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CHARACTER MEMORY EXPLORATION: WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO APPLY IT TO YOUR CLASSROOM

Dana Giampiccolo
Virginia Commonwealth University

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INTRODUCTION

“Growth as an actor and a human being are synonymous” (Stella Adler).

When I first began graduate study at Virginia Commonwealth University I was living by this code. As I sit here writing the final culmination of my scholarship I know that I fully believe it, and as I think about the young actors I have been working in tandem with, I am more deeply invested in the values of it. It is this idea of dual development, along with a strong work ethic and discipline, a seeking of knowledge, and a deep love for the art that I have come to expect from fellow artists and actors. In short, insofar as educational terms, the world of theatre academe and my own preparation as an actor, I entered graduate school being accustomed to conservatory style training.

This is also where my expectations of the work I ought to see from undergraduates lie. Many of my colleagues chided me for this but I disagree with the notion that this is unrealistic or that the bar was set too high. The VCU undergraduate program, however, is not built to emulate a conservatory and my first experiences watching undergraduate work was jolting. Within separate venues and parallel time frames, I viewed the entire freshman body and half of the sophomore population performing monologues. This was quite unpleasant. The freshman actors were forgivable as they had just barely started their acting classes and I had no knowledge of their previous training - it was the sophomore actors that really threw me. I consider the second year training for a BFA actor to be crucial and was surprised by their lack of readiness. At this point in my graduate work I was a teaching assistant for the BFA Acting II class and my heart went out to the professor of the course. He had his work cut out for him.

Much of what I noticed was typical for young actors. There were awkward, ungrounded

movements, unsupported voices and shallow breathing - especially with the first years. Though it was disappointing to see that a good portion of that carried over into the second years there were - at least - noticeable differences between the two. The thing that was getting under my skin is what I will refer to as a *puppet actor* which I define as an actor who plays solely on the surface and has nothing alive behind their eyes. As actors have legitimate capacity for thought, utilizing only the body for action while leaving the mind inactive is horrid. Not simply because of the larger universal themes that lie behind that statement, but also because it leads to bad acting. Not all audience members will be sated by a stage filled with tricks. Could one even attempt to perform Ibsen or Chekhov with such falsity?

Theatre practitioners are all abuzz with coined phrases like “acting is action”, “don’t get stuck in your head”, etc. I am *not* arguing these statements; in fact they are extraordinarily valid and important. Having physical and vocal freedom is one of the most important tools for an actor to have but without an active, invested mind that is based in character, the magic that should be a part of every role is lost and a window for audience connection is closed.

I argue - both loudly and defiantly - that this must not continue. Who wants an automobile in mint condition without an engine? The last thing the theatre needs is to become mindless entertainment - that industry is already stuffed to capacity. Of course it should still entertain but I would like to continue Adler’s thought by saying that an audience will also grow as human beings when privy to the artist connected to their work. I want to be a part of creating the Eva Le Galliennes of our own time. I want dynamic three-dimensional characters on that stage. I want to renew arise to *intellectual* actors.

With this said, over the course of the following year I observed the second year BFA actors within the classroom, and coached them weekly on scenes and monologues outside of it. I

watched as they began to gain a better understanding of play and character analysis. They delved more deeply into the teachings of Constantine Stanislavski and were given a multitude of information during class time. What I quickly noticed, however, was that once they left the classroom they applied none of the lessons they had received. They seemed unsure of their importance and did not fully understand how to engage with what was being shown to them. Instead they appeased the teacher within the room and dropped the work they were doing outside of it.

When I work with actors in a coaching capacity I tend to ask a lot of questions. These inquiries run the gamut of subject matter but are nearly always followed with the question *why*. All actors need to play detective while on the quest of their character's truth. *Why* should be one of the first questions they ask themselves, yet when I made my query to this group of students they primarily responded with a stupefied look or a one-word answer. In the best case scenarios, they could respond with an entire sentence and in the worst they did not understand the question. A majority of an actor's homework is the path of justification that they create for their character. How can one begin to build a character without extensively considering the reasons for their impulses and actions? Forget Stanislavski and the rest for just a moment. Even without our current support structure this should be implemented by all actors. I assumed that this was simply common sense. I hastily realized that I was wrong and I began to contemplate how to combat this. I immediately thought of the study I had taken under Dr. Suzanne Trauth, a protégé of Sonia Moore and the most influential teacher of my acting career. The exercises gleaned from her would become the basis of my format and the inspiration of a huge portion of my upcoming work.

Chapter 1

The Premise

It is often true that simplicity leads to beauty. On stage, a moment of stillness - supported by a connected actor - can affect the audience more profoundly than just about anything else. Acting teachers often find themselves battling frustration as they endeavor to communicate the necessity of the ability to just *be*. In our attempt to create emotionally connected, physically capable, vocally supported, honest, and believable actors, we throw a multitude of exercises and techniques at them and often forget about the obvious.

It seems a humdrum statement that to know where you are going you must first know where you have been, but it is absolutely necessary for the actor to stay aware of this. From the moment our senses begin gathering the data around us we set in motion the molding process that will take us into adulthood, and though this is an ever-continuing progression, the biggest strokes seem to be made in our earliest of years. We are not preprogrammed shells dropped onto this planet from a higher being, nor are we excused for everything we do because our genetics deem it so. Instead we are our experiences and a reflection of our environment. It is the culmination of life experience that creates the person we currently are. It is the exploration of *this fact* that will open up a plethora of doors for young actors. From the mundane to the extreme, the books we read to our first kiss, the sports we played to the first time we witness death - all of these details sculpt who we are, what we want, how we go about getting what we want, our impulses and the actions that follow them. Furthermore, though the mind may forget or block specific past experiences, our body will always remember them and store our tensions and the buttons of our emotional lives. Our movements, sounds, posture and articulators are all products of the extent of

our life. Ultimately, the point here is that there is no iota of a human being that is unaffected by this fact.

As actors, the most wonderful part about this is that every person is unique. Certainly not a new thought but one that is repeatedly forgotten as lazy actors group characters into ‘types’, and perform ‘types’ by using tricks. It is impossible for two people to go through life with identical experiences. An obvious statement, that when kept in the forefront of an actor’s mind, will be the key into the world of the character they are creating.

As teachers and professionals, the above postulation is likely to be second-nature - simply part of the homework done when creating a role. For the new actor stepping into a collegiate acting program, however, this is something that needs to be learned in the same way they learn the definition of an objective and how to do a proper roll down. It is all too often assumed that students understand what we - as performance teachers - mean when we talk of “background work”. After all there is so much to get through that if can be done outside of the classroom, that opportunity will usually be taken. Unfortunately, by doing this we miss big prospects of heightening our pupils’ development as artists. Simply telling an undergraduate actor to do background work usually leads to a long list of generalizations, and the magic of acting lies in its specificity. Instead, I would argue that using this premise as a key element in an acting class will -simply put - create better actors. A taught path of justification for the actor to follow that for the remainder of this work will be referred to as Character Memory Exploration. A technique in which the actor is “living” the process that brought a character to where they are in the frozen present of the play. I would argue that utilizing this technique will cultivate honesty in the actor and leave them open for organic moments on the stage. Experiencing character memory (through a combination of visualization exercises, improvisation, and writing) will lead to:

1. Stronger relationships with props, set, and scene partners.
2. A better grasp on the character's physicality and why they move a certain way.
3. A *thinking* actor who can react honestly and support their action on the stage with the thoughts of someone else.

How much more powerful is it to experience life moments, as opposed to simply thinking about them?

I gained my opportunity to find out the following year when I learned I would be taking over a section of the BFA Acting II class. This was thrilling news for me. Not only is this the class that I have the largest investment in and would teach infinitely if I could, but I now had the perfect template to add Character Memory Exploration to my class format.

My objectives for this course are an emulation of what Ms. Adler had to say. I wished to :

1. Find a way to encourage an actors' growth as both the person and the artist - and encourage knowing the difference.
2. Further their teachings in the language of Stanislavski, following program regimen.
3. Utilize *Character Memory Exploration* whilst maintaining students' full range of voice and body, and ensuring that work is in no way compromised.
4. Encouraging the desire for mental stimulation and growth.
5. Developing honest, organic actors.

The following chapters are a scrutiny of my first semester teaching the BFA Sophomore

Acting course. Within them I will navigate the implementation and utilization of Character Memory Exploration. To better frame the technique and where it stood, I will also discuss as the exercises used to enhance and balance that work, whilst striving for well-rounded and capable actors. I will discuss these activities' original purposes, origins, placements, and pairings. I will hash out the failures and successes with my structure and note student reactions to them.

Chapter 2

The Approach

When approaching my acting class there were key factors that were kept within the forefront of my mind whilst laying out the semester. My aim was – and still is – the same as most educators; to bestow upon my students as many tools as I am able. There was certainly no shortage of abilities I wished them to attain, and to accomplish even half of what I desired I needed to balance their education carefully. A necessary skill to teach them was a work ethic that could take them through the challenges they would face as artists and actors attempting to run themselves as a business. I sought to deepen the respect they held for the art they were called to create, and to sift through the ones that lacked that respect and, consequently, the ability to do this with their lives. For them to have a better foundation when approaching character work, it was imperative that my students gained better knowledge of themselves; both who they were and who they strove to be. They needed to attain a level of fearlessness in order for them to become emotionally available, honest, connected, and organic people on that stage. I wanted to guide them onto a path that would allow them to take risks without forgetting who they are as individuals. I hoped for them to see their classmates as people to support and rely on, as opposed to looking at them as competition.

The theatre is a demanding, unforgiving, and moody master who rewards generously and punishes harshly – to love her requires courage. I certainly held no short supply of expectations for these actors but along with them I carried a great excitement for the possibilities. It is, after all, in possibility where the magic lies.

The Person I Needed to Be

One of the most important elements in achieving my goals was my own demeanor within the classroom. Though a few of my students had heard of previous work I had done from upperclassmen, I was still an unknown for many and I knew that there were certain stigmas I faced upon heading this class. First, there is a tendency for students within this specific department to distrust their professor until it has been proven that they are sufficiently talented, knowledgeable, and capable of furthering the students' development. In my own collegiate experience I would never have considered approaching my classes in this manner, however this grouping of students had been dealt previous disappointments in performance classes and I now needed to handle the fall-out. Being their disappointments were the product of previous graduate students, and I myself was a graduate student, this held no shortage of significance. The first hurdle I therefore needed to face was the failures of those before me, and I needed to eradicate this quickly in order for them to trust me and the fact that I was there for them – not merely personal advancement.

The second set of issues that needed to be addressed in a timely manner were my age and gender. Though it pains me that this is still the case, my classroom experience has thus far shown me that being a woman means that you have to work twice as hard at the beginning of the semester. The previous courses I have taught had shown me that there was a one – two week transition period that proved to be primarily about testing me. The value that was automatically given to my male counterparts had to be earned by me. The students tested my level of knowledge, my adherence to my own classroom rules, the boundaries of the class that were set and how far they could push before meeting the repercussions of crossing one. In fact, it was

very much like dealing with children for the first few weeks. Thankfully this behavior dissipated quickly but I cannot help being fascinated that none of my male peers had the same occurrence – even those who started with less experience. There seems to be this preconceived notion that men automatically know what they are doing – even if it is proven to be a falsity later.

Regardless, added to this problem of gender was the fact that most students assume I am in my early twenties and, therefore, closer to being their peer as opposed to their professor. All of which result in an even lower status reading. For a while I actually considered wearing a wedding ring to alter perceptions but in the end I decided I needed no more than myself to change viewpoints and did not rely on such a binding symbol. This meant that the second hurdle I faced was the preconceived – or preprogrammed - notion that I was less capable as a younger female.

Taking these unexpected obstacles into consideration played a large part in shaping the role I needed to fill and dictated much of my behavior within this acting class. Even with the rumors of my being strict circulating before they experienced me, the students made it apparent that I was a shock to their systems at the start. Something I greatly prefer to being treated like a pushover – quite the opposite actually. Adherence to my rules and policies were a must and I didn't consider altering them for anyone. Of course it was a bit overwhelming for them on that first day of class when reviewing the syllabus and expectations. Conversely, this group in particular left their first year of acting with casual and careless attitudes that needed to be focused into something productive. Intense is the word they enjoyed labeling me with later on, and though that certainly brings a smile, what I really embodied was disciplinarian and task-master. I kept the troops in line, demanded everything from them as actors, expected more than

they thought themselves capable, and pushed them as far as I was able. Due to the successes I found with this approach I would not think of doing it any other way.

PAPERWORK, PAPERWORK, PAPERWORK...

One of the major elements in my class that was resisted by my students at the start, grudgingly accepted once they had adapted, and enjoyed towards the end was written work. Admittedly there was a very heavy load, and as the one grading all of this I felt every bit of it. If I did not find it absolutely crucial to their character memory work, character analysis, and play analysis I would have cut it in a heartbeat. Under the general umbrella of paperwork fall the following categories:

1. Acting Journals; a full account of everything that is covered during the semester including notes, all assignments, and all handouts.
2. Play Readings; a two page response per week for a new play they have read.
3. Play Reviews; a two page response per three productions on the acting within the show.
4. Barton Self-Observations; From Robert Barton's Acting Onstage and Off the actors need to journal and observe their own physicality.
5. Emotional Observations; a one – two page paper observing themselves in a heightened emotional state: the triggers, physicality, given circumstances, breath, etc.
6. Character Biographies; details vary per assignment.

7. Voice of the Character; a 5 – 15 page paper (depending on assignment) done to find their character's voice and explore paths of justification.
8. Character and Play Research; copies or printouts of the research they did on the givens within the play.
9. Performance Paperwork; varying assignments dependent upon the performance exercise due.
10. Character Memory Journals; after each character memory visualization or improvisation the actors took five minutes to write what they had learned and expounded upon that later if necessary.

**Please find handouts with a full description within the appendices.*

One of the most interesting things I noticed with my students in terms of paperwork, is that though it was resisted for a while it was never challenged. I find this intriguing because I was running only one of three sections of the Acting II course. There were few things that we all agreed upon trying to accomplish with our classes, but our approaches were completely different. My syllabus, assignments, approach and policies were of my own device, just as the other courses followed the careful planning of their concurrent Professor. This means everything from the paperwork to the syllabus to classroom policy was done differently. My course required much more from the students in terms of written work and discipline and I suppose they could have rallied against me if they chose to do so. I have to assume that by taking on more responsibility and not comparing themselves to the other classes, the actors craved the work as all who love the art do.

The policy on all written work for my class was an automatic zero for any late work. Skipping assignments was further discouraged by the fact that they still needed all missed work in their journals by the end of the semester or further points would be taken from their journal grade. This means that they needed to do their work whether it was for full credit or none – no exceptions. Therefore, the obvious choice would be to have it done on time. For those of you deeming me as being too harsh with this, pause for a moment and consider what this imparts upon these students:

1. Acting is hard work – respect that or find something else to do.
2. The mind is a tool that must continue to grow and be challenged.
3. Actors are scholars; they need to learn as much of everything as they can.
Something that unfortunately needs to be reminded to people both within the art and without.
4. This is an ever continuing discipline – all roles require homework.
5. A method of character development that they can choose to keep for themselves or alter to fit their future needs. Specifically character memory development to take them down the path of justification.
6. The power of specificity and forethought and how it translates on the stage.
7. Time management skills.
8. The rewards of such an investment when the difference translates in their work.

Paperwork did vary throughout the semester – it was not expected that they procured all of the aforementioned within the same week. They had specific requirements per major assignment as

well as the continuing assignments due weekly. Within the following chapters there will be tables of assignments, when they were due, and what their purpose was.

Insofar as the students handling all of this, I had quite the range of reactions. However, even at the start when their extreme dislike for it was in full force, not one of them gave an outright complaint - something which I truly appreciated even if it surprised me a bit. They knew I expected it to be done and by mid-semester they had adapted to what I was asking of them. The real joy came when they began to get excited about the work they were doing. Towards the end of that first semester I began hearing happy babbles of things they had discovered writing their character biographies, and by the start of the second semester I was being read teasers of their work and given interesting tidbits discovered during their research process. I cannot express the pleasure I felt witnessing their own. It made every struggle in the beginning something I will gladly do again. Though different portions resonated differently per individual, the sheer amount of *dedication* they invested makes me proud to have been their teacher.

In regards to Character Memory Exploration, writing is a wonderful way to specify memories and keep the creative juices flowing through free thought. Once the doors are open and a pattern established, actors can drop the writing portion if they choose and simply meditate on these thoughts allowing them to live only within the mind and not on the paper. It all depends on the person and since writing is a tool I have found to be the most helpful in my own work as an actor, I needed to present it as an option for my students and expose all of its benefits. It turns out many in my class have a real talent for it.

CHAPTER 3

Major Assignment #1: *Etude Scenes*

The first major assignment of the year was etude scenes, or open-ended scenes. I had a few reasons for assigning these before monologues or full scenes. Within the first year of an actors' training they are primarily learning the *basic* language and application of the Stanislavski System. In their second year, character development along with character relationships should deepen tremendously. Hence, the first reason for choosing etudes was to see them apply what they have already learned and pinpoint what they would most need from me to reach the next level.

In addition, newer actors have the tendency to rely on text when approaching a scene; Etudes take that possibility away. These scenes also immediately encourage using imagination and 'magic if', as the circumstances of the scene can be anything that the actors wish them to be. This will focus the importance of specificity within choices from the start, as generalized choices are bound to flop tremendously within this forum. These traits are tools that the actors will always need to utilize during Character Memory work, therefore making it the perfect assignment to start them on their memory explorations.

The actors had three weeks from the time the etude was assigned to their final showing of the scene. The following is a chart of additional exercises assigned to enhance their work within the etude (Table 3.1) and when they fell. Table 3.2 states the written work that went along with these exercises.

Table 3.1 Supplemental Assignments

EXERCISE	CLASS	TYPE	PURPOSE	
1	Precious Object	2	Trust	Begin bonding process with the class.
2	<i>Perfect Day</i>	3	<i>Character Memory</i>	<i>Creating the epitome of peace for current character and knowing why.</i>
3	<i>Etude Freeze & Justify</i>	3	<i>Character Memory Improvisation</i>	<i>Explore Different Moments in relationship history, and strengthen partner bond.</i>
4	Personal Task in Character.	4 5	Uta Hagen Exercise Performance	Importance of creating a specific environment. First done within characters space and then with added heightened circumstances.
5	Action Only Scenes	5 6	Performance Movement	Enforce relationship with space and props. Promote grounded acting and specificity.
6	Window Washing	6	Improvisation	Relationship Building
7	<i>If I Could Change My Life...</i>	6	<i>Character Memory</i>	<i>Build Memory and deepen bond with partner.</i>
8	<i>Given Object</i>	6	<i>Character Memory</i>	<i>Connecting Memories to props and deepening bond with partner.</i>

Table 3.2 Paperwork

Strengths and Weakness'

A chart listing what each actor pinpointed as their individual strengths and weakness' in acting terms. This is used for self-observation purposes as well as a growth chart.

Detailed Description of Space

Simply a sketch of the space you will be living in for your etude scene. Please

include the things only you can see such as the fourth wall. The sketch should be the same for each pair but each partner needs to hand in a copy. Don't worry about drawing ability - a box with descriptive words inside will work just fine.

Self Observation in Space

Observe yourself performing a routine task and write about it. You should be as detailed as possible. Pay attention to how you are feeling as well as what you are doing. Notice how the little things affect the overall objective. Make sure to continuously answer the question of *why*. Your observations should be typed and turned in with your sketches.

Etude Paperwork

This paperwork needs to be handed in by each student but your Activity sheet should be collaborated on and be the same.

1. Activity and Intentions

Example: 1. He slams the pot on the table (activity). 1. To grab her attention (intention).

This should include *all* movement, not only what you're doing when you say your lines.

2. Open Interpretation

This will include all of the given circumstances you have created for this scene; *setting, time, circumstance, and character descriptions, relationship to one another, etc.*

3. Character Biography

You must write a character biography for your character only. This should be around 3-4 pages and done in the first person. It can be in any style you would like (diary, simple paper, from psychiatric ward - whatever.)

4. Journals

Typed entries of any and all journals entries done in class up to the final

presentation of your etude scene.

Up to this point I have mentioned “specificity” numerous times because it is one of the traits that all great actors share. This is what makes the world the character is living in real – both for the actor and the audience watching them. It promotes not just a deepening of thought for the actor, but a heightened physical life as well. After all, acting *is* action and it is quite important that the actor remember that lest we find ourselves with an actor who simply wants to feel something extraordinary and forgets to drive the plot forward. It was crucial to push this point within my class in order to balance the developmental work being done. I therefore turned to some of my favorite women for guidance: Stella Adler and Uta Hagen.

Throughout the year, in conjunction with their major performance assignments, my students performed Adler and Hagen exercises – many with slight modifications. For the Etude work specifically, the actors had to take a deeper look at the details of the space they were living in. This exercise was derived from Uta Hagen’s *A Challenge for the Actor* (chapter ten), in which she speaks about how the variables within any specific day, changes the way she goes about a standard task. I consolidated this and made it more easily approachable by offering it in steps to my actors. Firstly, they needed to observe themselves performing a ritual task within their lives – something they partook in daily. This needed to be as detailed as they could make it, knowing what happened before they began their task, how it affected how they did their task, how they were feeling throughout, any nuances, where they were going next, etc. This was quite simply, to tune them into a detailed way of thinking and to stress the importance of the variables in their lives. For example, though they may always take their shower in the morning it will be different on the day that they woke up late, stubbed their toe on the way into the bathroom because they were rushing, and jumped in while the water was too hot. These changes

in circumstances will also color the way they approach the next thing they are about to do, and so on. The next portion of the assignment was to then take what they had learned from their own lives, and apply the same principles to their characters. This means they needed to create a personal space for their character and perform a two minute task as their character. This also gives nice opportunity for them to walk in their character's shoes amongst the more mundane day to day activities. They can look at the less dramatic portions of their lives and explore their physicality, etcetera. What I was asking for them here is arguably not theatre – or not interesting enough for the theatre. Be that as it may, the point of this was to stretch their instrument and as first rounds go most of them failed. *That* would be the greatest part about these exercises, when they go astray it is abundantly clear as to why. This gives the actor the opportunity to overcome the failure. Instead of being defeated it is a change they can make, a noticeable, tangible, thing that will raise their failure from the ashes. It is then further enforced when the same actor later watches from an audience perspective as their classmates goes through the same struggle.

Out of the sixteen students I started with, fifteen needed to repeat this portion of the exercise because it wasn't specific *enough*. Where they had believed they had considered and made choices for all the things that mattered, they here learned that they had barely scratched the surface. It is quite a wonderful thing to watch this sink in right in front of you. One of the very best parts about being an acting teacher is being witness to those “aha!” moments and the excitement that is derived from them. Their second attempt was infinitely better and done immediately following the first. One of the largest improvements I saw was a general settling among a large percentage of them. Where habit and past experience had them continue toward the tendency to ‘act upon’ within the first round, the deliberate choices of the second grounded them considerably. This also slowed down their scenes quite a bit so they did not look so rushed

and unfulfilling. Most importantly, what was a trial to view before was now something turning the corner of interesting – and they noticed.

The final step to this exercise was to perform the same task with a heightened circumstance. They needed to change the givens of that specific day for their character, and alter their behavior accordingly. For those students whom were most successful, the class was able to pinpoint what had gone wrong before the scene began. For those who were not successful, the class was quite clueless. In these instances, I walked the actor through their choices, made some suggestions, and had them try a portion of it again. It was the hardest for those actors who only worked with surface charms and tricks to get the hang of this exercise. They seemed to think that because it didn't feel like "acting" they were doing something wrong. Hearing class response - as my students were encouraged to talk about what they saw - made enough of an impact to assure them that it was better from an audience perspective, but these actors were just beginning to learn this for themselves. Some of them turned out to be quite good by the end of it all.

Following this exercise I had seen what I call a "rough draft" of their scenes. This simply means that they aren't performance ready but they are off book, blocked, etc. These were awful in comparison to their Personal Task exercise and I quickly figured out why. Within the Hagen exercise there was absolutely no text. There were no words to rely on – sounds only. The moment text was added back in - even such a stilted and barren one - they drove everything from a text point of view. The worst of them ran their entire scene in this manner, and the best were outdone by it eventually. This made their next project self-evident. They were to do their scenes using action and sounds only. I don't believe in sugarcoating notes for actors – I tell them the truth. This being said, they knew exactly why they needed to do this. Their bodies were lifeless

and awkward, most of them had lost any sense of character, and movement was ungrounded and done for no good reason. The other element that always seems to be paired with this is the utter fear of using sound that is not vocalized through speech or overly breathy. As this is practically an epidemic with newer actors, I made the usage of supported sound a requirement. Might as well start chipping away at the roadblocks from the start. This assignment stabilized the horror from before, and lent a backbone to their etudes in general. It opened the door for the etude itself to fulfill its original purpose. However, it also taught me the lesson that even though these BFA actors are taking movement and voice classes, I need to be supplementing that part of their education by keeping it a focus point in my own class as well.

Beginning Character Memory Exploration

Stella Adler believed that the given circumstances of a play gave the actor all of the clues they would need for their imagination to create the rest – and I agree with her. Character Memory Exploration is a way of delving into this theory within the classroom. It is supplemental work done to act as a thought stimulus for the actors, and to help them connect more fully with the characters they are portraying within their major assignment. I tried to keep these mental warm-ups to no more than two per class – especially if they were both visualizations. To go beyond that is mentally draining and will run the risk of diminishing their energy level completely. These exercises were done immediately following their group warm-up, directly before we started the performance work for the day.

The first time I introduced Character Memory Exploration was the third day of class and only the second day we were working. It was – therefore – implemented right away. They had received their etude scenes the class before and were assigned to be off-book with a developed story line by their next class. As we only met on Monday and Friday this gave them plenty of time, especially since etude scenes have minimal text. If I had not stipulated that work to be done before their next class I would not have been able to utilize this technique. It is important that the actors are grounded in - at least – the facts of the play before they allow their imagination to take over. If they do not have this foundation they run the risk of creating a background that goes against the grain of the play and their role within it. This would directly conflict with the point of Character Memory Exploration and is, hence, inadvisable.

On this day, I ran them through two exercises; one visualization task and one improvisation. The first I created and titled *Perfect Day* and the second I modified from the ever popular *Freeze and Justify* – please reference tables 3.3 and 3.4 for a full description of the exercises. It was important to start the class off on a light note, for although we would explore the dark side as well, I did not want them to associate Character Memory Exploration with pain and emotional overindulgence. The human spirit continues to stumble on because of hope and a seeking of happiness, if it were only bleak no would stick around past the age of thirty. The actors need to balance the characters they are creating in this same way. Every role is different, some will require more light and some more dark, but my job is to present all of the options. The strength of the memories they create will take care of the rest.

The first step in a visualization exercise is to get their bodies relaxed, breath deep, and spine aligned. Their minds need to be open for a visualization to be successful and daily tensions within their muscles will blockade that. I begin by having them do a slow roll-down, one

vertebra at a time, gently lowering themselves into child's pose, and carefully extending themselves into dead man's pose along the floor. I then have them concentrate on their breath, breathing deeply into center until they feel their backs expanding across the floor. Once their breath is steady, I have them release it on an 'ess' sound which will sound like a tea kettle, until they are able to release on a count of sixteen. They then continue breathing deeply while I talk them through the *Blue Light Exercise*.

The *Blue Light Exercise* can be done with multiple colors – I simply prefer a bright, sparkling, blue light. I ask my students to picture this light dancing above their heads and then lower the light, starting at the tip of their head, and talking it through the rest of their bodies. As the light travels it massages the tension and does not continue downward until they feel the release. Most students will automatically tense the muscles that the blue light is working on and release it when it is finished which will also give the desired effect. This exercise works wonders for the start of visualization work but should not be necessary for the entire year. By the time we hit mid fall semester, they were able to relax their bodies into the floor with breath only, and no guidance from me. I would bring it back on days where tension was very high – usually around exam time. However, every group of students will be different and will dictate how long, or how often, the exercise will be necessary.

I did have the fear that half of my class would fall asleep, especially since I shut half of the lights off for the exercise. Surprisingly, this did not occur within this specific class but I have seen it happen many times so do not be surprised if a student drifts off in the middle of this – they are simply more relaxed than most. This class seemed to really enjoy the exercise – especially on high stress days – and the only other feedback I received were the gentle sighs and groans of pleasure as they relaxed into the floor.

On this day, as my students continued their breathing I instructed them to take in an aspect of their character with each breath and on each exhalation to breath out an aspect of themselves. I had them focus on everything the given circumstances they had created and then began to lead them through *Perfect Day*. This visualization is just as it sounds, the exploration of their characters perfect day. It does not need to be something that has already happened, in fact it is better if it is the perfect day they desire. I talk them through the visualization, and when they can see it perfectly in their mind and hold it there, I have them slowly stand up and experience it with full body and voice.

Though this particular exercise is not creating a specific memory, it is exploring the character's hopes. When the exercise is over and the actors record what they have learned in their journals, they need to talk not only about what they produced but more importantly *why* that was what they produced. By answering that question they are actually creating multiple snippets of memory, and some will probably be more delved into than others. The point of Character Memory Exploration is still present here – they must first create the daily trials and tribulations of their character to create the perfect day for them.

It is very difficult to pontificate what I witnessed during this exercise. Under the tutelage of Suzanne Trauth I had experienced many visualization exercises as an actor, so I knew how powerful they could be. It was this fact alone that kept my heart from jumping out of my chest during the first half of this exercise. I had not yet been on the other end of it, and the only thing that you will see as the person narrating the experience, is a group of actors lying on their backs, breathing deeply, with eyes closed, and flickers of emotions running over their faces as they go through the visualization. This is absolutely terrifying. If the exercise is failing there is no way to know or alter anything to get it back on track. Blind faith pushed me forward here, for all I

knew they were thinking how terribly daft all of this was. I can laugh about it now but at the time I am certain that I broke into a sweat. I did not begin to breathe easy again until I saw how vigorously they wrote in their journals, and how difficult it was for me to get them to put their pens down. Later, when I was able to view their journal responses, I put my fears to rest. Their entries were filled with excitement and discoveries, and I now knew that this technique was one that I could continue.

The following Character Memory exercise for the day was a modified version of *Freeze and Justify*. Instead of becoming new characters in new situations, they kept their characters and their relationship with their scene partner, and improvised different times in the history of their relationship. The basic elements of the game were still there, however, and they needed to justify the start of their new scene from the position they froze on in the last. I liked the idea of using this game because it is great for relationship building and does not allow room for nitpicking – it forces them to rely on impulse and what they had previously created. This way, they are taking a deeper look into the history of their relationship together, instead of formatting opposing situations separately. This type of relationship exploration can lead to some lovely moments between scene partners on the stage.

My biggest folly with this exercise was assuming they had all played *Freeze and Justify* before. After a moment of confusion, I asked the class who had *not* played it before and all of them raised their hands. Lesson learned. For any readers who are falling into that same category, I have explained the rules of the game in table 3.4 – lest I repeat the same mistake. Looking at my actors' journals, the game seemed to extract the larger themes within the lives of their relationships. I do not think that they fully understood the fact that they were building their own foundation, but they did notice the more blatant attributes of their rapport. This game is

something that I will continue to use, but only towards the beginning of Character Memory work. It is a nice introduction into some of the more demanding work they would do later on but is not meaty enough to push them once they have delved more deeply into the work.

The next two exercises I utilized with my actors were called *If I could Change My Life...* and *Given Object* done during our sixth class together. Since it was still early in the semester I began in the same way I had before; slow roll-down, breathing, and *Blue Light Exercise*. It is simply something that needs to be repeated until their bodies are able to focus themselves in the manner. *If I Could Change My Life...* is an exercise I formatted to begin as a visualization that led into relationship building. Though the visualization portion of this exercise could be made obsolete with field ready actors, I am trying to implement within their minds a fuller way of developing their characters. For the actors to commit to the technique it must first be re-enforced.

As with all visualizations, the text and layout of the exercise are left up to the instructor's discretion - making it easy to adjust and alter a basic format to suit the needs of your class. With this class I began by taking them through the everyday trials and tribulations of life. Based on the givens – as always – they were to explore the little worries that crept into their minds on a daily basis, the things that aggravated or annoyed them within their lives, where they felt pressured during the day and their level of ease when they returned home. Once I talked them through this, I asked them *why* and followed that with *when*. Once they began to stack up the reasons they were behaving or feeling the way they were in these situations, I then asked them to remember a key moment in their lives that either epitomized this trait or spawned it. It is important to note that at this point within the exercise, there are some lags of silence that are required by the instructor. It is important to give them enough time to finish 'seeing' the

memory they are simultaneously building and it is a bit awkward at first to balance the silence and the gentle reminders of what they are doing to keep them grounded. This is something that still takes me a moment to adjust to but is necessary.

Once the visualization portion of this exercise is over, the students are to stay within their character, stand up carefully and find their partners for the next portion of the exercise. They can choose to sit in chairs or crossed legged on the floor but they must be sitting knee to knee. I ask them to hold hands, maintain eye contact, center themselves with breath, and simply talk to one another. They will speak one at a time, with the second partner simply listening, absorbing, and supporting if need be. I then instructed them to think about what they had just learned about themselves, recognize what they would like to change, and be prepared to state the reasons. The speaker is to begin pinpointing what they would change by continuing the statement: “If I could change my life, I would...” They can then expound upon why, and once they are ready to move on to the next issue, they repeat the statement and continue so-on and so-forth.

I created this exercise for two reasons. Firstly, it supported relationship building as well as character memory – two things that can go beautifully together. The benefits are shown when all of those moments shared between partners outside of their scene add up and are present within the scene due to the simplicity of the exercise supporting honesty. Thus the bond between partners grew stronger. The second reason I created this exercise, was because it played so nicely into *Given Object*, an exercise I learned - and minimally modified - from Dr. Suzanne Trauth.

In an effort to avoid having them go through the roll-down process again – as I feared they would become a bit *too* relaxed – I simply had them turn so they were sitting with a straight spine, and back to back. I made sure their breathing was regulated and then simply had them

think about their partner. I encouraged them to allow free thought in and to follow impulse. I supplied a range of events for them to remember, always giving a second option for those partners whose relationship does not go back very far. Once I felt they had enough of a focus on this person and how they viewed them, I asked them to think of the perfect gift to give them. This can be anything their imagination desires, from the grotesque to the poignant. When they had the perfect present, they were to turn to their partners and have a gift exchange. This was quite amusing to watch, especially since their investment levels were so high from doing two visualizations in a row. It is also one of those exercises that the actors will continue for ten minutes or more if they are not cut off, so I allowed for a three minute impromptu conversation before sending them to their journals to write about their discoveries. After reading and comparing their entries, it is clear that this was one of the favorite exercises of the semester. Something about it resonated with this group of actors, and they seemed to have just as many discoveries in the receiving of their gifts as they did in the giving of them.

The etude scenes were allotted the shortest amount of time for the semester and these two exercises ended the character memory work that applied to them. The scenes themselves made vast improvements from the time of their rough drafts but there was still plenty of work to be done. There were now more moments of honesty on the stage but it was still inconsistent. Their *Voice of the Character* paperwork revealed to me a tendency to stifle their creativity. In fact, with this round of written work I made notes and had them make the appropriate changes. There seemed to be a real fear in exploring past the obvious – which consequently obliterates the purpose. Reading their first round of papers had Keith Johnstone's words from *Impro* echoing in my brain, perhaps the educational system set up in our country truly does attempt to kill creativity at an early age, or maybe I was simply experiencing a communication issue.

Nonetheless, improvement had been made all around, the first giant of the semester had been overcome, and the next was soon to begin.

Table 3.3 Perfect Day; *An example of visualization text.*

Continue breathing into the floor and allow your mind to focus on the given circumstances of your play. Continue breathing into your center. Focus your mind towards the given circumstances. Think of all of the facts you have created. Keep breathing while you are doing this. With every inhalation take on another part of your character and with every exhalation let a part of yourself go. Check in with your neck and make sure your jaw is slightly open. I want you to think about your life now. What daily responsibilities do you have? How old are you? Do you work or are you still in school? Does responsibility even have a place in your life yet? Hold onto what you know about your character and fill in the rest, making sure you don't oppose the given circumstances of your play. Good, remember to keep taking those deep breaths into the floor. Is your life filled with people or quite the opposite? How many others rely on you? How do they rely on you? Allow these thoughts to come freely. Resist the urge to edit yourself. There is nothing that cannot be changed later if you need it to be. I want you to continue your deep breathing and allow your mind to show you a familiar place. Where are you? Are you indoors or outdoors; is it personal or professional, what is this first place that came to your mind? Good, now make it specific and take a look around. What time of day is it? Is there an abundance of light or has the sun already set? Does the room smell like lemon polish, is it dank and musty, is coffee brewing in the air? What are the scents that surround you? Now take a seat and feel the firmness of the chair, bed, ground etc. Notice the texture and the way it feels on your skin. Keep breathing. What sounds are happening around you? Can you hear the cars outside or are you in nature? Is the only sound what you are creating? I want you to find all of these little details, and engage all of your senses. When you can see your familiar place with more than just sight I want you to think about your life and feel its burdens upon you. Good. Now I am going to give you a gift. Notice where the tension lies in your

character's body, and begin to breathe it all out. When it is gone fill yourself up with hope. Let it start at your toes and rush up to the top of your head. Where does this hope live in your body? My gift to you is a perfect day. I want you to imagine the day that you dream of having. It can be as elaborate or as simple as you want it to be. It needs only to bring you peace and joy. Good. When you have established this day in your mind I want you to slowly sit up and enact what you have created.

Table 3. 4 Freeze and Justify Original Rules

Two actors begin an improvisation. When the instructor chooses – usually when they are in a moment of awkward physicality – the instructor or classmate yells “freeze”. The actors freeze exactly where they are and someone jumps in and taps one of the two actors out. They then freeze in the same position as the person they are replacing until the instructor yells “justify”. The actors then have to justify the strange position they are in with a completely new scene, set of circumstances, and characters.

Freeze and Justify Modified

The improvisation begins in the role that they are currently working on. When they land in an interesting position or seem to be getting stuck I yell “freeze”. This time the same two actors stay in the game and they continue on as the same characters. When the instructor yells “justify” they need to create another key moment in their lives.

Chapter 4

Major Assignment #2: *Audition Monologues*

There are very few actors in the world that will gush over their love for audition monologues. To date I have met no more than three, and I am nearly certain they were lying. This being said, when audition monologues were given as the next major assignment, I felt complete sympathy for the responded collective moan. I knew that this had the potential to be a thorny, gargantuan task for both the actors and myself. Not only did I understand the overwhelming nature of taking such a small bit of text and warping it into something that shows true potential, but I had also seen the monologues they had performed the previous year. We all had our work cut out for us.

The guidelines for the performance aspect of the assignment were simple; the monologues needed to be one minute in length and the target event was their upcoming main stage auditions for Theatre VCU – *Tommy* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. The work for this assignment began immediately following Etudes, and their pieces had been chosen and approved by me before their scenes had come to an end. At this point in time our numbers had already dropped by one – due to the unforgiving syllabus I had written – and we were down to fifteen students. Their work load was only about to increase and I sincerely hoped that they would all make it through.

The analysis paperwork my students now needed to complete had just grown weightier. As time management is a crucial skill for actors - as well as an attribute that makes people want to work with you again - I assigned their paperwork immediately, giving them around three

weeks to accomplish it. I knew that ninety percent of them would attempt to get it all done the night before, but I allowed them to learn their own lessons there. The following is what I now expected from them for each major assignment, unless I specified differently.

1. *Voice of the Character*; the same paperwork as aforementioned, with a five page minimum.
2. *The Bare Bones*; a twenty page questionnaire on their characters, each answer should be one – two paragraphs in length.
3. *Script Scoring*; a twenty-five page questionnaire on the analysis of their characters and the play – up to a paragraph in length.
4. *Research*; there is no minimum or maximum requirement here in terms of pages but the actor must do research on every aspect of their characters that they are not fully knowledgeable on. They did not need to write a paper on this but instead turn in the research itself with all sources cited.
5. *Layout of Space*; a simple diagram of the space they have created for their characters.
6. *Journals*; a typed, fleshed-out version of the journaling they have done in class on the current character.

As the timing for monologues fell when they did simply because auditions dictated that was when they needed to occur, the supplemental work put with them wasn't necessarily chosen specifically for the monologues. The end results were neither awful nor amazing, so continuing in that manner fell into a gray area. In reality, all of the work done in this class could be directly applied to any major assignment I simply feel I could have helped them further if I were more

specific with my own choices. Lessons and lectures were centered on *Magic If*, *Script Scoring*, *Through-line of Actions*, and *Super Objective*. Most of my students are readers and familiar with Stanislavsky’s system on an intellectual level. This made the moments of lecturing quite painless to get through. The supplemental performance assignments can be found in the table below.

Table 4.1 Supplemental Assignments

	EXERCISE	CLASS	TYPE	PURPOSE
1	Lost Object	9	Uta Hagen	To deepen relationships with props, & space. Actors need to be specific and able to recreate the same scene.
2	Monologue with task into straight Monologue.	10 11	Performance	To get the actors out of their head and allow for real moments.
3	<i>Childhood Delight</i>	10	<i>Character Memory Visualizations & Improvisation</i>	<i>To find a place of innocence and light and to share it with your partner with only sound and movement.</i>
4	<i>Five Objects</i>	11	<i>Character Memory</i>	<i>Relationship with props.</i>
5	<i>Heavy, Light</i>	11	Movement	<i>Build on Above.</i>
6	Abstract Movement	12 13	Performance exercise learned from Barry Bell.	To tell the story with their bodies.

For their practical application assignment, the students partook in another Uta Hagen exercise called *Lost Object*. The objective of the exercise is to stay honest and organic while looking for an object that you have lost, in a re-creatable manner. A sense of place and

relationships to props must be clear to the audience for this to be successful, and the exercise may only be up to three minutes in length. The obvious challenge is that the actor already knows where the object is and the steps they will take to go about finding it. Full investment is needed for this assignment to be more than an exercise in futility.

As with most practical application assignments done in the first semester, the students were given the opportunity to do it twice. Not only does this circumvent me failing the majority of my students, but these exercises really do leave room for immediate improvement. The lessons that my actors learned within these moments were among the most important of the year. They felt a truth, if you will, that registered within the actor making the realization, and resonated throughout the class watching it.

The number one problem with this exercise was pace. No one seemed to want to take enough time with it, it was as if they made their specific choices before hand and then put them on fast forward. Some of them made more general choices, which usually led to a hyperventilating actor as things became over the top. Those actors panicked because things were not going the way it did in their minds, thus proving the fact that rehearsal is necessary for even the seemingly simple, or they had simply chosen 'build' moments where the emotion would enhance, but in an ungrounded manner. This leads to one big mess on the stage, a non-invested actor and a highly unbelievable performance. Other students simply allowed nerves to rule their scene, resulting in various objects flying through the air.

A smaller portion of the class struggled with discovery, whether it is the final discovery of what was lost, the possible discovery of it being in the next place they looked, or the mental tallying of where they *should* discover the object if only they take a closer look. Again, the class feedback showed that they noticed something wrong. At this point in their collective process,

however, they could not quite put a finger as to *what* was wrong. This was quite natural as most of them were making the same types of mistakes. So one by one, I had them do it again. I asked questions, a lot of questions; at least sixty percent of the time actors need no more than the stimulus. I had them focus on their relationship with the object; what it was, why it was necessary for them to find it, what would happen if they didn't, etc. I reminded them that life doesn't necessarily happen in a 'build'. Starting out calm, moving to anxious and ending in tears is not what always needs to happen. I asked them to trust what they had created around them – i.e. their relationship to the space and other objects in it – and allow the room to think, consider, and reject the possibilities of where the lost object could be. Then if all else fails, the full panicked state you end up in – if they still choose to do so – will be honest.

All of them improved. Some of them were starting to take massive strides away from the 'acting upon' actors I had started off with. Whatever their level of improvement, I was happy because any form of it is good. There is no formula for when it will all start to click for an actor, opening the door to new possibilities. In fact, this class was a real example of this as a few of the starting stragglers took off mid-year and ended at the top of their class. Needless to say, I was increasingly impressed with the success of Hagen's exercises within my class.

For their next performance assignment, I had them perform their monologues with a task. I had already seen their monologues a few times at this point, and my aim here was to get them out of their heads. Having them engaged in a task while performing their monologues would engage both sides of their brain. Therefore, the "what I am going to do next" mentality is channeled into the task they must complete, leaving room for free impulse and emotion whilst performing the monologue. Though this is an exercise I truly believe in and I have witnessed

growth in actors among a wide range of ages and levels, I learned a very big lesson here; technology can be the ruin of an acting assignment.

Not once did it occur to me to ban them from doing something on their computer, phone, I-Pod, or other contraption I don't have the name for. If you have not yet experienced this soul-sucking phenomenon for yourself, I suggest you allow it once just observe how truly altering technological devices are. Simply put – it deadens the actor. Nothing lives behind the eyes, movement is unnecessary so therefore minimal, voices become nearer to a monotone, and the actor falls into a trance-like state. Consequently, I had supremely different results between the actors in my class. There were two camps here, those who did an engaging task, and those who used a laptop.

Thankfully, this was not an assignment that was being graded. As it was my own fault for not specifying against use of technology, the actors who fell victim to this were given the opportunity to repeat the exercise correctly in their next class. One folded laundry, another filled a picture book and the last got a good workout in. All of their monologues were significantly better than what they were with the use of electronics. In general, the monologues were quite good once the actors freed themselves from the self-critiquing part of their brains. It was a nice way to show them what they are capable of when they are not judging themselves, and a great way to show them how natural a monologue can be. The trick then for me, was to figure out how to get them to this place without the crutch of a task.

If only I had achieved an iota of this success within their next performance exercise. In an attempt to win the struggle of attaining grounded and believable movement in my actors – as here the baby steps they were taking were not covering enough ground – I utilized an exercise I had learned from Barry Bell, an Acting Professor at VCU. I had the distinct pleasure of

observing his second semester Acting II class and was privy to an exercise that he called *Abstract Movement*. This was a highly successful and popular exercise within his class, and it was applied to both scene and monologue work.

The exercise was comprised of three stages. The first being abstract movement and sound only. The actors were to use the full range of their bodies and the space, telling the story of the monologue through movement – similar to the way dancers do. The next phase was abstract movement with text. Nothing was to change about the movements they were doing, there was only the layer of the script added on. Here is where failures and triumphs within the monologue would become apparent. For instance, there were often moments where a movement was repeating itself when the monologue shifted. This showed an issue with the tactical choices the actors were making, and often explained why moments were not working. On the other hand, when movement, actions, and tactics were supporting one another there were some truly beautiful and moving moments. Finally, the last stage of the exercise was text without abstract movement. It was simply the performance of their monologues, however after the rigor of the first two phases there was more fluidity in movement, less fear, and most importantly - grounded actors.

I always understood the fact that every actor relates to their art differently. Various things work for every person and I am fully aware that some of my students will forget most of what I've taught them because it is not for them, where others will absorb or mold it permanently into their process. The fact that I know this should have prepared me for the possibility of dismal failure in terms of the *Abstract Movement* exercise. Some actors have a very hard time using movement and physicality as the primary window of connecting with their characters. As I sat

watching the pieces my actors had created – I knew the majority of my class fell into that category.

It would be understated to say that what they came up with was uninspired. Where they were instructed to use a *full* range of movement utilizing their entire body, they used about twenty percent of it. Apparently my class felt that a person's limbs and neck comprise their entire body – I think not. Where they were instructed to fill the space they instead operated in a linear manner across the room, or kept themselves cozy within an invisible three foot radius. The movement itself was primarily stagnant, with little to no fluidity, and questionable at best. Everything read as safe, and it was clear that all of them were fearful - be it consciously or not – of taking risks. Most unfortunately for them, this *was* a graded assignment. It was also something that I decided not to drop. After all, they clearly needed help in this area and they certainly needed to learn to take risks. Actors must be brave, there are always risks, you will be asked to put it all on the line over and over again; if you want to be an actor of substance you must take this on. My class was still finding the truth in this and it was my responsibility to hold them to it and call something a cop-out when I saw it. Most of them looked chagrined and all of them were aware of the low caliber of work they had presented. This was the last time that they presented such rubbish within my classroom. Maybe they thought I wouldn't notice or maybe they didn't care. All I know is that this was the last I saw of such behavior. From this point on, any student who was being actively lazy – as this is what their choices translated into for me – was asked to sit down and lost the opportunity to work for that class.

Thus far, the plague of the audition monologues was bleeding into their additional performance assignments as well.

Character Memory Exploration

In terms of the audition monologue, the downfall of novice actors is most often due to laziness. Pieces are picked the night before, there is little or no thought put into who they are speaking to, beat shifts are mottled over, character choices are few and generic, and there is little thought to the givens of the play or the life of the character. This is an astoundingly big problem as its main result is failure. Much of this is due to the actors' lack of process at this stage of their training. At the start of their artistic journeys, most of the character development happens along the way within play rehearsals. I highly doubt that the roles they played in high school had any homework going into it. It therefore begets the tendency to treat a monologue as a random piece of text – often found solely in monologue books without ever reading the play – leaving their overall objects to either entertaining the adjudicators or to show a deep emotion.

In regards to my own acting class they were about to turn a corner. At this point of their collegiate career they were all aware that there is more work to acting that meets the eye, and they had the structure of the process to follow. Character Memory Exploration becomes an especially important factor within this assignment because it will help to bridge the separation they have created between monologues and all other acting roles. They knew they needed to approach their pieces with as much tenacity as all of their other work, and now they needed to dismiss the showy aspects of their monologues and replace that with a fully developed and grounded character.

The two exercises I chose for this occasion were *Childhood Delight* and *5 Objects* as explained in the tables below. Both of which are of the more substantial variety and will run upwards of fifteen to twenty minutes each. I wanted to give these actors a lot to think about

when it came to their monologue approach. They needed to understand that even though their final performance would only run for one minute, they should aim to equal the success of a final performance within a full play.

Table 4.2 *Childhood Delight*

Part1; Visualization and Sense Memory

Begin by gently guiding your actors into the proper relaxed state of readiness for visualization. Once they are relaxed and breathing deeply the instructor should start focusing their minds onto the givens of the play and their characters, and slowly have them start thinking about their childhood. I find that the easiest way of doing this is by using one of their senses as a gateway. Though you may choose to do it differently, I find taste to be the most effective within this particular visualization.

When their minds are focused and filled with their characters lives have them remember their favorite food as a child. There are some wonderful emotions that find themselves attached to different foods when remembering one's childhood. Whether it is the comfort of the spaghetti and meatballs that were always on the table Sunday afternoon or the hot fudge sundae you were treated with for getting good grades, there are almost always distinct feelings of pleasure that accompany this memory. Here, the instructor should guide their students first to eating the food, then to note what feelings are coming with it and where they live in each actors body, and finally to explore the memories surrounding the food; Did you always get a soft pretzel at the baseball game which then reminds you of a particular game on a specific day with your best friend and a side adventure you find yourself on?

Memories come easily when attached to food allow them to explore these for a moment. Make sure to hone their senses as you go. Not just focusing on how the food tastes but everything else that goes along with it. It's all in the details and the instructor needs to be onboard with that.

Part 2; Visualization of Favorite Place

As these memories are fluttering through them, instruct them to become the age they are remembering. They need to let go of their current time and status and revert back to a simpler one. Allow them to feel the innocence seep into their bodies and make sure they note the buoyancy that accompanies this and where it lives. Gear their minds towards the new emotions that are filling them; are they curious, giddy, content or tired? What they are feeling now will be vastly different than what they were feeling in their characters' actual ages. Give them a moment to explore.

When their minds are focused and alive – this is something that is noticeable even though their eyes are closed – have them run to their favorite place. (Please note that this is still within the context of the visualization; there should be no movement yet.) Stress the fact that this place is special and should not be as simple as their bedroom. I find it procures the best results to have this place be outdoors, finding that the imagination tends to create a brighter and sharper picture when focusing on nature. As this exercise is meant to lead them to a place of *delight* I do what I can to dissuade from the dank and the dark.

When they have arrived in their place instruct them to explore it. As they do so make sure you continue to talk them through their senses and don't be afraid to energize your own voice with wonder to better help them find the happiness of this visualization.

Part3; Solo Improvisation

When they have had enough time to explore, instruct your class to open their eyes while continuing to hold onto what their mind has created. They are still children, and when they are ready they should get up and begin to physically explore the space. At this point you can continue to throw in a few reminders here and there, but they are usually enjoying themselves too much to hear you anyway. Again, it is something to adjust based on what your students need at that time.

When they have had a moment to be a kid again, instruct them to age within the space. They should begin to feel their characters physicality shape itself, their leading center adjust, their pattern of breathe, emotional life widen, and mental state mature. They should stop aging at the present age they are within the show.

When they have regained their current state of being, have them take a look around. They are now looking at a place of the past and they need to note all of the feelings that come with this. Allow them a moment of reflection.

Part4; Paired Improvisation

This portion of the exercise will alter slightly depending on what they are working on in class. If it is scene work they are partaking in have your students pair off with their scene partners. If they are working on monologues or solo projects – as in my case – simply have them find a partner. In this case, it does not matter who they pair off with as everyone in the room will be treated as a stranger.

Their next task is to show their partner the space utilizing movement and sub-vocal sounds only. This will work on their ability to create an environment and react to the elements. This portion of the exercise usually leads to the actors engaging one another in an activity. This should be encouraged as it further explores physicality and discourages simply having a show and tell session.

Make sure to have them switch so both actors can fully experience the exercise and keep in mind that this exercise takes a while to get through. Make sure to allot at least twenty minutes for the exercise itself and another five for them to write in their journals once it has been completed.

When I first created this exercise, not only did I have no semblance of how popular and worthwhile it would end up being, but I also could not have guessed just how fun it would be for me to watch. When the actors were exploring their space – both alone and with partners – the room around me truly transformed. The range of emotional discovery, joy, wonder, and realizations was wonderful to behold. It was as if there were all of these sparkling jewels for me to stare at and I didn't know which to keep my attention on. This was truly one of those times where I may have experienced a higher level of awe by merely watching, as opposed to my actors experiencing it from the doing.

When the actors actually ran to their journals to start writing after the experience I knew that this would be an exercise I would utilize with them again. Their response was immediate; they let me know just how much they loved the exercise and some of the things they had learned. All of them still wore the afterglow of delight and peace when the exercise was done, and when I read their journals I was startled as to how much they were able to gain from it. When I was designing the exercise I knew that it was a bit meatier than some of the others but I thought I was merely filling a need. I had no idea I would receive a treasure. As to date, this has been the chosen favorite of this acting class as well the majority of other actors I have worked with. I highly recommend using it within the classroom or as a cast bonding exercise. It will certainly have a home in my teaching repertoire for a long time to come.

Table 4.3 *5 Objects Exercise*

Begin by relaxing your actors into the proper state of relaxation for a visualization exercise. Then talk them through the sensations of being in the home that they grew up in. If they had their own bedrooms place them there, always giving options for those who did not. If they are still living within that place in the play that is fine and if their character did not have a typical home growing up, the actor needs to find the place that felt most like home. Texture, sight, sound, smell, taste, temperature, and time – all of the surrounding elements need to be addressed when you talk them through this exercise. It is vital that they are ‘seeing’ their surroundings in detail.

Once you have done this tell them that they have to leave. This does *not* need to be an abrupt decision. As the narrator it is important you state multiple options and don’t allow their minds to jump to the most dramatic conclusions for no reason. Granted they could be leaving because they got pregnant and their parents kicked them out, but it could simply be for the new job they just accepted or the natural desire to begin the next stage of their life. Again it can be anything at all, just make sure that they stay aware of this and that it stays consistent with their given circumstances and their characters.

Now that they know they have to leave, explain to them that there is a suitcase lying open on the floor. They are only able to take five objects with them when they go. This suitcase is magic and will fit anything; size and shape do not matter. What matters is that they know why they are choosing these objects and why others were chosen to be left behind.

When they have chosen the objects instruct them to slowly rise to sitting position, open their suitcases, and study what they have taken. This will work their sense of endowment whilst they continue the exercise. When they have essentially bonded with their objects they are to go and write about their experience.

5 Objects is an exercise that I learned and modified from Dr. Suzanne Trauth – I will never have an opposition to emulating brilliance. The objective of this exercise is to really start to implement the importance of objects, whilst simultaneously exploring character revelations. This is not nearly as entertaining to watch as *Childhood Delight* but it is of equal importance. This is one of those exercises in which patience needs to be a key factor for the teacher. Visualizations are not easy, and the actors need to be given enough time to see and feel the objects they are remembering. The real fear with this particular exercise is that an actor will simply mime the ‘seeing’ of their objects while their eyes are open, and it is something that needs to be watched for by the instructor as you will have some students who struggle with this. Visualizing something when one’s eyes are open is infinitely harder than doing it when they are closed. However, if they fall into this pattern of behavior because it feels too hard for them, they will miss the meaning of the exercise and the chance to fully explore the importance of the object they are dealing with. With these students it is encouraged to continue to guide and coax them through it. It can be frustrating for some of them, and if those who struggle don’t receive that extra hand they will more than likely turn off to the exercise and gain nothing.

Though my students did not run to their journals with great zeal afterward, they were given a lot to ponder over, discoveries were made, and steps were taken. They seemed quite contemplative after this exercise and I cannot help but be fully satisfied with that. It is, after all, the thinking actor that I am after.

Chapter 5

Major Assignment #3: Scenes

The final and most exciting installment of the fall semester was – what else – scenes. As is noted in the first semester teaching calendar, I had originally planned on doing four major assignments within this semester. Unwilling to sacrifice quality for quantity, I ultimately decided that it would rush their scene work and dropped the axe on a second round of monologues. At this point of the semester I had just lost my last student bringing our final tally to fourteen students. Say what you might about my somewhat militant approach to the first semesters' rules and regulations, but it ensures that the students who make it through are the students who are dedicated enough to be there.

The paperwork for this assignment was a continuation of what they had already been doing. My only added expectation was that now that they knew the ropes, the caliber of their work was expected to be higher. Previous to this I had made suggestions on their work and asked them to expand upon certain areas. They would then make the additions and hand the new work in with the original work. At that point I would average the original grade with the new one. From here on out this practice was discontinued – primarily because it takes about fifty minutes to get through one student's paper – and they had one shot to get it right.

More time also meant more opportunity for supplemental performance exercises, and a more thorough undertaking of *Character Memory Exploration*. The following table is a depiction of the supplemental work done with these scenes.

Table 5.1 Supplemental Assignments

	EXERCISE	CLASS	TYPE	PURPOSE
1	Mirrored Pairs into knee to knee.	15	Relationship building.	To strengthen partner connectivity and sense of give and take.
2	Ballet Class	16	Character Improvisation	Character revelation and energy builder
3	Walk Through the park.	16	Relationship building.	Deepen bond with partners and get into their bodies.
4	<i>Secret</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>Character Memory & relationship building.</i>	<i>Character revelation and relationship building.</i>
5	<i>Key Moment #1</i>	16 17	<i>Character Memory prepared assignment.</i>	<i>Create history within scene partner relationships.</i>
6	<i>Overheard conversation.</i>	17	<i>Character Memory</i>	<i>Character Revelation.</i>
7	<i>Key Moment #2</i>	17 18	<i>Character Memory prepared assignment.</i>	<i>Create history within scene partner relationships.</i>
8	Clay Sculptor and Scene Noun.	18	Relationship building.	Focusing viewpoints of scene and each other.
9	"I think you..."	19	Relationship building.	Focusing viewpoints of scene and each other.
10	<i>Truth Walk</i>	20	<i>Character Revelation and Character Memory.</i>	<i>Promoting honesty in work.</i>
11	Three Entrances	20 21	Uta Hagen Exercise	Works commitment to circumstances before entering a scene.
12	<i>Key Moment #3</i>	22 23	<i>Character Memory prepared assignment.</i>	<i>Create history within scene partner relationships.</i>

Table 5.1 Continued

13	Embarrassing moment as self and character	24	Performance Exercise	Risk taking and honesty on stage.
14	<i>Nightmare</i>	25	<i>Character Memory</i>	<i>Exploration of fears.</i>

The first two exercises that I would like to review for this major assignment are *Three Entrances* and *Embarrassing Moment*. These two assignments are the only supplemental performance exercises that were not directly linked to Character Memory Exploration. My actors continued their work with Uta Hagen's exercises – as they would per every major assignment – each exercise they partook in being more difficult than the last and *Three Entrances* was no exception.

The objectives of *Three Entrances* are deceptively simple. The actor must enter the space or the scene from off-stage. As in a play the circumstances they are walking into are the same every night, the plot, characters, and set will be relatively constant. This is also the case for *Three Entrances*; the actors will enter the same space every time with the same expectations of what situation lay in wait before them. What they need to change is *how* they come into the room and they need to enter three separate times. Beware of the actors who take this part of their instruction too literally, there were a few in my own class who latched onto this statement and

merely physically entered the room three different ways. This misses the point of the assignment.

Actors should never walk onto the stage and then begin to act once they are there. Their character life needs to begin *before* they re-enter the world of the play. What has happened in our immediate past affects our immediate future. This means that all of the details need to be thought about before you enter the scene; where are you coming from, what are the elements surrounding you, what is the temperature, did you see anyone on your way to where you're going, did you just stub your toe, wake up from a nap, get some good or bad news? The questions are endless and the possibilities are long. A play will pare down all of these possibilities for the actor as long as they use the given circumstances as a guide. Within the exercise, however, there are no given circumstances so the actors can be as vast and wide with their choices as they wish. If the actors have succeeded in creating a full life for their character before they walk onto the stage each entrance and moment of discovery – in regards to what is in the room – will be different.

To be frank, the most difficult part about this for me was giving clear cut instructions. Where in my mind things were clear, the students misunderstood me and interpreted the exercise in their own way. If I were to do this again I would have had the class read about the exercise directly from Hagen's book *Respect for Acting*. Then I would have a discussion with them to further make sure they understood what they had read. Not until that point will I actually assign anything to them.

On the day that the actual assignment was due and the first two students had already gone, I immediately knew that they had completely twisted around what they needed to be doing. Instead of fully working on their life before entering, they were changing the situation they were

walking into. When I explained to these students what they were doing wrong, about fifty percent of my class raised their hands and said that they had prepared the assignment in the same way. This was a bit of a flabbergasting moment for me because I can only repeat myself so many times and the fact that they still misinterpreted what I was stressing was a bit disconcerting. However, I believe in a fair environment and though this could have been the after-effect of a game of telephone, it could also have been solely my failing. Luckily the rest of my class had prepared for the day correctly and were able to present; the rest reworked their pieces and brought them into the next class.

The work that they brought me was pretty good. If they were bringing me amazing work at this point I would be quite surprised – these assignments are not easy – so I was pleased with their level of progress. I have been told that I am a difficult grader, but when I studied their grades up to this point I can tell they are improving. Where a Hagen exercise would earn most of the class a B or a C before, it now earned a few A's and mostly B's.

As per usual with these exercises, I had most of them repeat the exercise whilst coaching them through it. Again, this is learning by doing and they need to be reminded of what they are missing. After all, this is a new approach for most of them and they are still becoming comfortable with the process. It won't be until the second semester that they don't need me in this capacity any longer.

Embarrassing Moment is quite a different exercise, for though I will always expect my actors to be striving towards specificity and organic life, this exercise is all about taking risks and building trust. In regards to this exercise there can be no careless thinking or planning by the instructor. It is an extremely delicate exercise and if you don't feel that your class has become a unit that works together and has stopped judging one another, you should forget doing it. This is

one of those assignments to keep on the backburner and wait for the right moment to present itself. If you wish to try writing it into your teaching calendar, make sure that your class has been together for a minimum of a few months.

I have seen many different varieties of this exercise, melded them, and further adapted those to bring about what I felt would be the most effective. The premise of the exercise is for the actor to get in front of their class and do something that embarrasses them – literally. There is no miming or pretending, they need to actually do it. If they are embarrassed brushing their teeth in front of people there should be two cups of water, toothpaste and a toothbrush up there with them. The only limitations I gave them were that there could be no nudity or potentially harmful acts. If you would like to avoid watching one of your students take off all of their clothing, I would highly stress giving this as a stipulation as every time I have seen this exercise performed there was at least one person who did so. Though it is certainly a risk and an act of bravery, things like that can get sticky within a collegiate environment and I wanted to take the steps to avoid it all together.

This is also an exercise in which your own sensitivity to the assignment is crucial. There will always be a level of fear your students feel before doing this and it is the job of the instructor to keep them feeling safe. Also, keep in mind that you may find yourself with a few students who aren't really being honest with this exercise. I am of the opinion that although they are young adults, they are adults and can make this decision alone; there is no need for me to point it out during this assignment. If a student does something that you don't believe truly embarrasses them then it is quite feasible that they were not ready to do so. I am neither their therapist nor their best friend and if they aren't ready to take a big leap I will certainly not push them into it.

Aside from building bravery, this exercise also stretches their instruments by using substitution to feel embarrassment. In my mind, embarrassment is one of the hardest things to feign as an actor, and a near impossible emotion to truly recreate. This being said, I decided to add to the embarrassing moment exercise by having them do a second embarrassing moment as their character. This should be done a few moments after they have completed their embarrassing task as themselves. The tasks must be different and geared towards their characters' emotional lives. By doing this, their previous feelings of unsettled emotions will carry over into their performance and push them into a more organic character response. Mainly, however, the more important result of this exercise is class dynamic. The risk taking and substitution elements are valid and helpful, but once a class goes through this assignment together – when timed correctly – they become people that are truly on the same team.

Due to the nature of this assignment, I felt it necessary to have a talk-back session with the students. I wanted to make sure everyone was breathing easier again and note their reactions to the assignment. Much of what I received came with the giddiness that is usually felt after a big rush. They were all extremely proud of themselves for accomplishing this. None of them were worried about the grade that would be placed upon it because they all felt that they had broken new ground and jumped a few hurdles. (At this point in time they were unaware of the fact that they all received full points for simply participating in the exercise.) The most exciting part, however, was the level of accomplishment they felt for each other. It was as if each of them experienced the exercise again every time a classmate went up to partake in it. When this class was over I knew that my students had created a family for themselves and I was quite proud of them. There is enough of a struggle when they enter the business and I am tired of artists falling into a pattern of ill-will and competition with each other. It is one of my most precious goals to

impart upon my pupils a different way of approaching the obstacles in their acting futures. It was during this acting class that I knew I may actually be able to do so.

Character Memory Exploration

As the work throughout the semester begins to deepen, so will the content of the Character Memory work being done within the class. Some of this is directly related to the specific exercises they are doing, but most of this is simply due to the new level of being that the actors have achieved. The mind is a muscle that needs to be worked and imagination is an extension of that. No matter what the order of exercises, at this point of the semester the students are simply more capable and creative within these exercises, therefore achieving higher levels of commitment and discovery. With this in mind added to the tiresome nature of such a commitment level, I created some quick and simple exercises that complimented the Character Memory work while adding a level of fun to their warm-ups and an increase in energy levels. The following table is a quick depiction of the exercises I utilized to achieve this. They are short, fun, and can be changed or replaced in a number of ways. Their purpose was to simply lighten the mood or gain a quick focus, whilst complimenting the work.

Table 5.2 *Quick and Easy Exercises*

Ballet Class

The actors should be in the character they are working on. Then simply place them within a ballet class and see what they do! Another venue would certainly work but I like there to be an element of silliness with this one. There are some

revealing personality traits that come out when you place people – characters – in a situation outside of their element. Let them play, make some observations, and notate what they learned in their journals.

Walk Through the Park

This exercise is exactly as it sounds. Have your actors pair up into their scene partners and take a quiet walk through the park. Now, depending upon the dynamic of their character relations this can either be quite relaxing or downright tense. Depending on how far you want to go with it, you can either have them merely take the walk together or talk them through a quick visualization first. This exercise is simple but deepens the relationship between partners. In my own class I like to use it as a precursor to *Secret*.

Clay Sculptor and Scene Noun

Clay Sculptor is a well known game in which one scene partner is the sculptor and the other is the clay. The sculptor then creates a sculpture out of their scene partner depicting how they view them. The partners should then switch off. When they finish this exercise I ask them to take what they have learned about how they are viewed by one another and name their scene with an appropriate noun. They are then asked to record any discoveries in their character journals.

“I Think You...”

For this exercise think of marriage counseling or a situation that requires a lot of “I feel...” statements. It is simply a way to focus them on one another instead of worrying only about them self. Eye contact is important in this exercise. The actors should simply take turns making observations about one another.

As this is their final assignment of the semester, most of the Character Memory exercises will be more in depth. This is also the time when the *Key Moment* series was introduced to my class. *Key Moment* is a prepared assignment that is the most directly linked into Character Memory Exploration and is built to focus around the history of the relationship. In general, Character Memory work will be less effective if it only revolves around the sole actor and the character they are creating. It is necessary to put a large amount of focus on relationships as to not lose the action/reaction portion of scene play. If relationships are not focused on you run the risk of working with actors that cannot easily translate what's living inside of them into playable action. Therefore these *Key Moments* become a major influence in the final culmination of their scene work.

For this exercise the actors must create a series of three key moments – or turning points – in the history of their relationship. To give the exercise some structure and the students more focus, I have them present these scenes in progressive order. I do not, however, think that it would alter the outcome of the assignment if it wasn't done this way – it's just a step in avoiding confusion within the class. It is the actors' responsibility to make big choices here. They should be creating these scenes around big moments in their lives, and choose specifically with the ultimate goal being enhancing their scenes. Poor choices within this exercise leads to a waste of time. Though I luckily did not run into this problem with this acting class, I think that it is a point worth repeating to actors receiving the assignment.

These ran about three to four minutes in length and were some of the best work I had seen them do all semester. Ultimately - since we were nearing the end of the semester - anything they had done at this point should be an improvement but this is when their work started to take a turn towards *good*. My notes began to change in regards to what I witnessed. There were less

technical issues and I found myself starting to give more suggestions that simply helped them find ways to continue to go further and keep it fresh. This is also the point where my actors first critiqued themselves before getting feedback from anyone else. It was apparent that they were learning the skills to better themselves without someone else needing to point out every detail. This is a tool I needed them to learn and they utilized it in a healthy and productive manner. When I am able to sit back and get caught up in what I am seeing in front of me, I know that good things are starting to happen. The discovery, impulse, emotional life, and attention to detail created some beautiful scenes. They were well on their way to becoming self-sufficient actors.

This also meant that my job became a little easier. In terms of the Character Memory exercises being done in class, the students needed much less guidance from me. The *Blue Light Exercise* was almost never done, their breath was immediately deep and into the floor, their alignment was good, and their minds were ready. They needed less help from me to sculpt the memory and instructions were given in about half of the time. The following table is a depiction of the last section of character memory work utilized this semester.

Table 5.3 *Character Memory Exercises*

Secret

This exercise is used as a way to quickly focus the actors' minds before doing scene work and get them in tune with one another. In lieu of running them through a full visualization, I simply have them sit with their backs against the wall and focus their minds on their characters and what they have discovered about them. Where you are within your own class' progress will dictate whether you need to guide them through this. At this point within my own class they did not need me to do so.

After a few minutes of re-focusing their minds, the actors then join their scene partners. Next, they are instructed to take turns sharing a big secret with their partner. It is important for the instructor to remind them not to say anything that could potentially harm their scene; i.e. if their scene revolves around a husband trying to get his wife to admit adultery, her secret should not revolve around the sordid details of her latest affair. I do, however, ask that it is an *important* secret. Something that directly affects their life and they have been wishing they could share with someone. I assure them that there are no repercussions to telling this secret and that it is safe to do so. Most actors will end this exercise by embracing one another without any guidance from the instructor. If this does not happen naturally encourage them to do so as it fully releases and balms any unsettled emotions.

Overheard Conversation

This exercise is done as a full visualization with no following improvisation. Guide the actors to a current, familiar place. As you talk them through the visualization tell them to hear raised voices in the distance. Enough to know there is an argument occurring but not loud enough to make out the words. How they begin to hear the argument is up to them. They can wake up to these voices or hear them as they enter the building, etc. The only stipulation is that the argument is already in full swing by the time they become aware of it.

Guide them through their awareness of the situation and tell them to go towards the people arguing and eavesdrop on their conversation. As they get closer to the argument, talk them through their awareness of who the people are that are arguing and the suspicion that they are the subject of the heated discussion. Allow them to get close enough to hear what is going on without being seen. As this is happening make sure that they are still noting their sensory responses and how the image they have created is changing as the visualization progresses. The

air may feel heavier, the lights dim, the hallway feel crowded, etc. The mind will automatically change elements such as these to fit the emotion they are feeling so paying attention to one of these elements will automatically record the other.

When they can fully hear the conversation they should only stick around for a few moments of it. They need to realize that the conversation is about them, and they should *not* like what they hear. Guide them through getting out of their – again noting all of the emotions, senses, and changes in breathing – and have them go to their journals to record the experience.

Truth Walk

This exercise is wonderful but it eats up a great deal of time so make sure to have a half an hour to play with or a smaller number of people before using it.

Have the actors take a moment to properly focus their minds on their character and *who they are* as people. Next, have them line up in single file across the room, filling the entire space. They should be looking at the back of the person in front of them and not be shoulder to shoulder. Then have the first person in line step out and turn to face their classmates.

The actor that has stepped out will be the one to go on the truth walk and all of the other actors will act as physical obstacles in their way. The objective for the actor walking is to get to the other side of the room. Their only path is directly through the actors that are in front of them and they are unable to physically move them. Instead they must say a truth about themselves to each actor that they face. The objective of the other actors in the class is to move *only* when what is being said is honest. If they do not believe the actor on the truth walk they are not permitted to move. No matter how long this takes.

When the actor walking makes an honest and grounded statement the obstacle then steps out of their way. This process will continue until the actor walking

becomes the end of the line. At that point the next actor in line steps forward and begins the exercise.

You may choose to have more than one person go at a time, starting the next actor up when the previous one is halfway down the line. I only do this when time is becoming an issue because I would rather focus on each student individually. Additionally there will be times when the instructor is needed to keep the obstacles in check. They may feel pressure to give their classmate a pass if they haven't moved for a while. Part of the instructor function is to make sure that they don't do this.

When the exercise is complete, the actors are to go record their experience in their character journals.

Nightmare

This exercise is all about the actors exploring their characters fears. Hopes and fears are constant drives for people. As unfortunate as it may be, humans have a tendency to let fear be the larger influence in their lives and their hopes often spring directly out of that fact. This being the case, to have organic impulses on stage the actor must first explore the characters fear.

Begin by talking your actors into this state by bringing them into a place of readiness for visualization, and focusing their minds on what they are afraid of. These should be channeled by encouraging quick clips of memory for their minds to flip through. Remember at this point they don't need a step by step only a stimulus – the instructor's objective here is to offer them one.

Have them note the changes in breath and the muscles that are tightening and holding more tension than usual. When you notice the physical changes happening in their bodies re-direct their minds to creating their own personal

nightmare. After giving them a few minutes to create this, have them slowly get up and live within the nightmare they created. At this point of the exercise it is very important that you instruct them not to touch any other actors in the room. A sharp eye is required here to make sure that the actors stay safe within the space.

Instead of having them immediately write in their journals once they have finished the experience, have them roll back down into dead man's pose and talk them through a soothing visualization. Once they have returned to a normal state of being they can go ahead and record what they have learned. I choose to always follow this exercise with a fun game that gets the energy pumping again. Otherwise, some dregs of fear will linger and taint the rest of the day's work.

The greatest part about Character Memory Exploration is that once this way of thinking is established within your actors, it becomes its own unfailing entity. By this time it is nearly impossible for these exercises to be unsuccessful. If the students have truly embedded their minds into this process, there will be no shortage of discovery and learning happening throughout it.

With my own students I had simply become a medium at this point. I gave the instructions and made sure things ran safely and smoothly. That was all they needed me for and that was exactly how I wanted it. In truth, they were able to attain this level of work more quickly than I originally thought they would have. This was something I was expecting to see mid-second semester and the fact that they were surpassing what at first seemed to be an impossibly high bar, cemented my belief that Character Memory Exploration is a tool that is worth giving your actors. By the time the fall semester came to an end, I was working with

driven, invested, intellectual, and capable actors. The training wheels had come off and I knew that the spring semester would become an entirely new ball game.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

I cannot help but to feel anything other than pride when I look back on my time teaching this Acting II class. Though the focus of this piece of work is around the *implementation* of Character Memory Exploration and therefore the first semesters' work, I would like to talk for a moment about what I saw as a direct result of this work in the spring semester.

I vividly remember our first day back to class as it was one of the best moments in my adult life. My actors were completely transformed. Time away had not made them complacent. Instead they were eager, motivated, prepared and ready to work. They treated the class as professionals and they approached the art with love. I would not need to be such a disciplinarian this semester because they had those tools and the work ethic to go with them. They came back into my classroom knowing more than they had left fall semester with because they took it upon themselves to do so. We started immediately, and when the policies and assignments only became more demanding they smiled in excitement. There were no groans or overwhelmed students now. To put this in perspective, I added the following tables to show what they received from me on their first day of spring classes.

Table 6.1 *Addition to Class Policies*

EMAIL

In order to prepare you for the demands of the business, you will check your VCU email EVERY DAY. You will be responsible for anything and everything I

send you via email. Unless an email is responded to directly I will assume that anything sent has been retained and understood. **This will include changing due dates.**

PROPS

We will be heightening our use of props this semester. There are a row of lockers by B57 - UTILIZE THEM. All Hagen exercises and partial scene work will **require** full usage of props. Failure to do so will result in the drop of one full letter grade.

REHEARSAL TIME

Welcome to the next level. I expect the quality of your work to supersede last semester's and continue to improve throughout this semester. This means a minimum of three hours rehearsal time per one minute of performance time **weekly**. This includes all actor exercises assigned to you. There should be **no** improvisation of exercises as it is your job to be able to recreate the same events as organically as if they were happening for the first time. You are expected to work every moment and every angle of a scene. General acting is unacceptable. A rehearsal log will now be added to your journals.

Table 6.2 *First Assignments*

Personal Monologue - Hopes and Fears

DUE: M 01/22/10

- 2-3 minutes in length
- Music, props, costume, dance, vocal sounds, etc. is allowed but there should be no spoken text.
- This should be an exploration of your own hopes and fears - be creative and take risks.
- Strive to reveal your own inner truth. BE BRAVE.

Phone Conversations - Hagen

DUE: F 01/29/10

- 2-3 minutes in length
- In this exercise you will have three separate phone conversations with three separate people. The objective of the exercise is to notice and detail the differences in your own demeanor and persona when speaking with different types of people. Make sure to re-create your own personal living space for this exercise - relationship to props should be clear and specific.
- Show a large variety in whom you are speaking with. For example, it would not be wise to choose your best friend from college **and** your best friend from high school. The audience should have a clear understanding of relationship, status, and your feelings towards the individual with whom you are speaking.
- I expect all details of this exercise to be thoroughly thought out. You should be able to replicate the exercise if asked while still maintaining organic life on the stage.
- Work every tiny moment.

Monologue with Partner- Declan Donnellan

DUE: M 02/01/10

- This will be the first showing of your “opposite attributes” monologue.
- 1-2 minutes in length.
- You will each pick a partner - whoever will best fulfill the requirements of whom you are speaking with.
- You will then separate your monologue line by line.
- Next you will write dialogue for the ‘other’ to say in between all of your lines, this way each line of actual text will be said in response to something.
- Be sure to give your partner a character description and a copy of this text before the due date. Partners should be familiar with the text but do not need

to be off-book.

- You will perform the monologue once with your partner and once without.

If one were to note the due dates of these assignments and the rehearsal time they needed to now be putting into them, it is abundantly clear that this was a lot of work. When we went over it together they smiled, laughed, and spoke of their excitement and how they had missed acting class. This is a moment that will forever be burned into my mind. It will never cease to astound me how little credit is given to actors in general. I would like to see anyone deeming actors as lesser or lazy take on that amount of work with such vitality and joy. Even more amazing, is that they knew the assignments were only going to become increasingly difficult as the semester continued and they faced it head on.

Their work was fantastic for most of the semester. If comparing it with what I saw during the fall, it was downright amazing. They still had infinitely more to learn and worlds to grow in, but that will be a fact for them their entire acting lives. The learning process should never end as each character will bring a new adventure.

My role in the class also changed tremendously. Though I gave a very heavy load to them, I had no worry that they wouldn't accomplish all of it. I was able to greatly relax and lighten myself around them because they were capable of doing it on their own. When the year came to an end, I knew I was no longer needed by them and that they were ready to move on. They had the ability to be self-sufficient and grow as artists without me. That was a truly wonderful realization.

I do not think that my year would have been so successful without the use of Character Memory Exploration. It heightened their skill and their way of thinking tremendously. When

paired with the correct actor exercises, it is a powerful tool. It is easily molded to fit the needs of the class and time constraints, and there are endless possibilities with the exercises one can create for what their actors need at that time. The mind is an amazing and powerful thing; Stella Adler had it right when she said that all an actor needs to create a full character are the given circumstances of the play and imagination.

People are either a reflection or a refraction of their environment and experiences. Every person, and therefore character, are composed of different variables placed into the same equation. Creating memories for a character is essentially creating a life. It grounds the actor, supports honesty in their work, and deepens their relationships to people and things. My own experiences with it have led me to believe that it is one of the most substantial tools I can give to my actors. It is the premise of my process and the key in my successes. I hope that those of you who try it in your own classroom have the same fulfilling adventure I did.

Works Cited

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2006. Print.
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- Trauth, Suzanne. Acting II BFA. Montclair State University. Upper Montclair, NJ. Fall 2002
and Spring 2003.
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Applause/Music Dispatch, 2001. DVD.

APENDIX A

ACTING II
COURSE SYLLABUS
THEA 213/214
SECTION 2

INSTRUCTOR: Dana Giampiccolo
OFFICE HOURS: by appointment only

EMAIL: giampiccoldb@vcu.edu
OFFICE: Schaffer 304

COURSE DESCRIPTION

THEA 213/214 is a continuation of THEA 113/114 in which we will continue to explore and deepen your work through the Stanislavski system of acting. We will do this by utilizing exercises from Uta Hagen and Stella Adler, character memory work, improvisation, rehearsal, scoring, and performance of scenes. The end result of which should lead to an enhanced connection to character, deeper relationships with props, partners, and audience, as well as organic moments on the stage that are honest and believable.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each student must demonstrate the ability to receive and accept criticism of their work and, if necessary, to make positive changes in behavior and work habits.

Each student must demonstrate the ability to work effectively with partners.

Each student must demonstrate the ability to work effectively in an ensemble.

Each student is required to be on time.

Each student is required to have all assignments (both written and performance) ready on time – no exceptions.

Each student is required to keep and maintain a personal Acting Journal. This journal will be purchased from Theatre VCU.

Each student is required to attend all Theatre VCU main-stage productions and at least one theatre performance outside of Theatre VCU. Each performance must be documented in your acting journal as a typed critique (2 page minimum).

Each student is required to read one play per week during the semester. The assignment must be completed and documented in the appropriate section of your Acting Journal before Friday's

class. Please refrain from reading more than two plays being discussed in Intro to Drama.

Each student is required to maintain a professional work ethic and is expected to hold them self to the highest level of discipline.

CLASS POLICY

You will arrive 15 minutes early to any 'actor related' activities you have. This includes class, rehearsals for this class, rehearsals for any production you are involved in, as well as your additional performance classes. Exceptions will only be made for classes you are taking that make this impossible. If this occurs bring it to my attention along with documentation.

Before you enter the classroom you will sign in and place any assignments that are due next to the sign-in sheet.

You will bring your acting journals to every class.

You will not eat or drink in class. Water only.

You will warm your instrument before beginning in-class work.

Cell phones will be off and away before you enter the classroom.

You must check the call board every day.

You are responsible for all handouts given to you in class. If lost, it is your responsibility to replace it.

For the length of this course you will refrain from using the elevator and stick to the stairs.

You will abide by the Theatre VCU's dress code policy.

You will receive an automatic failure for any late assignment.

RECOMMENDED READING

Respect for Acting by Uta Hagen

The Technique of Acting by Stella Adler

An Actor Prepares by Constantine Stanislavski

Building a Character by Constantine Stanislavski

Creating a Role by Constantine Stanislavski

DEPARTMENTAL ATTENDANCE POLICY

Acting is participatory: there is no way to learn without doing, no adequate substitute for a missing partner, and no way to "make up" missed experience. You are therefore allowed no more than two absences from any core acting class.

With a third absence, your final grade will automatically drop one full letter and will continue to drop one letter grade with each additional absence.

Besides adversely affecting your own learning process – arriving late for class disrupts the learning process of fellow students. Therefore, tardiness in excess of 20 minutes will be considered a complete absence and every two instances of tardiness – **of whatever duration** – will equate to one absence for grading purposes.

Also, every acting teacher reserves the right to declare a “no lateness” policy should the need arise. This means that if the door to the class is shut and you are not inside by the time class begins you are absent. No exceptions.

(Student Handbook, pg 12)

DRESS CODE

Students must wear sweat pants, dance pants, exercise pants or tights; unitards are permitted.

Pants and tights must extend to the ankle. **NO SHORTS.**

Pants and tights must be worn at the waist, not on the hips.

Pants and tights must be form fitting, **NOT BAGGY.**

From the waist up students must wear a t-shirt with sleeves, no tank tops.

T-shirts must be long enough so that when hands are raised above the head no skin is showing at the midriff.

T-shirts must be form fitting and not baggy.

All students must wear supportive underwear.

All jewelry, including body jewelry, must be removed **BEFORE** entering class.

Long hair must be tied back unless the student is asked to wear it down.

All clothing must be **SOLID BLACK** without emblems or logos.

Shoes must be cross trainers, indoor soccer shoes, jazz shoes, gymnastic shoes, or any shoes that are form fitting with a relatively thin sole. Flip-flops are not shoes and you may **NOT** go barefoot under any circumstances.

STUDENTS MUST BE DRESSED BEFORE CLASS BEGINS.

If a student does not wear appropriate clothing to class they will be asked to go get the proper clothing. The student will be counted **LATE.**

DISABILITIES

All documented disabilities need to be submitted to the instructor on the first day of class. Personal information will be kept confidential by the instructor and will not be discussed with other students or faculty members without a student's knowledge.

GRADING

Written assignments and in class work = 50%
Performances and Professional Prognosis = 50%

WRITTEN WORK

Written work does not need to be written in MLA format for this class but it **MUST** include:

Name and Due date on EVERY page

Pages **MUST BE STAPLED**

Please use 12pt font and double space

SECURITY

1. Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts at: <http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify>
2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms.
3. Go to <http://www.vcu.edu/alert> for additional emergency information.
4. Know the emergency phone number for the police (828-1234).

INCLEMENT WEATHER

To find out about school delays or cancellations due to weather or emergencies:

1. Call 828-OPEN (6736)
2. Check out the website at: <http://www.vcu.edu/weather>

VCU HONOR SYSTEM

All students are expected to abide by the VCU Honor System as laid out in the VCU Resource Guide (VCU Student Handbook).

By My Signature, I certify
That I have received the
Syllabus for

THEA 213/214 002

And I have clearly understood
What my responsibilities
Are and what is expected
Of me as a student in this class.

Printed Name

Signature and Date

APPENDIX B

FALL TEACHING CALANDER

CLASS 1 **WEEK 1** **F 8/21/09**

ASSIGN PRECIOUS OBJECT

- DUE NEXT M 8/24

PROPER DRESS, NOTEBOOK, & PEN READY FOR NEXT CLASS.

CLASS 2 **WEEK 2** **M 8/24/09**

PRECIOUS OBJECT

- RECORD IN JOURNAL

STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

WHY THEATRE? WHAT ASPECT ARE YOU MOST INTERESTED IN?

LEARN WARM-UPS

- RECORD IN JOURNAL

ASSIGN GROUP LEADERS

ARTICULATIONS HANDOUT

FLEA FLY HANDOUT

ASSIGN ETUDE PAIRS

- 1ST SHOWING ON M 8/31

- BEGIN THINKING ABOUT CHARACTER IMMEDIATELY

ASSIGN BARTON SELF-OBSERVATION SHEET

- DUE NEXT CLASS 8/28

CLASS 3 **WEEK 2** **F 8/28/09**

WARMUPS

PARTNERED ROLL-DOWNS

DEAD MANS POSE - "MAGIC IF" YOUR CHARACTERS PERFECT DAY

- RECORD IN JOURNAL

FREEZE AND JUSTIFY - ETUDE PAIRS EXPLORE RELATIONSHIP

- RECORD IN JOURNALS

LECTURE

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES

OBJECTIVE

OBSTACLE

TACTICS

INNER MONOLOGUE
TEXT
SUBTEXT
EVALUATION
BEATS

- omitted above and inserted quick review due to level of knowledge

ASSIGN ETUDE WRITTEN WORK DUE 9/4

ASSIGN FOR NEXT CLASS

- DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SPACE
- SELF OBSERVATION IN SPACE
- 2 MINUTE TASK OF CHARACTER IN PERSONAL SPACE
- TWO MINUTE TASK WITH HEIGHTENED CIRCUMSTANCE (on due date)

CLASS 4 **WEEK 3** **M 8/31/09**

WARMUPS

DESCRIPTION OF SPACE DUE

SELF OBSERVATION IN SPACE DUE

WALK AROUND SPACE, TOUCH WALL, SIT DOWN, LIE ON BACK, GET UP -
REPEAT WITH CLIMATE CHANGE, REPEAT WITH PHYSICAL
IMPEDIMENT

REPEAT EXERCISE AS CHARACTER

- RECORD IN JOURNAL

PERSONAL SPACE EXERCISE

BEGIN ROUGH DRAFT OF ETUDE

CLASS 5 **WEEK 3** **F 9/04/09**

WARMUPS

GIVEN OBJECT

BURIED OBJECT

ROUGH DRAFT OF ETUDE

Finish Personal Space Exercise

ETUDE PAPERWORK DUE

ACTION ONLY INTO FULL SCENE

WITH PROPS DUE NEXT CLASS

MONOLOGUE LECTURE - CHOICES FOR 9/14

UNIVERSITY CLOSED FOR LABOR DAY **M 9/07/09**

CLASS 6 **WEEK 4** **F 9/11/09**

WARMUP

PARTNERED ROLLDOWNS
WINDOW WASHING
IF I COULD CHANGE MY LIFE... GIVEN OBJECT
RECORD IN JOURNALS

FINISH ETUDE ACTION ONLY INTO ETUDE

MONOLOGUE CHOICES REMINDER
FINAL PRESENTATIONS OF ETUDES
-DUE NEXT CLASS

CLASS 7 **WEEK 5** **M 9/14/09**

WARMUPS
TAKE TIME WITH PARTNER, GET INTO CHARACTER

FINAL PRESENTATION OF ETUDE SCENES
REVISED PAPERWORK DUE
BEGIN MONOLOGUE CHOICES

ASSIGN HIDDEN OBJECT EXERCISE FOR 9/21

CLASS 8 **WEEK 5** **F 9/18/09**

WARMUPS
GRAB JOURNAL
LECTURE
 THROUGHLINE OF ACTION
 MAGIC IF
 SUPER OBJECTIVE
 SCORING THE ROLE

HANDOUT AND EXPLAIN ANALYSIS PAPERWORK - 9/28
ASSIGN SCENE PARTNERS AND SELECTION DUE DATE 9/25
FINISH HEARING MONOLOGUE CHOICES - FIRST TIME THROUGH IN ONE WEEK
9/25

CLASS 9 **WEEK 6** **M 9/21/09**

WARMUPS
ANIMAL MOVEMENT TO MUSIC

HIDDEN OBJECT EXERCISE

ASSIGN MONOLOGUE WITH TASK FOR NEXT CLASS

CLASS 10 **WEEK 6** **F 9/25/09**

WARMUPS

BARRY BELL SNAP GAME

CHILDHOOD MEMORY

- RECORD INTO JOURNALS

MONOLOGUE FIRST TIME THROUGH WHILE COMPLETING A TASK

SCENE SELECTIONS DUE

MONOLOGUES STRAIGHT NEXT CLASS

CLASS 11 **WEEK 7** **M 9/28/09**

WARMUPS

5 OBJECTS YOU MUST HAVE WITH YOU WHEN YOU LEAVE

- RECORD INTO JOURNALS

HEAVY-LIGHT EXERCISE

- RECORD INTO JOURNALS

MONOLOGUES PRESENTATION

PAPERWORK DUE

ASSIGN ABSTRACT MOVEMENT

SCENE CUTS DUE

CLASS 12 **WEEK 7** **F 10/02/09**

WARMUPS

TEN MINUTES TO PREPARE

ABSTRACT MOVEMENT - ABSTRACT MOVEMENT W/ WORDS - MONOLOGUE

CLASS 13 **WEEK 8** **M 10/05/09**

WARMUPS

MONOLOGUES FOR GRADE

REVISED PAPERWORK DUE

ASSIGN SCENE PARTNERS FIRST MEETING

NEXT CLASS KNEE TO KNEE- OFF BOOK

ASSIGN CHARACTERS FIRST MEETING M 10/12

PAPERWORK FOR SCENE DUE ON M 10/18

CLASS 14 **WEEK 8** **F 10/09/09**

WARMUPS

LECTURE
RELATIONSHIP
SPACE
PARTNER
OBJECTS
PARTNERED MIRRORS
RECORD IN JOURNALS
MEISNER PINCH/OUCH INTO YES/NO EXERCISE

KNEE TO KNEE (REPETITION)

CLASS 15 **WEEK 9** **M 10/12/09**

WARMUPS
BALLET CLASS
WALK THROUGH THE PARK
- RECORD IN JOURNALS
SECRET
- RECORD IN JOURNALS

1ST MEETING

ROUGH DRAFT OF SCENE DUE NEXT CLASS
ASSIGN SECOND MEETING

READING DAY OCTOBER 16TH

CLASS 16 **WEEK 10** **M 10/19/09**

WARMUPS
OVERHEARD CONVERSATION
- RECORD IN JOURNALS
BUILDING THE FOURTH WALL
- RECORD IN JOURNALS

ROUGH DRAFT OF SCENE
BEGIN SECOND MEETING
ROUND ONE OF PAPERWORK DUE

CLASS 17 **WEEK 10** **F 10/23/09**

WARMUPS
CLAY SCULPTER

SCENE NOUN
RECORD IN JOURNALS

FINISH SECOND MEETING
KNEE TO KNEE WITHOUT QUESTIONS (EYE TO EYE)

SCENE WITH PROPS NEXT CLASS

CLASS 18 **WEEK 11** **M 10/26/09**

WARMUPS

PARTNERED ROLLDOWNS

“I THINK YOU _____” PARTNER OBSERVATIONS WITH REACTIONS
- RECORD IN JOURNALS

SCENES WITH PROPS

ASSIGN THIRD MEETING
ASSIGN THREE ENTRANCES
REVISED PAPERWORK DUE ON M 11/02

CLASS 19 **WEEK 11** **F 10/30/09**

WARMUPS

5 MINUTES TO GET INTO CHARACTER
FINISH SCENES WITH PROPS

ONE MINUTE TRUTH

BEGIN THREE ENTRANCES
PLAY READING DUE

ASSIGN MONOLOGUE CHOICES FOR M 11/09

CLASS 20 **WEEK 12** **M 11/02/09**

WARMUPS

WIN THE PRIZE (PAIRED ACTIVITY)
- RECORD IN JOURNALS

FINISH THREE ENTRANCES
THIRD MEETING
FOLLOW WITH SCENE

ASSIGN EMBARRASSING MOMENT; DUE 11/09

CLASS 21 **WEEK 12** **F 11/06/09**

WARMUPS

PREPARE INTO CHARACTER

FINISH THIRD MEETING INTO SCENE

LECTURE

JUSTIFICATION

ENDOWMENT

HOPPER EXERCISE - REAL MOMENT OF ANGER - RETELL STORY - INTO
ARGUMENT WITH SCENE PARTNER

REVISED PAPERWORK DUE

CLASS 22 **WEEK 13** **M 11/09/06**

WARMUPS

MOVE YOUR PARTNER ACROSS THE ROOM

EMBARASSING MOMENT - YOU FOLLOWED BY CHARACTER
- RECORD IN JOURNAL

SCENE FOR GRADE F 11/13

MONOLOGUE CHOICE PRESENTATIONS FOR NEXT CLASS

CLASS 23 **WEEK 13** **F 11/13/09**

WARMUPS

MONOLOGUE READINGS

- ASSIGN CHOICE

WRITTEN WORK FOR MONOLOGUE DUE 11/23

FINAL GRADE FOR SCENE NEXT CLASS

PLAY READING DUE

CLASS 24 **WEEK 14** **M 11/16/09**

WARMUPS

PUSH PULL WITH LINES TO PREP

FINAL PRESENTATION OF SCENES

CLASS 25 **WEEK 14** **F 11/20/09**

WARM-UPS

MAIN STAGE MONOLOGUE

PLAY READING DUE

CLASS 26 **WEEK 15** **M 11/23/09**

WARM-UPS

WORK BOTH MONOLOGUES TOGETHER WITH AUDITION TECHNIQUE

ASSIGN MON W/ TASK OR PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE - ACTORS CHOICE

WRITTEN WORK DUE

CLASSES CANCELED 11/27/09 FOR THANKSGIVING BREAK

CLASS 27 **WEEK 16** **M 11/30/09**

WARMUPS

NIGHTMARE

- RECORD IN JOURNALS

MONOLOGUES WITH TASK/PHYSICAL PERF

CLASS 28 **WEEK 16** **F 12/04/09**

FINAL PRESENTATION OF MONOLOGUES

WRAP UP

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATIONS

APPENDIX C

Etude Scene #1 from Robert Barton's Acting Onstage and Off

A. OH

B. YES

A. WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

B. IT'S THE BEST THING

A. YOU CAN'T MEAN IT.

B. NO, I'M SERIOUS.

A. PLEASE.

B. WHAT?

A. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

B. NOTHING.

A. LISTEN.

B. NO.

A. SO DIFFERENT.

B. NOT REALLY.

A. OH.

B. YOU'RE GOOD.

A. FORGET IT.

B. WHAT?

A. GO ON.

B. I WILL.

Etude Scene #2 from Robert Barton's Acting Onstage and Off

A. HEY.

B. HEY.

A. HOW DO YOU FEEL?

B. GREAT. HOW DO YOU FEEL?

A. GREAT. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO EAT?

B. WHATEVER.

A. I'LL FIX YOU YOUR FAVORITE.

B. YEAH...OKAY. WHATEVER.

A. YOU GOING TO WORK?

B. HUH?

A. I SAID -

B. I KNOW WHAT YOU SAID.

A. OKAY FINE.

B. FINE.

A. SO.

B. SO....WHAT?

A. IT'S UP TO YOU.

B. ME?

A. YEAH. YOU.

Etude Scene #3 from Robert Barton's Acting Onstage and Off

A. HEY.

B. HEY.

A. DO YOU KNOW WHY I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU?

B. NO. NO, I DON'T.

A. WELL...WOULD YOU LIKE TO GUESS?

B. GUESS? IS THIS A GAME?

A. NO, IT'S NOT A GAME. I WANT YOU TO TELL ME THE TRUTH.

B. TRUTH? TRUTH ABOUT WHAT?

A. ABOUT YESTERDAY.

B. YESTERDAY?

A. I REALLY DON'T WANT TO DO THIS AGAIN.

B. DO WHAT?

A. YOU KNOW.

B. NO. NO, I REALLY DON'T.

A. FINE.

B. WHAT?

A. I'M JUST...JUST--

B. JUST WHAT.

A. OVER IT.

APPENDIX D

GRADING EVALUATION FORM

STUDENT NAME:
PARTNER:
MATERIAL:

ASSIGNMENT:
DATE:

1. Did you enter with a sense of joy and energy?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

2. Was there a clear relationship with your partner / the other?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

3. Was there a clear relationship to your set? (if applicable)

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

4. Was there a clear relationship with props? (if applicable)

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

5. Were there moments of truth on the stage?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

6. Were the given circumstances clear?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

7. Were there noticeable transitions?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

8. Were there organic REACTIONS to the action on the stage?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

9. Use of physicality?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

10. Vocal clarity?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

11. Connectivity to character?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

12. Adjustment to the space?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

13. Did you apply the notes you've been given?

Excellent Good Above Ave Average Below Average Poor Very Poor

14. Were you word perfect?

of Words Missed: _____ Percent:

INSTRUCTOR NOTES:

APPENDIX E

DR. SUZANNE TRAUTH

Dr. Suzanne Trauth is a professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance at Montclair State University where she coordinates the B.F.A. Acting program. Most recently, she co-created and directed *Katrina: the K Word* at Montclair State and directed staged readings of the play at Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey and Drew University. Other productions directed at Montclair State include *She Stoops to Conquer*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Picnic*, *Extremities*, *Laramie Project*, *Flyin' West*, and *House of Bernarda Alba*. For TheatreFest, she directed *The Middle Ages*, served as Associate Producer, and founded the experimental Next Stage. She co-produced and directed productions at the Ensemble Studio Theatre (NYC), the Whole Theatre, and 12 Miles West. As part of a global initiative for the College of the Arts, she directed *The Crucible* for the Theatre-on-Podol in the Ukraine. She has co-authored *Sonia Moore and American Acting Training* and *Producing Musical Theatre*, and co-edited *Katrina on Stage: Five Plays About Hurricane Katrina*. She has also written journal articles on acting theory and Soviet theatre. Dr. Trauth served as Assistant Artistic Director and faculty member at the Sonia Moore Studio and performed for the American Stanislavski Theatre. She holds degrees from the University of Dayton and Bowling Green State University.

APPENDIX F

Barry Bell

A professional actor since the age of seventeen, Mr. Bell has had a varied career in the entertainment industry. Ten years on the road in regional theatre, off and off-off Broadway, dinner theatre, outdoor drama and children's theatre, took him from New York to Florida, as far west as Oklahoma and Idaho and to Spain and France in shows ranging from *The Odd Couple* to *The Misanthrope*, from *American Buffalo* to *Best little Whorehouse in Texas* from *The Tempest* to *Educating Rita*. Mr. Bell followed the touring with eleven years as the artistic director of the Barn Theatre in Greensboro, NC. Directing over 117 shows. His directing credits include Brian Friels' *Lovers*, *Greater Tuna*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *The Rainmaker*, *Wait Until Dark*, *On Golden Pond*, *The Mousetrap*, *How The Other Half Loves* and over a dozen Musicals ranging from *Chicago* to *Pump Boys and Dinettes* to the campy *Della's Diner* as guest director for Northern Kentucky University. Mr. Bell also won critical acclaim for his production of *Brecht on Brecht* at the Theatre of Notre Dame in NYC. The last twenty years, he has spent working in Film and TV. His resume' includes; guest-starring roles on *Matlock*, *Walker Texas Ranger*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Legacy*, *American Gothic*, HBO's *From the Earth to the Moon* and *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*. On film he has appeared in *Maximum Overdrive*, *Morning*, *Bruno*, *Reuben, Reuben*, *Doomsday Man*, and three dozen other TV and Feature Films. Mr. Bell directed *Hair*, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, *Wait Until Dark*, *Dracula* and *The Who's TOMMY* for Theatre VCU. Mr. Bell is a Stanislavski trained actor whose influences include Adler, Hagan, Chekhov and Vakhtangov. He holds a BFA from The University of North Carolina, Greensboro and a MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University. He is a member of Actors Equity and the Screen Actors Guild.

Vita

Dana B. Giampiccolo was born on September 25, 1982, in Staten Island, NY, and is an American citizen. She graduated from Manalapan High School, Manalapan, NJ in 2000. She received her Bachelor's of the Fine Arts from Montclair State University, Upper Montclair, NJ and performed in New Jersey for two years before moving to Los Angeles California for a year in 2006. She received her Master of the Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2010.