchange with theatre professionals and audiences around the globe" (Bogart, *Afterword* 212). Between 1997 and 2003, the SITI Company's work became more widely renowned and moved into the mainstream of American theatre. They became known for a specific theatrical aesthetic, which included: "the triadic conceptual strategy of question-anchor-structure; the layering in performance of three quasi-independent texts (verbal/textual, physical/gestural, and visual/aural); a non-linear approach to theatrical time and space; and, most important, a rigorous, precise, and choreographic approach to movement onstage" (Cummings 97).

As the SITI Company's performance work became more publicized and respected, so did their actor training workshops, which included classes in Suzuki (a precise physical approach to training actors developed by Tadashi Suzuki's production work in Japan), Viewpoints, and Composition (a way of creating short new theatrical works). The most extensive and intensive version of Viewpoints training is at SITI Company's four-week Summer Training Institute in Saratoga Springs, NY. From this central hub of training, Viewpoints has become dispersed and is taught in many other places and settings. After the four-week long intensive, many SITI artists travel around the country teaching shorter workshops, which may range from a weekend to two weeks long. In addition, many artists who are trained by the SITI Company then go on to teach Viewpoints classes in college classrooms or community settings and to use Viewpoints in

production rehearsals. Despite the fact that each of these workshops would be specific to the teacher and the setting of the course, all would involve the basic structure of a Viewpoints session: actors participating in a highly physical training program that emphasizes physical spontaneity and ensemble.

DEFINING VIEWPOINTS

Now that I have historicized the development of Viewpoints and located its practice in a larger context of artistic experimentation, I will analyze the major texts on Viewpoints as well as my own embodied experience in a Viewpoints workshop to explore how the actor's body, mind and expressive self are conceptualized in Viewpoints training, and how these ideas relate to larger issues of authority and artistic agency.

In July 2008, I attended one of these dispersed trainings—a two-week workshop in Viewpoints and Suzuki at Links Hall in Chicago.[31] Links Hall is mainly a presenting venue for dance and performance, though they also offer workshops and space for rent. The workshop was taught by SITI Company artists Akiko Aizawa and Leon Ingulsrud, both originally members of Suzuki's company in Japan. While the SITI Company's summer training at Saratoga Springs combines three forms of actor training—Viewpoints, Suzuki, and Composition—I focus this chapter primarily on Viewpoints, as it is currently the most dispersed of these three methods.

In Viewpoints training, actors explore a variety of deconstructed theatrical elements known as the Viewpoints. Overlie, Bogart, and Landau articulate slightly

[31] This workshop took place July 7-18, 2008. Classes met Monday through Friday from 9:30 am to 1 pm.

different versions of the individual Viewpoints, but most of the same components are present in both systems. As noted previously, in Overlie's formulation the Six Viewpoints are space, shape (design), time, emotion, movement, and story (logic), while in Bogart and Landau's expanded model, they include the following elements: tempo (the speed at which movement happens), duration (how long movement continues), kinesthetic response (an impulsive response to stimuli), repetition (doing something more than once), shape (the contour or line the body makes in space), gesture (a specific movement with beginning, middle, and end), architecture (the actual physical surroundings), spatial relationship (the distance between things onstage), and topography (the floor pattern created by moving through space) (8-9).

Bogart and Landau believe that naming these theatrical elements is extremely important because names create a common vocabulary that theatre artists can use to communicate (8). Bogart, however, adamantly argues that Viewpoints is not a "method" of training: "I worry that people think of the Viewpoints as an answer as opposed to a question. This is what terrifies me. My big concern is that people see it as a technique as opposed to a practice. I worry that Viewpoints is considered a method" (Herrington, *Directing* 167). Bogart's objection to calling Viewpoints a "method" is most likely because the word "method" implies a certain rigidity that Viewpoints actively works against. I *do* consider Viewpoints to be a method of actor training however, though I agree that its practices are considerably more open-ended and flexible than those of other methods. At the SITI training I attended, Ingulsrud argued that the trainings were always evolving. He stressed that neither Viewpoints nor Suzuki is a performance style, and he

argued that they do not imply an aesthetic, as many people think. According to Ingulsrud, Viewpoints and Suzuki are specifically "training methodologies."[32] Ingulsrud's comments represent a continued desire to disavow any kind of rigidity in Viewpoints training, but I think the issue of aesthetics is a bit more complicated than his comments imply. Though I believe that theoretically, one could use Viewpoints to stage a wide variety of productions, the training tends to de-emphasize a realist aesthetic and privilege a presentational aesthetic with an emphasis on the visual and kinesthetic over the interpersonal.[33]

Composition, an essential part of the SITI Company's Saratoga Springs training, is a technique for creating fresh, original theatrical pieces in a short amount of time. In Composition, performers typically use what they have learned about time and space through Viewpoints to create these short works. According to Bogart and Landau, Composition "is the act of writing as a group, in time and space, using the language of the theater. Participants create short pieces for the stage by putting together raw material into a form that is repeatable, theatrical, communicative and dramatic" (137). If a typical text-based acting class culminates in performing a scene, it might be said that Viewpoints training often culminates in creating compositions.

These compositions can be created around particular themes for an original work or can use an established play text as inspiration. Typically a teacher or director will give

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[32] Ingulsrud made this comment in class on July 7.

[33] For more on the specific aesthetic of the SITI Company, see Scott Cummings' *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 7.

a group of actors a list of “ingredients” that they must incorporate into their composition, which may include elements such as a reference to a famous painting, a surprise entrance, a staged accident, and fifteen consecutive seconds of unison action (Bogart and Landau 150). The groups have extremely limited time to create their composition, which they then share with the group. Though my training at Links Hall only included a small amount of Composition, I will touch on the practices of Composition in this chapter, as they are closely tied to Viewpoints practice.

PURPOSE OF TRAINING

The Viewpoints classroom is a place of exploration and practice. A performer can train in Viewpoints intensively to develop her skills as a creator of new work, or she can take classes in Viewpoints to develop particular skills that will be useful to her in performance. The classes are a place to practice and develop one’s craft as a performer, to keep the skills of spontaneity and group awareness well-honed. Teachers of Viewpoints usually do not emphasize dramatic texts, and classes rarely culminate in a final product, such as a scene study performed and critiqued by the class.

In Viewpoints training, actors engage in a continuous *practice* of theatrical skills. In Overlie’s view, Viewpoints classes are a place for a performer to discover her own unique way of being in and seeing the world, something she calls a process of *investigation* (196). She describes the interaction of the Six Viewpoints as “The Matrix,” and argues that “The Matrix practice is designed specifically for the actor to enter into an experiential dialogue based on contemplation and emotion” (195). Bogart and Landau see Viewpoints training as having many purposes—one is to form and strengthen the bonds

of an ensemble, and another is to practice skills that performers will rely on in many different kinds of acting situations. They argue that Viewpoints and Composition "work to allow actors and their collaborators to practice creating fiction together on a daily basis using the tools of time and space" (Bogart and Landau 17). Landau in particular views training as a steady practice needed to keep the performer always ready to perform. She believes that

> As training, the Viewpoints function much as scales do for a pianist or working at the barre does for the ballet dancer. It is a structure for practice, for keeping specific 'muscles' in shape, alert, flexible. The actor, in the case of the Viewpoints, exercises awareness (awareness of the different Viewpoints), the ability to listen with the entire body, and a sense of spontaneity and extremity. (Landau, *Source-Work* 24)

Ingulsrud used a sports metaphor to discuss how Viewpoints training is an opportunity for an actor to practice her skills, saying:

> It seems to me that most acting classes that I've seen, if you think about it in terms of putting, that you have a ball and you have your putter and you have a hole. You miss, and so your teacher gives you some pointers, and so you hit it again. And you miss, and you get some advice . . . and it finally goes in, and everyone applauds. And then the next person goes up and they hit it and they miss, and some people are better than others, and so you go through it. Whereas, what I think training needs to be is: you get a bucket of balls, you stand in one place and you putt it until your

> percentage goes up. You just do it over and over. You get it in the hole, you just do another one…The point of the training is not to get it into the hole *once,* the point of the training is to increase the likelihood that you're going to get it into the hole (Personal Interview 2008).

Ingulsrud is critiquing acting classes in which the goal is to perform a scene once well, and instead he calls for training that, through repetition, increases the chance that an actor will be able to perform well when the opportunity arises. This idea of constant practice is modeled in the class structure. Unlike many scene study based classes, in which some students perform while others watch, in many Viewpoints training sessions, the entire class of students actively explores space and time throughout the entire session.

Viewpoints training is process-based, not product based. For Overlie, the purpose of training in Viewpoints is to continually question, investigate, and discover new aspects of one's artistic perceptions, not to produce a final scene. In Viewpoints as a whole, there is not necessarily a relationship to texts or dramatic material. In fact, Overlie emphasizes that the lack of texts in Viewpoints work is liberating because it "frees the actors from acting by allowing them to enter into a dialogue with what pre-exists in a production or a specific role" (195). Overlie notes that "in the Stanislavsky system, the product—that is, the play—is necessary for the actor to understand and participate in the training," but in Viewpoints, the ideas of text and character become one of many languages to work with (191). Actors training in Viewpoints do not learn how to create the emotional life of a character or how to analyze a dramatic text; instead they train to understand and experience the raw materials of theater, which could then influence the way they

approach character and text in the future. Overlie is adamant that Viewpoints training "is not art, but simply a preparation system for making art" (190). Since Viewpoints is a process-based training, there was no culminating event or final product during the training I participated in. Aizawa argued against the idea of a final product, saying on the last day that there was no way to package a neat little two-week Viewpoints and Suzuki bundle. Instead, the training is always ongoing.

APPLICATIONS TO PERFORMANCE

Though Viewpoints is clearly framed as a practice of preparing for performance, the training has several different applications in performance itself. First, the training develops skills such as awareness and spontaneity that can be useful to actors performing in a wide variety of performances. Overlie argues that all art is built from "abstract form, from elemental materials" but that these abstract materials can be shaped and applied to either realist or abstract expression (212). Though Viewpoints is often associated with abstract or postmodern production styles, Landau argues (much as Ingulsrud did) that "the Viewpoints are not a style, nor do they imply a style. The Viewpoints are meant as much for naturalism as they are for postmodern abstraction" (*Source-Work* 17). Viewpoints training can be a site for developing and practicing skills that make a performer more physically aware and responsive, which are skills that can be applied to almost any kind of performance. Aizawa emphasized that everyone is already "using" the Viewpoints in theatre, even without awareness or training, while Ingulsrud argued that Viewpoints can be used with regard to any style of performance:

> It's all stuff that's already there. If you're doing a Chekhov scene in a naturalistic style, you can still talk about the relationship to the architecture, the spatial relationship, what are the shapes, what's going on on the level of floor pattern. All of that stuff is all there. It's a question of whether or not you're aware of it or not. Becoming aware of it doesn't mean that suddenly it becomes all weird and wacky. You can keep it inside of that envelope of the set of naturalistic choices, but you're very aware of it. (Personal Interview 2008).

As previously noted, though Viewpoints can theoretically be applied to almost any kind of performance, the training does tend to privilege an aesthetic that is more visual and physical than realistic or naturalistic.

As Viewpoints has become more popular, the technique is now widely used as a directing and rehearsal tool. Over the last decade and a half, many mainstream directors who have studied with Overlie, Bogart, or their students have started to incorporate Viewpoints into their rehearsal process (Herrington, *Directing* 155). Bogart and Landau's core philosophy of viewing the actor as a creative collaborator underpins their suggestions for how to use Viewpoints in the rehearsal process. Bogart and Landau do not see actors as collaborators solely in the Viewpoints classroom; they want actors to be at the center of the rehearsal process as well. Ingulsrud shared a phrase that Bogart quotes a lot, "The director directs the play; the actor directs the role. You're actually designing the role" (Personal Interview 2008), which I think is a critical distinction that reveals important conceptions about the actor's agency in and responsibility to a production.

Using Viewpoints in rehearsal becomes a way for the actors and director to collaborate and continue a conversation during all stages of the production process.

Directors and theatre practitioners often use Viewpoints and Composition during the process of devising new performance. The Viewpoints are associated with original performance partly because the SITI Company frequently devises new work. For example, their original production *Cabin Pressure* (1999) was created to explore the relationship between audience and performer, and their 2001 production of *bobrauschenbergamerica* was created as a tribute to avant-garde Rauschenberg's influence. Bogart describes herself as having a "scavenger mentality," meaning that she frequently draws material from different sources and assembles it together in collage form (Cummings 39). In general, The SITI Company's work can be described as a process of putting new material together or taking already established plays apart (Cummings 38). Because of the way the SITI Company employs Viewpoints and Composition, the entire company creates the shows, not just the director or the playwright.

Just as actors can apply the skills of Viewpoints to many styles of performance, directors can use Viewpoints as a rehearsal tool with multiple kinds of plays. Bogart and Landau argue that directors can use Viewpoints in the early stages of rehearsal to help build ensemble and create a physical and verbal vocabulary that the ensemble can refer to for the duration of the process (122). Later on in the process, Bogart and Landau describe specific ways that directors can use Viewpoints to engage with the play at hand. They are not against beginning with a dramatic text, but when rehearsing a performance

that has a scripted play at its center, they emphasize using the text as inspiration but not being overly reliant upon it. They refer to the scripted play as "the source" and outline their belief that the whole ensemble should participate in "source work," which "asks each person to contribute, create and care, rather than wait to be told what the play is about or what their blocking should be" (Bogart and Landau 164). They suggest activities related to the script, such as conducting Open Viewpoints sessions with themes or elements of the play, or creating topographic floor patterns based on a character's life story (126-127).

In this way, Viewpoints can be just as useful in rehearsing a scripted play as it is for creating a new one. Herrington argues for the adaptability of Viewpoints, saying that their use "does not negate extensive text analysis or preclude psychological realism. Instead, the Viewpoints complement and enhance a wide range of individual skills and practices by providing an approach shared by an entire company" (*Directing* 157). In fact, several activities that Bogart and Landau suggest have much in common with a Stanislavsky-based approach to text, such as a writing activity in which actors create a written character portrait (128-129). These kinds of unexpected overlaps support Bogart and Landau's belief that Viewpoints is compatible with other techniques and methods of training (133). Viewpoints can be used to rehearse many styles of plays, and it need not be thought of as useful only for the creation of new work.

SEQUENCE OF TRAINING

The sequence of Viewpoints training varies depending on the particular class or workshop that a performer attends, and in this account I rely primarily on the Links Hall

workshop I attended when delineating sequence. The most comprehensive introduction to Viewpoints is at the SITI Company's Saratoga Springs intensive, where the training progresses from self and group awareness to learning and exploring Viewpoints and Suzuki, to more elaborate Composition work inspired by a SITI Company production in the early stages of development. Performers may also encounter Viewpoints at workshops around the country taught by SITI Company members, or college students and community members might take classes with a teacher who trained with Bogart or Overlie. Since both of these women are still working, the chain that links back to them is fairly short. Although with the publication of *The Viewpoints Handbook*, there has been an attempt to codify the way Viewpoints is taught, Aizawa and Ingulsrud argued that Viewpoints teaching is different from person to person (Personal Interview 2008). Ingulsrud described the goal of the two-week Links Hall workshop as being two-fold:

> We want to have two weeks in which somebody who's never done this before, no experience, gets on one hand enough of an exposure to it to know whether it's something they would want to pursue further [and] also enough exposure to it so that, assuming that there are benefits to it, that some of those benefits are actually manifest. I mean, both of these are methodologies that need to be studied over a long period of time, so it's impossible for them to be fully blossoming within two weeks. So that's one thing. The other agenda is for people who have more experience, who've been doing it for a longer period of time, to be able to touch in

> with them, have a conversation with them about sustaining the work that they're doing. (Personal Interview 2008)

The Links Hall workshop took place in a large dance studio with wood floors, white walls, and several banks of windows. There was nothing else in the classroom—no desks, no blackboard, no chairs. Approximately twenty students (a mix of men and women) were dressed in movement clothes—loose shorts and t-shirts. Quite a few people had traveled from someplace else to be at the workshop. There was a range of experience levels—some people had done the Viewpoints Intensive in Saratoga Springs while others had experienced Viewpoints at rehearsal or not at all.

The workshop began on the first day with an exploration of the five senses and sensory awareness in general. Ingulsrud explained that this is one of two different approaches to beginning the training. Some teachers begin with group awareness activities (which is how Bogart and Landau sequence the training in their book), but there is a subset of teachers who prefer to begin with sensory awareness, to work with the idea that you're introducing concepts that are already in play, all the time, but we are just not attuned to them (Ingulsrud 2008). In Viewpoints, both sensory and group awareness are taught through bodily engagement since "awareness is not primarily a mental or cognitive construction but a corporeal one that employs all the performer's senses in a visceral and somatic relationship with the world" (Murray and Keefe 143).

We spent two days learning the Viewpoints of space (spatial relationship, architecture, shape), a day learning the Viewpoints of time (kinesthetic response, duration, tempo), and a day learning the Viewpoints of time *and* space (gesture, floor

pattern, repetition). At the end of the first week, we had learned all the Viewpoints and started to use them in Open Viewpoints sessions. In an Open Viewpoints session, participants use the Viewpoints to improvise in space without a predetermined floor pattern, cultivating the skills of listening, awareness, and spontaneity.

A key aspect of Viewpoints training, and one that was obvious during the first week of classes at Links Hall, is that it fundamentally challenges received notions of artistic hierarchy, partially by de-emphasizing the primacy of text. Overlie sees the deconstruction of theatre into multiple elements as a radical shift away from a theatrical hierarchy that prioritizes story and emotion over all else (192), a shift from what she calls the vertical into the horizontal. When actors engage each of the Viewpoints separately, and then together, they are at the center of an exploration of all the theatrical languages available to them, which Overlie describes as work being done directly by the artist (190). Bogart and Landau also describe both Viewpoints and Composition as challenging the status quo of theatrical training and instead representing "a clear-cut procedure and attitude that is nonhierarchical, practical and collaborative in nature" (15). Key to this inversion is the fact that, unlike Stanislavsky-based acting techniques, Viewpoints is not dependent on a text for training. Instead, as Overlie notes, "The Six Viewpoints unhooks the actor from the issues of acting a character in a play, placing him in the theater with the deconstructed languages that surround him" (191). At the Links Hall workshop, text was a minimal part of our training, especially for the first eight days, during which we worked strictly physically.

During the second week, performers participated in Open Viewpoints sessions that were each prompted by a different focus or a particular directive. For example, the teacher might instruct us to begin our session moving alone and in chaos and gradually come to move together in harmony, or performers might be inspired by a specific piece of music that sets a tone. Towards the end of the second week, we got a very limited introduction to a few more advanced aspects of Viewpoints—the Vocal Viewpoints, an activity that introduced some of the building blocks of Composition, and a scene work activity that introduced the idea of physical score. In the second week, we did have some engagement with text, as we were asked to memorize a very short scene from *Macbeth*. We worked with the text during the last two days of the workshop for two main reasons—to learn and practice the Vocal Viewpoints and to explore ways of separating text from movement. The session did not culminate in the performance of polished *Macbeth* scenes, but rather the text became a way to further experiment with the theatrical elements of Viewpoints.

ACTOR'S BODY-MIND IN VIEWPOINTS

In Viewpoints training, the body is framed as both the primary site of learning and the source of the actor's creativity. While the mind or the intellect is seen as a component of the actor's preparation, there is a heavier emphasis on the body's ability to intuitively respond and react in the moment. The primary mode of learning in Viewpoints training is experiential and corporeal, with an emphasis on learning through active physical engagement. Viewpoints training, through encouraging the actor to shift her point of focus to her body and its perceptions, encourages what Phillip Zarrilli calls a "second-

order" mode of bodymind awareness, or one in which an actor focuses active intention on what she is doing in the moment (*Psychophysical* 33).

Both Mary Overlie and Anne Bogart use rhetoric that suggests an intentional privileging of the body. Overlie argues that for the artist to take on the role of direct participant in her own creative work, she must first work to prepare the body for this task (204). Bogart and Landau also frequently reference the body, and offer the directive numerous times that we "listen with our entire bodies" (20), which suggests a certain openness and sensory awareness that is central to Viewpoints. In Viewpoints, physical action is more important than spoken text or emotion (or, if not *more* important, then the primary place from which an actor should begin). For instance, Bogart and Landau write that "Speaking is a physical act, not a psychological one. Work with the notion that onstage one must speak from necessity: when all else is physically signaled and expressed, one speaks" (115). The idea that speaking comes from a bodily need is a radical shift away from psychological realism, in which verbal expression is the manifestation of inner psychology.

In Viewpoints training, bodily engagement is the primary mode of learning. In most Viewpoints activities, participants move through space and physically explore each Viewpoint by attempting to focus their physical and mental attention on one element at a time. Instructors emphasize learning through the body and learning about the body, and there is no talking while exploring the Viewpoints, especially in the early sessions. While participating in the workshop at Links Hall, I noticed two types of bodily learning. In the first type, I was becoming more aware of my own body's perceptions and reactions while

also becoming aware of my body in time and space. I was learning to experience my body from the *inside out*, or to engage what Zarrilli refers to as the *surface body*, which is characterized by how the five senses open the body out into the world (*Psychophysical* 51). At the same time, I was learning to perceive my body from the *outside in*, speculating about what it might look like in spatial relationship with other people, engaging what Zarrilli would call the *aesthetic outer body* (*Psychophysical* 52).

My Viewpoints training at Links Hall began with the *inside out* approach to the body, which could be called a phenomenological approach in that it directs attention "to the world as it appears or discloses itself to the perceiving subject" (Garner 2). On the first day we participated in a physical exploration in which we tried to isolate each of the five senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, touch) to activate our overall ability to use sensory awareness. The instructors also participated in the exploration. Ingulsrud introduced an exercise where he asked us to "listen" to the room as if it were a piece of music. Then we "teleported" into the room and pretended it was an art installation, viewing everything with that lens. This exercise made small details suddenly apparent and more interesting than they were before. For example, I noticed previously unapparent details such as splotches of red paint on the floor and different kinds of doorknobs on each door. Next we explored the space trying to focus on just one sense at a time, which I found to be unexpectedly difficult. Smell was particularly hard, because I realized that I don't usually notice smell unless it changes. I also found it next to impossible to explore the space using taste. At times, I noticed myself getting bored or losing focus. I tried to find ways of keeping myself interested in the activity, but there were moments when I wanted

to move on. Notably, although everyone was participating simultaneously, each person's experience of the activity was dependent on what he or she noticed in his or her own body. I noticed that no one watched me, corrected me, or told me what to do. Afterwards, people responded to the experience briefly through discussion, but the primary tool of learning was through direct experience with our own body. In this way, the "content" of what we were learning was entirely subjective—each actor was learning independently about how he or she engages the world on a sensory level.

On the second day, we began to explore the idea of how the body perceives itself from the *outside in*, in relation to time and space, through attention to the aesthetic outer body. We learned about the individual Viewpoints, in this case, those that dealt specifically with space (spatial relationship, architecture, and shape). We explored these Viewpoints by putting our bodies into motion. For example, to explore spatial relationship, we began by walking through the space. Aizawa introduced a scale of movement from one to ten (slowest to fastest) and called out different numbers for us to adjust to. She froze us in *five* and in *ten* and asked us to notice that the spatial relationships in *ten* were more extreme and thus more interesting. I noticed here that Aizawa chose to give us her observations rather than ask us what we noticed, reflecting her sense as the instructor that she was trying to communicate a specific skill.

Next, we all sat down and Aizawa arranged five chairs around the room. She told people that we could go up one by one to change the positions of the chairs. As people changed the chairs, and the meaning of the space, Aizawa offered encouragement. "Genius!" she might say about a particular choice. She noted (and I noted along with

her) how the changes dramatically transformed the space, and every so often she asked for our responses. I found this activity especially useful because it highlighted how space and spatial relationship create story, drama, and change. For example, all five chairs facing away from the audience signifies differently than one chair directly facing four other chairs, which conjures images of interrogation and confrontation. Aizawa then asked half of us to improvise with the chairs but also to see ourselves as the chairs, as able to affect story and space because of *where we are*. In my group, I could feel that people were hesitant, but we improvised with our bodies and the chairs. Although this activity felt fun and improvisational to me, I still wondered whether I was doing it "right." I made a mental note that the idea of being "right" is hard to get away from, even though Ingulsrud specifically stated on the first day that there is no such thing as right or wrong in Viewpoints. Though Viewpoints encourages a mode of teaching that does not judge things as specifically right or wrong, there are certainly aesthetic biases in the work that I will explore in more detail as I discuss how the "ideal" actor is conceptualized.

Continuing the investigation of how the body relates to environment, we explored the Viewpoint of architecture by finding something that interested us in the room (the floor, a window, a nail in the floor) and having a "conversation" with it using our bodies. This could mean a number of different things, from directly touching the object to giving it one's focus from across the room. Then we all faced one side of the room and went in a small playing space one by one, with people having a specific relationship to a piece of architecture. It was striking to me to notice that when a person had a specific physical

relationship with an aspect of architecture, it immediately drew my attention to that piece of architecture, in a way that I often found to be visually and dramatically engaging.

To work on shape, we got into pairs and had a "conversation" using only angular shapes. Though the idea of "conversation" comes up often in Viewpoints, it is specifically a *physical* and not a verbal dialogue. My partner would make an angular shape with his body, and then I would respond by making an angular shape of my own, triggered in some way by his shape. Then we used round shapes, and then a combination of both. Partners could then find a new partner, or blend into a bigger group. The Viewpoints work on this day made me more conscious of my body in space and made me think about how I might use space as a director. Aizawa emphasized this duality, too, noting that Viewpoints teaches you to be conscious of yourself and your body, but also gives you that "director's eye" perspective. That larger perspective is assumed to be something that actors should develop in Viewpoints, not a skill that should only be associated with a director. At this point, I could see how Viewpoints activates the space and makes actors aware of themselves in relationship to everything that surrounds them. All of the work we did on that particular day, and would continue to do while learning the individual Viewpoints, was physical, with minimal time for verbal processing.

In Viewpoints, the body is associated with the subconscious, which is considered to be where the actor's best ideas and true creativity come from. As in Meisner training, actors are commonly told to get "out of their heads," (Bogart and Landau 60) as the mind and intellect are seen as impediments to true creativity. The emphasis is instead on instinctual response. According to Joseph Roach, the idea of unconscious impulse has a

long history in the field of acting. Roach notes that "nineteenth century theories of mind-body relationships increasingly adopted the view that nonrational and instinctive forces in man reside in a mysterious and capacious place called the unconscious" (*Player's Passion* 179). A belief in the creative power of the unconscious is apparent in the rhetoric and practice of Viewpoints. Both Viewpoints and Composition "employ a strategy of quick or instantaneous response in order to inhibit the tendency of aspiring artists to think too much, to impose premature judgments on work in progress, and to rationalize the creative process instead of trusting intuition, impulse, and accident" (Cummings 130). As Joan Herrington notes, Viewpoints has an "essential demand: that all acting choices be dictated by an instinctual response to what is happening onstage" (*Directing* 157). Using this kind of language tends to promote the idea that creativity is mysterious and spontaneous, when in fact the process of creativity is multi-layered and involves many aspects of consciousness.

The language used by Viewpoints practitioners reveals a paradoxical conception of the intellect. On the one hand, the instinctual response of the body is privileged in Viewpoints class work and actors are encouraged not to consciously think about what they are doing. On the other hand, when the SITI Company rehearses a play, the entire company is often deeply engaged in research and analytical work which the company refers to as "Source Work." Before beginning to physically work on the show, the company does extensive intellectual and dramaturgical work, such as "watching related movies, videos, DVDs; listening to related music; reporting on related topics, including historical research on the movement, etiquette, etc., of the period of the piece" (Bogart

and Landau 165). This preparation is a key component of the SITI Company's creative process and in fact, a preparatory phase in which one learns the formal conventions of an art form is an essential part of any kind of creative cycle (Sawyer 60). Although the Viewpoints and Composition work is primarily physical, the artists begin by actively engaging with ideas and images about the play that they can then explore physically. Herrington calls the Viewpoints approach to text "informed spontaneity" which she defines as "a combination of careful script and/or character analysis with a nonintellectual approach to onstage movement" (*Directing* 159).

While I like the idea of "informed spontaneity," I find that the rest of Herrington's analysis (and the rhetoric of Viewpoints practitioners) reflects a continuous Western tendency to view mind and body as separate. Herrington's further description of the SITI Company's mind-body relationship is also revealing: "They engage their intellect and consider the material from which the text will eventually be culled. But in order to create the physical structure freely, the Company must put aside the intellectual and proceed from an instinctual point of view" (*Breathing* 129). The use of the phrase *put aside* suggests that the mind and body can be separated, revealing the binary between body and mind that runs throughout much of Viewpoints training (and of course through much of Western actor training at large.) If Viewpoints practitioners were to shift their language in such a way that acknowledges that the body-mind is always engaged in creative work, albeit in different levels of consciousness, the technique might begin to challenge the mind-body binary and instead promote psychophysical integration.

ACTOR'S CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSIVE SELF

In most methods of actor training, the actor is assumed to be creative, but the specific articulation of *how* an actor is creative can vary dramatically. In Stanislavsky's system of acting, the actor is conceived of as a creative artist who shoulders much "responsibility for the interpretation of the play" (Carnicke, *Focus* 162). Lee Strasberg's strand of Method acting tends to focus on the actor's ability to creatively link his or her own experiences to those of the character. In Viewpoints, in addition to being sourced from the body's instincts, the actor's creativity is conceptualized as spontaneous, driven by action and not emotion, and self-directed yet collaborative. Because Viewpoints conceptualizes the actor as a primary creative collaborator, traditional power relationships between teacher/student and teacher/director are frequently subverted, leading to greater creative agency for the actor both in the classroom and in rehearsal.

In Viewpoints, one major aspect of the actor's creativity is the ability to spontaneously respond in the moment. Overlie argues that an artist working with Viewpoints must first learn to perceive all that is around her and then interact with it. This process is "always dependent on what transpires in the moment" (190). Bogart and Landau believe that an actor is most creative when he or she exists in a state of being fully engaged, responsive, and attentive. They compare this state of creative engagement to athletes being 'in the zone:' "Both sports and Viewpoints involve play, the kind of play young children engage in—that of reacting to something that happens in a spontaneous fashion, without self-consciousness, judgment or hesitation" (Bogart and Landau 209). Though they don't use the language of "creative flow," their ideas very much parallel

creativity researcher Mihály Csikszentmihályi's concept of *flow* as an optimal engagement of an artist's mind and body through creative work (*Flow* 111-112). In a 1999 interview with Joan Herrington, Bogart expressed a belief that true creativity is intuitive and comes from the body. Bogart stated that "all artists and scientists agree that to do one's best work, one has to bypass the frontal lobe—just essentially stop thinking and just respond and work intuitively" (*Directing* 159). Because the actor's creativity is conceptualized as a spontaneous, impulse-driven process, much of the Viewpoints training is structured around physical improvisation rather than text-based work. Kinesthetic response is one of the key Viewpoints, and isolating it encourages the performers to notice whether they respond to stimuli or ignore their impulses.

At the Links Hall workshop, Aizawa introduced kinesthetic response through an activity called lane work.[34] Five actors stood in imaginary lanes that cross the room, and Aizawa said we had several choices for movement—walking, running, jumping, sitting down, or falling down—but that we should always be responding to something else. We were supposed to base our movement on impulse, not on conscious choice. Actors must stay in their specific lanes, though, so movement was not entirely free. During this activity, I wondered whether I was truly moving in response to other stimuli or whether I was inventing things to do. I found myself doing quite a bit of conscious thinking during the lane work, even though I knew I was supposed to be connecting to my physical impulses, which points to the inseparable nature of body-mind. It also raised questions about what was "creative" in the moment. If I consciously decided to fall down, was it

[34] July 10, 2008.

less creative than if I felt the impulse to fall down in response to something another actor did?

I became more aware of responding kinesthetically to my surroundings during Open Viewpoints sessions (movement improvisations with no predetermined floor pattern), which we began to participate in more frequently during the second week of training. One particularly dynamic session began when Aizawa divided the class in half and asked my group to remain onstage.[35] She told us to think of a song to sing as loudly as we could and then to engage in "The Flow," an exercise in which people move through space using a specific movement vocabulary and cultivating awareness of how their bodies kinesthetically respond to stimuli.[36] All the songs I knew suddenly vanished from my brain completely. I stood there, searching the back corners of my mind for something interesting, something creative and surprising. The only song I could think of in this moment was "Who Will Save Your Soul?" by the pop singer Jewel, and I sang it with as much energy as I could, projecting the notes across the dance studio. Other voices followed, some singing big bellowing musical numbers and others chiming in with silly children's songs. There was a sense of surprise, randomness, and the unexpected as we heard these songs enter the space. After each person sang, he or she entered the larger playing space and joined other participants in the movement of The Flow.

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[35] This activity took place on July 15, 2008.

[36] I don't know the origins of the name of "The Flow" exercise in Viewpoints, but it certainly overlaps in an intriguing way with Csikszentmihályi's use of the term "flow" to describe a state of total creative engagement.

In this activity, I could feel my body engaging in kinesthetic response. There were moments where I felt the joy and freedom that comes from investing fully in a moment-to-moment experience where creative choices are made impulsively. I sensed a heightened energy flowing between participants. As we continued to move through The Flow, Aizawa asked each of us to sing our song again when she called our name and clapped her hands. As people sang their wildly different songs, I could feel my bodily movements being influenced by their tone, volume, and rhythm. At the end of the session I felt more attuned to the process of kinesthetic response. The random elements of people's songs, their loud voices, and their exuberant energy contributed to an Open Viewpoints session where my abilities to respond and be surprised were heightened and magnified. Here, as in other Viewpoints activities, mapping an unknown element (the songs) onto something known (The Flow) is part of what leads to spontaneity.

Unlike forms of actor training in which the actor's creativity is conceptualized in terms of the actor's ability to genuinely express inner emotion, Viewpoints concerns itself more with the way an actor creatively and physically responds to circumstances, which may or not may not involve emotion. At first glance though, Overlie's take on emotion sounds similar to that of Method acting. She writes that "the Six Viewpoints initially studies emotion through presence practices to develop the actor's ability to observe and embrace their inner life, and to expand their willingness and ability to share that inner world with others" (Overlie 202). However, Overlie's philosophy diverges from psychological realism in that she separates emotion from story, and doesn't believe emotion to be the *primary* component of theatre. Instead, she believes that all theatrical

elements are equal. Bogart more forcefully argues for the importance of physical action when she says, “what you’re looking for in a rehearsal is an action or a shape or a form in which the emotions can *always be different*. Because the minute you pin down an emotion, you cheapen it. So I prefer to look at the body, at placement, at arrangement. I’m interested in the emotions, but I don’t want to strangle them” (qtd. in Diamond 33). Another way of looking at Bogart’s comments is to say that she is invested in creating structure (action) and then letting any emotions emerge through a full engagement in specific moments. It’s important to note that in Viewpoints, the term *action* does not mean a psychological action, or a “goal” as often used in psychological realism, but it instead refers to a physical movement or action.

This kind of body-centered approach continues throughout the training, even when text is introduced. When actors work on scenes in Viewpoints, the physical actions or “score” of a scene often come before any text has been introduced. This approach is extremely different from the approach of psychological realism, in which action or movement should always be psychologically motivated and justified. In writing about scene work, Bogart and Landau emphasize the primacy of movement when they say “‘No acting please’ is the operative here, until the movement organically and inevitably begins to inform the action and lead to emotional choices” (131). Even when Viewpoints moves from pure bodily exploration into scene work, movement and the body remain central.

One particular activity from the workshop illustrates this philosophy of physical movement or action first. On the last day, we worked with a piece of text that everyone had memorized throughout the week, a scene from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (the SITI

Company was, at the time, in rehearsal for a production called *Radio Macbeth*). In pairs, we created a movement score for the scene. Ingulsrud emphasized that our physical "score" did not have to be sequential or realistic. The process of creating the score was entirely improvisational and visual and our choices were not motivated by character psychology. Once we had our movement score, we tried adding text to the scene. Ingulsrud encouraged us to experiment with the Vocal Viewpoints (tempo, pitch, dynamic, acceleration/deceleration, timbre, and silence) as well, which took the scenes even farther into the realm of abstraction.

We performed our scenes for the class. I felt solid about my lines and the physical score but tried to improvise with my timing and vocal delivery. After we performed it once, Ingulsrud asked us to do it again, but completely differently. The second time I was able to focus more on kinesthetically responding to my partner, because I could not do what I had practiced. As an audience member, what I found most interesting were the subsequent variations on this activity. I watched as three pairs simultaneously performed the same scene, but with only one person speaking at a time. It was fascinating to watch actors listening, sharing the lines, and responding to their impulses. Then my partner and I went up with another pair, and Ingulsrud told us to swap partners. We would be vocally performing the scene with our original partner, but physically responding in a dialogue with our new partner. I found it easier to kinesthetically respond this way and thought it led to more surprising moments between me and my new partner than it had with my original partner because originally the text and movement were more linked.

In general, I had mixed reactions to watching the scenes, particularly to the use of Vocal Viewpoints. People were speaking their lines in extremely abstract, wild ways, which certainly expands the way an actor sees his or her vocal potential, but I found it hard to find any kind of meaning in the scene (which was, of course, probably beside the point). Ingulsrud stressed that you might not want to *perform* your scenes this way, but that this exercise can be a way to open up new possibilities for a scene that you might not find if you just stick literally to the text. This exercise illustrates that in Viewpoints, the actor first makes creative physical choices and then tries to be fully in the moment when performing them. As Bogart and Landau note: "Viewpoints can free an actor from the belief that: 'My character would never do that.' Viewpoints is a tool for discovering action, not from psychology or backstory, but from immediate physical stimuli" (125).

The actor's creativity in Viewpoints is paradoxically both self-directed and generously collaborative. The process of learning the Viewpoints is in large part about developing your own "artist brain," as Ingulsrud phrased it during the workshop, and this happens partly through actors taking on the role of noticing and monitoring their own artistic progress. Overlie argues that working with the Viewpoints allows the artist to develop into "a responsible, self-reliant individual" (214), and the actor does this partly through taking on a certain amount of responsibility for her own learning process. Overlie stresses that the actor is "in the position of being his own guide" (195), and she deemphasizes the role of the teacher, arguing that "most of the education in Viewpoints actor training comes from the actors' direct contact with the six languages through the practices" (195). Overlie uses the metaphor of the performer as *original anarchist*, "one

who knows through experience what the right action is, and who can listen with great humility and clarity to others without losing himself" (195). Her words emphasize a duality at play here—the actor must be aware of the self as individual but also able to interact with and learn from a group.

Bogart and Landau likewise emphasize that Viewpoints is a tool for developing self-awareness. They argue that Viewpoints can be "a gauge for your own strengths and weaknesses, for discovering how you are free and how you are inhibited, what your own patterns and habits are. Again it is *awareness* that offers this gift—the option to change and grow" (20). In this way, Viewpoints training offers a way to discover the self as artist. The training aims to create a self-directed and confident actor, partly through subverting traditional actor/teacher power hierarchies. Bogart and Landau posit that "Viewpoints helps us recognize the limitations we impose on ourselves and our art by habitually submitting to a presumed *absolute authority*, be it the text, the director, the teacher" (19). Bogart and Landau frequently point to the fact that actors trained in Viewpoints are able to self-direct and will instantly respond to just the mere suggestion that they need to pay attention to spatial relationship (123). Ingulsrud emphasized that one essential element of Viewpoints is

> The idea that the actor can make choices, can make aesthetic choices that have value, not just on the behavioral level, on a psychological or emotional level, but that they can make design choices [about] how the actor is interacting with the environment and the content of the play . . .so

> that they are a fully engaged creative participant in the process. (Personal Interview 2008)

In Viewpoints, the actor needs to be capable of making choices confidently and freely and contributing to the process as a whole.

The actor in Viewpoints is certainly seen as a self-directed creative artist, but also as a *collaborative* creative artist whose energies are directed toward the group, not as an individualized artistic genius whose attention is turned solely inward. This represents a challenge to a U.S. culture that is heavily invested in notions of individual creativity. In Viewpoints practice, even as an actor works on developing her own artistic and perceptual abilities, she does so in conscious relationship to the people and environment that surround her. Being open and available to the group makes one's own creative contribution possible. The actor's ultimate role is as "co-creator" of the artistic event (Bogart and Landau 18). This conception of the actor as a collaborative artist is partially linked to the legacy of experimental and feminist theatre collectives in the 1960s and 70s whose practices emphasized collaboration and collective creation.

Despite her emphasis on self-reliance, Overlie also sees creativity as a collaborative process and frames Viewpoints as being part of a movement in which the definition of an artist shifted from creator/originator to observer/participant (189). Overlie's view is that the artist's creativity does not come from an inner well of personal vision, but instead from observing and interacting with others and with the world. Bogart and Landau emphasize interaction as well, arguing that "Viewpoints relieves the pressure to have to invent by yourself, to generate all alone, to be interesting and force creativity.

Viewpoints allows us to surrender, fall back into empty creative space and trust that there is something there, other than our own ego or imagination, to catch us" (19). They believe that de-emphasizing *individual* creative contributions paradoxically frees actors to be more creative, to fully engage the moment.

Toward this end, group awareness and listening is often a significant component of the Viewpoints training, and much of the early sessions are spent on group ensemble activities. One such group activity is High Jumps, in which the group stands in a circle and attempts to jump in place together. The jump, however, "is not initiated by any individual but, rather, happens because of a shared consent" (Bogart and Landau 26). These kinds of exercises work to develop a fluid group dynamic in which participants are fully aware of and responsive to those around them.

Most of the activities we did during the Viewpoints workshop were as a large group or in smaller groups; we rarely performed a solo or even in pairs. One activity in particular emphasized the way that the actor's creativity is conceptualized as both individual *and* collaborative.[37] To begin, participants got into groups of three and chose who would be the beginning, middle, and end performers. The beginning people created a spatial relationship, and then began to move when Ingulsrud put on a slow, lyrical piece of music. He quickly stopped them and told them to go back to the beginning, do the same movements again, and then add new movement. This process continued over and over until a repeatable sequence was created.

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[37] We participated in this activity on July 16, 2008.

Then Ingulsrud asked the middle people, and then the ending people, to perform the entire beginning sequence. I was the end performer in my group, and found this task to be extremely hard. I had thought I was watching the sequence very closely, but when I was performing it, my movements felt imprecise. In a processing conversation afterwards, many performers mentioned that it was difficult to repeat what they had watched because people's movements tended to be more vague than specific. Ingulsrud recommended paying attention to several things at the same time: trying to repeat the same movements, making it your own, and trying to have the same energy or spirit as the original. The process continued, with the middle people creating a new sequence that we all performed.

Finally, the end group created a new part. Ingulsrud changed the music yet again, and this piece had a whimsical circus sound. I felt myself kinesthetically responding to the music, but also paying attention to the spatial relationships created by my group. Ingulsrud would stop us frequently to have us repeat our movements from the beginning and sometimes I could not remember exactly what I had just done, even though I felt very energized, connected, and focused. Our piece ended with everyone's bodies taking up bizarre, contorted shapes.

As a final step, each group performed the entire sequence—beginning, middle, and end—but Ingulsrud changed the music unexpectedly. He said that now we had our score and it was time to perform it as superbly as we could. My group went first, and it was jarring to perform the sequence to new music because I wasn't sure exactly when to do things. The performance, though, went surprisingly well. I committed a large amount

of energy to the sequence, and though the new music threw me off balance, it ended up leading to an energized and unexpected performance. Finally, the beginnings and middles performed the whole sequence to completely different pieces of music, and each performance had a completely different tone and energy. In our discussion afterwards, Ingulsrud encouraged us to think about what we were doing as creating a role that can be performed again, and to be generous in thinking about who can perform what we're doing. I was amazed that the group collaborated on creating a piece entirely with our bodies, without speaking. Ingulsrud noted that this can be a fresh way to create work, because sometimes when a group sits down to talk about something, the ideas begin to flatten out or stall. This exercise clearly shows how in Viewpoints, individual artistic contribution comes from being part of a group, a concept which is key to the pedagogy of Viewpoints training.

CULTIVATING THE IDEAL ACTOR

Just as each method of actor training cultivates a different kind of body, mind, and creativity, each kind of training also cultivates a different kind of idealized actor. Embedded in each technique are standards of excellence that an actor strives to meet, as well as core assumptions about what an ideal actor should be. Even though these standards and assumptions can morph and change depending on instructors' pedagogical choices, it is still productive to examine how practitioners of Viewpoints articulate what makes an actor "good." In addition to being spontaneous and self-directed yet collaborative (two major traits of a "good" actor in Viewpoints which I have already

discussed in detail), the ideal actor is also physically adept, responsive in the moment, and aware of the power of presence.

Because of the primacy of the body in Viewpoints training, the ideal Viewpoints actor has a highly responsive, precise, focused physicality. Overlie believes that an ability to deconstruct and experience movement leads an actor to increased physical clarity and a new ease with expression (204-205). She notes that any serious practice of Viewpoints requires extensive physical training, since "the body is the instrument of observation and participation" (215). Notably, Overlie advocates integrating several alternative kinds of movement work into Viewpoints training, including Contact Improvisation and Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen's techniques of body-mind centering (215). Bogart, Landau, and the SITI Company similarly encourage a Viewpoints performer to be highly attuned to her body's capabilities, and Viewpoints teachers guide students toward this goal through inviting them to participate in exercises that are rigorously physical. The SITI Company emphasizes this kind of physicality in their own productions, and in fact, one of the distinguishing features of a SITI Company production is their heightened physicality onstage.

The ideal Viewpoints trained actor is responsive in the moment of performance. Overlie, Bogart, and Landau all stress the importance of vitality onstage, which is cultivated primarily through an emphasis on kinesthetic response as well as an emphasis on sustained openness. Bogart and Landau emphasize repeatedly that Viewpoints work is about being in the moment, as when they write that "*Always, when working with*

Viewpoints, the choices are made intuitively and based on surrounding events" (emphasis theirs, 66).

The idea that an excellent actor is fully engaged in the moment and responsive to his or her surroundings is not unique to Viewpoints. Joseph Roach posits that much contemporary training is invested in the philosophy of what he calls "romantic vitalism," or the idea that the body has "a special energy, a life force that exceeds the sum of its interdependent mechanisms. An impulse rather than a reflex, this autonomous force accounts for 'true' spontaneity" (221). Roach cites the work of Grotowski and Artaud as prime examples of this philosophy, and notes that in this mode of working, "impulses are trusted and habits are shunned" (*Player's Passion* 221). Roach goes on to argue that throughout the history of acting, theorists have been torn between opposing poles. On one hand are the mechanists, who believe that actors must be controlled and precise like a machine or chaos will ensure. On the other hand are the vitalists (the most extreme version of which emerged in the 1960s), who believe that the performer's impulses and spontaneity are more important than text and all else (Roach, *Player's Passion* 161). The Viewpoints approach to spontaneity, though, occupies a liminal space in between these two extremes. There can be a highly mechanistic aspect to Viewpoints, as shown in the exercises that take place on a formal grid for example, or that restrict performers to a limited movement vocabulary. However, the philosophy of Viewpoints is that you set a structure so that within that structure, there is room for things to always be different. Paradoxically, the actor may discover kinesthetic response through doing activities that seem mechanical or repetitive.

Emphasis on spontaneous, uninhibited response is also a primary component of several strains of Americanized Stanislavsky training, particularly Meisner technique. Even though the philosophy of Viewpoints is quite different from that of Meisner technique, much of Bogart and Landau's language about being "in the moment," mirrors the language of Meisner technique very specifically. The authors acknowledge as much when they make a note that their work is especially compatible with Meisner's (Bogart and Landau 133).

The ideal actor in Viewpoints is comfortable onstage and has a presence that exudes focus and confidence. Overlie sees presence as "a special kind of theatricality" (Sommer 49). Overlie writes that actors should be "interesting to watch and capable of being watched without a role to carry them. Truly interesting actors are truly present with themselves and able to deliver that presence to the audience with confidence, detail, and generosity" (202). She believes that presence practices are essential components of training that work to expand performers' connection with their own emotions and widen the circle of connection to include the audience (202). This work happens through exercises such as "Presence Work," in which actors sit on chairs, allow themselves to be watched, and notice how their emotions change throughout the experience (Overlie 202). While Presence Work is in some ways a conduit to emotion, it is also a way for an actor to understand that "he can communicate to the audience everything that is transpiring simply by being present" (Overlie 212). Bogart and Landau agree that presence is fundamental: "Presence is related to moment-to-moment *interest*; interest is something that cannot be faked or indicated" (29). Cummings also argues that presence is a central

component of both Viewpoints and Suzuki training: "The trainings in tandem aim to develop—and *maintain*—performers with a powerful and dynamic presence, even in stillness or when doing 'nothing' on stage, so that their work commands attention through its energy, focus, interest, and truthfulness" (108). [38]

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER FORMS OF TRAINING

Steven Drukman has argued that theatre training often does not evolve with the times. In "Entering the Post-Modern Studio," he writes, "the lessons young theatre students usually learn are fundamentally the same as those their teachers and their teachers' teachers learned. Even those theorists and instructors who claim to be anti-Method are often using the same vocabulary—'motivation,' 'action,' 'objective'" (30). Drukman points to Viewpoints as an innovation in theatre training, partly because it introduces a fundamentally different vocabulary. Despite the fact that Viewpoints training represents a paradigm shift in actor training, or perhaps because of it, Viewpoints is a technique that is compatible with, and in fact *complements* other acting techniques.

At first read, Viewpoints seems diametrically opposed to, and therefore incompatible with, the methods of psychological realism. Bogart and Landau in particular have offered strong critiques of psychological realism-based training, and have framed Viewpoints as an alternative to the Americanized version of Stanislavsky training. They offer a harsh critique of American actor training, arguing that:

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[38] For a historical overview of the concept of "presence" in acting, see the following books by Joseph Roach: *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1993) and *It*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

> The approach to acting for the stage in the United States has not changed much over the past sixty or seventy years. Our misunderstanding, misappropriation and miniaturization of the Stanislavsky system remains the bible for most practitioners. Like the air we breathe, we are rarely aware of its dominance and omnipresence. (Bogart and Landau 16)

Notably, Bogart and Landau take issue *not* with Stanislavsky's articulation of his system, but with the way it has been adapted in the United States and transformed into the American Method. Their harsh critique of the American Method's emphasis on emotion points specifically to Lee Strasberg's adaptations. Bogart has said that her main issue with the Americanized version of Stanislavsky is with the actor's thinking "If I feel it, the audience feels it" (qtd. in Diamond 32). Viewpoints works *against* an emphasis on the creation of genuine emotion, which can lead actors to become self-focused and isolated. While not against emotions arising in acting, Bogart and Landau believe that Viewpoints offers actors an alternative point of entry into their work that is based not on emotional excavation, but on action and relationship with other people in the room. The action-based philosophy of Viewpoints is actually more similar to Stanislavsky's later work than one might expect. In fact, Scott Zigler stated that "In Russia (where perhaps the best actor-training is in the world right now) they are currently developing what Stanislavsky was doing at the end of his career—which is far more structured, formal and physical work, like the Viewpoints" (qtd. in Drukman 31).

While Viewpoints is, in many ways, an alternative to Stanislavsky-based training, it is by no means incompatible with other methods. Even though Bogart and Landau see

Viewpoints as a unique and vital way to train actors, they argue that Viewpoints "is not at war with Grotowski, Stanislavsky-based or classical training. This is because it functions in a postmodern 'both-and' structure, rather than an 'either-or' condition" (215). In fact, Bogart often works with actors who have a background in psychological realism, and many actors say it is necessary to their process to have both kinds of training. SITI Company actor Tom Nelis argues exactly this point:

> Well, psychological realism is necessary for me to do either Suzuki's work or Anne's work. The beautiful sculptures, the physical narratives that they both create need an enormous amount of specific justification. . .without an understanding of psychological realism, I think I would be swimming in their work. I wouldn't be able to make it make sense, so I don't think it would make sense for an audience. (qtd. in Coen 31)

This is an interesting point because it brings up questions about whether Viewpoints training can stand alone, or whether actors feel that it is fundamentally a complement to other forms of training. Aizawa and Ingulsrud have both trained exclusively in Viewpoints and Suzuki and do not express a desire to learn psychological realism. However, they would both argue that Viewpoints needs the counterpoint of Suzuki (Personal Interview 2008). I do think that unlike some other methods of training, Viewpoints does not claim to have all the answers, to be "the" way to train. It is a way of training that develops specific skills, and is promoted as a kind of practice that can be useful in many theatrical contexts.

While in theory, Viewpoints is compatible with many other methods of training, in practice, it has come to be paired specifically with Suzuki training. The two forms of training may never have come together, were it not for the fact that Anne Bogart and Japanese theatre director Tadashi Suzuki, having met in 1988 when Bogart traveled to Japan to see Suzuki's work at a summer theatre festival, shared a common interest in developing cross-cultural theatrical opportunities, which led them to co-found the SITI training institute in Saratoga Springs.[39] Suzuki, a prominent director in Japan, developed a style that fused Eastern and Western traditions, a theatre that "cut across cultural and historical boundaries by borrowing elements from the modern shingeki, the traditional noh and kabuki, and Japanese martial arts and using them to stage pared-down versions of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy and also Chekhov" (Cummings 88). To develop performers who were capable of matching his aesthetic vision, Suzuki emphasized the engagement of a "stillness activated by animal energy" (Cummings 88). To train towards this goal, Suzuki led actors in a series of demanding, choreographed physical exercises that emphasized a connection with the ground and with their feet as well as making a strong connection to the audience (Cummings 88). These exercises began to be codified into the Suzuki method of training after the success of Suzuki's 1974 production of the *Trojan Women* required him to constantly teach the exercises to new and rotating cast members (Cummings 89). As Suzuki traveled to the U.S. to teach

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[39] For a more thorough discussion of Anne Bogart's relationship with East Asian art forms, see both Scott Cummings' *Remaking American Theater: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and Eelke Lampe's article "Disruptions in Representation: Anne Bogart's Creative Encounter with East Asian Performance Traditions," *Theatre Research International* 22.1 (Summer 1997): 105-110.

workshops, American practitioners began to display interest in his techniques. However, when Suzuki and Bogart's SITI Company began to train extensively in Viewpoints and Suzuki, the two distinct methods became cemented together in the company's practices. The growing renown of the SITI Company and the dispersal of its training methods meant that Viewpoints and Suzuki continued to be linked in the training of many actors.

Unlike Viewpoints training, which emphasizes openness, group awareness, and spontaneity, Suzuki training emphasizes precision, stillness, vocal energy, and projecting a strong presence. Cummings describes it as a process that "develops the performer's capacity to initiate movement and speech (and, by extension, expressive stillness and eloquent silence) from the center through the repetition of codified exercises that test the limits of control, strength, and balance" (118). Ingulsrud presented Viewpoints and Suzuki as "complementary but contradictory." He laid out the contrast, explaining that Suzuki is rigid, has a clear sense of right and wrong, and you can never be good at it. On the other hand, he argues that Viewpoints is nonjudgmental and you can never be wrong. Eelka Lampe also usefully parses out a main difference:

> Another way of addressing the issue is to refer to the Suzuki training as primarily a solo exercise to cultivate one's self, or, more precisely, one's feet and center as foundation and expressive tools from which vocal work naturally arises; and to see the Viewpoints training as primarily a group exercise to cultivate one's relationship to others as well as one's kinesthetic and visual/aural awareness. (*SITI* 189)

The actual process of training in Suzuki is very much rigid, individualized, and in some ways invested in traditional power relationships between teacher and student, rather than challenging them as in Viewpoints. It also does not involve a particular encouragement of individual creativity (Allain 78). For example, on the first day of Suzuki training at Links Hall, Aizawa said she wanted to spend time "downloading" information about the Suzuki sequences to us. Aizawa demonstrated specific postures and sequences of postures to us (referred to as Suzuki Basics 1-4). We watched her and then repeated the sequences ourselves. Everyone performed the Basics simultaneously, but there was little connection with fellow participants. The focus is instead on your own body and your own connection with an imagined audience. She and Ingulsrud then came by and physically corrected our body postures. During instruction, Aizawa emphasized that the body should be in a straight line, the performer should always be directing energy downwards, and we should constantly be working on our presence, on the idea of projecting energy, even in stillness. The pedagogy of Suzuki training is more similar to that of a dance technique class than to many acting technique classes.

Suzuki is extremely different from Viewpoints, and at many points I doubted whether Suzuki was an effective training method for me personally. I also wondered whether this technique that was developed very specifically in a Japanese context was really so easily translatable into American actor training programs.[40] The most

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[40] Paul Allain also raises questions about whether or not elements of Suzuki training, especially the vocal work, are translatable within an American context in his article "Suzuki Training," *TDR* 42.1 (Spring 1998): 66-89. For further critique of such "interculturalism" in theatre, see: Rustom Bharucha's *Theatre and the World: Essays on Performance and Politics of Culture,* (New Dehli: Manohar, 1990); and

convincing argument I heard about the usefulness of Suzuki came from Ingulsrud, who argued that non-Western theatre has always had a strong emphasis on form and formal components. In this context, a performer is considered “good” when he or she can properly execute a specific form, and this is what performers practice to do. Ingulsrud then argued that one of the effects of psychological realism and naturalism as a style is that it is harder to know what you are supposed to do to be “good” at it. He said that much psychological realism training is like psychotherapy and borders on emotional abuse. Therefore, Ingulsrud argued, one thing Suzuki does is to give the performer a form to practice over and over again, a way to find discipline in practice.

Although in many ways Suzuki is very much overtly invested in a traditional “expert and novice” relationship between teacher and student, I also found interesting moments where this was subverted. As I began to learn the form, I noticed that I did not need specific feedback from the teacher. Instead, I was completely aware when I was doing something “wrong” and became increasing astute at knowing what I needed to do to correct myself. It doesn’t always mean I was capable of taking myself to the next level, but I did notice an absence of judgment from the teacher. Instead, I placed myself in the role of evaluator who critiqued my own performance and tried to coach myself to get better at specific things. Aizawa said that in Suzuki, “Students or participants can make their own goal, which is really great, I think. It’s not about ‘This is that, so you should

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Interculturalism and Performance, Eds. Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta, (NY: PAJ Publications, 1991).

master it.' No. This is the way for you to train, so they can train or they can set the goal by themselves, which is really unique I think" (Personal Interview 2008).

ROLE OF AUTHORITY

From inverting the hierarchy of theatrical elements to re-envisioning the role of the actor as creative collaborator, Viewpoints work aims to destabilize traditional theatrical power relationships. Overlie, Bogart, and Landau offer salient critiques of the way power usually works between an actor and higher authority, and call for a vision of theatre in which the actor is a primary creative collaborator. At all levels—from theory to classroom to rehearsal—Viewpoints is a method of actor training in which traditional power relationships have the potential to be subverted.

At its theoretical core, Viewpoints involves breaking down theatre into individual elements that are given equal weight and importance. Overlie frames the creation of the Six Viewpoints as being fundamentally about redistributing power when she claims that the Six Viewpoints "releases the existing materials of theater, formerly organized into various rigid hierarchical orders, into a fluid state for reexamination" (188). Overlie's belief that emotion and story dominate the theatrical hierarchy and that the other languages should be explored on the same kind of scale reflects an abiding commitment to subverting power, and this idea is present at the core of all Viewpoints work.

This emphasis on challenging theatrical power relationships plays out in the way Viewpoints is taught in classrooms. Like Overlie, Bogart and Landau emphasize that the training aims to create a self-directed and confident actor through subverting traditional theatrical power hierarchies that give more authority to the text, director, or teacher (19).

Bogart strongly advocates looking for the uniqueness of each actor rather than trying to create actors who fit a preconceived mold:

> I'm going to say the ultimate stereotypical thing. They say there's two ways to make a sculpture. One is you have an image in your head and you have a stone, and you bang away at that stone until you have the thing that's in your head. The other way is to know that inside the stone there's a sculpture, and your process is to find the thing that's already there. I very naturally belong in the second category . . . I say, 'In any actor there is a perfect actor. How do I find that perfect thing?' instead of trying to bang that person into my image of what they should be. (Bogart qtd. in Daniels 103)

Bogart articulates a philosophy that the teacher or director should not simply impose their will on an actor, but rather work with the actor to find his or her personal best potential.

Viewpoints requires the actor to monitor his or her own work and progress. The teacher functions as more of a guide than a traditional leader who imparts specific information to students. Overlie argues,"this work cannot be taught in a right/wrong, good/bad format. Guidance is only given to insure clarity of focus and separation of each of the six languages" (190). Bogart and Landau believe a Viewpoints instructor should be flexible and open rather than rigid. They write that "The most essential quality in teaching Viewpoints is being open to what actually occurs in the group rather than what you had hoped would occur" (Bogart and Landau 61). Aizawa spoke to the challenges of this kind of open-ended teaching approach: "Viewpoints is a conversation always. It's not

just doing it and then the evaluation, it's a conversation with the students, that's why [teaching it] is difficult" (Personal Interview 2008).

In the Links Hall workshop, we rarely got specific, personal feedback on our work in class, a radical shift from most other acting classes I have taken. Direction and feedback would usually be given to the whole group, and take the form of suggestions for how to improve our work rather than specific critiques on what we did wrong. At the beginning, I found this dynamic disconcerting. Perhaps as a result of my previous performance training, I often found myself hoping for approval, wanting to be "good" at Viewpoints, and looking for external validation of what I was doing. At the same time, I could see by watching others that doing things "right" or being perfect was not the goal. I observed that the most engaging people to watch were comfortable with their own unique energy and were present in the moment, not hoping to impress the teacher or fellow classmates. Towards the end of the workshop, I began to find this lack of personal critique incredibly freeing, and I noticed that I was beginning to self-correct or evaluate my work, giving myself specific goals for a session and then noting later whether or not I met them.

There is an interesting tension between this "teacher as guide" philosophy and some of the actual pedagogical practices that run through Viewpoints training, however. Many progressive pedagogues argue for student-centered learning that places the students' observations and reactions at the center of class and the "teacher as guide" philosophy would seem to fit into the definition of progressive pedagogy. However, much of Viewpoints training relies on the knowledge and expertise of the teacher to

function *as a guide*. As Aizawa suggests, teaching Viewpoints is a specific kind of skill. The teacher does not represent the ultimate authority in Viewpoints, but in his or her role as guide, he or she is responsible for setting the parameters of an activity and offering side coaching meant to help students engage more fully in the moment. Students often respond to the instructors' direction and command while moving from activity to activity, without much time for discussion or processing. As a participant, at times I felt myself at the center of my own training but at times I found myself blindly following the specific parameters laid out by the teacher. Julia Whitworth critiques this dynamic in Viewpoints training, as well as the relationship she sees between individual and group, saying: "It's curious to think that a training so dedicated to freedom, to open creativity, to release, could be seen to inhabit a space of subjection even more acutely than the rigidity of Suzuki. In Viewpoints one is rendered, becomes a subject, via the will of the group" (*Translating* 26). Though Whitworth's critique points to the complexities of power relationships in Viewpoints training, ultimately I believe that Viewpoints still offers the potential for an actor to more fully explore the languages of the theatre and find ways to be a self-directed artist. While it would be extremely difficult to learn Viewpoints without a sensitive, responsive, observant teacher, this does not have to result in that teacher becoming the ultimate authority on whether a student's work is valuable. Viewpoints pedagogy represents a model in which the teacher sets a structure, and then students are free to play and explore within that structure. While this may not fit the definition of student-centered learning, it does allow the student room to explore and process things on their own and as part of a group.

As an actor moves out of the classroom and into a rehearsal setting, this same concept of the actor as creative collaborator becomes central to a reconfiguration of power relationships between actor and director. Bogart and Landau critique a kind of relationship in which the director has a vision for the play and the actor's job is to do what the director "wants." They argue that "the word 'want'—much overused and abused in our American system of rehearsing a play—implies a right and wrong. It encourages artists to search for a single satisfying choice, driven by seeking approval from an absolute authority above them" (Bogart and Landau 18). Rather than adhering to this traditional model that seeks to place the director above the actor in the power hierarchy, Bogart and Landau argue that Viewpoints creates a model for how to work with actors in a more collaborative way. Ingulsrud said that his experience using Viewpoints means that "as a director, I can say to a group of actors, 'Something's wrong with the spatial relationship, can we clean it up?' and I don't have to micromanage" (Personal Interview 2008).

In Viewpoints, the ideal model for an actor-director relationship is one in which the whole ensemble contributes to the process and feels essential to the theatre-making experience. Bogart and Landau invoke the term "parental approval" to refer to the traditional relationship between actor and director, invoking a familiar power dynamic that frequently involves judgment and disapproval (18). Instead of placing the actor in a position where he or she needs to seek approval, Bogart and Landau's vision of an ideal rehearsal is one in which participants can all offer ideas and make creative contributions. In fact, Bogart does not see the director's role as "telling the actor what to do." She says

that she is “very frustrated with what a rehearsal is for most American actors. It seems a little bit small. As a director, when I hear an actor say ‘Is that what you want?’ I think, ‘Is a rehearsal about doing what the director wants?’” (qtd. in Diamond 32). A Viewpoints-based rehearsal process can be significantly more empowering for actors because it helps to create shifting power relationships, a common vocabulary, and a cohesive sense of ensemble. SITI Company actor Will Bond says of the company’s collaborative process, “there is great joy for an actor to have that much responsibility, and to be trusted like an adult. I often think of her directing style as that of a conductor. She gives you the score, such as it is that day, and we take off and she conducts it” (qtd. in Coen 37).

Of course, as the principles and techniques of Viewpoints become dispersed, directors can choose the extent to which they want to use Viewpoints in rehearsal, or can choose to define the power relationship as they wish. Some directors may feel uncomfortable with their role in a Viewpoints-based rehearsal process. Herrington argues that “working with the Viewpoints involves relinquishing some of the control it has taken directors a century to acquire. When actors become active participants in the overall creation of a show, power is redefined: the traditional director/actor hierarchy disappears” (*Directing* 156), a power which some directors might be reluctant to relinquish. Still, Viewpoints represents an important contemporary intervention into the power relationship between actors and directors. As the technique continues to become more dispersed, time will tell if its contributions to shifting the balance of agency will endure.

Chapter Four

Towards a Pedagogy of Generative Creativity: Actor-Creators at the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre

"In the absence of a courageous and compelling theatre that speaks to their concerns, devising has been a way for young artists to engage with each other in the stimulating territory where art and ideas commingle to generate excitement, provocation, even hope."

-Joan Schirle, *Potholes on the Road to Devising,* 99

"There's a danger about writing this stuff down and then it gets set into words and therefore set in stone."

-Joe Krienke, Dell'Arte Faculty, Personal Interview 2009

PRELUDE

It was a chilly summer night in Blue Lake, California. I stood on the lawn of the Dell'Arte outdoor amphitheatre waiting for the thirtieth anniversary production of *Intrigue at Ah-Pah* to begin, part of the 2009 Mad River Festival. Audience members carried sleeping bags and blankets to wrap around themselves as well as grocery bags full of picnic supplies. A live band played jazzy, swingy tunes. Workers at the concession stand poured plastic cups full of wine and draft beer from a local brewing company. As the sky turned even darker blue and fog began to roll in, the lawn was packed full of people and the air crackled with anticipation. I was struck by the palpable combination of audience energy and a sprit of play, sprinkled with a dose of irreverent informality.

Though I had read much about the work of the Dell'Arte Company, *Intrigue at Ah-Pah* was the first production I'd seen. First produced in 1979 and originally starring

Founding Artistic Director Joan Schirle, the show engages with local issues about who gets to control vital regional water supplies through a detective genre production that employs over-the-top physical comedy and larger-than-life characters. It had many elements that I expected from a Dell'Arte show based on my research: it seemed designed to appeal to a local audience (in fact, I didn't get many of the jokes that the crowd laughed at) and constantly referenced the specificity of place; it was a devised show that drew on multiple performance genres; the characters were physically specific; and the comic timing was impeccable.

The program advertised that all of the performers were graduates of the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, which offers a one year Professional Training Program (PTP) as well as a three-year MFA in Ensemble-Based Physical Theatre. So how did the performance of *Intrigue at Ah-Pah* reflect the work done at the school? What does it mean to train in physical theatre? How does the Dell'Arte Company's commitment to creating theatre with a community-based ethos come into play in their actor-training program? These were some of the questions I had in mind as I participated in the Dell'Arte Intensive, a four-week program designed to introduce students to the basic philosophy of the school's training.

HISTORICIZING THE DELL'ARTE SCHOOL

The Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre is located in Blue Lake, a small town in Northern California surrounded by coastal redwoods. The school describes itself as "the U.S. center for the exploration, development, training and performance of the actor-creator. Its mission is to employ and revitalize the traditional physical theatre

forms to explore contemporary concerns" (Schirle, *History* N. page). Italian theatre artist Carlo Mazzone-Clementi and his wife Jane Hill founded Dell'Arte in 1971 (originally in Berkeley), and the school opened in Blue Lake in 1975. In Italy, Mazzone-Clementi worked with a variety of theatre artists who would eventually influence his teaching style, including French mime artists Marcel Marceau and Jacques Lecoq, renowned mask maker Amleto Sartori, and modern day commedia practitioner Dario Fo. Part of Mazzone-Clementi's goal in creating the Dell'Arte Company and School was "to bring the European physical training tradition to the United States and to develop actor-creators through training in mime, mask, movement and ensemble creation" (Schirle, *History* N. page). The Italian form of commedia dell'arte was a major influence on Mazzone-Clementi and heavily influenced the non-psychological approach that the school's training program would embody. According to company member Donald Forrest:

> [Mazzone-Clementi] was part of a group of people who after World War II revitalized the ancient form [of commedia]. It included an exploration of the mechanics of how the masks were made and an investigation into how to play characters from a physical perspective — from appetites, not from psychology. It was the antitheses of the Moscow Art Theater which was the vogue when he arrived here. That 'Who am I? Where am I? What color is my character? What do I do on Saturdays when I'm not in this play?' stuff was all bullshit to him. (qtd. in Doran N. page)

The Dell'Arte School is known for emphasizing two main principles: that all theatre is local, or "theatre of place," and that the *actor-creator* is central to theatre

(Buckley 41). Neither of these ideas are completely unique to Dell'Arte, but in fact come from a long lineage of theatre practitioners who have experimented with community-based arts and actor-centered theatre. The historical lineage and influences on the school are eclectic and wide-ranging. According to Schirle:

> Dell'Arte International came into existence anchored in the great traditions of the European popular theater: Commedia dell'Arte, melodrama, the world of circus, fairs and streets, pantomime, music hall. The long river of tradition includes actor-creators such as Shakespeare, Moliere, Chaplin, and Nobel Prize winner Dario Fo; it includes literary masterpieces as well as a huge body of nonliterary theater that is topical, visual, nonverbal, and original. (*Movement* 187)

In addition to the influences mentioned by Schirle, current practices at Dell'Arte have also been affected by the work of French artist Jean-Louis Barrault and actor and movement theorist F.M. Alexander. I will now investigate in further detail several historical lineages that are embedded in the work of the current Dell'Arte program: physical theatre, mime, commedia dell'arte, and community-based theatre.

PHYSICAL THEATRE TRADITIONS

In the late 1980s, Dell'Arte changed its name from the Dell'Arte School of Mime and Comedy to the Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre. This shift was significant because while theatre that emphasizes the body of the actor in space has a long history, the actual term *physical theatre* had just become popular in the 1980s (Murray and Keefe 14). In *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction*, Simon Murray and

John Keefe identify several different trajectories that physical theatre has taken through time—a mime tradition with roots in court jesters and circus, a dance tradition stretching back to social court dance and including the work of German artist Pina Bausch, and an avant-garde tradition that challenges dominant societal values and includes the work of Artaud and companies like The Living Theatre, who placed the actor's body in a position of primacy (53-72). While Anne Bogart and Mary Overlie's Viewpoints can be considered a descendent of the dance tradition and the avant-garde tradition, Dell'Arte can be considered a direct descendent of the European mime tradition. Murray and Keefe argue that "one of the key characteristics of the mime tradition (as of many others) is its rediscovery of certain earlier practices which fall outside hegemonic conventions," (53) including the form of commedia dell'arte.

While some argue that *all* theatre is physical, Murray and Keefe claim that "the key line of distinction between the range and nature of physical actions within text-based theatre, and those forms we might with some confidence label as 'physical theatre,' lies around notions of authorship, authority and the creative role of the actor/performer" (17). Artists who create physical theatre, including those at Dell'Arte, can be said to be connected through a shared commitment to devising work rather than using pre-existing text, challenging established theatrical power hierarchies, and placing the actor or performer in a central creative role. The central role of the actor is especially key to physical theatre traditions. While profiling several teachers who teach physical theatre including Eugenio Barba, Anne Bogart, and Jacques Lecoq, Murray and Keefe conclude that:

> The training practices of all these innovative pedagogues—but with varying degrees of emphasis—place the actor in a position of compositional creativity, rather than merely as the conduit for a writer's script or the director's interpretation. All regard the actor as part of the shared authorial process of making the work in question. (137)

This key emphasis of Dell'Arte's work—the centrality of the actor-creator—is not therefore new or unique to them; in fact it comes from a long lineage of physical theatre traditions, especially mime and commedia dell'arte, that rely on the actor as the source of generative material. It is worth looking closely at the European mime tradition and commedia dell'arte to examine why the actor's role in these performance traditions differed so vastly from scripted theatre forms.

LEGACIES OF EUROPEAN MIME: JACQUES COPEAU AND JACQUES LECOQ

Performances using body and gesture are, quite obviously, a deep tradition in cultures around the world. Annette Lust's history of mime begins with ancient Greece and Rome, but regardless of where these traditions began, "one could broadly summarize all mime forms, whether stylized and symbolic or natural and spontaneous, as expressive movement brought into play by the mime artist, actor, dancer, or clown" (6). Historically, mime has been a non-text based theatrical form with the performer at the center of creation and expression. Twentieth century European mime, with its emphasis on actor-creators, an anti-realist aesthetic, and eclectic training practices, has left a visible imprint on training at the Dell'Arte School. The practices of two French theatre artists in

particular, Jacques Copeau and Jacques Lecoq, still resonate deeply within the contemporary practices of Dell'Arte.

In 1913 Jacques Copeau, whom Marvin Carlson terms "the most influential theatre director of his generation in France," (338) founded an acting school called Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, with the goal of creating an ensemble of performers who would train together using techniques of mime and mask in a rural, natural setting. In part, he was rebelling against the commercialism of French theatre and the dominant artistic style of the belle époque, which valorized "all things beautiful and ornate" (Evans 6). Many of his ideas about training practiced at the school influenced the training model at Dell'Arte. For example, Copeau offered a clear vision of an actor-creator. He said, "Aim for nothing less than making the actor, not only the medium, but the source of all dramatic inspiration" (qtd. in Evans 78). Copeau rejected realism as interfering with the actor's creative potential and instead embraced an eclectic and physical approach to training actors. He also believed that the actor's training should be about more than performing in commercial theatre. Instead

> Copeau's mission was to develop the 'actor-artist,' a creative and mature individual whose best work grew within a group of fellow actors. Such a vision was directly antithetical to the conventional system of the time, whereby a student went to a dramatic academy, got an acting job, and then never thought again about their skills and techniques. (Evans 119)

This anti-commercial philosophy also manifests in the contemporary practices of the Dell'Arte School.

Copeau also strongly believed in the principles of ensemble and eclecticism in actor training. For the idea of ensemble, he drew on commedia dell'arte as a model because "the commedia dell'arte troupe or the circus family represented a close-knit band of performers drawing on a rich tradition of improvisation and physicality, and sharing the economic realities of producing and performing their work" (Evans 51). Copeau's training philosophy consciously drew on many traditions and Evans argues that "the blending of traditional skills with those of the acrobat, the clown, the commedia actor and the story-teller is a remarkable innovation, even now" (65). Even though Copeau was inspired by commedia dell'arte, he didn't want to do historical recreation but wanted to create new characters for contemporary times, so he encouraged actors to learn a variety of skills and create their own stories and dramatic situations. He employed techniques such as "introducing his student-actors to the acrobatic and clowning skills of the circus; encouraging them to create their own characters and scenarios, using song, music and dance as well as drama; and developing mask training exercises to include the half-mask" (Evans 79-80). Copeau's eclectic approach to training and emphasis on acrobatics, mask, commedia, and clown are visible in the modern day approach of Dell'Arte.

Copeau's ideas about theatre influenced a generation of French artists, including people such as Marcel Marceau, Etienne Decroux, and Jacques Lecoq, who all developed their own styles and schools of mime. Marceau is known for popularizing whiteface illusionistic pantomime; Decroux for a style called corporeal mime in which actors expressed ideas and emotions through codified movement; and Lecoq for a movement based theatre that combined acting, dance, and clowning (Lust 110). Though many

accounts present each of these artists as singular innovators, they of course were in dialogue and collaboration with other artists of the time and the artistic developments that came before them.

Though Dell'Arte's founder, Carlo Mazzone-Clementi, worked with Marcel Marceau, the pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq has been most influential on the work of Dell'Arte for two major reasons. First, because Mazzone-Clementi worked with Lecoq in Italy, and second, because Ronlin Foreman, Director of Pedagogy at Dell'Arte, studied at Ecole International de Theatre Jacques Lecoq in Paris and counts his work as a major inspiration. Lecoq founded his school in 1956 after working in Italy with Piccolo Teatro di Milano and mask maker Amleto Sartori. Like Copeau, Lecoq's actor training is based on several key assumptions: movement is the basis of theatre; the actor is a creative source of material; and the actor's creativity can be engaged through explorations of different styles, or dramatic territories.

Lecoq's philosophy of actor training is based around movement and the idea that all theatre is physical. Lecoq says that "Movement is the basis of everything. We call the art of acting *le jeu*—it is a physical act" (qtd. in Rudlin 201). Lecoq's teaching is based on a conception of mime as "a silent language that precedes, accompanies, or follows the spoken word when it is present" (Lust 4). It is not based around what many people envision mime to be, the whiteface illusionistic mime made popular by Marcel Marceau, which Lecoq teaches only as a period style (Rolfe 36). In Lecoq's broad view, mime involves recognizing and observing the world and then imitating it through movement and the body (*Movement and Gesture* 68). Movement analysis and improvisation are

therefore at the heart of Lecoq's pedagogy.

Two other key concepts in Lecoq's work are play and neutrality. Play involves a sense of "openness or availability" (Murray and Keefe 146). In the course of study at Lecoq's school, there is a unit on what is called the neutral mask, which "invites the wearer to activate and sensitise the rest of the body, to explore a physical and sensual relationship with the world and its matter" (Murray and Keefe 145). The mask is intended to be "neutral" in that it does not portray a specific character type or suggest a particular emotion, but obviously, even this neutral mask suggests a certain style. There is valid criticism about the idea of finding neutrality in the body, because, as theorists such as Marcel Mauss have reminded us, there is no such thing as natural movement that exists outside of society and culture.[41] However, neutrality might be the wrong word to discuss what Lecoq does. Murray and Keefe argue that

> Although Lecoq's use of language may open him up to such criticisms, these practices are essential heuristic strategies and devices which operate at two reinforcing levels: as imaginative metaphor to facilitate a different way of seeing and being in the world, and as pragmatic teaching instruction to help students open themselves up corporeally and psychologically to a range of possibilities which will help them as actors and theatre makers. (Murray and Keefe 146)

The teachers at Dell'Arte expressed discomfort with the word "neutrality," as though

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[41] Mauss makes this argument in the essay "Body Techniques," reprinted in *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader,* Eds. Keefe and Murray, (New York: Routledge, 2007.)

agreeing with Murray and Keefe that the word does not accurately express what Lecoq's pedagogy encompassed. Teachers at Dell'Arte do not use the word neutrality, and there is a focus instead on noticing exactly what the body does and how even the most "natural" seeming movements are in fact, a choice, which is perhaps the same idea that Lecoq was striving toward.

In Lecoq training, the actor is a distinct creative artist who is a source of generative material. Lecoq argued that "Mine is a school of creativity. I remind the actors that they are auteurs" (qtd. in Rudlin 201). Students learn to become physically aware and flexible through improvised exploration and mask work but the primary way they learn is through the *auto-cours* (self-course), which are weekly performance assignments that are entirely student-generated. Actors are constantly creating new work unsupervised by authority.

At the Lecoq school, teachers guide students to experiment in a variety of dramatic territories including tragedy, melodrama, commedia, and clowning, which "offers students an entire palette from which they can draw to create compelling theatre" (Brady 33). Like Copeau, Lecoq was not interested in historical recreation of these forms, but in what they have to offer the contemporary theatre artist. He said "I don't bury myself in historical references. I try to rediscover the spirit of these forms" (qtd. in Rudlin 201).

Many aspects of Lecoq's pedagogy—an actor-creator model, the use of dramatic territories—are found in the current work at the Dell'Arte School. Schirle explains that

> Students inspired by Lecoq who choose to study in the U.S. sometimes

> come to us because we are the only full-time professional actor-training program in the States devoted to the work of the actor-creator. [We offer students the tools] to make theater, not tools to make the actor act better. (qtd. in Brady 33)

Schirle also explains how Dell'Arte has been inspired by both Lecoq and Copeau: "While his training approach was based on Lecoq's pedagogy, Carlo modeled his own school after Jacques Copeau's, by locating it in a rural area and developing a resident professional company" (*Movement* 187). Traces of both of these legacies are still visible in the daily practices of pedagogy at Dell'Arte.

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

Throughout its long and varied history, commedia dell'arte has remained a form in which the actor is a primary participant in the creation of the work. Commedia dell'arte began in sixteenth century Italy when actors took folk forms such as masking and dance and combined them into a theatre form, passing their techniques down through the generations as "professional secrets" (Rudlin 2). Commedia was initially popular in part because its fast-paced, physical style appealed to a wide variety of people. In the Italy it developed in, people spoke in many dialects, but "Because the *commedia* depends not on the literary merit of a text, but on the actor's talent for improvisation, if his acting was lively and ingenious and he could communicate through movement and gestures, it mattered little whether Pantalone spoke only the Venetian dialect or Dottore exclusively Bolognese" (Lust 39). It became even more popular in the seventeenth century, but then

fell out of favor until it became the subject of interest to theatre practitioners in the twentieth century who wanted to reinvent the form (Rudlin 4).

Commedia dell'arte generally features masks, stock characters, improvisation, and bawdy comedy. According to Lust, "The scenarios are short and simple and the action flexible enough to allow the actor freedom to improvise, mime, and clown" (39). Commedia players wore half-masks, usually made of leather, that represented different "types" of characters such as Pantalone, an old miserly character, or zannis, a whole variety of servants. The mask represents a persona, a loose outline of a character that the actor must fill in, but the actor has a responsibility to bring the character to life. With no scripted dialogue as a guide, the actor's talent for physical and verbal improvisation was key. An actor in commedia was a well-rounded performer: "the actor developed his art to a high level. In addition to studying history, literature, and philosophy, he trained the body and voice and acquired the skill of spontaneously blending words and movement" (Lust 39). The twentieth century saw an expansion of interest in commedia, though most artists were not interested in historically recreating the form, but in rediscovering what the form could offer to contemporary actors and audiences. Many artists seem to have been inspired by commedia's extreme physicality, broad comedy, potential for actor-generated story and character, and popular appeal.

COMMUNITY-BASED THEATRE

One of the most unique aspects of actor training at Dell'Arte is the emphasis on the specificity of place and the importance of community. Dell'Arte is, to my mind, one of the only acting programs that actively promotes concepts of community-based theatre

and incorporates notions of community-based theatre into their actor-training practice. The company itself has its own engagement with the local community, but the way they integrate this ethos into their performer training is particularly noteworthy.

In the introduction to *Performing Communities*, Jan Cohen-Cruz usefully traces some of the different threads that run through the history of community-based art. She identifies several different lines, including: the art/life movement, which involves the experimental art of artists such as John Cage; and activist performance, such as the performance tactics of suffragettes (10-11). Cohen-Cruz argues that, "woven amidst all these threads is an emphasis on participation and access" (11). While examining Dell'Arte as an example of community-based theatre, Cohen-Cruz situates the company as belonging to a lineage of European popular theatre traditions:

> Popular theater has historically relied on techniques accessible to people no matter what their education, such as the physical, archetypal Italian commedia dell'arte and Mexican carpa, or tent show. The popular is often linked with democratization of theater, extending to the working class by virtue of content, form, and venue. (18)

Other general characteristics of community-based theatre that are true about Dell'Arte are: "the primacy of place, deep interaction with constituents, and commitment to goals including and exceeding the creation of great theater" (Cohen-Cruz 3). Schirle's articulation of the company's philosophy echoes Cohen-Cruz's assessment of what qualities community-based theatres share: "Since we adopted a philosophy, and I believe invented the term theater of place, we've had a commitment to that – to doing pieces that

reflect the issues, the themes, the characters, the life of around here" (*Interview* N. page). This focus on creating for and sometimes about a local audience distinguishes Dell'Arte from some other ensemble-based companies who create new work, such as the SITI Company. The Dell'Arte Company frequently creates shows that engage with local themes, characters, and issues, such as *Intrigue at Ah-Pah*, which examined issues of water ownership and environmental preservation or *The Korbel Trilogy* (1994-1996), a soap opera-esque local saga set in Humboldt County. The company also engages with community in other ways:

> We have developed programs with local schools, hosted benefits. We created numerous plays about local themes, characters, history and issues, held open houses, started a summer festival, marched in parades, joined civic groups, gave our work to the local public-access TV channel, held community forums, toured to most of the towns in our region, and gave umpteen free performances in three counties. (Schirle, *Walking* N. page)

I don't want to strictly romanticize Dell'Arte's relationship with community, however. As Miranda Joseph suggests in *Against the Romance of Community*, there are ways in which a romantic discourse of community obscures the effects of capitalism and denies the very real differences between community members. The company's practice involves a struggle with issues such as how to deal with community expectations and how to include a diversity of perspectives into their notion of community. For example, Dell'Arte created a project called *Wild Card* (2002), about the opening of a casino on

nearby Native American land, but Native American community members did not feel their voices were fully heard in the creation of the piece. During the production, as part of an Animating Democracy grant, three diverse writers were invited to attend the production and offer their perspectives on the process of combining art and civic life. David Rooks, a journalist and Oglala Lakota Sioux member, critiqued the company's inability to truly engage Native American voices, which prompted Dell'Arte to re-examine its relationship with the community and to consider new strategies for engagement, for example, offering a scholarship to interested community members from the Rancheria to study at Dell'Arte.[42] As this experience shows, it is useful to look at Dell'Arte's goal of community engagement as a thing to strive toward and not a perfect model. Nevertheless, Dell'Arte's commitment to community engagement leaves significant traces on the training program.

For example, the training at Dell'Arte is about more than the development of an individual performer. Schirle says that the work "calls for both generosity and strength of ego, a desire to serve something higher than your own desire for self-expression . . . We're training the artist as citizen" (qtd. in Burnham 69). Faculty member and Associate School Director Stephanie Thompson believes the Dell'Arte philosophy of theatre of place is integral to the actor training: "Theatre can't exist devoid of place. At Dell'Arte we exist in a really particular place. So that influences the theatre that's created. Any artist is shaped by their community" (Personal Interview 2009). Joe Krienke, faculty

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[42] For more on this particular case study, see Kathie Denobriga's "*The Dentalium Project* Case Study: Dell'Arte," at Animating Democracy's website, www.americansforthearts.org.

member and Director of Recruitment, agrees:

> One of the big deals about getting our students into community is to nurture the thinking that it's not work in isolation. You're affected by it. The work you do has an impact. Whether you know it or not, it does, so you'd better make sure you're putting out the work you want to put out, that it's having the impact you intend. (Personal Interview 2009)

In the actor training program students create all new work in ensembles, which promotes the creation of a community of artists within Dell'Arte. But two units in the MFA program stand out as being especially community-based: a rural residency and a community-based arts project. In the rural residency, groups of students go into a remote northern California town to teach and create work for ten days. In the community-based arts project, students find a community to partner with and create work together. Thompson says of the community-based arts project: "It is a little more pedagogical, in that there is this field of theatre, community-based performance, documentary theatre, that this is a significant field of theatre work and some of this, pedagogically, is about giving students an experiential learning in that" (Personal Interview 2009).

I saw a production during the summer that had its roots in a community-based arts project. Dell'Arte MFA student Brian Moore, in partnership with senior citizens at the Timber Ridge Assisted Living Facility, created a performance called *The Body Remembers*. As the United States lurched into a deep recession in 2008, Moore was inspired by Studs Terkel's book *Hard Times* to talk to people who had lived through the Great Depression. Unlike many documentary theatre productions, in which actors often

perform the words of the original storytellers, the seniors themselves were onstage telling their own stories. The production was a moving piece of community-based art. Moore, along with other Dell'Arte students, had clearly crafted the stories into a specific structure, but to hear these older women telling stories not just about the Great Depression, but about their lives, was a striking reminder that the stories of older adults are often silenced. As I watched the performance, which alluded to the creation process and storytelling workshops conducted at Timber Ridge, I felt that I was watching a very exciting manifestation of actor training. The vision that the actor is an actor-creator contributes to a pedagogy in which actors are being trained as broader artists, trained to look beyond headshots and agents and to see themselves as valuable cultural contributors.

THOUGHTS TOWARD A DEFINITION

Now that I have historicized the development of Dell'Arte's training and located its practice in a larger context of European popular theatre as well as community-based artistic practices, I will analyze the major texts about Dell'Arte as well as my own embodied experience in a workshop. In this chapter, I explore how the actor's body, mind, and expressive self are conceptualized in this training, and how these ideas relate to larger issues of the actor's generative potential and the place of critical pedagogy in actor training. In the summer of 2009, I attended the four-week Dell'Arte Intensive in Blue Lake, California, and my experience in that workshop will serve as the embodied counterpoint to my discussion of the theories at play.[43]

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[43] The entire intensive took place from June 23-July 17, 2009 in Blue Lake, California. All descriptions of class exercises are from this span of time.

Though not easy to define or codify, Dell'Arte training is a physical-based theatre program that draws on an eclectic host of popular theatre traditions to engage the actor's creativity. It involves a pedagogy of self-discovery, in which students are expected to figure things out for themselves. Actors work on physical awareness and awareness of the self in time and space, and then begin to engage the different "dramatic territories" of melodrama, tragedy, commedia dell'arte, and clown, with the goal of becoming a transformative actor-creator who has "an instinct for play" and "embraces the dynamic reality of time and space" (Schirle and Foreman, Personal Interviews 2009).

EFFORT, RISK, MOMENTUM, JOY: THE SEQUENCE OF DELL'ARTE TRAINING

Dell'Arte training, much more than Viewpoints or Meisner training, is eclectic and difficult to describe as a fixed entity. It is also fairly context specific, as a performer wishing to experience the training has to go specifically to Blue Lake to attend. While there are teachers who trained at Dell'Arte who teach in university and community contexts, it is not a codified technique that can be directly replicated in another context; much of the work is specific to being in a community setting with a very focused pedagogical philosophy.

Dell'Arte offers a one year Professional Training Program and a three-year MFA in Ensemble-Based Physical Theatre. The four-week Dell'Arte Intensive was designed in 2009 to be a compressed version of the PTP program. The title of the workshop was "Effort, Risk, Momentum, Joy," which Schirle described as the arc of the training:

> We use Carlo's 'Effort, Risk, Momentum, Joy' progression as a

> touchstone of all our teaching. First one must understand where the effort must be made. It involves risk (psychological, physical, emotional). The work builds a momentum as you make discoveries and find the enthusiasm for continual self-discovery, and finally it's about the joy of performing with clarity, intent, and abandon. (Personal Interview 2009)

Ronlin Foreman explained that the summer intensive changes from year to year: "Last year the intensive focused on the fundamental work of the program. This year we wanted students to move through the arc of the one-year PTP. It was an experiment to put the [dramatic] territories into this workshop" (Personal Interview 2009).[44] Both Schirle and Foreman resist the idea that the work at Dell'Arte can be easily defined. Schirle argued that "We are researchers. In terms of what's the best training for an actor, we are deeply researching that. Though we have not codified in absolute terms our pedagogy, each year we plot an arc for the training based on our past researches. And each year we learn a little more" (Personal Interview 2009). I want to acknowledge early on that there is a spirit of exploration, research, and ambiguity at Dell'Arte that I want to honor in the way I write about it. Most all of my interview subjects, while willing to share their thoughts, expressed a concern that their words, when written down into this dissertation, would become fixed, set, and codified. I would like to encourage readers, then, to interpret any quoted comments as pedagogical reflections of a particular moment, and likely to evolve and change in the future. All conversations cited here were conversations of a particular time and place.

[44] The summer 2010 workshop will focus exclusively on the dramatic territory of clown.

Week One: Effort

Thirty-four students attended the Dell'Arte Summer Intensive, several of whom traveled from Denmark and Australia to attend. The students, a fairly even mix of men and women, ranged in age from eighteen to sixty, and had varying levels of acting experience. Students were housed by volunteer families in Blue Lake, some affiliated with the school and others not. The classes (held Monday through Friday from 10 am to 4 pm, with many evenings and weekends devoted to rehearsals) took place in both an open studio with mirrors and a gymnastics studio with a springboard floor for acrobatics.

On the first day of the summer program, Schirle contextualized the Dell'Arte training as a whole.[45] She said that the school is a living thing and the company is involved in ongoing research, asking questions such as, *What is the training of an actor in this time?* She said that although many students come to Dell'Arte from variety or circus backgrounds, the school does not intend to teach towards a particular style. Instead, Schirle argued that if an actor understands certain principles, she can find and use technique on her own. She explained that the school is invested in devising and that the goal is to encourage actors who make theatre, actors who are part of the generative process. She emphasized that part of the work is about self-discovery: "You won't learn anything if you don't discover it for yourself." In terms of how Dell'Arte fits into the realm of physical theatre, Schirle argued that physical theatre is about the body of the actor in the space. She surmised that nature is what teaches us about rhythm, play, and presence and noted that the mind/body/soul should always be engaged so the actor

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[45] June 23, 2009.

doesn't have time for self-critique in the moment of performance. Finally, Schirle pointed out that it's impossible to abridge their whole course of study, so the summer intensive would involve cross-sections of the year-long program. She ended with the idea that ultimately theatre is about what the audience sees and hears, and even if those of us in the program did not know if acting was for us, self-discovery would serve us in life no matter what we choose to do.

During the first week, we primarily engaged in the process of physical self-discovery. This unit was similar to the first part of the Lecoq journey, which is about movement analysis and improvisation, in which "exercises develop the receptive and expressive potential of the human body" (Lecoq, *Moving Body* 14). We worked with three teachers: Donlin Foreman, former dancer with the Martha Graham company and teacher at Barnard College; Ronlin Foreman, Director of Pedagogy at Dell'Arte; and Joan Schirle, School Director and Founding Artistic Director. All the teachers guided us towards awareness of the body in space and time, but each one approached this idea from a different perspective.

Donlin Foreman structured his class like a traditional dance class, during which he would frequently demonstrate specific physical sequences and ask students to replicate them. He introduced ideas about movement that stem from his career as a modern dancer and from training with the Graham company, including: the dynamic shift of opening and closing the body, maintaining a sense of opposition and tension, and imagining the body as extending into infinity. Foreman's approach teaches that everything the performer's body does should be specific, and he drew attention to the clear difference between

moments when the body is vague and moments when it is precise. Foreman maintained a strong sense of formal authority and leadership in the class, but also stressed that ultimately a performer has to become her own authority and choose what works for her.

Classes with Ronlin Foreman during the first week were clearly inspired by Lecoq, and focused on the idea of learning about movement and the body through observation of the natural world. Ronlin Foreman usefully explained on the first day of class that our work with Donlin Foreman had been objective (do this, this way) and his work was more subjective (how you do things, how you play). A key principle of this week was learning that everything your body does reads to the audience as a choice even if you are not aware of it.

Joan Schirle's classes in the first week, while also about physical self-discovery, focused on two very different approaches. One approach was to play with "The Showers," a variety of games and exercises introduced by Carlo Mazzone-Clementi. According to Schirle,

> Mazzone-Clementi created the name, the idea, and the group of exercises known as The Showers, 'because you are never too clean to do them.' Though he had formal theatre studies (worked with Barrault, Lecoq, Decroux, many Italian directors, performed with Marceau and Fo), his broad interests also contributed to his teaching: he was a classical scholar and many of his ball exercises come from his love of soccer. The Showers were not the only thing he taught, but we have tried to keep those exercises that he identified as Showers as a discrete entity so that his unique contribution to our pedagogy is acknowledged. (E-mail 2009)

The Showers, according to Ronlin Foreman, "are about playing forward, stimulating awareness, availability, and responsiveness. They reveal information about the self and create dexterity. They inspire you to experience things newly everyday, to wake up." [46] The second approach Schirle used to guide students toward physical self-awareness was Alexander Technique, an approach that focuses on the idea of "use of the self" and how to strive for greater ease in movement. She also introduced British vocal coach Patsy Rodenburg's idea of "circles of attention," which we referred to many times during the intensive.

Week 2: Risk

In week two, we continued to work on physical self-discovery, but our work became situated within the context of the dramatic realms of tragedy and melodrama. The concept of playing in dramatic territories also comes from Lecoq, who categorized these styles and their essential lessons into: "melodrama (grand emotions), commedia dell'arte (human comedy), '*bouffons'* (from grotesque to mystery), tragedy (chorus and hero), clowns (burlesque and absurd)" (emphasis in original, *Moving Body* 15). Schirle describes playing in the dramatic territories as "Investigations into rhythm, opposition, alternation, stillness, surprise, the use of space, of flow, of minimum to maximum scales—these studies open the actor's expressive channel for impulses, passions, ideas, feelings and relationships" (*Movement* 193). Schirle and Foreman contexualized tragedy and melodrama with a few major ideas that I will briefly gloss. They lectured that in the

[46] In class comment, June 26, 2009.

dramatic realm of tragedy, there are themes of destiny, fate, and a hero's journey or descent. It's often about a disturbance rebalanced by a death. The chorus functions as witnesses/participants and often behaves as one entity. Spatial balancing is key to performing tragedy. Melodrama involves a moral universe and the triumph of virtue, with stories that often revolve around repressive society, love triangles, obsession or neurosis, and family. Spatially, the play of diagonals is key.

Donlin Foreman's class followed a trajectory similar to the previous week. One comment that stood out to me was when he noted that we as performers engage in repeated movement sequences for two purposes—one is to extend the body outward and towards infinity and the other is to then turn inward and be able to focus the body on finding specificity. Ronlin Foreman's classes were structured around activities to bring melodrama and tragedy to life. For example, we did an activity in balancing the space that came from Lecoq, which Foreman argued could be especially useful for tragedy. For melodrama, we took part in a melodrama obstacle course, which was meant to encourage the actor to find dramatic moments and make choices about how to play in space and time. One person (a villain) chased another person (the hero) through a series of obstacles, with the goal of creating a dramatic scene through improvising dialogue and reacting to the spatial landscape. Foreman argued that "The insistence in melodrama and tragedy is that we not be too concerned about narrative. It's about a visceral engagement of the dynamic realms" (Personal Interview 2009).

Schirle's classes involved learning several new movement based techniques that we might apply to our work, including Laban movement and basic Viewpoints

vocabulary. We also worked on vocal training and chorus work that could be specifically applied to tragedy. One important note here was that Schirle advised students to enjoy the playing of something, even something as dark and intense as tragedy. In addition to our in-class work, week two involved our first performance lab assignment. Performance labs, in which students work in small ensembles to create an original performance in the style or genre of the week's theme, are key to the pedagogy at Dell'Arte, and are assigned at the beginning of every week and performed on Fridays. I will discuss the performance labs in greater detail later in this chapter.

Week 3: Momentum

In week three the Intensive changed dramatically, as we now had an entirely new group of teachers: Joe Krienke, Faculty and Director of Recruitment; James Peck, Faculty; Michael Fields, Producing Artistic Director; and Stephanie Thompson, Associate School Director. The focus of this week was physical comedy and commedia dell'arte. Thompson detailed a variety of skills that actors can engage through the study of commedia: "Technically, there's just a whole list: size, shape, dimension, expansion, vocal power, playing in comic timing, finding resiliency and the ability to balance" (Personal Interview 2009). Mazzone-Clementi strongly believed that training in commedia meant training in improvisation. He argues that:

> The actor, in addition to knowing his character intimately, must be able to accept a proposed scenario, a mere plot-and-circumstances skeleton, and create. His creation must be original, unpredictable, and balanced. At its best, commedia is a tour-de-force for the actor, limited only by his

> imagination, his skills, and the ability of his partners to respond, interact, and create with him spontaneously. (Mazzone-Clementi 62)

Schirle specifically explained that the engagement of commedia at Dell'Arte has never been about trying to recreate a historical form, but rather to find the essence of that ensemble form in today's world, and especially, to provide "the actor with the ability to play with physical characterization in situation and circumstance" (*Movement* 193).

We began each day this week with a short Daily Practice class with Krienke, meant to activate our bodies in such a way that we would begin to notice how small adjustments, such as shifting weight from palms to fingers on the floor can make a huge difference in movement. Krienke also taught acrobatics, a class where we learned how to do skills such as tumbling, cartwheels, headstands, and handstands. Obviously not everyone was at the same ability level in the class, but Krienke spent a lot of time on individual coaching. James Peck engaged us in a variety of games (inspired by the work of Keith Johnstone and others) meant to engage a sense of play and encourage us not to take ourselves too seriously. With Michael Fields we focused specifically on physical comedy. Major aspects of physical comedy include being able to separate each gesture, making gestures distinct, and articulating each moment. To practice these skills, Fields had us do such activities as using our bodies to tell a story in five frames, learning technical "bits" such as double takes and slaps, and using relationship status to tell a clear story. These activities worked to develop the skills of: storytelling, communicating clear information, articulating, focus, and coordination.

Stephanie Thompson taught the commedia dell'arte unit, during which we worked with specific commedia masks. Thompson has us look specifically at all the different types of masks and introduced the different commedia archetypes. Even though the "types" are important, Thompson explained that we need not feel entirely constrained by our character type because at Dell'Arte they are less prescriptive about playing the specific commedia types. Thompson also told us that in classic commedia, characters have appetites for sex, money, and food, while in more contemporary scenes, characters may have appetites for fame, notoriety, and power. A key concept in working with masks is that the actor should work to connect the body with the dynamic energy of the mask, or as Mazzone-Clementi explains it "The commedia actor has a free body with the mask as a natural extension" (63).

The performance lab assignments for this week provided the opportunity for students to explore the skills we learned in class. In one, pairs of students created an infomercial for an absurd product, working with the idea of finding a minimum to maximum scale and agreement with a partner. We were also assigned to work in trios to create a commedia scene called "The Crisis," where we were entirely responsible for creating the characters, story, and action.

Week 4: Joy

Week four focused on clown, a form of physical theatre with a long history: "The buffoon character, Lecoq argued, had deep roots in European culture, dating back to medieval festivals; these outcasts of society would return to the town squares on selected

days of the year when their irreverent mocking of the dominant order was tolerated" (Brady 113). Thompson also articulates this key component of clown:

> A clown exists beyond the social norms of our human lives. The ability with a clown is to tap into an internal energy or spirit that is not totally bound by the experiences we've had and accumulated throughout our lives, so the clown finds his own world of logic. (Personal Interview 2009)

During the school year, Ronlin Foreman is one of the primary teachers of clown. According to Lust, "Foreman, a forerunner of the clown theatre movement in America, has brought to the theatre a clowning form that is more traditional and independent from the New Vaudeville trend" (210). Lecoq's ideas about clown, which have been influential on Dell'Arte, are based on the idea that "Research on one's own clown begins by looking for one's ridiculous side" (*Moving Body* 145).

In the workshop, Krienke and Thompson, both of whom have performed as clowns, were the primary teachers, along with guest artist Stephen Buescher from American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. To begin with, Krienke taught us some basic physical maneuvers that are often used by clowns, including tripping, slipping, and banging one's head into a door. We continued to develop our acrobatic skills, and some new progressions were added, such as sitting and standing on a partner's shoulders. Buescher, our guest teacher, taught a movement class that was meant to be preparation for clown, and it focused on things like being silly, open, and vulnerable in front of an audience.

In the afternoons we did specific work with red nose clown. The nose functions as

a kind of mask:

> The clown nose . . . is still a physical object that you put on your face that sets up a particular expectation for the audience. As soon as a clown enters, you set the expectation for the audience. People know what clowns are supposed to be. They're supposed to be funny. You're supposed to be able to laugh at them and cry at them. (Krienke, Personal Interview 2009)

Krienke noted that red nose clown was "playing in the clownesque" and not really clown. Clown, as it is taught at Dell'Arte, is usually focused on developing specific character clowns, which we did not have enough time to truly delve into. One example of playing in the clownesque is a game where each student, wearing a clown nose, had to come onstage and tell an interactive, rhythmic knock-knock joke. This exercise made clear the importance of timing in comedy, as well as the pleasure of seeing someone on the beat. Interestingly, students noted that it's even funny to see people *off* the beat if it is part of a character's particular rhythm. Students commented that seeing the person think and respond in the moment was great, rather than looking away with nervousness. The importance of always playing forward and playing to the audience was also obvious.

In addition to our in-class activities focused on clown, we also had a performance lab assignment. In duos or trios, we were to create a short clown piece called "The Flop." The simple premise was that we were coming onstage to do something and expect to be good at it, but it ends up being a flop. These performances were framed as an investigation into the nature of clown, and Thompson noted that even this short foray into clown territory can be valuable for a performer:

> A big thing for an actor who's never played a clown before is really to tap into their personal sense of humor. To sound really cheesy, 'to find your funny.' Just the basics of comic timing, presentational focus, forward presence, connection to the audience, resiliency. (Personal Interview 2009)

Our final day of the Dell'Arte Intensive included the clown performances and then an extended evaluation session, which I will explore in more detail later in this chapter.

The sequence that I have just described is a microcosm of the longer Dell'Arte training programs, the PTP and the MFA, both of which contain additional units that were not explored in the summer intensive. The structure of the days in these longer programs is similar to what we experienced. In the mornings, students take a variety of physical-based classes, such as acrobatics, Alexander technique, contact improvisation, games, and vocal training. The afternoons generally focus on exploring the week or month's theme or dramatic territory. Each week involves a performance lab, in which students typically get an assignment on Monday and present a performance on Friday. Some of the additional units that we did not explore are: an adaptation, a character project, a rural residency, a community-based arts project, and a "Carlo Project" where students create an ensemble-based piece of their choice.

ACTOR'S BODY AND MIND: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

In Dell'Arte training, there is a fairly integrated approach to training the actor's body-mind. Though the training is considered to be physical, it is just as much

imaginative, creative, and analytical, with minimal rhetorical binary between mind and body. Joan Schirle argues for a specifically integrated psychophysical approach to training:

> With good intentions, movement classes are assigned the role of helping the actor improve her 'instrument,' as though there were an instrument (the body or voice) 'controlled' or 'played' by the mind of the actor, and that the instrument required a different kind of training than the 'player' of that instrument. If we separate instrument from player, even as a casual frame of reference, we disorganize body, mind, and spirit, leading to a disembodied practice for the actor—a practice in which the body does not have to be intelligent or conscious, only obedient. 'The freest use of the most intelligent body' requires an integrated training in which player and instrument are educated as one. The eye, the muscles, and the imagination must all be trained as a unity. (*Movement* 188-189)

In Dell'Arte training the actor practices physical self-discovery through experiential learning, explores how to read everything the body does as a potential theatrical choice, plays with the idea that movement/action rather than psychology can be a way to originate story and character, learns to see the body as both material and metaphorical, and comes to understand how the principles of stillness and subtraction relate to physical theatre training.

Students learn about the body through somatic practices that promote physical self-discovery through experiential learning. As in Viewpoints, students learn through the

body and about the body's responses at the same time. However, there is less focus on sensory perception at Dell'Arte, and the vocabulary is entirely different even though some of the principles are the same. One key principle at Dell'Arte is the idea that performers can learn about the body and the self through observation of the natural world, an idea that comes from Lecoq, who claimed that "the interior world is revealed through a process of reaction to the provocations of the world outside" (*Moving Body* 30). Another major idea is that physicality relates specifically to character. According to Ronlin Foreman, "The work is about physical self-discovery. Acting and character begins in the body; *how* someone goes *from* something *to* something else is character. You must begin where you are, so you must know where you are."[47]

One primary way that students engage in these kinds of physical self-discovery at Dell'Arte is through the work of Alexander Technique. Joan Schirle is certified in Alexander Technique, and she explains its main principle by saying, "Fundamental to all work on conditioning, on physical and vocal technique, is learning a constructive way of using the whole self. Good use permits the actor to find the ease and flexibility for a lifetime of creative work" (*Movement* 191). Alexander Technique is about identifying bodily habits so that one can choose to change them in order to move with greater ease; it functions as a kind of Foucaldian "technology of the self," in which people strategize in order to transform their bodies and selves. "Good use" is a key term in Alexander technique, and the idea of

> 'Good use' implies economy and availability to the moment, to the

[47] In-class comment, June 26, 2009.

> partner, to the emotion, to the unexpected, the essence of improvisation and the enemy of rigidity. Good use implies choice in deciding to go into action, what action to do and how to do it. Good use means we are capable of delicacy and subtlety as well as thrust and force. (Schirle, *Alexander* N. page)

I found the work we did with Alexander Technique to be startlingly revealing. In one particular exercise, Schirle asked students to walk to a chair, sit down, and walk away. She asked us to watch others and then say what we noticed. People noticed that many people lead with their heads and that gender seems to influence the way people sit in the chair. Then we did the exercise again, this time looking specifically at the movement of heads, and Schirle asked what we noticed about *how* the head moves. I observed that the head is the last thing to fall into place and the first thing to come up, and so Schirle asked me to demonstrate what I saw. I sat down and got up a few times and she asked me what I thought my head was doing. I responded that I thought it was going down and then coming back up, but Schirle showed me what it was actually doing, which was going *back*, or compressing, and then coming up. I found it incredibly interesting that I wasn't conscious of what my body was actually doing, or that my perception of what my body was doing was not reading that way to observers. Rather than confirming the separation of body and mind (as it might seem to at first reading) this exercise shows that greater psychophysical awareness can be learned through conscious, mindful attention to the body's movements. Damasio explains why the conscious mind is not always aware of what the body is doing: "It is true that we are not aware of every part

of our body, all of the time, because representations of external events, through vision, hearing, or touch, as well as internally generated images, effectively distract us from the ongoing uninterruptible representation of the body" (152).

In another exercise, Schirle had us stand in a circle and she asked us to very quickly respond to her stimuli. She gave us prompts such as: *clap, shout across the room*. We didn't actually execute the whole movement, we just found what our first impulse was when Schirle issued the stimuli. I noticed that I raised my shoulders up at the beginning of almost every prompt, which seemed completely unnecessary and probably leads to a lot of my upper back tension. Then we did the activity again, but Schirle told us not to move on our impulse right away, but instead to relax and think about what our impulse would be, to see if we might find a way of doing it differently. I noticed that I could do a lot of things without raising my shoulders, and Schirle told us that we can cut out a lot of this unnecessary tension through learning to say no to our habitual responses to stimuli. This, then, is a major principle behind using Alexander Technique at Dell'Arte—these practices actually aim to integrate the body-mind, to make the conscious self more aware of what the physical body is doing, so the entire body-mind becomes more connected and aware.

Another foundational principle of how the body is experienced at Dell'Arte is that students learn to read everything the body does as a potential theatrical choice. In this way the body is perceived as an outward sign-system and the actor becomes aware of the semiotic potential of what Zarrilli calls "the aesthetic outer body" (*Psychophysical* 58). Erika Fischer-Lichte argues that the idea of the actor's body as sign-system came out of

the development of avant-garde theatre in the early twentieth century, when “the actor’s body was no longer perceived as a text composed of natural signs for emotions but as raw material for sign processing with a wider field of reference than the emotions of a dramatic character” (29). Schirle talks about the body as sign-system for revealing character:

> What are we learning as students of the Alexander Technique that can help us in preparing a role? First of all, we are learning a way of perceiving and practicing good use, thus we have a standard of balance and ease from which to look at the many varieties of habitual use that can be thought of as ‘character.’ There are many theories of what character is and how to develop one. But acting teachers would generally agree that character is revealed in ‘how’ we do things. For an Alexander student, that ‘how’ is the same as ‘how-you-use-yourself’ in doing your actions. Simply put, why one person throws their head back to take a drink and another brings their neck forward is a revelation of character differences. (*Preparing a Role* N. page)

Schirle places emphasis on how the actor’s body conveys information to the audience to reveal character rather than on how the actor creates character based on psychological analysis.

Ronlin Foreman, while also teaching that everything the body does is a potential choice, takes a slightly different approach than Schirle does with Alexander Technique. He focuses on prompting students to explore the dynamics of the body through their

observations and impressions of the natural world. Citing the influence of French theatre artist Jean-Louis Barrault, in one class[48] Foreman explained we would be using our bodies to look at the movement of a seed, which is fundamentally expansive. We spread out across the room and individually explored the physical dynamic of being contained and then expanding, like a seed. Foreman observed that most of us were playing at it rather than really doing it. He also said we were trying to express the seed rather than physicalize it. The seed's growth begins with an eclosion, a small but noticeable burst of energy, and he encouraged us to find this in our movement. We explored this for a while longer, then Foreman asked us to explore the same movement with our breath. How does an inhale work? How does an exhale work? What's the velocity? Does it begin slowly or quickly? I found that for me it began quickly and decelerated, then there was a suspension, then the exhalation went quickly. He asked us to then try to make our movement mimic the dynamic of the breath.

Foreman then used our exploration of the dynamics of nature as a way to teach that everything the body does signals something, is expressive. We watched a group of five students explore the dynamics of breath and then Foreman observed qualities of their movement that they perhaps did not see. For example, Foreman commented that one student centered the movement on hinging at the waist, a mechanical sort of movement. Another had the quality of a spiritual seeker, operating with the same dynamic over and over with a calm facial expression. Another let her hands dangle without energy, and yet another seemed to be pushing all the air away from him. I found it incredibly interesting

[48] This particular example comes from a class at the Dell'Arte Intensive on June 25, 2009.

to have my attention drawn to these particularities of movement that were not immediately perceptible. I realized that when I do the exercise (or any movement) I don't realize how much information I am communicating. The goal of this work, and observing what bodies do, is not to find neutrality per se (a word that Foreman hesitated to use), but to strive for simplicity and clarity of movement. The training is about understanding the body's expressive potential, so that the performer can more consciously choose what she wants to communicate. Notably, the success of this exercise depends on the teacher's experience and ability to observe and explain what he sees to model that kind of perception and analysis for the students.

Rather than analyzing a character's psychology or attempting to flesh out an inner emotional life, actors at Dell'Arte are encouraged to create character and story through movement and action. Dell'Arte is a physical school in that the work often originates from principles of movement. Schirle argues that despite the fact that many university programs include supplementary movement training for actors "*what has yet to evolve in U.S. academic theatre training is the role of movement as a fundamental basis for the creation of theater*" (emphasis in original, *Movement* 188).

In a class with Schirle, we practiced the philosophy that movement can be the basis for creating theatre.[49] Half the class stood on one side of the room, while the other half watched. Schirle asked us to imagine that there was a line across the room that went from our height to the floor, creating a long diagonal across the space. We were to walk across the room as though descending on this imaginary line, so that at the end we would

[49] This exercise also comes from a class on June 25, 2009.

be on the floor. A partner watched each individual and gave that person feedback (for example, telling you that you knelt down too quickly, or that you reached a plateau in the middle.) We did the exercise several times and then reversed it, beginning on the floor and following an imaginary line until we had ascended to our full height. In the next phase Schirle asked us to ascend from the floor to our full height while crossing the room with a specific imagined scenario in mind. We were each to find a physical object to carry, and then to imagine that we were returning to our people/society with this very valuable object that would save our society from destruction. We were to imagine that we were coming through a tunnel and had to ascend precisely in a diagonal line or we would die. When we got to our full height we were to lift the object high and turn and present it. Schirle played music to accompany the activity.

When I watched the other half of the class perform this, I was struck by how the physical action we began with (ascending from the floor at a steady pace in a diagonal line) when combined with an imagination-based scenario and a dramatic soundtrack became an extremely striking moment of physically committed theatre. When doing it myself, I found that the actual physical task was difficult enough that it required a lot of my concentration, but the imagined scenario influenced *how* I performed the task. While it read to the audience as an intense, important moment, the performer's main *concentration* was to lift her head in a straight line up to her full height. If the class had begun with the scenario rather than the activity, I imagine we might have seen a lot more over-acting and over-emoting as actors sought to convince the audience of the importance of the situation. The reality of the physical task, however, grounded the scenario in a

concrete action, which mediated the impulse to "show" the direness of the situation. Schirle emphasized that it was the use of our imaginations that changed the activity into a play, into theatre.

At Dell'Arte, the body is concrete and material as well as highly metaphorical. In training, students learn about the mechanics of the physical body (how things work), while also coming to understand how body parts or body principles may be used as metaphors for larger concepts. For example, the daily practice sessions and the acrobatics classes were specifically about learning how the body moves, with the idea that understanding the mechanics of movement can help performers move with greater ease and confidence. In one class, Krienke specifically talked about bones and joints, trying to make students aware of how the body is materially put together. For example, he highlighted that the pelvis is part of the torso, not the legs, as we often think it is, a principle that comes into play when learning headstand, where one needs to be able to understand the pelvis as part of the torso.

In terms of using the body as metaphor, the pelvis was frequently emphasized and came to stand in for the idea that performers don't always know exactly what their bodies do, hence we were always being reminded "Remember your pelvis!" Donlin Foreman tended to emphasize increasing one's awareness of the pelvis and expanding the pelvic range of motion, an idea that comes from his training in Graham technique, in which movement originates from the solar plexus. Ronlin Foreman, too, used the pelvis to symbolize the undiscovered aspects of the body. For example, we tried a pushing and pulling activity in pairs. As we pushed our partners, we were to think about how we

pushed. Foreman asked what we discovered, and the main response was that we noticed you need to push your pelvis forward and tuck under to get leverage. Then with a different partner we pulled each other and noticed that here, too, the pelvis needs to tuck under and push forward, which is almost the opposite of what I expected. Foreman then showed us some mime technique, which also tends to emphasize the pelvis, noting that if you want to show lifting or pulling you must move from the pelvis or it looks fake. This was another key moment where we were "discovering" things about movement that seem unexpected or new and this was linked specifically to the pelvis. This mode of teaching through bodily experience once again works toward a greater integration between mind and body, making the conscious mind more aware of what the body does and its expressive potential.

Another way the body is used as metaphor is through acrobatics. In almost every acrobatic move there is what Krienke referred to as a "threshold" point where the actor just has to let momentum take over. For example, in the forward roll, once the performer has squatted down and extended her hands forward, there is a threshold point where she must let momentum take over and initiate the forward movement. In acrobatics, I noticed that I would sometimes get stuck at a threshold point. With headstand, I could do many of the steps—rolling onto the crown of my head, walking my legs toward my body, balancing my knees on my elbows—but I could not move past the next threshold point of taking the legs off the arms and extending the legs into the air. Krienke said that one thing we are learning in this work is to love those threshold moments instead of fearing them. This idea of physical thresholds extends throughout the training into a metaphor for

taking risks, for pushing oneself farther than one thought one could go.

Training at Dell'Arte sometimes challenges notions that physical theatre is about constant motion or bold physical movement, and instead part of the training teaches that physical theatre might be about subtraction and stillness. Schirle puts it in terms of Alexander Technique:

> Your training has probably emphasized that drama is based on conflict, and that your objective - your <u>want</u> - must be strong, even urgent, when you walk on stage. Characters in the western dramatic tradition also reflect our cultural bias toward wanting, getting, doing <u>more</u> - towards <u>addition</u>. But the Alexander Technique is teaching you, the actor, about doing <u>less</u> - about <u>subtraction</u>. In that lively paradox lies the art of the creative performer. (emphasis in original, *Preparing* N. page)

Stephanie Thompson argues a similar point:

> A lot of the work is finding fulfillment in economy. So sometimes it's antithetical to what people expect, that to be in a physical theatre production you should be moving all over the place. And, like the poet, it really is about finding that every gesture has meaning, and if it doesn't have meaning, you take it out. (Personal Interview 2009)

Schirle and Thompson seem to be offering a critique of a U.S. cultural obsession with doing, even relating typical acting vocabulary (*goal, want*) to this drive towards achievement. Dell'Arte's training relies on completely different assumptions and works to challenge ways of training (and ways of being) that are about addition rather than

subtraction.

ACTOR'S CREATIVITY AND EXPRESSIVE SELF: THE ACTOR-CREATOR MODEL

At Dell'Arte, the actor is explicitly envisioned as an actor-creator. This vision of the actor is more expansive in scope than some other training models, and Peter Buckley argues that, "What the concept of Actor/Creator truly calls for is theatre artists with the courage to continuously define the creative process and to accept full responsibility for their work" (41). Schirle says that "You are creative not just to the extent that you interpret the words of the playwright, but because it is only through you that the words of the playwright can live! There is a great desire now on the part of actors to be part of the creative process. It has been coming for a long time" (Personal Interview 2009). While the concept is not unique to Dell'Arte, it does underlie the pedagogical philosophy at the school and influence the structure and content of the program. At Dell'Arte, the actor's creativity is conceptualized as a core value linked explicitly to devising new work for the stage and to working in an ensemble. The fundamental expressive task for the actor is to create new theatrical material that expresses an artistic point of view.

Since actors are expected to be theatre artists who create new material from their bodies and imaginations, devised work is key. Schirle says that "we don't have students do scene work in the traditional way, though. Students don't memorize scenes and present them for critique" (Personal Interview 2009). Instead, actors engage in weekly performance labs in which they create material based on that week's prompt or provocation, to be presented every Friday. Schirle explains, "They are as likely to be devising scenes themselves, or if we work with an existing text—*Hamlet*, let's say—the

scene is investigated dynamically, looking at the play of forces, the spatial tensions, the pushes and pulls, compressions and expansions, as well as the text work" (Personal Interview 2009). The idea of performance labs, like much of the curriculum at Dell'Arte, has multiple roots, one of which is in the work of Jacques Lecoq. According to Lecoq:

> Throughout the year we facilitate the students' own personal creative research by means of *auto-cours*: each week students are given a theme to work on without a teacher in whatever way they choose. This is their own theatre. It is essential to allow them this freedom, and it ensures that we never lose sight of the main goal of the school: creativity. (emphasis in original, *Moving Body* 28)

In the performance labs at Dell'Arte, actors are expected to engage their creativity in how they approach the assignment. Crucially, labs always involve working in a small ensemble to create a new piece. Though the actor is an actor-creator, one whose task is to create new work, it's not framed as an individualized task but a collaborative one, or perhaps I should say, a community-based one. It involves what R. Keith Sawyer calls *group creativity*, which "involves distributed cognition—when each member of the team contributes an essential piece of the solution, and these individual components are all integrated together to form the collective product" (121). This is a key point, because rather than promoting a singular genius model, teachers at Dell'Arte frequently reiterate

that we learn about ourselves through community. All of the assignments are ensemble-based, and there were no solo performances during the Intensive.[50]

Our first performance lab assignment, during which we engaged in group creativity, was in a unit on tragedy and melodrama taught by Joan Schirle and Ronlin Foreman. Students in the tragedy group were given the poem "The Cold Heaven" by William Butler Yeats and told to stage the poem as though it were the final scene of a tragedy. Though this assignment involved text, the text was ambiguous and metaphorical, and the challenge was how to stage this poetic piece that did not involve characters and dialogue as in a typical scene from a play. The parameters of the assignment were extremely vague. The assignment was not fleshed out in specific detail; there was no rubric; and the teachers were reluctant to answer specific questions, all strategies that fly in the face of what I've learned and what I usually practice as an acting teacher. The open-ended nature of the performance lab initially confused some students, including myself, who were used to specific details and desired to meet teacher expectations.

Our group rehearsals were also initially frustrating, as we all struggled to decipher what we thought the teachers wanted. We seemed to hit up against the wall of open-endedness and not know how to proceed. Several students expressed a desire for more information about the assignment. Foreman, though reluctant to offer specific instruction,

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[50] The logistics of working in small groups were challenging. We worked in different groups for each assignment, so that we could work with different people. The group dynamic was always changing based on the particular personalities and leadership styles. Most rehearsals for the performance labs took place outside of class time. Sometimes we would meet directly after class, sometimes later in the evening or on the weekend. We had little guidance from the teachers on how to work in a group, and some groups experienced more problems and conflicts than others. The overall guiding principle seemed to be that you learn about how to have a successful collaboration only through trial and error.

gave a talk where he employed poetry and metaphor to motivate us. Rather than giving us specific guidance, Foreman counseled that tragedy was about how to find "the dark root of the scream," a phrase from the Spanish poet Lorca. He implored us not to be trapped by thinking about "how it should be done," but instead to find something in the adventure. To stand up, play forward, and strive towards performing with ferocity. He also said that working in a group enhances what the individual can find, which points toward the collaborative nature of creation at Dell'Arte.

Though I still felt lost, I began to see that the point was not to do something "right," the point was to exercise creativity through exploring the assignment. It brought the question to mind: How often in an acting class do you really *create* the thing you're exploring? My group eventually began to find momentum. We created a back story and then worked to stage it. We tossed out our first very literal staging and created a more abstract performance in which we imagined that our bodies made up an intact pane of glass that shattered as we spoke. Despite my initial frustration, I eventually made the discovery that the lack of structure and guidelines for the performance labs was not a *trick*. I think I suspected that the teachers would watch our performances and then say something to the effect of, "You got that wrong. That wasn't what we were looking for." This did not happen. I discovered through watching the performances and hearing the feedback that the teachers actually weren't looking for students to perform a specific thing. It was, as Foreman had emphasized, an investigation. The point of the assignment was to explore what we were learning during class time in an ensemble, to investigate the idea through doing it. What I saw in the scenes, and what I felt in rehearsals, was that

people were playing with the things we'd learned, which led to scenes that were more physically adventurous than I would imagine they would be had we started simply with text. I could see some of the work we had been doing with elements (water, earth, air, fire) and materials, with the use of space, with the chorus, and with a certain type of ferocity.

The emphasis on self-discovery in the performance labs places the student in a role where she must take responsibility for much of her own learning. Because we were given the assignment at the beginning of the week before diving into the week's content, it often felt like we were starting to create before we knew much about what we were creating. But if an acting student is truly to emerge as an actor-creator, confident in his ability to devise new work for the stage, able to work within an ensemble as a collaborative artist, then this pedagogy of provocation, of not always providing answers, is important. Of course, there is a fascinating balance for the teachers between providing careful guidance and allowing the space for student-generated work to emerge.

The work of creating a new performance to explore the week's theme continued with the infomercial assignment and the commedia scene, and ended with a final performance lab in clown. The clown unit in particular highlighted the fact that the actor's expressive task at Dell'Arte is to create from their own artistic point of view but within the context of an ensemble. The assignment for this unit was typically vague—we were to work in duos or trios to create a short clown piece called "The Flop." In essence, we were to be clowns coming onstage to do some kind of task, and we then fail at it miserably. The key is that you can't play the flop, you must come onstage expecting to be

good. Most of the activities we did in class to prepare for the clown performance focused on having individuals explore their own personal sense of humor and find what is uniquely funny about them. For example, in one of our afternoon classes, groups of eight students went behind a flat. When each person came out wearing the clown nose, he or she was supposed to have a strong emotion (fear, anger, joy, sorrow) and say something. The provocation to have a strong emotion and verbalize seemed to be designed to get students over their fear of speaking as a clown and give them *something* to start from.

After trying out activities such as this one, students had a direction to go in with their own personal clowns. In our duos or trios, then, the task became finding a way to play your own clown within the context of a small group. It's important when working as clowns not to mirror each other's energy and become too similar. Instead, you bring your own energy and rhythm to the performance, which creates a more interesting and dynamic clown performance. This is actually much harder than it sounds—I found that the natural tendency is to mimic or match your partner's energy level. If your partner is loud and excited, usually you want to do that, too, but it's important to find a distinctive clown energy. Our group had a difficult time creating "The Flop" and ended up scrapping our original idea the night before the performance and creating something new. In the end, I played an over-enthusiastic dance captain who doesn't realize that she keeps smacking and kicking her partners as she dances. The partners try to keep going but they eventually confront my character and chase me off stage.

In general, the link between a vision of the actor-creator and devised material seems to be crucial. Many of the techniques of psychological realism just don't apply

when actors are creating new material in a variety of genres rather than working with an existing play text. A different vision of the actor necessarily requires different pedagogy.

CULTIVATING THE IDEAL ACTOR

While the teachers at Dell'Arte are careful not to give specific standards of what makes an actor "good" in their program, there are nonetheless several key assumptions about what skills an actor should possess. The idealized actor in Dell'Arte training is aware of the physical dynamics of theatre and how to use the body in space, is versatile and able to play across many styles in a way that challenges commercial models of art-making, is a creative artist with a unique artistic point of view, and is invested in a sense of community and the larger world around her.

Dell'Arte is a school of physical theatre, and therefore the ideal actor knows the importance of understanding the body and how it signifies in theatrical space. Actors are not invested in genuinely feeling emotion but are trained to understand how to make such choices read through the way they use their bodies in space. As Schirle puts it:

> Our work at the Dell'Arte School begins with the absolute fact of the body of the actor in the performance space. This is what the audience sees. No matter what the actor *feels,* the audience's experience is based on what they *see* and *hear*. (emphasis in original, *Movement* 190)

The physical presence of the actor is valued and cultivated in Dell'Arte training. Mazzone-Clementi writes that "Self awareness in space and time equals presence. Self-consciousness leads to immobility and is the enemy of presence. From presence, one can develop the ability to represent" (61). To these ends, many of the exercises at Dell'Arte

are investigations not only into the body, but also into the dynamics of time and space, all adding up to a proficiency with movement as well as an ability to make use of *theatrical* space. Actors train to be able to engage with the physical demands of performance that are different from everyday life but they also simultaneously train their imaginations, as body-mind-imagination cannot be so easily separated in this technique.

The ideal actor is versatile, what Ronlin Foreman called "the transformative actor," able to play across many styles and genres. The vast scope of the dramatic territories taught at Dell'Arte (tragedy, melodrama, commedia dell'arte, clown, adaptation, community-based arts project, etc.) ensures that the actors practice creating in a variety of genres and become adaptable to different circumstances. When asked what makes an actor "good," Schirle said that the teachers at Dell'Arte value the following: "A global, flexible actor. Someone who can step into many kinds of performance situations—directed, devised, classical, improvised—even though not everyone excels at all of them" (Personal Interview 2009).

This vision of the actor as one who can create and perform across style and genre intervenes in a commercial model in which actors are typecast into a specific kind of role and expected to find financial success through selling themselves as a certain type. Schirle argued that the work at Dell'Arte is not about being typecast and said that the goal is not to create an actor who can play one specific type (Personal Interview 2009). Krienke also articulated an anti-commercial perspective.[51] He emphasized that there were

[51] Krienke made these comments on July 10, 2009 at an informational session for workshop participants who were interested in finding out more information about Dell'Arte's PTP and MFA programs.

better programs for an actor who wants to be a regional theatre actor or perform in conventional plays in the system that exists. Krienke suggested that the training at Dell'Arte was for actors who are not only actors but who have something more to offer, perhaps as good writers or visual artists, or who have a broader sense of what they want to do. Dell'Arte's training model, then, represents a direct challenge to the commercial model that insists acting is about headshots and monologues, and instead offers a vision of success that is more about maintaining artistic integrity and working in community.[52]

The ideal actor at Dell'Arte is an actor-creator with a unique artistic point of view. In an interview, Krienke mentioned that the term *actor-poet* is circulating currently at Dell'Arte. I want to note that Krienke expressed hesitation about making this the new public metaphor for training, but I think it's worth parsing out this evolving language a bit as I found the metaphor intriguing.[53] Krienke talked about relating a performer to a poet because:

> Poets use words that we all use all the time, but they shape them in such a way that it makes you think about life differently. And it's often economical, it's often rhythmic, it's often imagistic, and images change from one thing to the next in the course of three or four words. So we try to get people to understand the power of that as performers. Performers

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[52] Much actor training in the U.S is based, implicitly or explicitly, on a commercial model based on a capitalist system of production. For a thorough materialist reading of U.S. actor training, see Amy Steiger's *Actors as Embodied Public Intellectuals*, (PhD Dissertation, U of Texas, 2006).

[53] A recent visit to Dell'Arte's website revealed a promotional video called "Training Actor/Poets for the Theatre of Tomorrow," suggesting that this term is now being used in their marketing materials. (www.dellarte.com.)

> are people who are poets in space—economical, metaphorical. (Personal Interview 2009)

I think adding the term actor-poet to the already existing actor-creator is useful, as it implies not just that the performer is one who creates, but that the performer is one who shapes something into existence in a highly crafted and artistic way. All of these metaphors are a way of looking at the essential vision of an idealized actor at Dell'Arte, which is someone who has a full artistic stake in production, whether it is a devised production or a more traditional performance model with scripts and a director. Thompson explains:

> Your job as an actor is to be fully responsible for this play. It doesn't mean that you have to come in and direct everyone but it means you have a responsibility to have a point of view and to know how to hold time and space onstage. It's one thing if a director tells you to cross and you cross from point A to point B exactly as you're told, but it's another thing if you already know that's where you're supposed to cross, and it comes not from a direction but because your actor's instinct tells you it's a necessity that you move there because you are pulled into the space or you are pushed into the space by the dynamic forces at play. (Personal Interview 2009)

All of these statements reflect a great desire to re-envision the role of the actor in production as a truly creative theatre artist whose skills are part of the creation and performance process.

The ideal actor at Dell'Arte, though he is expected to develop an artistic point of view, is not expected to be an individual genius. Actors are Dell'Arte are taught specifically to develop their art and their point of view in community with other performers and with the faculty, who all make up an ensemble, or as Krienke puts it, "a group of artists committed to work." As with Viewpoints training, there is productive tension between the idea that the actor is an artist with an original point of view and yet that artistry and point of view is developed specifically through ensemble and community. The program promotes the development of a larger perspective that provides an alternative to an interior, individualistic model of actor training. The philosophy at Dell'Arte is, in many ways, meant to challenge traditional hierarchies that insist on maintaining individualistic models of art-making. Schirle argues:

> The American way demands its hierarchies, discouraging collective action and exalting the individual—not to mention that we are still lugging around in our cultural baggage the romance of the lone genius, usually assumed to be the playwright or director. I have encountered critical prejudice against work acknowledged as group creation ("You can't write plays by committee!"). It takes commitment and trust to list in a playbill "Created by the ensemble." (*Potholes* 96)

The ideal actor is connected to the ensemble around him, and also to the larger world. Dell'Arte graduate and guest teacher Stephen Buescher said it is "central for the actor to be engaged in the world, to see where you stand in relationship to everything around you instead of 'what do I want from this person?'" (Burnham 69). All of these ideas feed into

the pedagogy at Dell'Arte, which constantly emphasizes ensemble and community engagement in a way that is very unique within the broad field of actor training.

ROLE OF AUTHORITY: TEACHER AS PROVOCATEUR

Though all the teachers at Dell'Arte have their own unique styles and specialities, there are some underlying pedagogical principles threaded throughout the program. The teachers at Dell'Arte employ a critical pedagogy to teach acting that aims to make the student responsible for much of her own learning. To do this, the Dell'Arte training involves reframing the role of the teacher as provocateur, employing a strategy of the "via negativa," emphasizing the progress of the group over the progress of the individual, and envisioning teaching as a form of research and reciprocity. At its core, the Dell'Arte model challenges many other models of acting pedagogy as well as traditional assumptions about the role of the actor.

If the student's main role at Dell'Arte is to become a generative artist, the teacher's role is to issue provocations that allow students to make discoveries. Schirle notes that "Carlo always said you never learn anything unless you discover it yourself. The 'self-discovered point' was a major aspect of his work. Teachers create provocations for students as a means for their self-discovery" (Personal Interview 2009). There is a large emphasis on not giving students answers but letting them figure things out for themselves. Krienke speaks about provocation in terms of how it helps elicit artistic development for the performers, "the whole thing is to bring the person forward, their point of view, and so it is a provocative role" (Personal Interview 2009). Thompson asserts:

> To say that I'm a teacher is kind of a misnomer. My main role is to cause discoveries, or a-ha moments, to help cause some learning to happen. It is a provocative role, to set up experiences that will cause the students to have discoveries and I can't predict what those will be. So it's very different from a university model wherein a university professor has essentially become an expert in a field of study, and the teaching is 'I teach what I know.' Here, I almost feel that I teach what I don't know, which means I have questions about this. I don't really know the answer, but it's an investigation and we're going to enter into it. And all of us in class will look at it and try to understand and make discoveries. (Personal Interview 2009)

What Thompson describes is a relationship between teacher and student in which both bring knowledge to the table and can learn from each other, certainly a challenge to a traditional "banking model" of education critiqued by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Krienke cites the work of educational theorist Parker Palmer and his book *The Courage to Teach* as an inspiration for the model employed at Dell'Arte, which Krienke says rejects the model in which "you have to pass through the expert to get knowledge of the subject" in favor of a model in which the work is at the center and "You don't have to pass through an expert to get to the information. The information is there and your work is to strive toward the objective thing and in so doing you find out about yourself" (Personal Interview 2009).

Though they don't use the term *critical pedagogy*, I see the teachers at Dell'Arte employing pedagogies that examine the relationship between teacher, student, and subject in a conscious and transparent way. The term critical pedagogy can cover a variety of teaching strategies, ranging from hierarchical to dialogic to praxical (Grossberg 16). Dell'Arte's particular type of critical pedagogy comes closest to what Lawrence Grossberg, in the introduction to *Between Borders: Pedagogy and the Politics of Cultural Studies*, calls a fourth model of critical pedagogy, which is a "pedagogy of articulation and risk. Such a practice, while refusing the traditional form of intellectual authority, would not abandon claims of authority" (18). This idea fits Dell'Arte, because while teachers do not claim the mantle of expert, they are very much experts at their particular style of teaching, of teaching in a way that allows students to be generative. Grossberg argues that this fourth model "is a pedagogy which aims not to predefine its outcome . . . but to empower its students to begin to reconstruct their world in new ways, and to rearticulate their future in unimagined and perhaps even unimaginable ways" (18). Again, this sounds very much like what Thompson described as her way of teaching in which she does not always know what is going to happen when students begin to investigate a dramatic question.

While the idea of teaching as provocation destabilizes the banking model and challenges the idea of the teacher's ultimate authority, another practice at Dell'Arte complicates this dynamic. Many times at Dell'Arte I heard teachers use the phrase *via negativa*, which in this case describes a model of teaching in which the teacher constantly tells the student what is *not* working. Though the term also has a religious connotation

and history, the direct lineage of its use in regard to teaching acting comes from Lecoq:

> The creative imagination is exercised by his use of the *via negativa*; that is, his comments are always in terms of what *not* to do, leaving affirmative paths open for the student to find. This teaching strategy acts as a kind of benevolent frustration; by blocking the path taken by the actor, you oblige him to take another. (emphasis in original, Rolfe 38)

The way this works at Dell'Arte, according to Thompson, is that "It's very much like, in sculpture, negative sculpting. The taking away to reveal what's there" (Personal Interview 2009). Krienke described it this way: "It's essentially a negative teaching, or a taking away. It's not necessarily harsh or negative in tone, but it is a subtraction" (Personal Interview 2009). Ronlin Foreman argues that using the via negativa asks the student to be responsible for her own education. He says that *all* education is self-education and that the teacher can only provoke, lead, and inspire, but in the end one must accept responsibility to learn.[54]

My experience of the via negativa was complicated. At times, I experienced it as described, and when a teacher pointed out that something wasn't working, I adjusted. Other times it proved frustrating. In a particular class with Ronlin Foreman, he arranged some students into forming a narrow corridor and other students into a line. Then he asked remaining students to walk through the space one by one and respond to its volume and density. Foreman responded to almost everyone by saying that they did not seem to be noticing or responding to the volume and density of the space, but despite his

[54] In-class comments, June 26, 2009.

comments, students kept repeating the same thing. He kept saying "that's not it," but students (including myself) did not seem to understand how we might move through the space differently. I wondered if he had something specific in mind that we were not doing, or if this was supposed to simply guide us to register that the space had volume and density. This was an instance where the exercise never seemed to make sense, and Foreman's reluctance to explain it in detail actually obscured its potential lessons.

Via negativa can be a paradoxical teaching tool. On the one hand, it can work to do as the teachers explained: it can provoke the student into trying things again and again, never settling into something because it's "right." I think in this way it can indeed serve the actor's creative development. If you never hear that something was "right" or "perfect" it helps loosen you from those expectations and allows you to be able to create more freely. On the other hand, I found that in some ways it sets up the idea that the teacher holds the "right" or "ideal" version of something in his mind, and the student will not be able to reach it. Foreman attempted to dispel this notion by saying that although he wants to provoke us to strive toward something, he doesn't have in his head what that perfect thing would look like. In less conscious or experienced hands, however, use of the via negativa could set the teacher up to wield a mysterious power.

Sometimes teachers at Dell'Arte use the via negativa, but other times they offer feedback based more on observation than judgment. Teachers also frequently offer feedback in a way that emphasizes the larger group and the work itself rather than the individual, a model that once again challenges assumptions about the teacher-student relationship and productively risks defying student expectations. Ronlin Foreman was

particularly skilled at offering close observation as feedback, which was likely inspired by his study with Lecoq. According to Rolfe:

> Lecoq's comments differ from other actor teaching methods more in degree than in kind; one is made aware of infinitesimal detail and nuance (silence makes these more apparent). It is this depth of awareness that Lecoq strives to transfer to the students who will later develop it through self-knowledge. Another result of this sort of criticism: it keeps the students' sights on artistic rather than personal goals. (36)

Foreman, too, makes extremely specific observations. In one class, Foreman had us begin walking around the space.[55] He gave us the seemingly simple direction to find something that makes you want to begin moving, move, then find something that makes you stop. While watching us, Foreman observed what particular people were doing. He observed that: some people focused on specific things in space as if the things were an inspiration to move; someone else was moving aimlessly, as though waiting for a bus; I was moving as though timeless, but also confused about where I was going and what I was looking at. Another woman moved as though she were giving a poetic speech, and a male student had his mouth open which made it seem like he was about to say something. Foreman asked us to observe what it means to move with all of these subtle variations. All of these small differences in how people performed the action might read differently to an audience, and many of them were things the performer was most likely not even aware of. All of Foreman's comments during this exercise were not intended to be a critique

[55] June 23, 2009.

about how well you did the task, but instead close observations that make the performer more conscious of how her movement reads to an audience. This type of close observation is very different from the via negativa—rather than the teacher saying, "that's not it," in this model the teacher says, "here's what I saw." While not based on a judgment, this type of teaching very much relies on the skills and sensitivities of the teacher.

Though Foreman gave comments and observations to individuals, more often at Dell' Arte the feedback is group feedback rather than specific to individual students. Stephanie Thompson describes the model at Dell'Arte:

> We give individual feedback but it's not the same as my experience in a university, as a student and as a teacher. The [university] program was for individuals. An individual would come in and enter into a contract with the faculty and there was an intensive focus on their progression as individuals. Here, individuals make the choice to come in and enter into an ensemble and they learn to say: I can learn from my fellows, I can learn from whomever's leading a class, and I can learn from my own experience. We try to keep the focus on the work and not on the individual although there are times when it's really beneficial to say something to a certain individual and the whole class learns from it. (Personal Interview 2009)

As a student in the Dell'Arte Intensive, I found this group-oriented feedback oddly liberating. When we presented our performances in the melodrama and tragedy unit, for

example, the critiques were useful and engaging for the whole group, not just for individuals. Schirle and Foreman led the discussion and commented on each scene while also asking each group to talk about their collaborative processes. I found it interesting that they did not offer directorial comments (e.g., "Claire, make eye contact with the audience"), nor did they offer individual critiques. They tried to frame it in the mode of observations, "this is what I saw," offering ideas about how the group could have pushed its exploration even farther. For example, Foreman commented that people were pressing the energy down and crushing the space rather than playing up and forward, a comment that could be useful to the whole class. Another comment was that there was not much experimentation with time, again, an idea that could be processed by everyone as a general thing to work on. This kind of feedback mediated the usual dynamic of individual performance and critique; the exercise became more about the way we as a group explored the assignment.

Teaching at Dell'Arte is seen as research, and there is a reciprocal learning relationship here, in which teachers learn from students and vice versa. Again, this fits with what Grossberg calls a fourth model of critical pedagogy, which "involves offering new positions and forms of authority, moving between teaching and research" (19). The emphasis on reciprocal exchange and the value of student feedback was evident on the last day of class, when the entire group gathered for a large evaluation session in which students expressed their opinions of the program.[56] Thompson and Krienke led the session, with Thompson asking what students' expectations were and whether they were

[56] This evaluation session was on July 17, 2009.

met. It was a fascinating session, as students discussed both what they particularly valued from the workshop and what they were vexed by.

On the positive side, many students said that they enjoyed the freedom of self-discovery and self-driven learning at Dell'Arte. For example, one student commented that while working on the tragedy unit, Foreman had told her group that they didn't need his permission to create, they should just forge ahead. She felt as though this helped her group feel free to experiment. One student voiced that she felt more comfortable learning to do something constructive with ambiguous feedback and felt a greater sense of direction in her own work. Another student noted that the lack of structure at times forced her to figure out how she was going to do something on her own. Many people commented that learning at Dell'Arte was a very different experience than what they were used to in more traditional educational settings, where the teacher lays out specifically what you have to do to get an A in the class. Others enjoyed what they saw as a "taste" of Dell'Arte, learning a little about a lot in a short period of time.

Students also raised debates about how the workshop might operate differently. The main debate centered on the issue of individual versus group feedback. Some students expressed a desire for more individual feedback as well as more supervision by the faculty. To answer the question of why there was a lack of individual feedback, Krienke said, "People learn from their fellows here, it's not all about an individual's progress towards a career. It's about everyone's pursuit of the work, including faculty." I discerned a split in people's reactions to the program. Some people liked the Dell'Arte model but some wanted a more traditional teaching style with individual feedback. I think

people's expectations about the program as well as the extent of people's previous experience with training factored into this. I think I appreciated the teaching style at Dell'Arte in part because I've already been through more structured approaches and was ready to explore something completely different. Students with less acting experience, however, voiced a desire for more specific feedback and direction.

To me, the Dell'Arte model represents a contrary model of education in general and acting pedagogy in particular. There are not a lot of programs that would say they don't prioritize the progress of the individual, what matters is the work. While listening to the debate about individual feedback, I became conscious of the way that Dell'Arte's emphasis on the creation of new work necessitates a different kind of feedback model. There are few models in acting pedagogy for how to respond to original, student-generated work. This kind of work raises many questions about how to give feedback: What matters most when responding to new work? Do you comment on individual performances or the work as a whole? Do you consider what the performers' process was like? In classes that use existing scenes from plays there is often a common language because of prior experience with the text—teachers and classmates can offer comments on the scene based on what they know about scene/play's existing style, form, character psychology, etc. Though teachers can use some of the same traditional tools when responding to new work, the lack of a common vocabulary for the work and the necessity to continue to encourage creativity creates the need for a new, or wider, set of strategies. It was clear in this session that the teachers valued student feedback and that their approach to the summer training would evolve based on the discussion.

It was also clear that training at Dell'Arte represented a huge break with what many students had previously experienced in actor training, including myself. In fact, it is this very "differentness" that Dell'Arte uses to market itself as an alternative to more traditional forms of actor training. Many aspects of Dell'Arte—from its pedagogical philosophy and its focus on the actor-creator to its location—are built around notions of uniqueness, and it is through this sense of uniqueness that Dell'Arte accrues some of what Pierre Bourdieu would call its "cultural capital" (*Capital* 3). Many people who come to train at Dell'Arte are in fact seeking something different from the actor training that encourages adherence to "type" and glorifies being a "star." The remote, rural location also suggests a rejection of the idea that urban centers are the epicenter of artistic culture. A small actor training school in a rural location without connections to a commercial market might have no alternative but to market itself as "different" in order to create a sustainable artistic community. In any case, it seems key that the differentness of the student experience in the training is intertwined with the whole image and purpose of the place, which is to provide an actor training experience that is a challenge to the mainstream.

Chapter Five

A Call For Transparency, Hybridity, and Collaborative Creativity

"Every precise pedagogic method, from my approach to the great dramatic territories onwards, suggests the need for *combinations*. Only by going beyond the frontiers, passing from one territory to another and overlapping them, can true creativity be nurtured and new territories come to light. The idea of 'pure' theatre is dangerous."

-Jacques Lecoq, *Moving Body*, 162

Throughout this dissertation, I have shown that these three methods of actor training offer their own discrete conceptual systems, complete with ideas about who the actor is, the role of text, the body-mind relationship, and how the actor's creativity functions. These ideas then get put onto the actors' bodies through training, in ways both conscious and unconscious. Now that I have offered theories about what it means *to be an actor* in three different contemporary methods of training, I conclude by offering ideas on how to shift the practices of actor training in ways that create greater agency for actors. I argue for: greater transparency in actor training, a more specific use of language, particularly language that describes the body-mind relationship, conscious hybridity in training, a reconsideration of acting in light of critical pedagogy, and a focus on the actor's collaborative creativity.

Teachers must be transparent about which approach to acting they use. As a starting point, I recommend that acting teachers historicize and contextualize the particular approach they use in order to help students understand how acting techniques are a product of a specific time and place. Lorna Marshall offers a useful way of thinking about performer training, which involves making explicit the outcome, process, and applications of a particular kind of training (160). In her formulation, "*Outcome* refers to

what we desire training to achieve. *Process* refers to the exercises or technical systems that the student experiences in order to achieve some aspect of the desired outcome. *Applications* refers to the factors that promote or impede the work" (emphasis in original 160). I like the idea that acting teachers might explicitly discuss with students what kind of outcome they hope to work toward (for example, increasing the performer's ability to maintain focus onstage) and then the process through which they will hopefully achieve this. Greater transparency in the field of actor training will help to lessen the mysterious power that acting teachers sometimes hold and increase the actor's ability to judge whether one particular approach is right for her or not.

As I have argued throughout the dissertation, the language that teachers use to talk about the mind-body relationship in actor training frequently reinforces a mind-body binary and continues a legacy of anti-intellectualism in the theatre. As I hope to have shown, mind and body actually make up an inseparable whole, and if teachers can shift their language to acknowledge this idea, we can make progress on dissolving this pernicious binary. Acting teachers might take up Rhonda Blair's suggestion to use specific language that directs students' point of focus rather than abstractly offering statements such as "Don't think!"[57] Or they might use the language of shifting modes of mind-body awareness that Phillip Zarrilli proposes in *Psychophysical Acting* (32-33). I think it would be empowering for acting students to know that they don't have to leave their intellect at the door when they enter an acting classroom, though conscious reflection or analysis might not always be the main point of focus during training.

Though I highlighted distinctions between methods of training, it's important to note that all of these modes of actor training are interconnected. As Murray and Keefe

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[57] Comments from Blair's lecture at The Performing Body in Theory and Practice Symposium.

remind us, “each innovator of performer training is in conversation—sometimes explicitly and antagonistically—with both historical figures (and models of training) *and* his/her contemporaries” (120). Viewpoints, for example, presents itself as different from, but complementary to, more realist-based training. Recognizing that modes of training are, in fact, in conversation with one another can help to intervene in the idea that any one way of training is *the* way to train. This is still a major issue in actor training—teachers often promote the idea that the method they teach is really the only true method. At the 2009 ATHE Conference in New York, I attended a panel called “The Purist vs. the Hybrid Approach to Acting,” during which acting teachers debated whether it was better to pick and choose exercises from a variety of acting approaches or to more faithfully teach an existing system, step by step.[58] The lively debate that ensued here proves that this issue of hybridity vs. purity is still a hot topic. Theatre professor Miriam Mills, who convened the panel, expressed concern that teaching multiple methods of acting could create actors who are “jacks of all trades, masters of none.” Anthony Abeson, a professional acting coach, disputed this notion, saying that the idea that one way of working could work for all students seemed “strange” to him. He said that if a student starts to question her talent while working in a particular method, he is alarmed by the idea that she should just continue to work in that method. I found myself very much agreeing with Abeson and siding with those who argued for a hybrid approach. I think it’s important to realize that *all* approaches to acting are, in fact, hybrid approaches, developed out of experimentation with and adaptation of previous methods, always in conversation with what came before. I would argue, then, for a kind of *conscious*

[58] “The Purist vs. Hybrid Approach to Acting,” panel included Miriam Mills, William Esper, Anthony Abeson, Merone Langer, and Dave Callahan, conference for the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, Marriot Marquis, New York City, 9 Aug. 2009.

hybridity in teaching acting. Teachers can acknowledge the lineages of their hybrid approaches while also acknowledging that acting techniques are constantly evolving and changing through practice. This kind of conscious hybridity can help actors understand what they are learning and develop the confidence to choose a new technique if one does not work for them.

I also think there is room for more overlap between critical pedagogy and actor training. Reconsidering acting pedagogy in the light of some of the principles of critical pedagogy might be a useful place to begin. Thinking carefully about the role of authority and the role of the teacher in the classroom is critical to shifting the power relationships between actors and authority figures. As I argued in Chapter Four, though the teachers at Dell'Arte do not use the language of critical pedagogy, they do very much embody some of its principles. They talk about teaching as research and acknowledge that their role is to provoke the students' voices to come forward. Their particular kind of conscious pedagogy, in which teachers are constantly asking, as Joan Schirle suggested, "what's the best training for an actor?" seems like a potential model for other teachers, across the boundaries of style and technique.

Despite our cultural vision of the actor as an individual star, I have shown that many acting techniques require a kind of creativity that is bound up in relationships, improvisation, and collaboration. From the conscious ensemble work of Viewpoints to the interpersonal improvisations of Meisner technique to the group creativity of Dell'Arte training, actors are always in relationship with other people. This idea presents a profound challenge to our cultural model of individual creativity, and I think more clearly acknowledging this idea could have the potential to intervene in many of our models of teaching acting. It might mean that teachers use fewer monologues and assign more ensemble-based devised projects. It might lessen competition between actors and

promote ways of working together. It might help us to see actors less as individual commodities and more as collaborative artists. I find the model from the clown unit at Dell'Arte to be the most apt metaphor for how creativity in actor training should be approached. Each clown must work to find her own particular sense of humor, timing, and energy, while also working within the group. It is the *distinctiveness* of each clown, working in *collaboration with* and in contrast to the other clowns, that engages the audience and creates the life of the scene.

I would like to offer some ideas for future areas of study in the field of actor training. My dissertation offers a subjective experience of what it was like for me, one individual performer, to learn particular acting techniques. There are not many accounts of what it is like for a performer to learn a performance technique, and I believe that more accounts from an embodied perspective would help us to understand the great variety of ways that these techniques are perceived and experienced by students.

Though it is clear that acting techniques have a relationship with larger social structures (for example, looking at the connection between the rise of Method Acting and the ethos of the Cold War), my project did not take on this idea as a main focus. Through my research, I found that words such as "freedom" and "democracy" are frequently connected with Viewpoints training, which leads me to believe that investigating the relationship between Viewpoints training and current U.S. political culture might be a fruitful area of study.

Future scholars will also hopefully offer new insight into how race and gender function in different methods of actor training. During the course of my research, I noticed that in classes that use text, issues of identity are necessarily brought to the foreground. Do you cast students into roles that line up with the identity markers of a character? Do you cast across lines of race and gender? If so, what does that mean? It

struck me that in physical modes of training that don't use text, issues of identity are not in the foreground, and so in some ways these methods could be seen as more inclusive modes of actor training. Then again, what does it mean that these techniques *don't* address issues of gender or race at all? These power dynamics are always present in the classroom, even though they may not be brought into sharp focus by the need to cast students into particular roles. In order to continue to intervene into traditional models of power and authority that haunt actor training, further examination of issues of race and gender in the acting classroom are essential.

As a final note, I ask you to imagine the following scenario, which represents the intervention I hope my dissertation has made. A college freshman, majoring in acting, embarks on her course of study. Instead of being required to register for "Acting I," (a class that claims to help her learn how to act but does not tell her exactly what kind of perspective it offers on acting), the student gets to takes classes that allow her to learn about the history, style, and practice of many styles of training. She learns that in Viewpoints, she will take part in a highly physical training that aims to develop her own perceptions as well as teach her how to work in an ensemble. As she studies Meisner technique, she will become highly skilled at listening and interpersonal communication, and will immerse herself in scene work from realist plays. In Dell'Arte based training, she will be engaging in another rigorously physical practice in which she will frequently create new material for the stage. When given an introduction into all of these transparent options, the student can then ask herself, "How can I apply each of these methods toward the goal of being the kind of actor that I want to be?" And she can develop her own particular artistic technique, based on the vast landscape of contemporary performer training.

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