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Method in Motion:
Grounding a Movement Pedagogy in the Lessons of Stanislavski

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth
University.

by Kevin Inouye
MFA Candidate Virginia Commonwealth University 2012,
BA Earlham College 1998

Director: Dr. Aaron Anderson, Associate Chair of Theatre

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract | iv |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Structure | 7 |
| Listening, Imagining, & Committing | 8 |
| Improvisation in Training | 10 |
| Physical Skills, Necessary Tension | 11 |
| Focus | 12 |
| Energy | 13 |
| (Relaxation Again) | 15 |
| Focus/Energy Outside of the Body | 15 |
| Story & Subtext | 21 |
| Pre-Beats/The Before Time | 23 |
| And So On | 24 |
| Sense Memory & Emotional Recall | 25 |
| Imagination & Sense Memory | 32 |
| Acting is Doing | 34 |
| Bits or Beats | 38 |
| Shifting Borders | 39 |
| Next Steps | 41 |
| Appendix I: First Semester Sample Syllabus | 43 |
| Appendix II: | |
| Further Work with the Locus of Energy & Props | 50 |
| From Martial Arts | 50 |
| In Stage Combat | 53 |
| Props and Bodily Extensions | 59 |
| Krump Power | 63 |
| Mime | 64 |
| Creation of the Fantastic | 65 |
| Emotive Truth | 67 |
| Training | 74 |
| Medical Validation | 80 |
| Appendix III: Suggestions for Further Exploration | 81 |
| Works Cited | 84 |
| Vita | 86 |

Abstract

METHOD IN MOTION: GROUNDING A MOVEMENT PEDAGOGY IN THE LESSONS OF STANISLAVSKI

By Kevin Inouye, MFA Candidate

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2012

Major Director: Dr. Aaron Anderson, Associate Chair of Theatre, Virginia Commonwealth University

This thesis is an exploration of movement pedagogy as a continuation of basic acting lessons from Stanislavski. Using the example of an introductory semester of movement instruction, physical acting and movement concepts are explained in terms of their connection to and derivation from universally accepted acting terminology and ideas. This is put forth as a way to facilitate the synthesis of movement instruction with other acting curriculum, as well as providing a new way to view some familiar acting concepts. Several specific examples are explored in more depth as case studies in physical equivalents to the intellectual, visual, or emotional techniques familiar to all with a basic knowledge of Stanislavski based acting principles.

Introduction

My path to becoming an acting teacher has been atypical. While most come to theatre through acting and then may delve in to specialties, I have worked from the fringes back towards the core; Initially in musicals, then for a dozen years focusing primarily on stage combat, before realizing that the answers generally lie in the most important common foundation of both: acting.

This initially created a challenge for me when teaching movement to actors, as my own path was not a viable roadmap for them. It also compounded a preexisting issue. As movement teachers, it seems that often our job is framed either as teaching movement as a supplement to acting, or occasionally a type of acting, and presumably in the end a path to better overall acting. If the body is an actor's instrument, movement is often delegated to a sort of grudgingly performed maintenance. It's changing the strings and keeping it in tune; a necessary bit of drudgery prerequisite to but not a part of the real creation of art. It is against this perception that movement teachers strive in order to have our lessons accomplish the supposed end goal of creating better actors. Semantically,

I'm becoming much more fond of the term 'Physical Acting' over 'Movement', but renaming the field is beyond my level of influence, and there's value to be found in consistency of nomenclature amongst colleagues teaching the same ideas--indeed, that's one my main arguments here. Regardless of what you call it, as long as Movement is a separate class and discipline, any gains made by students in our classrooms are often forgotten in any outside context.

To remedy this, it must be shown how movement and acting classes are but different aspects of not just the same art, but the same ideas about how to create that art. The body is the one common denominator in theatrical performance--even puppetry, where the physical acting is just transposed on to something else. If we can connect that (as we must!) with the common denominator in theatrical training -the near-ubiquitous concepts from Konstantin Stanislavski- we should arrive at universally applicable physical theatre training. Ideally, the movement training then cannot be left behind any more than can the ideas of goal and obstacle, or beat.

By the time our students come to movement classes, they are already familiar with at least the basic principles of

Stanislavski's system, at least in one of the iterations in which it came to this country. Even using primarily extant movement exercises and physical acting pedagogies, a linguistic framing and intentional organization of our movement courses along the same lines can solidify for our students the immediate connection between their movement training and their acting training - at which point movement can cease being a specialized field and feed back into informing one's holistic acting. Making explicit those connections through familiar vocabulary and structure can help students connect the dots in both directions: seeing Movement as a logical extension of their previous acting studies, and also as a venue in which to continue to refine those prior studies. Movement class should be an expansion of and testing grounds for their prior acting lessons, like word problems in a math class; no longer abstract numbers, we now deal with trains that have left the station and are in motion. This path of intellectual ideas (from prior acting training) leading to physical exploration fits well in the commonly extant constructs of theatrical training in higher education, as well as following Stanislavski's own journey, and that of many American theatre students. It also mirrors the path of modern American theatre, for a time dominated by the cerebral idea-focus of The Method, but moving now towards a more physical and

integrated theatre. Just as many of the practitioners typically included in Movement instruction came out of or were reactions to Stanislavski or his teaching (Chekhov, Meyerhold, Grotowski) so too can our understanding of them grow out of our preexisting grasp of Stanislavski's work.

What I present here is a general overview of a first semester of movement instruction ordered along these lines, along with more detail on some specific examples. There are acting concept/movement training pairings I have found especially helpful in teaching movement or physical acting in general, as well as specifically in teaching stage combat or other movement sub-disciplines. In terms of pedagogical practice, it takes well known and established acting principles and uses them as launching points for exploration of a new and deeper understanding as applied to movement, and/or a readily understood movement concept that has direct applications to familiar acting exercises. The foundation of this work lies in the writings of Konstantin Stanislavski, as published most recently and completely by Jean Benedetti. Stanislavski's later work already went well in to the territory of physical acting and movement training, but it is both lesser known and without the benefit of all the great work that has been done in

theatrical movement since, much of it a reaction to the perception of Stanislavski's 'system' as neglecting the body. In some instances we will take an extant piece of Stanislavski's work and just explore it further. In others, we will be taking concepts and applying them in ways never explicitly mentioned by him, but which I believe further both his original idea and our mission as instructors of movement. By re-claiming and re-framing Stanislavski's legacy and connecting it to our theatre movement classes, we can help reinforce the holistic learning our curricular matrices aspire to, helping our students integrate their studies in to their work more completely.

I should acknowledge that others have, not surprisingly, made inroads in this territory. For example, in 2008 Robert Blumenfeld published *Using the Stanislavski System: A Practical Guide to Character Creation and Period Styles*, which amongst other things posits that understanding period movement and historical Given Circumstances is a natural and necessary part of applying the Stanislavski method to any period production. While this addressed a particular technical element (period styling/movement) usually under the purview of Movement teachers, it fell short of making the general assertion: a

systematic grounding of the entire discipline of Movement training within this basic Acting context.

Blumenfeld's follow-up came closer. With his 2011 release of *Stagecraft: Stanislavsky & External Acting Techniques*, he both continues his period exploration and expands the discussion to incorporate everything from Blocking to Voice to Makeup to acting in Musical Theatre, all to some degree tied to Stanislavski. This text reads more as a collection of all things technical, without a through line of acting principles, and falls short of making direct parallels between these technical aspects and Stanislavski's work, let alone a parallel physical training construct. Historically styles are surveyed and the presumption put forth that external techniques must have influenced the internal, as in Stanislavski based work, but this conjecture is often the only connection to his technique. What I attempt here is specifically aimed at those tasked with teaching movement as a part of a higher education acting curriculum, and deals as much with curricular synthesis as the actor's process-my focus is pedagogical first and foremost, where Blumenfeld's is technique first and foremost.

Our purpose is not only to create 'the life of the human spirit in a role', but also to communicate it outwardly in

an artistic form," Tortsov corrected him. "So the actor must not only experience the role inwardly, he must embody that inner experience physically... To be able to reflect a life which is subtle and often subconscious, you must possess an exceptionally responsive and outstandingly well-trained voice and body... This is why an actor of our school, must more so than of other schools, must be concerned not only with his mental apparatus that facilitates the process of experiencing, but even more with his physical apparatus, his body, which conveys his inner feelings in a believable manner- their outer form, their embodiment. (Stanislavski & Benedetti 20)

Structure

Stanislavski's most important and influential idea was not any particular technique, but the basic assertion that we must have one. His exact psychotechnique may not be in popular use much anymore, but the ideas that it hatched are pervasive. His books have been a staple of actor training ever since, and even those who disagreed have generally done so in response to Stanislavski, a fact that only continues his influence. In Appendix I you will find a sample syllabus for a single semester movement course organized around a Stanislavski concept-based model. It was designed for a system in which it would comprise the first part of a year-long movement course, so some of the topics we might expect of movement training are not addressed until the following semester. This semester of course work is envisioned more as a segue from acting training in to movement training, in such a way as to make that transition feel as

natural and productive as possible. Not all of the connections are obvious from glancing at the syllabus, but a pervasive consistency of language between acting classes and the movement class helps reinforce the connection, as does the classroom activity time. The goal is that by the second semester, even the most technical, physical, or specific skill-based subjects one might include, such as period movement, mask, or stage combat, will be readily accepted as still being a venue for exploration of acting concepts, having established that relationship in the first semester's work.

Listening, Imagining, and Committing

For example, the first unit covered is listed as Boal and Contact Improvisation. Using some of Boal's ensemble building physical games, leading in to contact improvisation, is I believe one of the best ways to establish a healthy baseline of trust and a safe, productive work environment- but that's at the level of what it does for the classroom. From a movement perspective it lays a strong foundation for non-verbal, whole-body participation in acting. Key to this thesis though, is that for the actor it's about imagining and listening. The creative side of the Boal games aids with one of Stanislavski's first admonitions to his acting students in *An Actor's Work/An Actor*

Prepares: "What kind of actors are you if you can't get your imaginations working?" (Stanislavski & Benedetti 46). Meanwhile, shared weight type games, the Greek Exercise, and contact improvisation serve like a non-verbal take on listening, much like Meisner repetition; it's about really feeling what your partner or partners are giving you, and responding appropriately. With the shared weight parts of those exercises, it's about giving back exactly the value you are given, however that is expressed through your own body- a smaller person may need to push or lean more than their larger partner, but if we substitute presence or dramatic weight for literal size and strength, that lesson also easily crosses back from purely physical to text-based scene work as well. Unlike words, the body cannot lie- it may try to misdirect by inviting misinterpretation about the meaning of what it is doing, but it cannot pretend; in terms of balance, reach, weight, breath, etc. it does, or it does not. This makes our ability to listen with it, to it, and control what we say with it harder than with words -and more vital.

Stanislavski's basic focus and memory exercises involved looking and listening and then describing. Unlike that and the verbal Meisner drill, something like contact improvisation

requires a constant flow of simultaneous physical listening and responding, rather than taking turns. When pointed out to students, this can be applied back to verbal acting as well, such that even when delivering you are also listening- as I believe in person all good communicators do. To me, a script is an obstacle course- it's how you go around and through the obstacles that sets you apart, and the space between obstacles can win or lose your race; that's my biased relationship with the words in a script, but I don't feel it is in direct conflict with what students might get in voice training or other acting classes.

Improvisation in Training

Contact improvisation is not just good abstract actor training but also widely applicable to developing choreography/ blocking for staging specific scenes, especially of heightened violent or amorous passion. It is a prime chance to discover through doing. Stanislavski used several stock story ideas for having his acting students improvise scenes on stage, as a way to better understand and hopefully master the techniques they were working on at the time... but those scenes did not involve interpersonal feelings strong enough to transcend words. Had he done so, I imagine techniques such as this might have been

employed as a part of his 'Active Analysis' improvisational techniques, a part of discovering through doing. Making clear these connections after learning exercises (not before, as I want students to experience the exercises as exercises first, without mentally skipping any steps) can also help reinforce the immediate relationship of movement to acting.

Physical Skills, Necessary Tension

You may also notice from scanning the syllabus that Suzuki is included early on in the Semester. This is used largely as a physical exercise and warm-up, and once learned will be continued at the beginning of most classes. Such things were not directly addressed by Stanislavski's acting class as described in his books, but his students were concurrently taking courses in acrobatics, fencing, etc. While those activities may come in to play in a second semester via Grotowski or stage combat, Suzuki gives both a good foundation of core and base exercises as well as an excellent venue for discussion of relaxation and necessary tension, something Stanislavski did explicitly discuss. Relaxation/tension comes up in the next unit as well, but such is the nature of our holistic art: within each exercise the lessons of the others can be pointed out and reinforced.

Focus

From contact improvisation and that other-focus, I transition in to some solo focus work. Focus is another of Stanislavski's early units, originally couched in avoiding stage fright/preoccupation with the audience through 'public solitude,' as well as in truly performing your playable action. Blumenfeld refers to Stanislavski's circles of attention as protective shells for the actor, but I find it more productive to focus on defining focus by what it is, rather than what it excludes (Blumenfeld, "Stagecraft" 136). Unfortunately for those interested in physical performance, it is introduced as an almost exclusively visual concept, illustrated with pools of light on a stage.

To bring this in to the realm of physical acting, we need to acknowledge that a physical focus can also exist, either connected to or independent of the visual/cerebral focus. One quality of Stanislavski's focus that makes it useful to the discussion of movement is its fluid nature; Focus is something that can expand to fill a stage, or contract to the size of a small prop. It is constantly shifting both in location and nature, and it is often equivalent to the point of interaction, especially in the form of other actors. "This constant shifting

of attention is crucial to living on the stage," and no less so in the body than with the eyes and intellect (Brestoff 32). Just as with Stanislavski our mind was engaged with the object of our visual focus, so here is the physical focus the point with which our bodies are actively engaged. Focus being a visually-based term, it might be best to call it something else. The Eastern concept of ki (Japanese) or chi (Chinese) is perhaps related, in the way it can be focused narrowly or more widely, can flow throughout the body, and can be a source of physical power. In western translation it might simply be called energy.

ENERGY

In fact, it is in Stanislavski's own later writings that I have found the closest parallel concept to this physical focus, although he refers to it simply as "energy." While this is lifted straight from his text, it is not a part of his work that is as widely known. Introducing it as focus, as I have done, helps connect it to what is more likely the acting instruction students have received prior to their first Movement or Physical Acting class- but being straight from Stanislavski helps reinforce the point that movement training can indeed claim direct connection with the most basic denominators of acting training. Through bringing in characters like Sonova, a

specialist guest teacher in the segment on Physical Education for his imaginary class (normally taught by Tortsov), Stanislavski foreshadows the fragmentation of the field into movement specialists, voice specialists, and general acting teachers- but also models a collegial collaboration between them.

Sonova uses visualization to lead Tortsov's class through an exercise in developing fluid, smooth, allusive movement; she puts a pretend drop of mercury on the inside of the fingertip, then guides them in pretending to roll it gently around in different areas of the body, first radial along the arms, then from the top of the head to the feet and back, and all over (Stanislavski & Benedetti 366). Concentration and visualization are key (reinforcing the lessons of imagination from my prior unit on Boal games), but this is a form of non-visual visualization which centers more around the imagined physical sensation. Tortsov sums up: "She focused your physical concentration on the movement of energy through the inner network of muscles" (Stanislavski & Benedetti, 367). What's more, he even defines physical tension as the blocking of this passage of motor energy.

(Relaxation Again)

Almost every theatre instructor I've ever had has advocated relaxation, worked towards the removal of tensions in warm-ups, etc... but none has ever defined it this way. Selective clenching and relaxation while lying on the floor, or passive imagery, or massage circles can all help us relax in the sense of lack of muscular tension, but there is a need to clarify this relationship of energy to tension. As Stanislavski pointed out, when we are relaxed, energy flows freely throughout the body; it does not stop. This in a sense prevents the idea of focused intent, just as complete physical relaxation would prevent dramatic actions such as running, fighting, singing, or even standing up. Complete relaxation in a muscular sense is not the goal, it is more that economy of active energy and active focus of energy are the goal. Ideal theatrical relaxation is not passivity, it is dynamic energy with nothing inwardly hindering it!

Focus/Energy Out of the Body

While less explored in the first semester syllabus example, there is a whole world of application of this focus/energy idea to be utilized within gesture, period movement, stage combat, etc. I find dropping hints or teases of units to come can help

build students' perception of cohesiveness in the class, as well as reinforcing the idea that all lessons learned are to be remembered and incorporated rather than left behind at the end of the unit.

Stanislavski allows for the possibility of this energy I have mentioned not always residing inside the confines of the actor's skin: "You also know from your own experience of radiation that energy moves not just internally but passes from us, from the secret places of feeling towards the focal object which is to be found outside ourselves" (Stanislavski & Benedetti 367). Here I diverge from Stanislavski however; after such a promising start about focal points, he goes on to speak of this as an infinite, unbroken line of energy, rather than something specific like his concept of focus was earlier. An energy that goes out forever without focus is like a glassy-eyed stare that doesn't see; perhaps useful for the occasional moment in characters like King Lear, but not the specificity of engaged characters doing dynamic things for their own high stakes and our entertainment. It is not, to use Stanislavski's terminology from the chapter on Concentration and Attention, the "immediate object, the immediate focal point" (Stanislavski & Benedetti 92). Our bodies, unlike our minds at their best, cannot

effectively engage with the infinite. We work best with a specific but shifting focus of engagement. I choose to apply Stanislavski's words from his 'Magic If' section to choices on physical engagement as well: "'Real acting' and playing 'in general' are incompatible" (Stanislavski & Benedetti 56). He refers to 'in general' as the sworn enemy of theatrical art-- so it is in movement, a manifestation of that art.

We call this inner awareness of the passage of energy through the body a sense of movement. (Stanislavski & Benedetti 372)

To use the common (in movement instruction, at least) language of pushing/pulling, we are speaking not necessarily of the point on your body doing the push or pull or being pushed or pulled (your theatrical idea of center), but rather the point your body is interacting with in that push or pull- which may well exist outside your body. For example, if you push with your chest, you presumably are not pushing your chest but are pushing something in front of it. Likewise, if your chest is drawn forward, what is the source of that pull? Having that specific physical 'other' location makes just as much difference in clarity of physical action as having a clear 'other' does in an

audition monologue. For actors familiar with Michael Chekhov's movement qualities, it may perhaps be most visible in a very focused form of either radiating or molding. Once you add in Stanislavski's idea of playing opposites, and the physicalization of any ambivalence, you have resistance to your push or pull, which is why I sometimes find molding a more interesting choice than radiating. Another traditionally movement-based expression of that playing opposites concept could perhaps be found in Grotowski's sense of opposition, with every reach having its counter. Regardless, I think specificity in both time and space of that energetic location is helpful to an actor's physical performance.

By way of example, let me go back to my martial arts training to something that requires relaxation and tension, reach and specificity: Let's say we want to throw a punch. The arm cannot be stiff and tense from the start or it cannot extend and reach towards the target with any speed or grace. It cannot tense too early or it will telegraph the move. If the fists are balled tight constantly, it will lock off some ability to properly defend yourself and it commits you to a limited range of response. Obviously you also cannot strike effectively with a completely limp arm. The ideal is a relaxed but quick extension

towards the target, with a last-minute locking down of the fist, wrist, and arm so the weight of the body can be effectively brought to bear on the target. It's as though the energy shoots out towards the target, and is then caught in the fist just before it gets there- and then, holding the energy in your fist like a knuckle-duster, you hit with it, pushing that locus of energy through your target with your whole body weight. As soon as the hit is completed, the fist must relax again, allowing the energy to flow freely to wherever it is needed next; If your target decides to hit back while your energy is still stuck in your fist, you're in trouble, just as much as if they'd chosen to counter while your visual/mental attention was elsewhere. As an added bonus in stage combat application, this type of punch, besides being mechanically correct for the character action, also adds a sense of a 'pop' of impact even when performing a non-contact punch.

Everything I just described is called the flow of energy. You want to feel the energy traveling through your entire body from the feet to the fist. If one part of the body is lazy or feels uninvolved, you need to train harder to make that part of your body an active participant in the punch. (Nguyen)

The word I propose introducing for what we are discussing here is *locus*. Latin for 'place', it has since the death of its

mother tongue been adopted by many would-be foster homes: industrial psychology (an internal or external locus of control), medicine (the place a pathogen enters), mathematics (allowing for the plural *loci*, the set of points satisfying a particular condition), and a graphic element of feedback system diagrams (root locus analysis). All of these are in some way helpful associations for us to capitalize on in our movement work: internal or external centers of control, points of entry or exit, possibly multiple points along a line, and a way of describing a dynamic, ongoing phenomenon. The movement of the locus of energy can be external and visible, or inward, invisible energy, both of which are cited in the latter section of *An Actor's Work*, but both of which I would argue still have visible effects on the performance (Stanislavski & Benedetti 372).

Further discussion of this particular concept's application in stage combat, gesture, or in interaction with props has been relegated to the appendices, to preserve the organization of topics around the model first semester syllabus.

Story & Subtext

The next section is headed Imagination, Story & Subtext. This is when our work as storytellers really begins, and for a movement/physical acting course that means non-verbal storytelling. This should be our first real synthesis section, where all the previous lessons are brought to bear on an exercise. In the assigned reading in Benedetti's *Stanislavski & the Actor*, this includes multitasking activities, for which I consider being able to have simultaneous and distinct physical and visual foci is essential; Lady Macbeth must both maintain a physical focus on the spots on her hands she is trying to scrub away, while looking up at her imagined/remembered husband to whom she speaks in her somnambulation. The locus described earlier can involve either the Action or the Activity in Stanislavski's terms; expression of the goal-oriented pursuit or extraneous action that reveals character.

Here is where we re-introduce the Magic If, as well. Benedetti's first example in his section Using an Imaginary World is actually a prime candidate for physical expression: "If you were out in the woods, what would you do?" (Benedetti 47). This sense of physical space and condition expressed physically

in an actor in a classroom is a seamless link between the Stanislavski training and non-verbal physical actor training. Combining this sort of exploration with a shared A/B scene in class immediately reveals the power of non-verbal elements in establishing the all-important subtext to a scene. Even without the introduction of dialogue this is still an accessible concept, however; Working within the Stanislavski system there are the ideas of Action (vital to the pursuit of the primary objective) and Activity (extraneous to that main goal), which together can become analogous to text and subtext. In a non-verbal scene, our 'text' might be something like "your job is to stack the chairs." Your activity subtext could include such things as carefully counting the chairs first, or throwing them in the corner first, or dancing while you stack them, or dropping them violently in to place. For those adequately trained, this can also be a chance to experiment with internal versus external tempo.

This begins the creation of basic acting/story scenes, which to be acted will need, amongst other things, clear goals and obstacles for each character. I began with overall story and situation before this specific character work, as would happen with an actor working on a scripted performance. Their first

scene work, then, involves everything done to date: Imagination, theatrical relaxation, listening to and communicating with a partner, shifting focus, goal and obstacle, subtext, the Magic If, everything they have learned both in the movement class to date *and, importantly, in their prior acting training*. Apart perhaps from text-specific vocal training, they are encouraged to bring their entire being to their work, a being that is expressed through their body but must include also their intellect, their imagination, and their life history, including prior training.

Pre-Beats/The Before Time

These scenes then, beginning on the day of presentation, give us something to use to anchor our next areas of exploration. The piece on The Before Time (another basic acting concept) is readily explored from a movement perspective; having students do a minute of rigorous calisthenic activity immediately before beginning a monologue or scene can make a huge difference in their performance, with more emotional scene work aided by more specific choices of activity such as pushing or pulling. After initial presentations of their scenes, students are given physical activities to do as a purely physical pre-beat to their scenes, and discussion follows of the

differences felt by the performers and observed by the rest of the class.

And So On.

This general pattern then continues through the class: Concepts that all of the students should be generally familiar with from prior acting classes are explored in a movement-specific context, built upon all prior work both in and out of class, and periodically brought to bear on a scene as a way of testing the student's ability to apply them on stage.

Some of the units are I hope readily apparent both in how they pertain to basic acting concepts and in their physical execution, such as gesture, and physical observation including centers and leads. The first not yet covered is Objective and Obstacle- this one is very readily explained through non-verbal exploration, for example in David Leong's 'Water Meets Water', Dr. Anderson's *Push: The Show*, or any of a myriad of other ways of safely exploring physical pursuit of objective, contrasting objectives and obstacles, tactics, etc. Other units may have less obvious connection to movement or to a basic Stanislavski-based working knowledge of acting, so rather than continuing a chronological narrative of the course, I would like to focus for

the remainder of this paper on specific concepts with either wider or more ambiguous parallels for further explanation.

Sense Memory & Emotional Recall

No discussion of Stanislavski based actor training in the United States can ignore the idea of Affective Memory, or sense memory, emotional recall, or some combination thereof. It is often seen as the heart and soul of 'Method Acting,' which in turn was the heart and soul of the American Naturalism that long dominated our American institutions of actor training. At the most basic level of understanding (i.e., that which most beginning acting students carry with them to their first Movement classes) Emotional recall involves finding our own personal parallel emotional situations to those that a character would be experiencing within the given circumstances of the scene, and trying to bring up those subjectively equivalent situations as a way of generating the appropriate emotion for the scene. Such personal memories should be compelling and strong in their emotive content, but old enough to have been adequately dealt with, such that the emotion summoned will not overpower the actor and prevent them from playing the scripted scene.

One way this might commonly be approached is by having students deliver a monologue with especially emotionally charged content for the character. The students might then be asked to recall something in their own lives that produced a similar emotional response, and then, holding on to that feeling, deliver the monologue again. Emotional expression is not the only use to which we can put physical quality recall, however.

Emotional recall could be and has been debated at great length in terms of Stanislavski's original intent and its usefulness. It is acknowledged that sense memory can cover non-emotional physical sensations of things inflicted upon the body such as cold, hungry, drunk, effect of the physical surroundings, etc., and this is I think less contested. Yet the explanation of sense memory is lacking a category of physical sensation of the body as an active agent. We have physical, kinesthetic sensations that accompany our action verbs as well. I use these movement metaphors regularly when covering topics such as stage combat - a sword cut might be compared to chopping wood, or casting a fishing rod, or throwing a Frisbee forehand. More figuratively, I might compare a transition to the moment a heavy burden is released, or to the feeling of being physically restrained from desired action. Sadly, here (no more or less

than in general life experience with young actors) often the reference material is found lacking from the actor's personal history.

Let us look at the difference in life experience that most of Stanislavski's students had as compared to our own modern undergraduate acting population.

Stanislavski's students (as represented by his hypothetical students of Tortsov) split their time between the acting class we have heard so much about, and other much less frequently acknowledged courses in fencing, acrobatics, etc. as previously referenced. They relied on their own ambulation for most of their commutes, occasionally making use of trolleys or animal-drawn carts. For heat, they loaded fuel in a stove, perhaps after splitting the wood or hauling coal by hand. By contrast, today's students get almost everything they need either pre-boxed or electronically, rarely rely on physical exertion for their daily needs, and are unlikely to be studying physical disciplines as a part of their formal training, if at all. Sense memory may work for them in feeling happy or sad, but when asked to portray more mundane physical tasks, many of them come across

as completely unconvincing without coaching. The sad fact is they simply lack the physical repertoire to draw from.

In movement classes it is often a goal or prerequisite to the learning outcome goals to get the students in better physical shape. This can easily be seen as obligatory, tedious, or even punitive to students if taken at face value, so it is important to me to reference real-life activities when doing exercises, and what's more to show multiple real-life parallels as we go. As Grotowski points out, what could appear mindless acrobatic routines must be constantly justified as actors. This is not just for the practice in justifying action, but it accomplishes the first step in understanding how to apply these physical kinesthetic experiences onstage through physical sense memory.

We may need to look like we're using all our strength to hold shut a door as characters, when as actors we can barely commit any of our own weight without toppling the plywood wall the door is built in. This requires both the control of not pushing, and having an idea of true physical commitment to reference, such as might have been achieved in classroom exercises against a wall or with a partner. Such is the way as

with emotional recall or sense memory- you need to remember what it feels like, yet remain in control enough to preserve the integrity of the scene--including the maintenance of a theatrical world in which the wall remains stable when pushed. In units on centers and leads, I use a tug-of-war game to demonstrate our natural default inclinations for physical effort, and then the differences in trying to do so from different leads, centers, and angles. At the end of that unit, when students are performing scenes utilizing different leads and centers to reveal character, I have them stay in character at the end of the scene and perform a physical task I give them in the moment, to see if they can extrapolate how to keep that center and lead while actually doing something. My hope is that the prior experience of playing tug-of-war or other physical tasks from different leads helps them remember what it took to exert physical force in different ways, and that each continued challenge within different character leads gives them more to draw on the next time such challenges arise, whether the task at hand calls for real exertion or simply acted exertion, like pushing on a flimsy set's door.

The physical equivalent of sense memory depends on having some baseline of physical experience to draw from. On a basic,

remedial level we can achieve this by giving students a range of physical tasks, and referencing them with different parallels; students can 'pretend you're pushing a stalled car' while pushing on a wall or each other without leaving the classroom or losing the effectiveness of the exercise. What's more, the lack of contextual specificity involved will probably make these exercises even more widely and metaphorically applicable than the equivalent of real-life counterparts might.

Students need to experience what it feels like to physically do something right in order to recall that later in their acting, not just in task completion but even such simple tasks as standing, breathing, or walking. This demand is often filled through exercises and drills meant to provide the experience of proper alignment for the task at hand, whether that be the idea actor's neutral stance via Alexander Technique, a good solid base and connection to the earth through Suzuki drills, a free expressivity thanks to Grotowski exploration, period movement, etc. When done without explanation this training relies on unconscious conditioning or presumed permanent shift in the actor's behavior. While the latter especially may not be a bad result of something like Alexander training, I believe the more immediately useful and broadly

applicable approach to be a deliberate phrasing of these exercises in terms of how they might be applied specifically to work on a character or a scene.

Another parallel for Sense Memory in physicality can come not in the task, but the style of its execution. Popular movement analysis systems such as Chekhov's movement qualities and Laban's LMA allow actors to create a very intentional portfolio of physical styles to draw from. These are not used in a direct equivalency, where what is done in the classroom is what is being remembered consciously on the stage; rather, physical choices are remembered in the body, such that when useful for a character choice they can be physically recalled as a general quality rather than a specific move. Much like the general quality of 'grief' might be used in emotional recall, separate from the specific implications of dead puppies or traumatic breakups, so might the quality of 'molding' or 'flicking' be brought to a scene to quickly be able to access a certain aspect of a character or event. This physical memory is, if anything, more reliable than our powers of intellectual recollection, and does not weaken with repetition as the emotional impact of a memory might. It is sense memory in a full kinesthetic sense.

Imagination and Sense Memory

There is also overlap between this kinesthetic sense memory and almost every other physical acting exercise. Art is applied metaphor, and the art of acting no less so; sense memory is this codified as a system, where something a character is experiencing is deemed to be like something the actor experienced. For movement, those without formal descriptive notation methods like LMA resort to more poetic metaphor: "He moves like a cat," perhaps, or LeCoq might ask an actor to move 'like aluminum'. This relies on a chain of links through imagination, as we imagine the kinesthetic quality of being _____, then the physical exploration of trying things out in rehearsal, an experience of finding what works and locking in that feeling so it can be recalled at a later date when that quality is desired.

What set sense memory apart for those first exposed to Stanislavski's approach was not that sensations were recalled, but that this recollection could be a deliberately, systematically employed tool for consistent quality in acting. All of the physical approaches alluded to above (and indeed all types of physical training) incorporate some degree of this

method, even though it is often not thought of as such. I think pointing it out in class as an example of sense memory both enables better use of the physical material presented and helps demystify somewhat the more purely emotional or cerebral version of sense memory more traditionally taught.

Finally, even the specifically affective elements of emotional recall can be approached from a purely physical acting approach. The most direct physical equivalent is probably *Alba Emoting*, a codified set of physical behaviors including breath patterns that may or may not elicit genuine recalled emotion, but encourages it and approximates it effectively for stage regardless. I believe this would readily qualify under Stanislavski's definition of sense memory as a conscious psychotechnique designed to create the optimal conditions under which the appropriate unconscious aspects of the character can arise within the actor.

The language of the body is the key that can unlock the soul. (Stanislavski, qtd in Blumenfeld "Stagecraft" 72)

Acting is Doing.

One of the most common assertions made by those introducing Stanislavski's work is that an actor must not simply go through the motions of a character or feeling, but must, in some way, experience them. I believe this has been overplayed and is still debated as to what degree emotion is or must be either primary in the scene, exactly parallel to the character's, or is a byproduct of or impetus for the physical expression -- but regardless, the concept translates neatly to physical acting as well, where we can remove any ambiguous issues around 'acting is feeling' and translate them straight in to 'acting is doing'.

At its most basic, this speaks to the need for a sense of ease and lack of self-consciousness in stage action; don't pretend to cross the stage and sit down, really just cross the stage and have a seat. The most compelling acting generally happens between partners, however, and may well involve action that cannot be authentically replicated on stage, be it violence, sex, intoxication, or eating a full meal. The need for a pre-scripted outcome makes even the simplest and safest of competitive tasks (arm-wrestling, racing for a prop, shooting baskets) something that both actors may not be able to fully commit to at face value. This can all too often result in poorly

acted scenes whenever a fight or other such event takes place on stage. To solve this problem, we turn again to the parallel of emotive acting as taught by Stanislavski's followers.

With emotion, we are told to find something in some way equivalent to the character's emotive journey that we, as actors, can bring to the role. It is to stand in for the actor's emotion just as we stand in for the character: in every way real and tangible, but a substitution, and one that is controlled and repeatable. As such, the event, item, or issue we bring with us to engender that emotion must revolve around something fresh enough to effect us, but sufficiently distant to have been dealt with before, lest it prove too overwhelming and genuine to allow for the actor to follow their controlled script and blocking and character. Making the right choice is essential.

Nowhere is this balance more specific and explicit than in physical action. In something like a simple front choke as performed in a staged fight scene, obviously the attacker cannot truly squeeze or bear down on their victim's throat. At the same time, they must look like they are locked in a desperate physical struggle, and simply tensing everything can actually hinder the acting of this scene. Stanislavski devotes

significant space in his books to the idea of using only the necessary and appropriate tension for physical action, as have acting, movement, and voice teachers since him. However, if we assume the standard stage choke hand position, with one hand placed over top of the other making a V shape with the web of the thumbs (pad of one thumb resting on top of the back of the other hand), one hand can press down while the other presses up, thus giving both arms and the body that connects them something to actually try to do. Don't pretend to do something you're not doing; actually do something you're pretending is something else. In stage punches, trying not to punch the face is often a doomed endeavor and leads to timidity or tracking. Trying to punch the living daylights out of a patch of air a foot away, however, is something you can fully commit to.

A script may call for you to leave a room, and me to try to stop you but fail. I cannot play the idea of trying to stop you, any more than you can just play the idea of overcoming my efforts: to some degree, we need to be able to both commit actual effort to the endeavor. This show may well not have cast actors whose physical prowess match that of their characters, so even if it could be done safely, genuine physical competition is not an option. As an actor, I have my playable action (try to

keep you from leaving) but cannot just perform that action, so I have to learn to displace that goal on to something I can fully commit to- like making my scene partner earn the right to leave.

Characters constantly want things from or in spite of each other. Whatever our action verbs may be, from stab to seduce and everything in between, we need to find versions of it we can actually play. Much like the parallel experiences used in Sense Memory or Emotional Recall to make equivalent feelings, we need to find physical parallels that let us safely experience the physical expression that will read appropriately.

These kinds of exercises make immediately visible the forces and intent at play, but the concepts behind them are just as applicable to a less physical scene where you go to leave and I shout "Stop!" We've all seen actors be far too kind to each other about this kind of action, and walked away not believing their action. This is a classic example of what Fight Director Richard Ryan describes as being a nice partner instead of a good partner. A good partner gives you genuine motivation and obstacles, and makes you step up your own game in order to achieve the scripted action. Really pushing your partner in this way (either literally or psychologically) requires a certain

amount of trust, a framework of safe boundaries, and for both actors to be ready to respond appropriately - not anticipating their cue, but looking for it as real people in heightened situations are looking to see what is coming next.

Bits or Beats

Bits/Beats are generally a script analysis element, but in performance are associated with being in the moment. As an acting teacher or director I will sometimes ask actors to verbalize their character's inner monologue, as a way of quickly understanding the choices they are making and pointing out the connection between those choices and the effectiveness of their performance. In a physical acting or movement class, one of the goals is to challenge the actor to achieve the same level of specificity of choice and ability to react in the moment completely non-verbally, perhaps even without the benefit of facial expression. In the model course under discussion here mask work would be introduced in the second semester to challenge actors to develop this type of genuine response and clarity, but the work begins first semester with the initial non-verbal scenes.

One of the key lessons for a physical acting or movement class is that the unspoken moments matter just as much as those that are scripted. Thus even the early non-verbal scene work is still discussed and analyzed in terms borrowed from Stanislavski's script analysis work. Actions are divided into beats, with subsequent breakdown of proactive and reactive objectives and obstacles, and the discoveries that prompt them. When we have physical action like in stage combat it is all too often to see people anticipate their next action before they as a character have made their discovery or decision, to act before their cue, be it a parry that leads the cut, a reaction that leads the slap, or a stop that precedes the order to halt. To react genuinely in such circumstances requires a bravery and clarity of mind perhaps different from but no more or less than that required to genuinely hear a line of dialogue and respond to it only when truly hearing it, rather than doing so as an automatic response to a cue. This parallel is another that often must be pointed out to actors, but which they will all understand.

Shifting borders

One possible objection to what I have been doing here is that it blurs the line between the usual domain of acting

classes and of movement classes. This is by design, as the point is to highlight the arbitrary nature of their separation into distinct specialties. That said, I believe this approach can still serve within an existing curriculum of separate acting and movement courses. It by no means renders Movement and Physical Acting instruction obsolete; if anything, it reaffirms the need for them within the delivery of basic acting concepts. The goal is not to claim curricular territory within Acting, but to expand it and share it.

Academia can have an unfortunate predisposition towards myopic specialization, each new field developing its own must-know list of names, theories, and terminology. While for purely academic investigation such focus may be a perfectly valid approach, within the academic study of theatre, whether in the context of a BFA or Conservatory actor training program or a more general and academically focused liberal arts education, I find it counterproductive. It serves to divide us in to camps in a field that is demands collaboration. It makes a barrier to participation. While there should be noticeable differences between the trained and the untrained actor, impenetrable language should not be one of them unless absolutely necessary to accomplish the real goal: better theatre practice.

Whether justified or not, agreed with or contested, Konstantin Stanislavski (with the biases of a series of translators that have brought his work to the American audience) has created what amounts to our best chance at a universally accepted framework and terminology. Those of us within specialized sub-fields of acting, such as movement, voice, or stage combat, must ultimately reconcile ourselves with that universal terminology and approach, even if it is just as a point of departure, because this is where the actors we teach, coach, and direct are rooted.

Next Steps

Further specific exploration of physical focus can be found in Appendix II, with more suggestions for continued exploration of Stanislavski based movement instruction in Appendix III. As with the texts actors are most familiar with (scripts), I have left much out of the specific execution thus far, as I believe it is best for those specific choices to be made by the person filling that role, be it in this case a teacher, administrator, or theatre practitioner. My goal in both teaching and writing is simply to plant seeds, and to make them interesting enough that

someone will choose to water and grow them, that their later harvest may help bring credit to us both and the field at large.

Appendix I: First Semester Sample Syllabus

THEA 210 PHYSICAL ACTING

INSTRUCTOR: Kevin Inouye

M,W 3pm - 4:45pm in SSPLY 0302

inouyek@vcu.edu

TEXTBOOKS [REQUIRED]:

Office Hours by appointment in SSP203
(Movement Office)

Stanislawski & The Actor
by Jean Benedetti

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course on movement and physical presence for actors. Students will further explore the work of an actor through the lens of movement and physicality, experiencing the process involved in researching and presenting an embodied character on the stage. This first semester will be grounded in making physical the basic building blocks of acting technique you are already familiar with, and the second semester will then explore what will likely be more new territory. Our process will include limited academic analysis and discussion, regular performance experience, and many different training exercises.

This semester's portion of the course will be organized around the Stanislavski's core acting principles, including:

- Relaxation & Necessary Tension
- Focus
- The Magic If
- The Pre-Beat
- Being in the Moment
- Sense Memory
- Playable Actions
- Objectives, Tactics, & Obstacles
- Making Strong, Specific Choices
- Ensemble
- Application of skills to solo & scene work

As a Physical Acting course, our expression of these elements will be through primarily non-verbal, body-focused exercises. These will come from a variety of practitioners and sources. By the completion of the full year, it is expected that students will be able to:

- Perform all regular warm-up activities, including at least 10 pushups and 30 sit-ups.

- Balance the muscular activity necessary for physical action with the relaxation necessary for natural performance, good vocalization, and receptivity.
- Demonstrate and maintain distinct centers and leads through physical activity.
- Know & demonstrate Laban & Chekhov's movement qualities and an example of psychological gesture.
- Know & demonstrate at least five aspects each of Elizabethan and Restoration period movement.
- Describe at least five traits of your own habituated physical characteristics.
- Demonstrate inner and outer rhythm and intensity independently
- Be able to explain and demonstrate actor's neutral, mask and countermask
- Offer a concise description of the following approaches to physical theatre: Grotowski, Boal, Suzuki, Chekhov, Alba, Lecoq, Laban.
- Name two areas of movement you wish to explore further, and why.

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

Good acting involves taking risks. It means making strong choices and then subjecting them to public scrutiny. You will, on occasion, experience failures. This classroom is a training space, not a place of judgment, and as such all students need to feel it is a safe space in which to experiment. While you are by no means required to like everything you see put forth by your peers or by the instructor, you are required to be respectful and to respond in a constructive manner. If we are not free to risk looking foolish, we cannot progress; however, if others here are not free to tell us when we look foolish, we also cannot progress. The work of other students as well as actors in the school and community at whole will be discussed. Feedback is to be both offered and received in an honest and considerate way at all times. We may try to fool the audience when we act, but in this classroom we are here in honest pursuit of knowledge and experience. If your behavior is deemed disruptive of that environment, you will be asked to leave the class, for a period of time at the instructor's discretion, and it will impact your grade.

Students are expected to wear the standard VCU theatre blacks, in keeping with the dress code established by the department. Those with long hair should have the ability to tie it back if needed. Cell phones are to be turned off during class sessions. Water bottles are strongly encouraged. Some units may have other requirements such as socks or appropriate footwear.

Students are expected to abide by the VCU honor code, and do their part to create a safe environment for theatrical risk-taking.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Theatre cannot be done without both physical and mental presence! Every two absences = half letter grade penalty, in addition to any effect on other scores for activities missed that day.

Being late or needing to leave early (5 min or more) for two classes = one absence, in addition to any effect on other scores for activities missed.

GRADING & ASSIGNMENTS

Grading Scales

*In order to receive credit for this course towards your program you must receive a grade of C or better

| | | | | | |
|---|--------|---|--------------|---|-------|
| A | 90-100 | B | 80-89 | C | 70-79 |
| D | 60-69 | F | 59 and below | | |

Grade distribution will be as follows:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Participation..... | 30% |
| Journals..... | 10% |
| Contact Improv Scene..... | 5% |
| Non-verbal Objective/Obstacle/Tactic Scene..... | 5% |
| Observational Activity..... | 5% |
| Centers & Leads Activity..... | 10% |
| Tempo & Rhythm Activity..... | 5% |
| Character Analysis (5% written, 5% performance)..... | 10% |

Final Scene.....15%

Final Written Assignment.....10%

Participation: This includes attitude, your ability to work with others, effort put in to self-improvement, volunteering in activities and discussion, etc. from the time class begins to the time it ends. You will receive a weekly rating for participation, and these will be tallied at the end of each semester.

Journals: Due October 10th for 5% of grade, due December 7th for 5% of grade (total of 10%). Minimum of 1 entry per week that includes personal reflection as well as analysis of classmates' presentations, out-of-class observations, etc. Journals must not simply recount the day's classroom activities, but need to demonstrate ways in which the student is trying to apply the lessons of class to outside activity, or considering how outside activity applies to the lessons from the class.

Grading of Written Assignments: All assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Late work will be accepted only if you have received my prior approval. Every day that an assignment is late, one letter grade will be deducted. For example, if you earn an A on a paper, but turn it in two days late, you will get a C. Hard copies of all assignments must be submitted unless there are extenuating circumstances, and you have asked for permission to only email an assignment. **All written work is to be typed, double-spaced, and stapled.**

Grading of Presentations: Presentation assignments may involve a written component, and may or may not involve a second performance incorporating feedback from the instructor and your peers. In case of multiple performances, both will factor in to the grade for that assignment, as will improvement between the two.

SCHEDULE

| Exact dates are subject to change. | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--|--|
| 1 | August 29 | Review syllabus and course expectations, begin warm-up routine | No Homework Due |
| 2 | August 31 | What is acting, & why do we do it? Theater games, Suzuki & Boal | Read p. 16-32 of Benedetti. |
| 3 | September 5 | NO CLASS, CAMPUS CLOSED FOR LABOR DAY. | No Homework Due |
| 4 | September 7 | Leading, following, & ensemble through Boal | No Homework Due |
| 5 | September 12 | Focus & energy made physical, contact improv | Read p. 32-42 of Benedetti |
| 6 | September 14 | Imagination, story & subtext | Read p. 42-58 of Benedetti Memorize lines |
| 7 | September 19 | Objective & obstacle, non-verbal scenes | Read p. 1-15 of Benedetti. |
| 8 | September 21 | Present Non-Verbal Scenes, Introduction to beats and pre-beats, inner monologue Present Non-Verbal Scenes | Read p.58-61 of Benedetti, handout from Ball's <i>Backwards & Forwards</i> p. 1-31 |
| 9 | September 26 | Observation, centers, & leads | Read p. 95-97 of Benedetti |
| 10 | September 28 | Gesture, activity, & sense memory | Read p. 60-73 of Benedetti |
| 11 | October 3 | Centers & Leads Presentation Tempo & Rhythm | Read p.80-86 of Benedetti |
| 12 | October 5 | Present Movement & Tempo Chekhov's movement qualities | Read p. 74-79 of Benedetti |
| 13 | October 10 | Applying choices to scripted work | Read p. 98-113 of Benedetti Journals Due |
| 14 | October 12 | Exercises in scene work, discussion of main stage production: <i>Shakespeare's R&J</i> (attendance is mandatory!) | |
| 15 | October 17 | Character analysis | Read handout from Ball p. 60-78 Schedule mid-semester appointment with instructor |
| 16 | October 19 | Character analysis & understanding, justifying action, intro to Laban | Read Laban handout |
| 17 | October 24 | Creating a physical score In-class analysis day | No Homework Due |
| 18 | October 26 | Scene presentations. | Scene Analysis Due (written & Solo Performance) |
| 19 | October 31 | Sense memory & degrees of physicality | No Homework Due |
| 20 | November 2 | Animals & other metaphors | No Homework Due |
| 21 | November 7 | Experiments in non-naturalism, discussion of main stage production: <i>Grease</i> (attendance is mandatory!) | |
| 22 | November 9 | The audition process: monologues & physicality | Begin your scene work |
| 23 | November 14 | Play with Grotowski | Continue scene work |

| Exact dates are subject to change. | | | |
|---|-------------|--|--------------------------|
| 24 | November 16 | TBA / possible field trip | Continue scene work |
| 25 | November 21 | First presentations of scenes as work in progress | No Homework Due |
| 26 | November 23 | THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS | No Homework Due |
| 27 | November 28 | In-class scene work & coaching | No Homework Due |
| 28 | November 30 | Presentation of final scenes | Final Scenes Due |
| 29 | December 5 | Presentation of final scenes, discussion | More Final Scenes |
| 30 | December 7 | Semester-wrap up, preview next semester's material | Journals Due |
| FINAL PAPERS DUE IN MAILBOX BY DECEMBER 11th! Have a great vacation. | | | |

NEXT SEMESTER: We will begin with more exploration of the self- your own habits, your capabilities, and your experience. We will then do an abbreviated version of Lecoq's mask journey, leading in to further exploration of character, including period movement. We will finish the year with scene and monologue work attempting to synthesize the content of the entire course.

SYLLABUS CHANGES: As instructor, I reserve the right to amend or change the course syllabus at any time during the semester. I will notify students if any changes to the syllabus occur.

DISABILITY: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require Virginia Commonwealth University to provide an 'academic adjustment' and/or 'reasonable accommodation' to any qualified individual with a physical or mental disability who self-identifies as having such. Students should contact the Disability Support Services office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) for appropriate academic adjustments or accommodations as soon as possible, and then bring those suggestions to the instructor.

ACADEMIC HONOR SYSTEM: Virginia Commonwealth University recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education. A foundation of honor is essential to a community devoted to learning. The Honor System in its entirety can be found in the VCU Insider or can be reviewed online at www.provost.vcu.edu/pdfs/Honor_system_policy.pdf

RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY: Our classroom will be a place where diversity is accepted, encouraged, and valued. The differences between class members will be embraced and differences in opinions and backgrounds are views as a learning experience. Language that degrades any

individual or group because of gender, ethnicity, nationality, race, socioeconomic status, disability status, religious preference, or sexual orientation will not be tolerated.

VCU STATEMENT ON SAFETY: What to know and do to be prepared for emergencies at VCU.

Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (www.vcu.edu/alert/notify). Keep your information up-to-date and know where to go for additional emergency information (www.vcu.edu/alert).

Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.

Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

APPENDIX II: More on Locus of Energy

From Martial Arts

A wealth of related information is available in the form of 'internal' martial arts (such as taiji, bagua, chigung, aikido, etc.), yoga, dance, and other physical disciplines. What has been missing is their clear integration in to acting, as a tool for both expression and analysis.

Some of what prompted me to begin this line of inquiry included sessions on aikido energy, focus, and visualization given at the *Fights of Spring* workshop by Adam Noble (now Assistant Professor of Movement and Stage Combat at Indiana University and a Certified Teacher with the Society of American Fight Directors) in Seattle in 2006 and 2007, and at the 2010 Southeastern Theatre Conference by Marci Douglas, theatre faculty at the University of Maine. One technique shared by them included projecting your center outside the body through imagery and awareness to either make you easy to move (by projecting it on or above the head) or harder to budge (through extending imaginary roots or an anchor in to the ground below you). There were similar energy manipulation exercises using the circular flow of energy to make your grip stronger when touching your

forefinger to your thumb, or linear strength by drawing attention to the top surface of an outstretched arm versus the bottom edge while pointing. On a surface level, these are simple parlor tricks, but within them are martial keys to efficiency of motion, Chekhov's sense of ease, and more.

What those sessions gave me was a sensory way to demonstrate to people the real-world impact of energy imagery. It creates a physical focus with tangible results. Actors can experience the difference both in how hard it is to effect their partner when they use their energy/focus/visualization wisely, but also how much it helps their partner resist while maintaining the 'sense of ease' that Chekhov sought in his actors. Efficiency of physical action is both an aesthetic and practical benefit to actors, especially those who may have to deliver a song or speech right on the heels of a rousing fight scene.

Even staying within the martial arts context, we can also see this idea of energy as a sort of character, when we look at the idea of elements. Like actors, any martial arts draw inspiration from nature- not just the animal styles of gung fu, or the lynx, lion, elephant and tiger in Fiore dei Leiberi's

Flos Duellatorum (a 1409 Italian manual on combat), but also on the elements themselves. This is a more spiritual than modern chemical understanding of elements, and the list often includes things like fire, water, earth, air, wood, etc.

In the Bujinkan Ninpo Taijutsu lineage I studied in the 1990s, these were briefly introduced as a bit of a curiosity or a way of characterizing techniques, but the energy in each and the resulting movement styles were highly distinctive: Fire is a forward, aggressive energy, air a high and lighter receptive energy, earth a solid and unmoving force, and water a flowing entity that will give and take in waves. Each has their own strategies for dealing with offense and defense, but in terms of what we tend to reference as our 'center', earth would have a very low and grounded center in the pelvis, air one up in the chest like a ballet dancer, fire perhaps low but clearly pulling forward as though straining to launch forward, water more back and perhaps a bit higher. The way that this interacts with locus, then, is not in that center's location but in the flow of action that stems from it; Earth tends to work more with vertical energy movement (generally driving downward), water a linear flow in and out of horizontal energy with a bit of up and down flow (like a wave), air more of a 360 degree horizontal

movement, and fire almost all linear out from the center going forwards.

What I like about the use of these concepts in the martial arts is that the application becomes measurable and obvious—distinct payoffs exist in actual task-based activity. It also creates distinct character choices, all equally potent yet clearly differentiated from each other in how they give and receive energy. When we bring it back in to acting exercises, the payoff can be more ambiguous when described, but I believe it to be just as visible and effective in person.

In Stage Combat

In one of the first comprehensive textbook style publications on stage combat, *Swashbuckling: A Step-by-Step Guide to the Art of Stage Combat and Theatrical Swordplay*, Richard Lane describes the center of gravity as properly understood— the point around which your weight is evenly distributed on all sides, generally somewhere in the pelvis (Lane 63 & 64). He then speaks briefly about the need to project energy from that point. As with Stanislavski, my issue with the term project is that it is an infinite line, and I think we have much more to gain from better specificity. What's

more, often our attacks are not direct thrusts going from our pelvis to the target- they may originate from the shoulder, or from the side, or more frequently they may be a strike coming obliquely from the side, above, or below. As such, thinking of the energy transfer as being something linear projecting from the actor's center is not adequate; the true story of the energy involved requires parabolic curves, shifts, gathering and focusing.

Grotowski asked actors "to speak as if we had mouths all over our bodies" (Wangh, prelude). Shakespeare gave us "my voice is in my sword" (from *Macbeth*). What I hope to do is help actors see those two statements as naturally complementing- speaking through your sword is not just a metaphor, but just as natural a location for placing your voice as between your shoulder blades, out your forehead, or anywhere else through which a vocal coach might ask you to project. Granted, not all weapons are for pointing or projecting, but I believe similar principles of energizing and visualization can work for any weapon, just as they do for mask work, effective use of prosthetic limb extensions (claws, digitigrade stilts, etc.) or in a slightly different manner, puppetry.

In stage combat, we work regularly with props. One of the attributes of a skilled martial artist, fencer, gunslinger or stage combatant is their ability to integrate the weapon or prop as an extension of their bodies, of their selves, to develop what the French fencers called the *sentement de fer*, the feeling of the steel. In fencing engagements, the sword becomes a feeler, an antennae, allowing you to sense your opponent's tension and intension. There's a reason that finger-fencing and finger-gun fighting as a practice method comes so naturally, despite the obvious issues in distance change; a rapier or smallsword or pistol should feel like an extension of your finger already. The locus is then, for a time, placed outside the body and within the prop. More specifically, it lives within the part of the prop expected to do the most interacting; for thrusting weapons like smallswords, that may be the tip, or it may be the area where your blade contacts your opponent's blade. For cutting blades, it may be either the 'sweet spot' on the blade (where the physics maximizes the effectiveness of the cut) or wherever it is making contact with another object or person. Swords, like actors, will have both a center of balance and a place where they act upon the world- ideally the Center of Percussion (where the vibration transmitted to the blade and handle is minimized -- often correlating with the less readily

tested 'sweet spot'). This gives the blade its own set of attributes similar to the actor, of center, focus, locus of energy, movement quality, etc. - but it is the placement of the actor's locus within the sword blade which makes the key difference between a person holding an object and a skillful agent of action wielding an extension of their bodily intent. The locus will not live in this point in a static sense, any more than it can reside in any body part, but this becomes incorporated in the area within which a relaxed body's energy flows, and just as energy is sent to the fist for a punch, it is sent to the impact point of a weapon for a strike.

Even in something like archery or gun-slinging, where there is no physical contact with the object being acted upon, we still find reference to this idea of making the weapon an extension of the body. Most famous gunslingers from history used what is called 'point shooting' or instinctive shooting (also a term used in archery) rather than carefully lining up the sights and either closing one eye or focusing on the front sight as is generally taught for target shooting. Shotguns are likewise pointed rather than aimed, generally. Part of this is done through aligning parts of the body with the barrel to facilitate this instinctive 'pointing' aim, part through keeping the barrel

in the line of site to help calibrate that subconscious aim, but I believe an essential part of that act of 'pointing' is the extension of this locus of energy, the locus of intended physical action outward to the target. Think of yourself pointing when giving directions; you don't carefully establish a visual line down your arm and finger to overlap with the objective, you simply reach out and point as though if you had an adequately extendable reach, you would be touching the indicated object with your finger. There is a physical intent that is projected out to the point of interaction, even though it be beyond the reach of your unaided body.

When unarmed, the play of locus is vital. I have already outlined an explanation of effective punching in terms of the flow of energy. I will often use at least some of this language when teaching punches in a stage combat class, especially as it is rare for me to have many actors who come to class already knowing how to punch well. One benefit of teaching conceptually is that the benefits extend beyond the technique at hand; by teaching punching as a shift of locus towards and into the target, with a holding of the energy at the last minute within the part of the body making the hit, students are quickly able to apply these concepts to non-punch moves such as shoulder

hits, head-butts, hip checks, knees, kicks, etc. When receiving hits as well, we should see the transfer of energy from attack to target- which means as an actor, you need a locus of energy on the point of impact and rolling through the body from there. In an avoidance, we should feel the physical focus on the threat, as though that external locus were making the body recoil from it.

What's more, if we can learn to control this locus of energy enough to make it appear to be somewhere it is not, we will be better equipped as performers to handle the substitution required in performing staged chokes, stabs, and other non-contact or off-target techniques.

I believe that with time and practice, these tactics come naturally to anyone of sufficient proficiency, whether they think of it as a locus of energy or not. As a teacher and fight director, however, it behooves me to find ways to explain and direct inexperienced actors to more quickly bring them up to speed. Part of our job as pedagogs is to be able to explain the attributes of a good performance, and give them name and order whether they were initially acquired systematically, unconsciously, or through inherent talent.

Props and Bodily Extensions

If you are reading this paper with a pen in hand –perhaps a red pen, if you happen to be evaluating this thesis as an instructor or reviewer– take a moment to find the direction of your nearest exit. Point to it. Chances are good (especially if you are of an age that grew up writing rather than typing or texting) you will have just done so not with your finger but with the pen.

The same can be said of long-time smokers with their cigarettes, a Victorian gentleman on a stroll with his cane, a courtesan with her folded fan, or anyone working with a prop they are familiar with to the point of unconscious integration. The prop has ceased to be a thing the hand happens to be grasping, and has become an extension of the body.

It goes beyond gesture; an expert driver can feel the road through the car, and a woman confident walking in high heels will be able to feel the ground through her shoes, knowing when the heel will hit and where her balance on it will be. There's a dancer (Dergin Tokmak) who achieved some levels of success in the *Cirque du Soleil* and elsewhere using his crutches, having

been handicapped due to childhood polio. These things, these props, become assimilated in to our sense of self over time. Much like the sword of a true swordsman with their *sentiment du fer*, or the pistol of a point-shooter, or the brush of a sumi-e painter, the locus of energy can be extended through the object until it becomes a natural extension of the user. Over time, the body has calibrated itself to include that object in its range of motion, its reach, its balance, and its sense of touch. This is the mark of an expert.

Sadly, it is also what is lacking in so many theatrical performances, especially period pieces, where a character may be heavily interacting with props he or she has only had access to for a short time prior to performance, and which still feel and read to the audience as unnatural, as objects being held, not yet incorporated naturally in to the character.

I see this ability as relying on three basic elements in training: Visualization, Calibration, and Active Physical Listening.

To try to accelerate this process with the body, I have begun to experiment with several exercises in my classes when

using things like swords, canes, or fans. Coming out of a short basic set of exercises around and explanation of the concept of locus of energy, I have the actors place their locus of energy outside their body and in to the space the prop will later occupy (visualization). Then, picking up the prop, I have them try to send the locus of energy once again to that spot, now by sending it through the length of the prop.

Once there, I will have them try exploring their environment with the prop, feeling the shapes and textures of the room not with their hands but with the props (active listening). They trace the shapes of chairs, feel the different texture of stage blocks and floor and book bags, and explore the confines of the room all with the prop serving as their fingertips otherwise might.

Finally, I run through a modified version of a familiar acting exercise. Most have done this before: two partners make hand contact, palm to palm, and synchronize their breathing as best they can. One actor closes their eyes, and the other leads them around the room safely, based just on the tactile feedback between the hands. In my modified version then, the actors touch props, be it swords or canes or fans. Depending on the nature of

the prop some prior exercises may be required to feel how to move the prop around, to roll from one side of contact with the partner's prop to the other smoothly, etc. but the same concepts apply; a constant gentle level of pressure that is required to maintain contact, a relaxed enough contact to maximize sensitivity, trust, clear communication from the leading partner, and alert physical 'listening' from the partner with the closed eyes. Given the increased potential for accidents, this modified version is something I usually have to run one couple at a time, with others serving as spotters just in case.

Granted, once students begin to attempt techniques, let alone combat, with these props, this sensitivity often goes right out the window at first, but this does at least give me something I can remind them of later, a reference they will now understand, a physical sensation they can attempt to conjure through their kinesthetic version of sense memory.

Ultimately the last element (calibration) just takes time actively engaged with the prop, and it is through this primarily that I think most experienced persons gain this trait. In terms of training actors, I find that intentional early use of visualization and active listening can accelerate the process,

and early use of at least rehearsal props kick-starts the calibration process. When we see knife-fighters doing tricks with a balisong knife, flipping it open and closed in different ways or twirling it between grips, this is not any immediately applicable combat skill they are rehearsing, but it does assist with calibration, helping them instinctively know where the blade's balance and reach lie.

Krump Power

I tell 'em to create a ball, an you just use that ball of energy, and instead of throwin' it out -people would think that's a krump move, that's a krump move - that's not a krump move; you gonna throw it out, throw it out, and you hold it, and you let it go, and right when you see the tail, you grab it by the tail and you bring it back in... and you just got this piece of energy, and you just, you're manipulating it. You know, it's, it's, it's, you create power then you tame it. I attempt to reflect the balance between weight, energy, space, and time. (Lil C, the 'King of Krump')

I believe dancers have known and used this idea just as long as martial artists, but recent dance styles have made it obvious and explicit. One thing that dancers like Lil C show so clearly is not just how dynamic the locus or loci can be, but also that they are malleable, able to change in size and shape. Watching him perform I am reminded of Chekhov's qualities of expansion and contraction, in a way that confirms for me the

idea that the locus of energy is no set size- it can expand and contract as well as shift (just like Stanislavski's idea of focus). It is not simply Lil C who expands and contracts -- it is a force he is manipulating which does so at his physical compulsion.

Much of the Western tradition of dance involves a sense of ease and passivity that makes this more nebulous, but once we get in to things like hip-hop or breakdancing it becomes quite clear. Indeed, many of the moves I see in contemporary popular dance could be traced back to the skills of the martial artist (already cited) or the theatrical mime. The current dance-as-superpower series *The LXD* has made this explicit, calling that energy that is manipulated 'Ra,' and endowing it with a power much like Chi in kung-fu based fantasy; a destructive force that can be generated, manipulated, and wielded both within and without the body of the dancer. Its masters become energy gunslingers with style and rhythm.

Mime

The shrinking art of mime in many ways epitomizes the idea of props as extensions of your own body and energy, created through visualization and the creation of a locus there that can

be sensed by the audience. I believe every great mime is already a master of the concept I advocate here, but may not have been able to explain it as such.

Creation of the Fantastic

One of the ways in which the older skills of mime have become new again is in video production, where actors are frequently called upon to interact with elements that will be created digitally in post-production. Whether this involves green-screen or motion capture performances with actors or creatures who are not present, or just simple reversals when your partner, a portion of set, or a prop are absent, mastery of the locus of energy can help produce a believable performance.

This is actually one of the elements that initially prompted my thoughts on the subject; I was performing a role for a fantasy web series in which I played a sorcerer, conjuring fireballs in each hand and then combining them in to a singular swirling mass of flame above my head. This was to some degree explained to me on set, but in watching my own performance afterwards it was immediately visible to me when I had a strong sense of what I was conjuring and where it was, and when I was unclear what the effect was supposed to be. At the latter time,

the illusion crumbled and I no longer look like a convincing magician, just like an actor waving his hands over his head while some computer-generated flames hover over me. Without adequately explained or understood visualization, my locus of energy was not specific and strong.

Magic is not the only way in which this comes up. One common way of handling stabbing or cutting effects in modern fight scenes is to have an actor wield a bladeless hilt, do the stabbing action, and add in the blade and wounds later in post-production. To properly sell the illusion of a full blade, the locus should live in the 'sweet spot' of the imaginary blade just as it would were you wielding an actual sword.

There are many ways in which this sort of demand is made on modern television and movie actors. It may involve bodily extensions (wings, tails, or other elements added digitally later), props, magic or superpowers, or just attributing qualities to props that they don't truly exhibit, such as pretending an inanimate object is alive, a foam prop is heavy, or some unseen force such as internal injury, illness, magical force, parasite or wound is effecting the character. Besides any technical elements of post-production quality, the mark of

successful use of computer-generated or green-screen special effects is the ability of actors to appear to interact with the objects or environment missing during filming.

Emotive Truth

I want to be clear that this is not something exclusive to martial arts or dance contexts, but is a way of viewing all stance, gesture, and movement. It is equally applicable to more naturalistic acting. As my undergraduate psychology thesis in 1998, I wrote a paper on *The feature-based coding of emotive body language*. The research behind this paper, while too overly complicated to produce any simple or readily coherent conclusions, asked participants to pose a wooden artist's model as though it were experiencing various emotions. Granted, what people actually do may vary from what they think people do, but as performers the audience's understanding may take primacy over our own feelings anyway. While there were enough variables to make the statistical analysis overwhelming, where I did see consistent patterns was in attributes. That is, at face value the emotions themselves didn't form clear and consistent physical patterns, but if coded as being primarily inward versus outward, or positive versus negative, the results were then much more consistently aligned with attributes of the postures such

as forward or backward leaning, contraction versus expansion, etc.

While energy and focus are not terms explicitly used in techniques like Alba emoting and Laban analysis, both show the connection between character expression and specific physical traits and bearings. What I find enticing about this idea of loci, however, is its simplicity and utility. It is not an adjective, it is not an action, it is not a quality or a rhythm, it is a thing, no less real for its initially existing simply within our minds. It does not tell you how to express or access something as Alba emoting can, nor is it overly analytical as some might argue Laban might be, it simply gives us a way to describe what we see or what we want as directors/choreographers/coaches/teachers, or to physically embody those choices as actors.

Think of the way your attention shifts when you're doing some sort of self-diagnostic. You feel a hitch in your ribs, or a gurgle in your stomach, or your heart skips a beat, or your knee feels funny... your attention turns inward. I've run in to the explicit need for this in acting of injuries (for both stage combat and peripherally acting-related fields such as

standardized patient training), or sickness (like a heart attack, or stomach issues). This is a shifting of the locus from the usual engagement with the outside world to a very definite internal locus, and it can happen because of literal engagement with body parts, or figurative.

One of the things that initially drew me to stage combat was that it is, if done at all well, physicalized intention. There should be no great mystery as to what someone's intention or motivation might be at any given moment, or what is causing them immediate anguish! Non-combat scenes can often lack that clear physicality but this idea of a locus can, I believe, help.

Much of our emotive language is colored with associated body part references: butterflies in the stomach, heart on your sleeve, heart in your throat, pit of the stomach, heady, etc. If you let these inform your choice of locus, it can prompt possible choices for how to play a scene involving these emotional beats.

Take the example of the metaphorical heartbreak, ubiquitous in drama. Whatever the cause, it is rarely (outside of a few classic tragedies, perhaps) literal. An actor may have a hard

time finding a way to naturally express this, however- especially common in younger actors, of whom great demands are made in scripts like *Romeo & Juliet*. Have them, instead, stage (with imaginary dagger -- no need for technical or safety issues to arise) a literal stabbing. For this to work, the actors should already have experience with placing energy and focus outside the body.

With apologies for the graphic imaginative language:

A dagger passes between your shoulder blades (I suggest from the back, to keep their reaction more open to the audience). You feel it slide between the ribs, cracking one or two as it slides through creating both intense pain and the sensation of your fingernails being dragged unwillingly across a chalkboard as it scrapes by (note the use of sensations actors would be familiar with, on the assumption they have never been stabbed). The tip presses against the heart, which gives a bit and then the tip punctures through, ripping in to the muscle and spilling vital blood in to the chest cavity where it does not belong. Each beat of the heart slides the

dying muscle back and forth along the blade, stabbing itself again and again. It tries to shrink away from the blade, but it cannot stop beating, not while you yet live. Every breath draws pain. The blade is twisted, making your whole body shudder, and then the dagger is withdrawn, and with it out rushes the blood and energy and will needed to survive.

Shake it off. Take a nice deep breath, secure in the knowledge that there is not indeed any dagger lodged in your back.

Now we're going to take that very localized sensation, the feeling of the heart and chest cavity.. and imagine it traveling out, past your sternum, floating in front of you, coming to rest perhaps halfway between you and the bearer of the bad news you just received. This time the wounding happens to organs outside yet still a part of your body. Remember what it felt like before. The pain is still there, still immediate, but it's being done to a heart that is in front of you, that you can see, that no longer

resides in your chest. That's what I want to see when
Romeo hears that Juliet is dead.

This is a re-purposing of the visualization techniques used
to establish Chekhov's ideal center.

On a less graphic and more technical note, loci can also be
a tool for finding and showing shifting mood. Consider the
following exchange from *Macbeth*:

SIWARD

36 Some must go off; and yet, by these I see,
37 So great a day as this is cheaply bought.

MALCOLM

38 Macduff is missing, and your noble son.

ROSS

39 Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier's debt.
40 He only lived but till he was a man;
41 The which no sooner had his prowess confirm'd
42 In the unshrinking station where he fought,
43 But like a man he died.

SIWARD

Then he is dead?

ROSS

44 Ay, and brought off the field. Your cause of sorrow

45 Must not be measured by his worth, for then

46 It hath no end.

SIWARD

Had he his hurts before?

ROSS

47 Ay, on the front.

SIWARD

Why then, God's soldier be he!

48 Had I as many sons as I have hairs,

49 I would not wish them to a fairer death.

50 And so, his knell is knoll'd.

MALCOLM

He's worth more sorrow,

51 And that I'll spend for him.

SIWARD

He's worth no more;

52 They say he parted well, and paid his score,

53 And so, God be with him! Here comes newer comfort.

Enter MACDUFF with Macbeth's head.

Siward begins this scene feeling perhaps heady with the flush of victory, or perhaps his chest swollen with pride. When Siward hears from Malcolm and Ross that his son has fallen in battle, his initial response is suggested as great sorrow, as we might expect from a father learning of his boy's death. He processes this information (Is he really dead?), looks to see

the nature of the death (in battle or running away), and then comes around to console himself by making this a manner of pride in his son and his son's valiant sacrifice. For an actor having difficulty with this emotional journey in the span of three or four lines, they might try thinking of the center of energy traveling. It begins in the head or chest, in the moment of jubilant victory, then plummets in to the pit of the stomach on hearing of his son's death, rises enough to ask of his passing, then determinedly climbs back up in to the chest with pride of a life well given.

Training

The actual groundwork is rooted in a few simple exercises. Given the pre-existing recognition of the aikido exercises mentioned, and their being actively taught by other instructors, I will not list those here -- but I do consider them an excellent intro to this work for anyone who doubts the validity of energy visualization.

I often begin this work, as most Theatre Movement work is begun, with a warm-up. A staple part of many such warm-ups is the roll up, vertebrae by vertebrae, to standing from a position bent forward at the hips. Pedagogically I like to put the lesson

on Locus after introducing the ideas of centers and leads, so after rolling up I can ask the students where they think their center was during the roll. The majority always cite it as having shifted upwards during the exercise. This can serve as an immediate introduction to the concept of shifting centers. Having already been given a grounding in centers, I can then ask them, while still standing upright, to shift their center back down to the pelvis, and back up to the chest or head, and back down, and see if they find any associative mood shift accompanying that transition. Usually they do. While this shift is in center and not locus, the conscious focus on its manipulation generally makes the two shift together.

Another warm-up exercise I sometimes use to illustrate these concepts is to have the class play tug-of-war. As a quick way of creating an approximately even division, I tell them the room is a giant teeter-totter, and they must balance it by the time I count to ten- with everyone at the far ends and with nobody standing near the fulcrum, as there's generally someone who tries that clever cheat. Once there, I give them a tug-of-war rope and establish the idea. At first, it's best to let them choose for themselves how to hold and pull the rope, as this can later be used to illustrate their own preferences of center and

locus. Most people will tend to anchor their rope near their center and keep their grip close to that center- it is, indeed, an advantageous position to hold, as the further from your center the grip moves, the less you can anchor the object being acted upon to your own body weight. If the class can do this in pairs with towels instead of as a whole group, that will provide more accurate individual feedback, as rope placement in a team is always a compromise involving the height of the people next to you.

I then have them try holding the rope in different positions: up high, down low, off to the side, pushing vs. pulling, etc. Besides the obvious lessons in the importance of connecting to your core, having a low stable base, and advantages of linear motion from the center, this can also give them a feel for what it is like having a locus of energy outside their core, being acted upon in a direction oblique to the center-out line of energy described by Stanislavski, Lane, and others. To reinforce this point, I have the students immediately try to re-create the effort and physical sensation of the experience without actually holding the rope. This is also excellent training for stage combat, where actors are often called upon to look and feel like they are putting force in to

another object without having to actually do so, which is where thinking of this as a locus of energy rather than the application of actual physical force is vital!

Other common warm-up games involve the tossing of a ball or other object back and forth, either in a circle or as the actors walk around the room. Doing this and then removing the actual object (continuing with an imagined object) can also help establish this feeling of the tangibility of physical focus. Keeping eye contact with the person you pass to and receive from keeps the physical and visual focus distinct.

Another simple warm-up game that can engage the whole body in physical focus without having to think too hard about what you're doing is 'pass the shiver'. Actors begin in a circle. An actor will let a shiver/shimmy/shake pass through their body, and then 'toss' it to someone else, who 'catches' it in the same body part, lets it shift throughout their body and come out in a toss through a different body part. If actors are not engaging their full bodies you can impose requirements like catching and throwing with a different quadrant of the body, etc.

One warm-up game from *Stanislavski & The Actor* designed to increase body awareness and remove tension (again, defined by Stanislavski as blockages to the flow of energy) is to have actors crawl under an imaginary fence, first forwards and then backwards. For the purposes of this thesis, the focus should be on the imaginary fence line, and in pulling the closest part of the body away from it. Making it a barbed-wire or electrified fence might help -- as with many exercises, sometimes the key is to raise the stakes for the character.

At this point I will generally introduce a modified version of Stanislavski's energy exercise, as presented by the character Sonova. Instead of using mercury, I tend to find modern audiences more receptive to the idea of a small glowing ball of energy, which they can pass or pull through their body in any direction. Once we have gone through the basic sequence laid out by Stanislavski, I expand the exercise to include passing the energy from the fingertips to a point in space just outside the body, in front of the hand, where the students can just touch it with a fingertip. The next step is to have them be able to pass it back and forth from one hand to the space in front and then picking it up in the other hand again. This seems to be the critical point in realizing their ability to extend the energy

placement outside the body. From here, we can have them do such exercises as using this point of energy extant beyond the hand to trace the outlines of something in the room, 'feeling' it with the imagined pressure against the energy being projected.

Once the imagined reality of this has been established in this way, it also remains to show how the locus can be expanded and compressed. Just as they had a certain size, weight, and feel in mind for the imagined ball they were passing earlier, they can start with attributing those qualities to the locus of energy. Using visualization, I will then talk them through attempting to compress this locus, feeling both the resistance of doing so and the ability to change it, and likewise the ability to stretch it larger.

Similar exercises can be done later on with multiple imaginary balls, to practice maintaining multiple loci of energy.

To make sure that the concepts of focus and locus of energy do not become conflated, once both are established for the actors it is also important to have them attempt some of these exercises while maintaining a separate visual focus -- either a

conversation or exchange of lines with another actor, eye contact with the instructor, or other such diversion.

Medical Validation

There are success stories of patients with partial paralysis who have been able to regain the use of limbs, partly through a similar type of visualization and energy manipulation, which lends an air of real-world validity to our theatrical tricks. Similarly phantom limb pain can at least sometimes be psychologically controlled, as long-gone limbs perceived to be in pain can be relaxed through engaging that space on the phantom limb, often with the added visualization assistance of mirrors or other tricks. As with the previously discussed use of props, the mind's idea of what is or is not a part of the body can be flexible; a fact that can be used either for our gain or detriment.

APPENDIX III: Suggestions for Further Exploration

There are numerous movement-related fields which are often taught to actors with prior Stanislavski-based actor training, which can benefit from a similarly phrased pedagogy. One I would love to experiment further with is puppetry. I believe the elements of focus and imagery and substitution there are rich for exploration, while the actual performances of the 'characters' (puppets) still can be rooted in similar acting process. We are finally in the Western arts world entering a time when puppetry is being accepted as more than lowbrow exaggerated children's entertainment, and I think we may be ready to begin acknowledge at least a branch of puppetry as acting.

The wealth of information on physicality in Eastern Martial Arts and disciplines like Yoga or meditation is another area that I think could be profitably mined for acting lessons, but which would then need to be smelted in to recognizable terms in order for actors to effectively make use of such lessons.

These experiences [of studying Taijiquan] strongly influenced my own theatre practice, although they're not immediately related to the theatre. This ability to create a conscious, direct and organic contact between the mind and the body, the individual and the external world, is

largely lost in the West. That's why lots of people here are interested in experimenting with something, anything that helps to recover this connection. (Campo & Molik 160)

Something like center, a widely used but not completely agreed upon term in acting, shows up in the dantien or seat of internal energy in tai chi and other Asian martial arts. It is in the chakra of yoga. It is addressed in acting treatises as well: Chekhov spoke of the ideal center being the heart, and he used visualization exercises to help establish that.

The concept of chi or ki has already been mentioned in passing as analogous in many ways to my idea of a locus of energy, but it is not an aspect of martial arts I have actually studied very extensively. That too is an area I would love to examine further, first as a martial artist but with the ulterior motive of bringing lessons back to the world of acting pedagogy.

I would also like to see if this relationship can be reciprocated; that is, can the ideas of physical focus I'm trying to develop for actors then also be used to assist those training in martial arts or sports, where one might also be trying to coach performers to treat a piece of equipment (a fencing foil, a pistol, a tennis racket) as an extension of the

body rather than a separate and inanimate object. This will of course require collaboration with experts in those fields, but my position as a Fight Director and my intended employment on a university campus both will position me well for such opportunities.

Ultimately what is needed by way of further pursuit of this topic for me is just time putting it in to practice. As a relatively new professor with only a couple years' instruction under my belt and my MFA hot off the press, I look forward to future opportunities to continue to workshop and develop my own pedagogy within this framework, and to see what else emerges. If nothing else, periodically checking in with this lesson of basic acting terminology will help keep me from drifting in to overly academic or specialized language, and serve as a reminder of the primacy of good acting, which all our related theatre disciplines must serve.

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VITA

Kevin Scott Inouye was born on February 3, 1976, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and is an American citizen. He graduated from Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, Maryland in 1994, received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana in 1998, was granted a graduate certificate in Integrated Skills for Sustainable Change from Antioch University Seattle in Seattle, Washington in 2008, and is receiving his Masters in Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2012. Other relevant studies include training with the Society of American Fight Directors since 1998, and a variety of martial arts and dance training. He has worked as an actor, fight director, and stuntman, partly through the auspices of his company Fight Designer, LLC. He taught at Virginia Commonwealth University from 2011-2012, and has given numerous workshops, youth classes, and guest instructor appearances at other institutions.