2019

CLASS/ACT EMBODIED PRACTICES FOR PERFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY

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CLASS/ACT

EMBODIED PRACTICES FOR PERFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY

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A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Theatre

Virginia Commonwealth University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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by

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March 15th 2019

CLASS/ACT: EMBODIED PRACTICES FOR PERFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY

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Virginia Commonwealth University, 2019

Class/Act: Embodied Practices for Performative Pedagogy is a personal and practical exploration of embodiment's role in higher education acting pedagogy. In my thesis, I propose that embodied acting practices rooted in phenomenology and corporeal dramaturgy surpass conventional acting curricula. Embodied training is often confused with movement curricula and is regularly considered a shallow and/or unintelligent means to approaching acting work. However, I will argue the efficiency and effectiveness of embodied teaching techniques in four parts. *Part One: Seeing* is a retrospective of how my personal experiences outside of the classroom have drawn me toward embodied aesthetics. *Part Two: Knowing* unveils my research of embodiment, its origins, and its impact on theatrical disciplines. *Part Three: Being/Doing* is an in-depth look into diverse schools of acting and how they fall short of fully embracing embodied practices. *Part Four: Becoming* is an introduction to my creation of an embodied business approach for actors called Professional Embodied Preparation (PEP) and continues the discussion of embodiment's transformative influence and integration into the higher education curricula. Throughout the thesis, I hope to prove that embodied acting pedagogy is an essential tool for providing greater efficiency, proficiency, and auto-didacity for the pre-professional actor in the academic classroom and beyond.

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Introduction

"What is embodiment?" I asked. After hearing me go on and on about how I was trying to find a way to explain the acting method that had changed my life and my classroom, my graduate professor said, "Ah, embodiment. You need to look into embodiment." And so, I did. Thus, this thesis is an exploration of how my background, methods, and theatrical training coincide with embodied approaches to acting performance.

Once embodiment was introduced to me, I began reaching back into my memory to discover if embodied practices had been present in and amongst my work as a practitioner of theatre and instructor of the craft. After researching the term, I began piecing together how embodiment is explained, explored, and expressed in creative spheres and beyond. I had no idea that the embodied studies field had actually become quite popular in theatre circles in the past few years. However, I wanted to know how practitioners in the acting field were learning and using the term. I also wanted to explore how acting teachers were defining and using such methods in their classrooms, especially in higher education. Was embodiment something that practitioners and educators of theatre were moving towards as a viable method for actor training? My thesis explores just that.

Class/Act – Embodied Practices for Performative Pedagogy is an examination into embodiment's role in acting pedagogy and curricula in higher education. My paper is a personal and practical investigation of embodied acting practices informed by my many years as an actor, my transition into teaching, and my observations as a graduate student

and professor of acting. The majority of my observations were taken from my first year as a graduate student. I was able to examine one year's worth of classes and watch students, mostly junior and senior BFA acting students, progress through their acting curriculum.

My thesis does not detail the individual teaching styles or ideologies of the professors teaching the courses I observed. I understand and address the fact that teaching is a personal and varied craft even among those who teach similar specialties within the same field. Instead, I focus on the specific choices in acting methodologies that affect acting students and their progress. I do address the impact of teaching personalities in my work which in turn can affect their choice in pedagogy. However, I chose not to point to specific teachers observed in my study.

My thesis has four parts. *Part One: Seeing* is a retrospective on my life and beginnings prior to theatre. Much of part one is biographical and uses personal stories to explain how and why the embodied aesthetic appeals to me. I begin with the question, "What do you see?" The phrase holds a lot of meaning for me as an actor and teacher. It is this simple question that gave me insight into a way of working that was so obvious yet transformative.

I share stories about my physical upbringing in the country and the influence of my grandfather's literal 'body of work' that gave me a phenomenological perspective of inscripted or "written bodies." I continue with a story about my body and how the scars and memories my physical being and mind holds cannot and should not be erased from my creative self. I look back on my troublesome years as a college student to gather perspective on why I fought and searched so hard to find a method that embraced me as

much as I wanted to embrace it. Lastly, I discuss how the awareness and acceptance of my identity as a young, black, female in the white, male-driven field of acting pedagogy and methodology creation lead me to seek out female and African American theorists for my research. I wanted (and needed) such sources to give voice to my hopes, concerns, and culture which I inherently bring with me to the classroom and to my thesis.

Part Two: Knowing unveils my research and discovery of embodied studies. I dissect definitions, evolutions, and current trends in the field of embodied performative techniques as well as how they specifically apply to theatrical spheres. I discuss corporeal dramaturgy and phenomenology and how these theories are considered the origins of embodied practices today. I also unpack the correlation between post-structuralist acting techniques and embodiment, new approaches to somatic learning techniques involving body/mind versus mind/body theories, as well as the difference between movement and embodied curricula. The section also takes a look at the embodied audience and how the changing role and relationship between actor and audience have shaped the field of corporeal actor training.

Part Three: Being/Doing transitions back to the classrooms I observed and trained in to examine various schools of acting (i.e.- Stanislavsky, Strasberg, and Meisner). I uncover how the schools of acting include facets of embodiment yet fall short in their comprehensive implementation of embodied practices and possibilities for the actor. In the section, I clarify how 'being/doing' is different from knowing or just 'doing'. I also discuss how Stanislavsky's work may be misinterpreted in academic curricula and how a move towards embodied practices would, most likely, fall in line with his ultimate goals for the practice.

Finally, *Part Four: Becoming* introduces my method for an embodied business approach for the actor. The system is called Professional Embodied Preparation, or PEP. PEP was designed for my senior level audition technique course in which I wanted to create a bridge between theory and practice specifically for pre-professional acting students transitioning to the business. I detail aspects of the course and how PEP was received throughout the semester. After the section on PEP, I come back to Seth Barrish's work to discuss how 'play' remains an important yet often missing element in higher education acting classrooms. I discuss how play and skill can coincide along with theories on text analysis within the embodied sphere.

Lastly, I argue that despite an academic thrust towards embodied practices, the success of the method truly lies within the student/practitioner's and pedagogue's hands. I discuss the limitations that embodied practices can entail and conclude that despite such limitations, a practical approach to embodied acting pedagogy can be a transformative training ground for actors and acting instructors.

Overall, I challenge the acting pedagogue not to expect less structure from an embodied actor's work but to be surprised by the beautiful creativity that "transitional turmoil," as the embodiment scholar and theatre pedagogue Dr. Hannu Tuisku calls it, can produce. I urge acting professors to create safe, ethical, and actor empowered classrooms in which exciting art can happen in the performative space at any time. Embodied performative pedagogy is an effective and efficient process to training the actor in higher education. My thesis urges performative pedagogues to lean into the discomfort of the "not knowing" and graciously guide and walk alongside their students

as they travail their artistic paths and ultimately, chart their own unique, creative journeys.

My thesis is unabashedly personal. Although academic in nature, the work is a written journey of how I practice my craft as an artist, an acting coach, mentor, and professor. At its core, my thesis is simply an explanation of how I believe each and every acting student that walks through the doors of my classroom has something to bring to the table. Throughout the text, I share stories from my beginnings as a young acting student to moments of success and failure as a professor. Some of the stories relate to pedagogy. Others relate to life lessons I have learned. As a girl who came from a small, rural town with no background, connections to, or knowledge of the theatre, I was able to make a career (with many bumps and bruises along the way) with the core belief that although I did not know the theatre world, I had a right to be there. Ultimately, that is what I found embodied training to be about.

Over the course of my two and a half years of graduate study, I realized that my approach to teaching largely came from a perspective that my students have as much to teach me as I have to teach them. I now know that this is what theorists call learner-centered pedagogy. Rigor, discipline, and professional etiquette are to be learned and expected in the acting classroom, but the learning that happens when a student gets on their feet, enters the stage, and begins acting is much more open to interpretation than I have seen the academic sphere allow. Recently, I was watching the animated film, *Ratatouille*, with my daughter. At the end of the film, one of the characters said, "Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere." The quote deeply resonated with me because I do believe a great artist can live inside any of

my students. For that reason, I want to be the student just as much as I am the teacher. I discovered that this perspective is the heart and core of embodied pedagogy.

Along with my pedagogical transformation, my thesis explores my transition from artist, to mother, to teacher and how such changes have brought me to a place of choosing to 'become' in a professional sense who I always felt I was meant to be; a professor of acting. Many of my insights into acting and its various schools of thought, practice, and derivation have been taken from my beginnings in high school theatre and college programs. I share how such training eventually lead me to graduate study at the Actors' Studio Drama School and how my professional work in New York studios such as the Barrow Group Theatre Company and School changed my approach to the craft altogether.

Many of my influences in teaching acting courses stemmed from my successes and failures with such acting practices. However, observations of my professional colleagues, fellow classmates, and undergraduate students over many years has shaped and solidified my belief in embodied acting approaches for the practical classroom and the professional world. I hope my thesis opens the door to the discussion of how embodied pedagogies can be integrated into today's academic acting curricula to enable students of acting to be better prepared for the professional acting world and how that world has evolved today.

CLASS/ACT

EMBODIED PRACTICES FOR PERFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY

Part One: Seeing

1.

"What do you see?"

I waited for the students to answer.

"The scene was definitely more real," one student responded.

"Yes, but what did you *see*?" I waited again.

"I saw that the actors took more time with their actions."

"Ok, what else?"

"I saw that their bodies seemed more relaxed."

"What else?"

"I saw them looking out the windows of the car like it was a real car."

"Ok, what else?"

"I saw them talking to each other this time. Like they were actually speaking to each other."

"Ok, what else did you see?"

"I don't know. It just looked like everything was real. Like they were really the characters and this wasn't a scene at all. They didn't even seem like they were acting."

2.

The transition from the New York theatre scene to graduate school was shocking. After years of studying with masters and leaders of the professional stage, I was thrust back into a world dictated by academic structure, theory, and curricula. I felt like the DeLorean had taken me back in time. As comforting as it was to have structure after so many years of pounding the pavement, I grew confused and uneasy watching undergraduate acting classes. I thought, "*Why* are they still teaching this stuff?" The pedagogical style and curriculum seemed so antiquated and out of touch with what was happening in the classrooms and auditions rooms I recently had been in. No one I had come across in the past few years was still teaching this way in New York.

My training at the Barrow Group, on professional sets and stages, and in major network audition rooms solidified that fact. Directors and casting directors were looking for actors trained in methods that were efficient and effective and these same casting/creative personnel were going to studios like the Barrow Group to find them. When I introduced some of the new techniques I had garnered from my years of performing and training, a few theatre professors and colleagues regarded my recommendations as drib, contrived, and even shallow approaches to the craft. Yet, my recommendations often worked. The students saw the difference and so did I.

Seth's Barrish's book, *An Actors' Companion: Tools for the Working Actor*, gave me a concrete toolbox from which to introduce my new approach. However, I did not have a greater contextual or theoretical understanding of the method's origins. I simply knew that it worked. I saw it work every time I was in a Barrow Group classroom or on

my own. All I had to do was ask my students, "What do you see?". Immediately, they were able to articulate the dramatic difference that small, yet simple adjustments made in enlivening their bodies, the text, and their performances. The added benefit to using such simple, tangible tools was that the students could begin repeating the same techniques in their work right away. No teacher required.

After beginning my research on embodiment, I discovered that although this new way of working was on the cutting edge of theatre classrooms in New York City, perhaps, it was not so new after all. Regardless, why had this simpler pedagogical practice not made its way into the acting classrooms of higher education? The nagging question was the beginning of my search for how the same practices that transformed my craft could transform the academic classroom as well. My thesis is an in-depth exploration of who I am as a person and performer, why the aesthetics surrounding embodied techniques appeal to me, and how such techniques have the potential to change higher education acting classrooms and acting curricula for today's actor. The whole of my work encompasses all of the above in one question:

"What do I see?"

3.

I was always a physical person. Growing up in rural Virginia lent itself to strenuous work and physical play on a daily basis. We lived next to my grandparents who owned twenty plus acres of land. Many of those acres were covered with forests and trails that lead to more forests and trails. My grandfather was a tall, lean, and incredibly strong man. He prided himself on his hard-work ethic. Most evenings, he slept only five hours

so that he could drive trucks all night long. He then came home from driving to begin work during the days as a gardener, handyman, plumber, electrician, and mechanic to provide for his family of seven. He built the brick house they lived in (and I grew up beside) on weekends and in his free time when my mother and her siblings were small. He worked this way until he was diagnosed with liver cancer and passed away less than a year later.

My grandfather's legacy of hard work was encapsulated in his body. Every brick, every crop, every mile he drove, every drop of oil that fell on his fingers wore on his brawny yet agile body like badges of survival, pride, and provision that he worked so hard to maintain. I watched my grandfather while growing up and believed he was a superhero. Selfishly, I loved when he would take me and my eleven cousins on our yearly trip to the local amusement park, Kings Dominion. Toward the end of the day, he would take us to play the game where you have to bang a big target with a whacking hammer to make the ball go all the way up to hit the bell. If you hit the bell, you win a huge prize.

Obviously, the creators of the game made it practically impossible to win. Waiting in line, we would watch the majority of the theme park goers try to hit that target and fail. The ball rarely left its starting point. Foolishly, some young theme park attendant would see my grandfather stepping up to the plate (with four or five grandchildren in tow), and have a slight flicker of "really old dude?" in their eye. Handing him the whacking hammer, they would turn and zone out assuming he would try and fail just as the others had. However, my grandfather - being the humble, gentle, part-time pastor that he was - would not say anything save for the slight smirk on his face. He would step up to the plate, raise the hammer, and hit the ball to the bell over and over

again, with one swing each time, winning each of his grandchildren in attendance the largest stuffed animals the park had to offer. My intense glee came not from the awesome prize but the sheer shock and amazement on the young attendant's face who could not believe that this "old guy" could win the game not just once, but as many times as he wanted to.

It was these moments in my youth, amongst many others that solidified the fact that the body has its own history. An inscription of our lives. For my grandfather and that game, countless hours in the fields tending to animals and crops, cars and houses, children and home, came together in one magnificent moment of power and grace. I would never forget it.

To this day, I still think of my grandfather that way. Even after watching him deteriorate quickly, I remember his rippling body, his dirty (sometimes bloody) fingers, and his smirk, which he lovingly passed down to me. The lessons of the body and its inscriptions have stayed with me since I was a little girl. I was the girl who played in the dirt with my dogs and two younger brothers and pulled out splinters from my hands from hours of pretending to be Dominique Dawes on old two-by-fours. I rode bikes for miles upon miles in the sweltering summers, cooking countless meals for my family, and lugging logs around the forest to create a clearing in the woods that I deemed "Chauntee's Café." All of these experiences are part of my physical history that cannot be undone. Little did I know that this "part" of me is actually referred to as phenomenology and is a theory that would shape my creative future.

4.

As the years went on, I naturally gravitated towards sports. Since my parents did not have the means to drive me to after school activities due to their work schedules, I did not join a sports team until middle school thanks to the help of the activity bus. Basketball and volleyball became natural choices for me as did wrestling, which came as a surprise to many of my teachers and family. However, I *loved* wrestling. Not because I was the biggest or strongest person on the team (although I was not the smallest). It was because I loved how it pushed my body to the extreme. I did not win many matches but gave every guy that met me on the mat a run for their money/pride. I was strong and agile. My legs were like steel from the endless miles I rode on my bike. My arms were hard like bricks from carrying logs of wood for my café. And my hands and feet were like leather from running around barefoot, fishing, and tumbling on two-by-fours in the hot summer sun. When I wrestled, people saw the face of a sweet thirteen-year-old girl but the body of a trained athlete.

These were formative years for me. Long before I knew anything about theatre or theatre training, my body was training me for an artform and profession I would discover many years later. Looking back, I see how my life prepared me for the stage. However, as I began to peer into the embodied field and the theories that surround it, I saw how embodied practices and pedagogy involves so much more than the body itself. More than the muscles, it is the memories of the mind and body that make us who we are when we meet the stage and the stage meets us.

I hope my thesis addresses the divides that exist in mind/body and body/mind approaches to actor training - and how neither truly works. The goal of my thesis is to construct a bridge in higher education curricula that creates room for both the mind and the body, but most importantly, the memories that each student brings to their training from day one. As my favorite line from the poem, *Desiderata* by Max Ehrmann states, "They too have their story."

5.

I was a terrible college student. Not on paper but in practice. I made mostly A's and B's and graduated cum laude but I raised hell with my teachers. Their teaching methods seemed inefficient and ineffective and I let them know it. Thus, I was deemed a talented yet troublesome student. I made their lives hard and in turn, they made my life hard too.

It was in those early college years that I realized that academia may not suit me. In all honesty, it is a wonder that I am pursuing a career as a professor. Thus, I am inherently an empathizer with the student actor as will be evident in my thesis. My draw to the aesthetics that embodied approaches create in the classroom is also a result of my personal experiences as an undergraduate student. My research on learner-centered vs. teacher-centered student/teacher relationships is a direct result of the acting classrooms I encountered in my higher education experience. As a self-proclaimed "academic renegade," I believe my greatest asset as a professor is my "outsider" status. I bring the professional world in and, through my phenomenological perspective, aim to connect

theory and practice. The desire to create a succinct, sustainable, and ethical approach to acting work is the main objective for my thesis.

As a bright, young student and artist, I found academia (a place that prided itself on diversity of thought and inclusion of ideas) to be one of the most stifling learning environments of all. My rebellious, creative style was often rewarded in the professional sphere despite its threat to the structured system of learning. Now, having served as a professor, I have uncovered my 'beef' with academia. It is in my examination of embodiment that I began to find the theoretical and practical explanations for my off the cuff approach to acting. My graduate studies have only clarified that I am and will continue to be an out-of-the-box professor who will never be satisfied with the status quo.

Now that I am slightly older than my rebellious younger self, I understand that there are ways things need to be done. In academia, a lot of people are accountable for a lot of things. There are people and processes to uphold that accountability. However, after observing and teaching university level acting classes for two years, I still have my qualms with the academic structure and curriculum in higher education. Yet, instead of raising hell, my thesis is a banner call to put away old ways of teaching and embrace new pedagogies that are learner-centered for the sake of the students and their futures as independent artists. We *want* these types of artists in our academic classrooms because they are the ones who usually have something to say. Whether we agree with what they have to say is another matter. Nevertheless, these are the students/future artists that have the potential to be artistic and cultural catalysts for change. They have a voice and want to be heard, in and outside of the acting classroom context. Yet, the only way to get - and

keep - these truth tellers and beauty bringers in our classrooms is to make peace with their need for freedom and make space for them to question, learn, grow, thrive, and run.

I now know that I am a professor at heart. Before I ever heard the term embodiment, I instinctively knew that there was more to actor training than what I or any professor could bring into the room. Of course, I carried who I was, how I saw art, how I saw acting, and how I imagined actor training to transform the student each time I walked into an acting space. I think most acting professors do the same. However, what is different about my perspective is that I believe that every student has a right to bring *their* history and *their* voice into my classroom and into their work from day one.

My thirst for things to be simpler, freer, more present, less pretentious, and dare I say, more fun, was and is always at the forefront of my desires for change in acting pedagogy. Whether or not a young actor is going to be the next Bradley Cooper or Lupita Nyong'o is not my job to determine. Taking what an acting student currently embodies and teaching them how to connect their authentic self to the stories they tell *is* my job. Through my thesis research and personal retrospective, I continue to believe academia is terrified of departures from its partially functioning systems in place. Despite that fact, I strive to move the higher education acting classroom forward. My thesis demands it.

Embodiment is where I will begin.

6.

Lastly, before diving into my research, I took one last look back into my early training years. I wanted to remember all of the teachers who trained me and what they

trained me in. It became clear that my knowledge of acting pedagogy had mostly come from one demographic – white people.

There is no doubt that diversity in acting training is an issue. The first play I auditioned for was *Crimes of the Heart* by Beth Henley. I was blatantly told by my high school acting teacher - a youngish, mid-western, white lady - that I could not play one of the sisters because I was black. I was appalled. But then again, I lived in Virginia and liked theatre, so what was I going to do? Sadly, I dealt with the teacher until I graduated from high school, much to my chagrin. Yet, it was not until now that I realize how much my high school theatre teacher and the theatre teachers that followed impacted my perception of what acting is and 'should' be.

In the age of non-traditional casting, more color-blind casting has been embraced. However, actors of color still work to be seen and heard holistically and authentically on the stage and screen. Despite claims of inclusion, it is in the academic acting classroom that I find the least diversity of pedagogical thought. In my career, all of my acting teachers have been white except for one. Besides for Uta Hagen and Stella Adler who were forces in the appropriation and assimilation of European acting principles for Western theatre, most authorities in the subject are white and male. Stanislavsky, Brecht, Grotowski, Strasberg, Meisner, and the list goes on.

Along with the color line, acting teachers of color who want to focus wholly on acting courses as opposed to theory or performance courses within their designated race/ethnicity of identification (i.e.- African American/Black Theatre, Latin American Theatre, Asian Theatre/Studies, etc.) are directly or indirectly discouraged to do so. Although such an unspoken expectation is most likely present in order to bring awareness

to the cultural gaps and potential bridges within diverse sections of the theatre, it needs to be acknowledged that white acting professors are not asked to teach "White/Caucasian Theatre." Why? Because most acting courses being taught in academia are from the dominant culture stemming from European origins. White acting professors can have specialties solely along the acting spectrum (camera classes, audition technique, styles, etc.) Why can't I do the same?

After expressing my desire to focus on and dissect the higher education acting classroom and acting curricula as a whole, my desire was met with trepidation and concern time and time again. I was asked, "Why do you want to focus on acting? Why don't you focus on voice or movement?" And once again, I was appalled. I am a young, black woman who wants to become an authority on acting for everyone. Even white actors. I wanted to focus my energies along the acting spectrum, from the beginning of first year training to a student's transition into the professional world. Yet, my desire was consistently met with confusion. My academic career confession seemed to be an unspoken taboo, even for academic theatre practitioners.

Admittedly, I do have a background in musical theatre. I understand that diversifying one's portfolio for academic purposes is a way to secure more job options. However, the majority of my training is as an actor. I have always considered myself a storyteller first. Although I can sing and dance proficiently and will use such knowledge in my professional package, I thrived in the acting classroom before I ever had on a pair of tap shoes.

My graduate theatre history and theory courses were profound revelations to me as a professor and artist. My graduate professors introduced philosophical insights into the

origins and advances of drama and theatre in ways that I had not understood in the field previously. I learned how artists and creatives throughout history have fought to have their stories and voices heard. How their struggles and stories have impacted and changed history, culture, and society even to today. My greatest takeaway from those courses were how the artists and creative thinkers who break molds are the ones we are still talking about today. History and theory courses primarily cover the forks in the road or the places where things change. Why? Because the road less traveled is more fun and much more dangerous. That road changes things, or at least, causes us to remember what an effort was made to effect change.

As diverse as theatre claims to be, diverse perspectives in the area of acting pedagogy seems to be one of the final frontiers of such change. For that reason, I have looked to the work of female and African American actors and theorists to give voice to some of the methods I propose in my thesis. The work of Anna Deveare Smith has influenced me throughout my career. Her initial investigations into post-structuralist character work and psychophysical acting training provided an avenue for me to explore further research and authorities on the more theoretical fields of corporeal dramaturgy and phenomenology. Debby Thompson's article, "Is Race a Trope: Anna Deavere Smith and the Question of Racial Performativity" gives voice to Deavere Smith's processes which, in turn, gives voice to someone like me. I also looked to Mia Perry and Carmen Medina's, "Embodiment and Performance in Pedagogy Research: Investigating the Possibility of the Body in Curriculum Experience" whose research has been formative for many scholars on the topic of embodiment. In addition, I found their article to encapsulate many of my insights into how the higher education classroom can progress. Lastly,

Elizabeth Ellsworth's, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy" provided excellent perspective on the myths and theories behind classroom ethics.

The above sources are vital aspects of my thesis. They provide perspective on the female and African American voice that I intrinsically bring to the classroom. My hope is that such voices will not be labeled as only 'female' or 'African American' but will be heard as valid authorities on the burgeoning field of embodiment and acting. The deconstruction of the primarily white, male lens in regards to acting pedagogies is necessary for diverse acting paradigms to thrive and survive. Not only must theorists and artists change the dialogue about the origins of acting pedagogies but female professors of color must be present in the academic sphere to broaden and diversify the voices of acting authority.

Part Two: Knowing

1.

The field of embodiment has exploded over the last seven to eight years. A number of studies involve the intersectionality and integration of embodied methodologies across a diverse spectrum of academic fields. In David J. Nguyen and Jay B. Larson's article "Don't Forget About the Body: Exploring the Curricular Possibilities of Embodied Pedagogy," they write about embodiment's role in fields such as mathematics, cognitive psychology, social psychology and neuroscience. In fact, embodiment has been a part of music and dance fields for decades. So, why has it taken theatre so long to catch up? And what exactly *is* embodiment?

The Oxford Living Dictionary defines embodiment as the tangible or visible form of an idea, quality, or feeling (Oxford). With regards to this particular definition, anything an actor feels or experiences psychologically must be visibly expressed through the body. Thus, character is created. Methods such as the psychological gesture created by Michael Chekov and Stanislavski's physical actions explore how to bring the inside, out. However, a post-structuralist approach to acting, in a way, gives the 'outside' precedence over the 'in'.

In her article, "Is Race a Trope: Anna Deavere Smith and the Question of Racial Performativity," Debby Thompson states, "Smith, by contrast, is determined to encourage 'other-oriented' rather than 'self-based' approaches to acting (Fires xxvii). Instead of 'finding the character within ourselves' (as Uta Hagen puts it), actors should look for the character outside of themselves… Smith is developing 'a technique that would begin with

the other and come to the self" (Thompson, 130). In Deavere Smith's process, the tangible outer work informs and affects the unseen inner being. The body goes first, then the mind. Through the process the two, body and mind, hopefully begin to work in harmony to effectively depict the story.

Embodiment suggests that psychological investigation actually gets in the way of the actor. Working from an already thinking body and, perhaps, a less-knowing mind could get an actor closer to character than the other way around. The use of the physical body would immediately clarify embodiment of the character without the entanglements of "How do I think right now?" or "What should I do?" Instead, the actor begins with actions while thinking and psychology follow. However, in more recent years, even beyond Deavere Smith's discoveries, the mind and body do not just work one in front of the other, but in tandem. Thus, popular acting idioms like "Get out of your head" or "Stay in your body" are outdated and even harmful to actor training. (Blair, 11) These directives continue to reinforce the separation of the mind and body instead of working towards their integration.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is mostly credited for the initial research in the field of embodiment. His book, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, was published in 1962 leaving many years between the creation of valuable research on the body/mind relationship and its arrival onto the acting scene. Phenomenology, the study of engagement in lived experience (Tuisku, 42) grounds Merleau-Ponty's argument that people perceive and conceptualize everything bodily. Merleau-Ponty goes on to discuss how consciousness *is* embodied and there is no separation between the mind or body, whichever order you place them in. In "The Embodiment of Performance," David

Michael Levin recalls Edmund Husserl's version of phenomenology as being "…designed to reverse the alienation and decadence of meaning and return to us our natural signifying capacities." (Levin, 126) In short, he urges the artist to return to the innate method that 'thinks' without thinking – the body.

Nguyen and Larson describe a similar concept when they write, "Bresler (2004) defined embodiment as 'integration of the physical and biological body and the phenomenological or experiential body' indicating 'a seamless, though often elusive matrix of body/mind worlds, a web that integrates thinking, being, doing, and interacting within worlds.'" (Nguyen and Larson, 333) Thus, to embrace embodiment as pedagogy, you must embrace the whole person - who an actor is, what they bring to their work, and their world - in and out of the classroom. Even in pedagogy, the mind, body, and being cannot be separated.

Nevertheless, it is Hannu Tuisku's definition of embodiment in her work, *Developing embodied pedagogies of acting for youth theatre education: Psychophysical actor training as a source for new openings*, that provides the most life and breadth to what embodied training can and should be. She writes, "By 'embodied pedagogy of acting' I mean an approach to acting and training actors that, based mainly on the traditions of psychophysical actor training, emphasizes the centrality of the actor's sentient body in the theatrical event, the notion of a human being as a comprehensive body-mind entity, and the diversity and complexity of subjective experience that ultimately remain beyond reach of verbal definitions, necessitating consideration of a non-representational aspect in training." (Tuisku, 17) Thus, an awareness and collaboration with phenomenological and corporeal dramaturgy perspectives are

necessary aspects for any pedagogue wishing to apply embodied methods into their classroom. There must be a 'letting go' of conventional methods of connecting with students and the artform from the start. Tuisku expands later with a broadened, student focused perspective writing, "…(embodied training) is not about discipline or chaos but something that can create an open space of reflection and choice where the trainee can rely on her own creativity where the space for freedom widens... the trainee has a larger scale to operate than that perceived by conventional text-analysis, and she can move beyond the categories prescribed by language." (Tuisku, 64) Once again, the embodied classroom does not descend into chaos, as many teachers would assume, but elevates the ethics of the classroom and the student/teacher relationship to provide a safer, freer, and wider space for artistic creativity for both the student and the teacher. This type of classroom lives in the grey area and necessitates a balance of teaching, learning, and being.

2.

Phillip Zarrilli is given credit for creating the term "psychophysical acting". The 'psychophysical' is a creation and evolution of Zarrilli's work on how cognitive science affects the acting body. He believed that actors work through states of "being/doing" which means that they sequentially embody such states to remain open and perceptive to the "performative score" in which the actor is playing. (Tuisku, 76) In his work *Acting (Re)Considered*, Zarrilli recounts Susana Block's research that links "psychological, subjective, and expressive features of emotion." (Kemp, 14; Zarrilli 219-238) This differs from the psycho-realistic acting that most Western acting schools propagate which focuses on the representation, text analysis, and proports the continuation of the

mind/body split. (Tuisku, 17) However, it is this split that pioneers in the theatrical embodiment field are trying to suture.

Richard Kemp is an actor, professor, and along with Tuisku, one of the newest and foremost pioneers of embodied acting pedagogies. He aims to bridge the gap between practitioners of acting and theorists who study acting from a "cultural, social, historical, or political perspective." (Kemp, 10) He references Grotowski and Lecoq as two practitioners whose exotic disciplines remain on the forefront of what is now considered the concept of the embodied mind. (Kemp, 23) However, Kemp's work proves that cognitive science not only directly supports embodied pedagogy but also elevates it to a superlative status over conventional training methods because of its integrative aim.

In one example he states, "Most practitioners agree that the emotions cannot in general be consciously controlled. Muscular activity, however, can…The simple task of consciously arranging one's facial muscles in certain configurations would not only develop facility with facial expressions, but also offer a route towards the generation of the experience of emotions." (Kemp, 161) He goes on, "The process would seem to be more time-effective and specific than Strasberg's affective memory exercise, and could be linked with other controllable features such as breathing patterns and levels of muscular tension…" (Kemp, 161) Kemp uses Antonia Damasio's work in neuroscience, as does Tuisku, to persuade the actor and acting pedagogue that understanding the scientific implications of emotions and the brain will only help the actor to act more efficiently. He argues, "This is important information for theatre practitioners who seek to better understand emotional processes, which, I find in daily life, often seem to have no relationship to cause of conscious intent…Understanding how emotions occur is a

useful foundation for developing an approach to stimulate emotion in performance." (Kemp, 154) So, when Seth Barrish suggests to "Do something that is likely to create the emotional response you seek" in his acting tip entitled, "Get Physical" (Barrish, 63), his simple suggestion to the actor has a profoundly complex and fascinating backing from the science world.

3.

Corporeal dramaturgy is a term that has preceded the more recently deemed 'embodied field'. Similar to Oxford's definition, this type of dramaturgy trains in "things that are perceptible; things that both the student and the teacher can see." (Tuisku, 69) Looking back on the classroom conversation established in part one at the start of my thesis, by working with things that we can clearly see and identify with touch, sound, or sight, we begin to unveil the often nebulous and mystical side of acting education. Tuisku agrees when she writes, "Applying this kind of mutually accessible criteria, training becomes able to refuse mysticisms and uncover, overcome, and even undo hidden power relations, embedded in training situations. One's own experience becomes the highest authority." (Tuisku, 69)

Along with the perceivable and tangible way of working, the acting instructor introduces the ability to embrace more choices, diverse experiences, and a variety of perspectives as the students engage in the acting/playing space. Seth Barrish asks actors to reject the one beat/one action approach to text primarily because he believes that people do not behave that way. Tuisku agrees stating, "In our lives, we seldom experience one feeling at a time…the comment of the emotional as a grey area implies

that psychological expression, interpretation, or way of experiencing yields while momentariness and openness to what is about to emerge comes forth…" (Tuisku, 65) One of Tuisku's students agrees with Barrish and Tuisku's understanding of embodied training when they recount that the work is about "readiness for everything, you just act, search, do something and pick something out of it." (Tuisku, 64) In essence, Robert Downey Jr.'s famous line from the film Tropic Thunder seems fitting, "I don't read the script! The script reads me!" Although I would not advise actors to go that far, the statement is partially true. If we approach texts with the authority that the histories that are carried within our bodies, minds, and beings have the potential to add invaluable resources to the text itself, we then take the artistic authority away from text and place it in the hands of the ones who enliven it.

Meryl Streep once told Mike Nichol's about her acting process, "Oh, you never know what you're going to do until you do it." (Blair, 11) Although I doubt Streep lacks in preparation, her ability to remain open to whatever may happen is vital to her legendary work. However, it is that "readiness for anything" that usually scares those who have acting systems in place designed for the actor, or teacher, who wants to have a very intentional plan. The liminal/transitional space of the "not knowing" is an area that Tuisku addresses as a main hinderance to embracing embodied approaches to acting pedagogy, especially in higher education. Not only is there an "unlearning" of previous methods that needs to happen, but the not knowing is a necessary prerequisite for the pedagogue and student to accept and embrace.

Tuisku entitles her work in corporeal dramaturgy, Working with States of Being, or WSB. She admittedly says WSB and corporeal dramaturgy are the same thing but to

create exercises specifically designed for youth theatre, she wanted to generate a new term to encapsulate her work. (Tuisku, 67) WSB is an "interpretation of an interpretation" of embodied methods which propose creative work that lives in the grey areas of the artform, or transitional turmoil as Tuisku calls it. (Tuiksu, 43, 55) Upon embracing the unknown, the actor can transcend the often-oversimplified definitions of "playable actions." Tuisku reiterates the aim to encapsulate the complexity of the human experience in acting training when writing, "…how an individual experiences a moment in space and time cannot be comprehensively described in one word. Yet, in everyday communication it is. The actor's artistic creation cannot be contracted to match the abridged vocabulary of a given language…and instead celebrate the diversity and complexity of the human experience." (Tuisku, 74) I wholeheartedly agree and propose later in my thesis how theatre educators in the higher education space can move towards and live within the creatively rich transitional turmoil in actor training.

4.

What is the difference between movement and embodiment? Embodiment requires the body to be a central focus of actor training, but why not just take a dance class or train in a movement discipline and apply it to acting work? Dance and movement pedagogies have long been part of theatrical systems that dissect the connections between mind, body, space, and performance. Viewpoints, Lecoq, Laban, and Grotowski's physical repertoire of training are just a few of the disciplines and theorists behind seminal theatre-based movement training. They all have their place in theatre education, especially in higher education and professional programs, and most are acknowledged as viable supplementary training for actors. However, besides for Grotowski whose work

most closely resembles the methods I outline in my thesis, most of these disciplines are not at the center of pre-professional academic actor training. Although valuable, many movement training systems are optional elective courses alongside acting curricula. They are not the central focus of acting work despite being techniques that enhance the actors work from the start.

For example, Bogart's Viewpoints work on the 'physical score' greatly coincides with necessary acting preparation. Tuisku writes, "…Anne Bogart has in her training asked the actors to create a 'physical score that exists independently from the verbal expression of their character,'" (Tuisku, 75) thus using the physical representation of the story as a map for performance. This is a valuable tool and approach to text. But in dominant teaching systems, once the student starts talking, they often stop moving. This presents a problem. During my time at the Actors' Studio Drama School, movement was a large part of our acting curriculum. We were required to take Horton classes at The Ailey School, Alexander Technique as our primary movement component, and various workshops in Viewpoints and other movement disciplines. Not only did the faculty believe that an adept awareness of the body was essential for the actor but they also wanted the actors to understand that actors are like athletes. Acting is physical and the body must be strong, flexible, and vulnerable at all times to produce one's greatest work.

In the first year of my graduate acting studies, the professors lead students through a full body relaxation process that took approximately one hour to complete. Sometimes longer. However, the graduate students in my program had the same issues as the undergraduate students I observed in my pedagogy program. Once they started talking, most stopped moving. Or at least, stopped moving in ways that seemed relaxed

and practical in the scene work. However, after a few months, our actors' bodies became more flexible, free, and unencumbered. The culmination of movement training obviously affected the actors and their performance apparatus, their bodies, in a positive way. But it took months of time and hours of training within multiple systems on a daily basis to see the effect of such training. Therein lies the greatest difference between corporeal acting methods and movement systems; embodied acting techniques can change an actor's work instantly whereas movement disciplines require much more time to see change.

Although both embodied actor training and movement disciplines involve extensive movement of the body as Tuisku writes (Tuisku, 54), embodied actor training has the ability to transform the actor with a single adjustment. Actors can physically feel the difference in their acting bodies immediately and thus, begin to recognize and repeat such adjustments to gain a succinct and sustained way of accessing fully embodied representations in their work. Although movement-based pedagogies are valuable to the actor and certainly have their place in theatre curricula, they require sustained involvement to reap visible benefits. Even then, such movement training is often not repeatable in scene/acting work. Thus, embodied actor training is a fully integrated system from day one. Body, mind, and being are interconnected and provide a flexible formula for how the actor and teacher can approach all work – text, voice, and movement – within the acting classroom. The actor can enhance training through the above specified movement disciplines but does not need to separate disciplines to engage a fully working state of being in the performance space.

Embodied acting techniques create more spontaneity and freedom because there are less systems in place that dictate prescribed patterns, gestures, movement, or

exercises. Embodied/corporeal curricula simplify movement programs down to their core purpose, to give the actor fluidity and clarity while performing. Of course, it is the actor's responsibility to begin recognizing the internal changes and fluctuations of impulses that any physicality produces within the body or brain. However, a trained pedagogue who embraces extensive movement in primary acting curricula can aide the student's autonomous discovery of their personal, innate, unique acting technique.

Hence, through such discovery, an actor's dramaturgy is born. The actor's dramaturgy informs movement instead of movement informing it. The body/mind system precedes movement systems because, once again, the body and mind should not and do not function as separate entities. They/we are cohesive beings. Thus, pedagogies of corporeality drive the actor and acting teacher to move beyond "outside/in" thinking and move toward a "within and throughout" approach. Embodiment is the beautiful intersectionality that bridges the divide between acting and movement pedagogies. Not only is embodiment far more efficient, it celebrates somatic learning at its finest.

5.

David Mamet famously said, "Characters are words on a page." (Tuisku, 86) He concluded that building a character was nothing more than characteristics that are agreed upon between the text and the group of beings working on that text. (Tuisku, 86) If this is true, how do we honor textual truths and where does text analysis come into the picture? Furthermore, how does embodiment account for historical contexts, culturally important facts, and scriptural structure? Surely an actor cannot simply stand on stage and just begin 'doing' random actions and call it acting?

Pedagogically, performance and research are not the same thing. Knowing a text, memorizing lines, and understanding dramatic structure is important. However, it is *not acting*. To know and to do are two separate things. There are scholars who know vast amounts more than the average student or performer of acting. Yet those brilliant individuals cannot perform those same texts with the physical skills and artistry of such performers. In the same vein, acting students are often taught to *know*, not how to *do*. When they are taught doing, it is often by means of a method the students cannot see or repeat on their own. Thus, they are dependent on the teacher to continue 'doing' and are not able to build a sustainable mode of working for themselves for many years to come if at all.

Being able to define and point out the inciting incident, rising action, point of no return, climax, and resolution in a story/text is essential to effective storytelling. However, such analysis, as Seth Barrish teaches, is an appropriate *inhibition* of the creative process. To study structure and function of a narrative, one must wait to create. Once again, knowing is not creating. It is simply understanding and synthesizing information. Consequently, such synthetization does not lead to good acting, although, it can lead to better acting for an already good performer or performance. For instance, researching the historical and cultural context of *The Glass Menagerie* is important. Yet, for the actor playing Laura, such context may not be as important as experiencing how Laura's limp affects her internal and external relationship with herself, her family, her suitor, and her environment in which she interacts.

Stanislavsky is the father of the "Magic If". The term is used to describe the imaginary circumstances under which a play/story/event takes place. Stanislavsky

required such examination to take place in his early research to help actors to begin understanding the world of the play in which they were about to enter. However, in the realm of embodied studies, the "As If" is slightly more accurate. The difference between the "Magic If" and "As If" is that the latter takes into account how the circumstances not only affect the character within the story but how such circumstances physically affect the actor and their ability to truthfully portray that story. Tuisku again explains the term and its effect on the actor writing, "The moment when a person steps into the realm of the fictitious, the possible world, or the world of possibilities, accepting the 'as if,' affects the body." (Tuisku, 72)

Once the As Ifs are established, embodied training can begin. In practice, embodiment starts as an exploration of the agreed upon given circumstances in a play or story. Once agreed upon, the actors begin playing said circumstances to their fullest physical form. If performative pedagogy focuses on physically interpreting such circumstances, any story can be simply and clearly performed. As complicated as it may seem for young actors to understand the confines of historical or cultural necessities within a text, the inhibition of 'acting' should help the student define those given circumstances with tangible possibilities without the initial pressure of performance. Once those circumstances are established, an actor must simple do them. Once the body enters the performance space - ideas, feelings, and thoughts must become physical.

Charles Mingus, the famous jazz musician, once said, "Anyone can make the simple complicated. Creativity is making the complicated simple." I find theatre teachers incredibly guilty of such an act; the act of making acting complicated. Understandably, acting can seem complicated because no one can tell a person how they should think,

feel, and respond to given circumstances (the who, what, when, where, how, and why of a narrative) 100% of the time. However, this is the exact reason embodiment frees the teacher and the student in their discovery of theatre, character, and text. What if teaching acting is simpler and easier than most teachers make it? What if we can boil acting texts down to doing simple actions that create exciting stories and characters within appropriate contexts? Embodiment does just that.

6.

Lastly, one cannot fully discuss embodiment without addressing the audience. The relationship between actor and audience has changed over time. The modern audience is quite different than the audiences of old. In Shakespeare's time, the actor and audience were practically one. The audience was as much a part of the play as everyone on stage - and the actors knew it. However, the passive format of many traditional theatre performances today leaves what Levin calls the disembodied audience. (Levin, 122) Even before Shakespeare's time, he recalls the latter points in Greek theater when "spectators were exiled from the sacred space of performance" which over the next three centuries, left the audience "…immobilized and virtually disembodied, occupied a darkened, dematerialized space altogether outside the space of the performance." (Levin, 22)

Understandably, it makes sense that the actors of today and many years prior felt that they must conduct the audience in where to look, what to do, and how to feel. The audience was only recognized as an unimportant, unknowing, unfeeling "thing". Thus, the actor and the people training actors needed to make more structured "choices" and

specific actions to lead the audience through the performance, almost like an animal who could not see.

However, what most performers and teachers forget, and what Levin asserts, is that the audience, especially the modern audience, is as embodied as the actors and the characters they wish to portray. (Levin, 123) Each audience member brings their own history, cultural identity, and artistic aesthetics to a performance. Thus, an actor who can simply 'do' without creating a full, pre-planned psychology might save themselves the trouble of trying to "transmit" something the audience does not want - and is not looking for in the first place. In Declan Donnellan's postscript in *The Actor and the Target*, he writes, "Each time we tell a story it is different…It is one thing to tell a story, another to define what the story means. When we try to control all the meaning of a story, we invariably fail…Manipulation can reverse its desired effect." (Donnellan, 239) If Donnellan's advice is heeded, the actor might actually be relieved to realize that although they create physical and visual pictures for the audience, they cannot *make* an audience feel what they do not want to feel. An actor can simply play the story and leave the rest up to their fully embodied spectator/participants.

Once the responsibility of "telling" the audience how to behave is removed, what does that mean for an actor's performance? Does the audience notice less now that the actor is working more simply? I think not. When I was performing on Broadway, I had fellow castmates who had to watch the show on given nights to get refreshed on the updated changes made to show. Often times, they would come up to me and say (with authenticity), "Wow, you had a great show tonight." I would say, "Really, I didn't feel like it was my best. Actually, I was kind of checked out today." They would respond,

"Well you'd never know it. It was a great show." Again, the way I felt about the performance did not equate the audience's perception of the performance.

The modern audience is smart and still, most - if not all - are not mind readers. Just like Shakespeare's audience, they want to be entertained, enthralled, and I believe deep down, they want to gather their own thoughts and opinions about the work in front of them. As Levin points out, for artists like Brecht and Artaud, "the spectator's mimesis must not be merely cerebral, matter for the inward imagination alone. It must be, rather a mode of performance, since only this brings about a sensible unity of mind and body, being and truth; and only this can count as an authentic (or real) imitation." (Levin, 139) In part, I disagree with Brecht and Artaud's performative expectations of the audience. However, I do appreciate their acknowledgement that the audience can be and is more than merely props to the action happening on stage. Today, the audience arrives for a performance ready to take part in the show in whatever way they decide. For teachers of acting and the actor, acknowledging the audience as a wholly embodied being should provide relief for all involved.

Part Three: Being/Doing

1.

Now that I have gained a fairly comprehensive understanding of the origins, interpretations, and impact of embodied pedagogy on the theatre, and acting in particular, I wanted to look back into the modes of acting study I have encountered in my personal classroom experiences. My two years of observation and teaching at Virginia Commonwealth University's theatre department was eye opening. I watched countless presentations by students in classes, end of semester assessments, and on university stages. I witnessed entire classes struggle through scene after scene of standard American plays (Ibsen, Chekov, Williams, O'Neill, etc.) and contemporary film, tv, and theatre material. Again, I wondered, "Why are they having so much trouble embodying characters? Why does their voice not change, their body not move, and they have no sense of space?" Despite the rigorous training, authentic moments of "being" and "doing" were hard to find.

An easy explanation would be that the students in the program were not talented actors. However, the majority of the VCU theatre students were diligent, talented, and unique artists with most having the potential to succeed in some type of professional theatre circle. I watched many have glimmers of beautiful, truthful moments within their acting classes. Yet, they were rarely able to repeat such spontaneity that happened by chance, especially without a professor's guidance.

Unfortunately, the pedagogies the students were ingratiated under had very few tangible, workable tools accessible to the actors. They learned a lot of theory and very

little practical work on how to access impulse and intuition at will in order to gain and develop an acting system of their own. After years of training, acting was still a mystery to most of them. The talented senior actors about to enter the entertainment profession could not cohesively describe the devices that comprised their personal acting method. At best, they were shooting in the dark. After much observation and some questioning, the students conceded that they were never encouraged to build their own, unique way of working and after three and a half years in higher education theatre training, did not have a technique to call their own. Unfortunately, it showed.

As most programs can attest, there will always be talented, young students who excel regardless of the type of curriculum they are placed in. However, after watching actors who had tremendous potential train for an entire year and continuously remain confused on how to harness their acting autonomy, I realized that the cause of their inability to communicate effectively in performance stemmed from the conventional methods under which they were training, not their talent. The comment, "Why are they not moving?" was born from professors' frustrations of not seeing a finished acting product when the young students performed. However, "moving" was never the primary goal or intention for the curricular process. Talking was. The students knew how to give playwright presentations, hand in scored scripts, and could tell you the objectives and tactics for every line of each scene and monologue they were presenting. They talked a lot about a lot of things. Yet again, their work and preparation rarely showed in performance. They needed to know less and do more. They needed to learn how to *be* and *do* in the performative space. It became clear that embodiment was obviously the solution.

2.

Anna Deavere Smith was tired of conventional acting techniques. Smith began working with the "grey areas" in body/mind spaces to create work that eschewed psychology but not intellectual integrity. Her pursuit of character through physical and vocal repetition garnered a path to transforming into a character that informed her psychology as well as her body and being. Smith explains, "If words become your own, there is a 'you' pre-existing the words; but if words become 'you,' then your 'you-ness', your very self- hood, is made up of your interaction with words. Or, turned around, you become you by saying words. Identity isn't 'there'; it's 'always being negotiated'." (Thompson, 133) Her approach to acting forged a route to a career in which she not only transformed the scope of what theatre and playwriting can be but also, what a character is and how to create it. Once again, the doing/being self is integral and integrated in embodied work.

In Malcom Gladwell's book, *What the Dog Saw*, he quotes Picasso who said, "I can hardly understand the importance given to the word research…to search means nothing in painting. To find is the thing." (Gladwell, 796) Obviously, Picasso spent many hours, weeks, and years working to perfect his craft. Laziness and anti-intellectualism, like Smith, is not the goal for Picasso. However, Picasso's statement brings about the question, how much do you *need* to know to do something and do it well?

The very question of knowing vs. doing is addressed in Mia Perry and Carmen Medina's "Embodiment and Performance in Pedagogy Research: Investigating the Possibility of the Body in Curriculum Experience." The article argues that the body not only must be equal to the mind in approaching performative work but the body *is* the

primary path to understanding performance. They write, "The body is our method, our subject, our means of making meaning, representing, and performing." (Perry and Medina, 63) After watching the university students know so much and yet struggle to create authentic performative works, an integrated body/mind approach that leads to the doing/being self behind the psychophysical framework makes a lot of sense. Yet, even if students are open to the concept, what would it take for the systems of academia to change? And do they want to?

3.

I understand the tension between conventional acting techniques and the fear that embracing newer approaches arouses. As much as I rebut dominant acting theories, my theatre training and first portions of my career as an actor are steeped in them. A look back at my professional progression gave me increased understanding of how my search for embodied practices was a driving force in my creative aesthetic from the start.

My formative acting years began with high school productions of musicals, classic plays, and bits of commedia work. The training was seemingly basic, and as mentioned previously, my teacher was poorly educated/unmotivated to embrace diverse and inclusive communities in the classroom. However, this teacher was, at least, committed to artistic exposure outside of the classroom. Along with student productions, we were able to participate in theatre festivals, competitions, and even took a once a year trip to New York City to see Broadway theatre. Once I arrived in New York for the first time in my life, I knew it was a place I was going to be. During our visit, we had talk back sessions with well-known directors and Broadway performers. We participated in workshops in movement and audition technique. We were introduced to a culture on and

off stage that we did not see in our small, country town. For a little theatre department in the middle of nowhere (even despite my teacher's prejudices), I was fortunate to have had any exposure to professional theatre. Those experiences began to shape my creative self in a powerful way. Overall, my early training taught me that acting takes the whole body to tell stories which, as expected, my athletic sensibility welcomed with open arms.

I went to college on academic and theatre scholarships. Attending the Virginia Governor's School for theatre prior to my senior year in high school gave me a firm foundation to pursue high education theatre training. It was in college that I, like many first-year actors, was introduced to Stanislavsky. At the time, Stanislavsky's psycho-realistic work was completely foreign to me. Up until that time, I was, in all honesty, 'winging it'. However, I saw value in the structure that Stanislavsky's system brought to my work. After giving the method a try, I realized that what I gained in structure and knowledge, I lost in freedom and physicality. Most training programs are built on integration over time. However, I knew there had to be more than basic "Stan" for me.

As my theatre career progressed with shows in and out of the university setting. I used beats, playable actions, and the "Magic If" as a part of my repertoire. However, I never connected with the technique as a holistic training method and continued to look for more techniques that would give me more creative freedom in my work. Sonia Moore, one of the premier teachers of the Stanislavsky System, claims that Stanislavsky's work is not a "Russian phenomenon" and does not need to be translated across cultural boundaries (Moore, 9) I disagree. I did not fully connect with his work because I felt like the work was dated and out of touch with the modern trends I was experiencing in the acting world. It was out of touch with me and what I had to say in my work. Although

basic “Stan” is the pre-requisite for most acting training programs, I believed restricting freedom only to find it again was a backwards way of working.

Moore quotes Stanislavsky in her book, *The Stanislavsky System: The Professional Training of an Actor*, when he encourages others to, “Create your own method…Don’t depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you! But keep *breaking traditions, I beg you!” (*Moore, Preface 15) Now this, I wholeheartedly agree with. Yet, I never once heard a teacher give Stan’s endorsement to a college acting class! Regardless, up and coming theatre artists did just that in the reformation of the American theatre. The founding Group Theatre members (Meisner, Hagen, Adler, Strasberg) were successful in translating Stanislavsky’s methods into relevant adaptations for the American actor and audience. For me, it was Meisner’s interpretation of Stanislavsky’s system that spoke to me. I was blown away by the straightforwardness of responding to the acting partner and environmental circumstances. It felt easy and I felt freer. Ultimately, my collegiate level Meisner course gave me the majority of the tools that ushered me into my professional acting life and became my best weapon against ‘actory’ performances at the time.

During my training at The Actors’ Studio Drama School, my search for authentic acting methods that resonated with my artistic self continued. Although Strasberg’s method, like Stanislavsky’s work, did not appeal to me, I garnered clarity about physical relaxation as well as the use of environment and space. Emotional memory work was very hit or miss for me. Kemp speaks about the ineffectiveness of the technique with regards to the lack of cognitive/emotional responses to memories when he writes, “So Strasberg’s insistence on emotional memory as the actor’s sole pathway to emotion is

further counted; thinking of a past event is less likely to produce the sensations that are identified as feelings when they are consciously perceived." (Kemp, 159) Much of my time spent at the Actor's Studio was spent working on the inner emotional life of the character and self to inconsistent success when performing. I decided that although being emotionally available when playing scenes is important, Strasberg's method was not the tool that I needed to find sustained physical freedom and emotionally engaging work for myself.

Once I became a professional actor, I again found that my basic training in Meisner served me best. Beats, motivations, character histories, and objectives were all helpful in my character preparation but did not get me jobs. It was my ability to respond honestly in my acting work that garnered the most appreciation and praise from casting personnel, directors, and audiences alike. Often times, over-preparation and planned behavior got in the way of me simply *being*. It turns out that "being" when there were already plenty of directed and choreographed things to do, say, sing, and move, was more than enough to create a living, breathing character on stage. In a sense, Meisner's words, "Don't act, don't fake, don't pretend – work!" would seem to encompass the embodied work that I write of in my thesis (Meisner, 55) However, something was still missing. The repeat exercise, even in its progression, was still so dependent on the exercise and the other actor/actors. I began to wonder, what if an actor could generate that level of spontaneity regardless of the circumstances and acting partners they worked with? What if the As Ifs only added to an actor's already full toolbox of living, breathing, character making techniques? Little did I know, I would soon discover the answer to just that question.

4.

My hunch about creating character was confirmed when I met Seth Barrish. Through a fellow actor's recommendation, I signed up for a class at The Barrow Group in New York City. Seth and his wife, Lee Brock, are co-artistic directors at The Barrow Group which teaches a "method-less" method of acting. Once there, some of the best acting I had ever seen took place in the 3rd floor classrooms on 36th Street. I watched fellow seasoned actors drop bad habits with ease. I saw brand new actors give performances that were far beyond their experience level. It was baffling considering the main concept of the actor training was just to "do stuff."

The first few classes with Seth entailed lots of comments from students such as "That's it? It feels like I'm doing nothing? Shouldn't I be doing more? Why is this so easy?" With simple, non-pretentious tools and tips, the students were just "doing stuff" and creating beautiful acting work. Seth, like Anna Deavere Smith, is not anti-intellectual. In his own words he is just "anti-screwing people up." In *An Actor's Companion*, the first chapter is literally entitled, "Do Stuff". Do stuff refers to the observation that actors have the tendency to stand and speak on stage in ways that they would never do in life or most other settings. Usually, those ways include not moving. For example, an actor is playing a scene which takes place over breakfast. In their attempt to act well, they do not eat, drink, cook, fix coffee, or do anything pertaining to breakfast while playing the scene. However, once prompted and asked, "How would you play this scene if you were *really* eating breakfast?" the actors instantly became freer and the scene springs alive. Spontaneous behavior, clarity of relationship and narrative, as

well as heightened stakes all take place with a seemingly obvious and simple adjustment. Embodiment in its purest state.

Seth claims that "doing stuff" not only relaxes the actor but immediately creates something resembling a living, breathing being. (Barrish, 3) As embodied studies suggest, if we rely on the innate information we have and start with the body, would we not be better off? *An Actor's Companion* continues to detail countless ways to create character, connect to environment, text, and story mostly through behavior and physical activity. The activity in turns creates a plethora of unplanned and exciting behavior that brings characters and stories to life. Doing is being and being is doing. They cannot be separated in the creation of performative spaces that are alive. A teaching method that focuses on physical behavior as a means to enlightening the mind and performative sphere is the way towards simpler, clearer, and more spontaneous acting, and thus, embodied performances.

Part Four: Becoming

1.

During my second year of graduate school, I taught an Audition Technique class to six graduating senior acting students. When the faculty first asked me to do the class, I was thrilled. During my years as a young actress, I *loved* auditioning. I gained tremendous joy (and adrenaline) from preparing my audition materials, readying my outfits, and creating a cohesive package, from tongue to toe, that encapsulated who I was to play every time I stepped through the audition door.

However, after taking a break from the business to start my family, I gained tremendous insight into what worked during my audition years and how I could have grown in the area of auditioning. Before I taught the Audition Technique course, I knew my goal for the pre-professional acting students had to extend beyond headshots and resumes. What I wanted them to explore was their essence and how this aspect of their professional preparation would impact their career paths more than any other skill they could garner.

Essentially, essence is the embodied integration of the actor's authentic self represented within the acting business context. The term first hit me like a ton of bricks when Erica Arvold, a local casting director for major television and film projects, visited an Acting for the Camera course I was observing. Her first insight on casting for the students was that most of the time, she casts actors because of their essence more than

any technical skill they could master. When describing essence, she said, “It’s just who someone is. It’s who they are.”

In an interview with Claire Simon, the casting director for projects including *Empire*, *Chicago Fire*, *Chicago PD*, and *Divergent*, she recounts an experience she had when casting the role of Porsha on *Empire*. She describes her first meeting with Ta’Rhonda Jones, the Chicago based rapper with no prior acting experience who came in to audition for a small role. Simon says, “It was like fireworks going off. She was Porsha. I could hardly wait for her to finish the audition so I could call (Empire co-creator) Lee Daniels to say ‘We found her.’” (Gire, 3) In the article, “Casting Directors Say Acting Talent Doesn’t Really Matter,” a casting director was quoted saying, “Acting talent…may only account for 7% of the reason a particular actor would be cast in a role.” (Project Casting, 3) I observed similar sentiments when I was auditioning. Sometimes, I just had “it”. Other times I didn’t. Undoubtedly, there is an elusiveness to the acting business and what happens in those rooms. It is difficult to define. In the same vein, this ‘essence’ is yet another intangible quality that professionals in the field want actors to grasp and master. Yet, few have tangible tools or terms to help them do so. So, in my search for tangential training methods for young actors about the enter the business, I looked to embodiment to create a paradigm that could achieve just that.

Professional Embodied Preparation, or PEP as I will refer to it, is the term I have designated for my system of professional preparation through the embodied lens. The model is built on the construct that actors must:

1) First, understand themselves as people and artisans of acting (embodiment).
2) Secondly, understand the business of acting.

3) Finally, integrate their embodied selves within the business.

PEP has three modes of awareness: talent, vision/star quality, and character. Each mode has pros and cons and each mode is seemingly unquantifiable. Yet, after years of observation, there does seem to be a hidden formula for these modes working in tandem and predicting potential success.

I define talent (aka "Skillz") as the skill level to which a person executes their creative task. If you have a highly talented performer, their level of skill and execution will most likely garner a high probability of work options in their field. Such options may continue over lengthy periods in their career. However, if that person does not have an extraordinary artistic vision/star quality "it" factor, they may be the actor who always gets cast but never gets the lead. Many character actors fall into this category. They have talent to boot but rarely get to be or stay in the limelight as leading players.

Vision/Star Quality (aka "Swagger") is a combination of the physically extraordinary and accurate representation of self, combined with the "it" factor. Most vision/star quality performers are the stars. They are the leading ladies and gentlemen who people "just like." Often these performers are similar to the atmospheric stars that they personify; they shoot up quickly and fall just as fast. Often performers with this quality rely on their natural abilities to make inroads into the business but then are not able to sustain their success because they do not put effort into one of the other two modes – talent or character. They are attractive, physically or otherwise, in what they present and represent. However, if they do not grow in their skill level or cultivate a work ethic and constitution that builds trust with others, they do not last. These are the people

we watch in Hollywood, on television and film, and major Broadway stages and magazine publications. Often, we watch their rise as well as their fall.

Lastly, character (aka "Sweetness") is exactly what is means. It is the intangible culmination of qualities that add to the morale, work ethic, and overall working environment and community these performers come into contact with. Many times, these are the team players. In fact, professional sports teams often cite the intangibles of character as major factors in how they choose, hire, and keep players for their teams. In an interview with NPR, Lonnie Wheeler, the author of the book, *Intangiball*, describes two types of intangibles – situational and environmental. (NPR, 1) Situational intangibles are what happens on the field during the game. How does a player take a pitch in order to change the base runner's options? Or how do the outfielders back up each other? Those intangibles, as he states, can be (and now are) being measured to some extent (NPR, 2) Similar examples in acting would be how an actor handles a situation on stage when another actor drops a line or misses their cue. Are they able to perform under non-ideal situations like having a runny nose or performing alongside an understudy? Things of this nature.

However, it is the environmental intangibles that are even more important. Wheeler says, "Mostly, it's the things that people can't see that may go on in the dugout, in the offseason, in the clubhouse. It's players, by whatever means, making other players better through counsel, through example, work ethic. It's a social thing…players rubbing off on each other, playing well with other, creating a culture and atmosphere that is conducive specifically to winning." (NPR, 2) In the same right, performers who are

concerned with everyone "winning" wherever they work or "play" would fall under the character category.

However, similarly to the other modes, without awareness and balance, a character person will most likely end up behind the scenes. This may be where they want to be and many discover that it is. However, if an actor who wants to audition for professional roles falls primarily into the character mode of being, then the actor needs to identify how they can increase their talent or create some sort of tangible representation of themselves that would give them some relevance in the vision/star quality mode. To put it simply, a "character" performer may need more "swagger" or "skillz" to break into the business and have success.

Since I was entering the Audition Technique course as an instructor to senior students who I had not instructed in embodied pedagogies prior to the course, I began my instruction with the last two portions of the PEP construct – learning the business and integration of their embodies selves within the business. Without prior embodiment training, it was a sharp learning curve for them to say the least. The students expected the course to define and discuss business expectations with regards to audition etiquette, length of audition material, headshots and resumes, etc. They did not expect Audition Technique to venture into the theoretical. However, the bridging of both the practical and theoretical was vital for their understanding of how to wield as much autonomy and auto-didacity in their business dealings as well as their craft.

After coaching the class on the tangibles of the business, we covered the intangibles by means of PEP. The class was floored. The PEP model transformed the cohesiveness of their audition preparation, auditions, and ultimately, their career paths. I

designed the course to contain weekly mock auditions for the majority of the semester. I asked local theatre professionals to attend and adjudicate the auditions as well as give feedback on the PEP modes and where the students stood within in them. As the semester went on, the students identified their most accessible mode and one additional mode they could tangibly work on (i.e. – take more classes in their area of weakness, choose headshot photographers that worked with artists whose careers they wanted to emulate, etc.) to create a more balanced and concentrated focus in their audition and creative trajectory. Feedback from the outside auditors was extraordinarily positive. Repeat adjudicators commented on the tremendous change they saw in the students over the course of the semester, how they carried themselves, and how their material and presentations continued to speak to who they were becoming as artists.

In our final conversation and group assessment of the course, the students acknowledged that it was the PEP model that transformed them more than any other information they had received in the course or in many acting courses prior. Most expressed a desire and wish that they had begun their acting training with such a perspective; that they could begin with who they were and become who they were going to be. In their final papers critiquing the course, almost all stated they had found their "essence" and found themselves within the business of their art. They had finally become.

2.

An Actor's Companion has a chapter called, "It Called a Play." In it, Barrish cites an interaction with a professor during his time at university. While he was walking down

the hall, deep in thought about a scene he was working on, the professor says to him, "You students are always 'working' on one thing or another. I always see you walking around the halls looking so serious. Did you ever think that maybe you're working too hard? It's called a 'play', you know." (Barrish, 105) It seems obvious, but play is an essential element to using corporeal training in the discovery of character.

While observing the university students and their professors work through scenes, play seemed to be a missing ingredient to their acting work. What if the professor said, "Let's throw everything out the window for a go or two? Everything you think you know or don't know about this scene or character or play, just let it go? What if we just…play?" One can only imagine that the interaction would lead to some level of freedom and perhaps, dare I say, fun.

Would you believe it if I told you Stanislavski did just that? Well, he did. Richard Kemp wrote about Stanislavski's later in life approach that looked much like what I just described. He writes, "In the last production Stanislavski worked on, Moliere's *Tartuffe*, he replaced 'analysis of feeling' with 'active analysis', after complaining that 'after long discussions at the table and individual visualizations, the actor comes on stage with a stuffed head and an empty heart, and can act nothing.' This experience could be seen as an example of verbal overshadowing…To engage the actors in the fictional environment of the play, and to stimulate a shared imaginative response to the play, Stanislavski put the actors on their feet from the beginning of rehearsal, improvising the situations of different scenes, paraphrasing the dialogue, and discovering the spatial element of Orgon's house, creating what Carnicke calls 'collective fantasy'." (Kemp, 141) The above is not usually what we think of when Stanislavsky is taught to beginning acting

students in first year acting. But what if it were? What if Stanislavsky arrived at the same place we are now as we stand on the cusp of the new and important move toward embodied acting in academia? I think Stan would approve.

Yet, even if there is fun in acting, what about skill and expertise? How does beginning with the body's mind-eye and having fun bring students to acting better? Perry and Medina explain it best when they write, "We believe embodiment isn't simply an interesting possibility for education, nor is it an alternative practice or method: embodiment is." (Medina and Perry, 63) Embodiment is play, although it is not just for play. It is an essential skill which leads to expertise in using the body to portray a spectrum of performative experiences. If our bodies are adept at telling stories with little to no information, how much more adequately can a story be performed once informed by narrative analytics?

The most phenomenal performance I have ever seen was in the live taping of Benedict Cumberbatch's portrayal of the Creature in Danny Boyle's Frankenstein. For twenty solid minutes, he moves around the stage as the Creature, painfully contorting, twisting, and coming to life before our eyes. It is frightening and awe-inspiring all at once. As much as I admire Cumberbatch's acting genius, his ability to infuse his body, without words, with the psychophysical representation of a Creature who has literally been sown and sutured together at every joint was the essential element to creating an unforgettable theatrical moment. Without the Creature's physical language, there is no play.

3.

Beyond, exercises and techniques, I believe an essential step to embracing embodied acting pedagogies is to change the classroom dynamics. After many years of watching acting teachers who use their knowledge to wield, at times, unethical training environments for the sake of their own ego, I urge performative pedagogues to shift their teaching spaces from authoritative to one of auto-didacity. Give the students the artistic freedom and authority of self that empathic, embodied training demands.

Elizabeth Ellsworth speaks of redefining the classroom to dispel pedagogical myths of what is "critical" and "rational" in learning systems. Her article entitled, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?" discusses how classroom dynamics must account for origin of such systems. Her two theories in creating an exploratory space aim to "give students the analytical skills they need to make them as free, rational, and objective as teachers" and to "make the teacher more like the student by redefining the teacher as learner of the student's reality and knowledge." (Ellsworth, 306) Nguyen and Larson echo the same when writing, "Paradigm shifts from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction have already changed ways in which faculty members actively engage learners (Austin, 2002). However, instructors may be resistant to methods and perspectives that run counter to their early professional socialization or to those that challenge their own social assumptions." (Nguyen and Larson, 341) During my observation and personal experiences in academic acting training programs, I have witnessed such a resistance. Embracing embodied teaching perspectives challenges the teacher by asking them to give up their authority and give students more artistic freedom. Thus, many professors may like the *idea* of embodied training but are not willing to give

up the power they wield within the classroom domain to make such shifts a reality. Although artists encounter a variety of personalities in the professional field, this kind of egotistical obstructionism has no place in an emotionally safe academic environment dedicated to equipping young actors in their craft.

The move toward learner-centered curricula not only takes away the primary authority of the acting pedagogue but gives student actors, especially in higher education, the tools to train independently yet still follow direction and coaching from the teacher. (Tuisku, 32) Tuisku refers to the approach as "auto-didactic apprenticeship." (Tuisku, 32) Not only is the educator giving the body/mind precedence in training but also the student. Such a shift is an exercise in generosity by the teacher and moves towards ethically sustainable training which can, and often does, get put aside in the subjectivity of the acting classroom. (Tuisku, 69, 70) One's own experience *is* the authority. Such a perspective is one that I witness in the ease and generosity of Seth Barrish's classrooms at the Barrow Group but rarely in academia. If acting teachers could set aside their need to be the total authority on every aspect of acting or actor training, they could see that this paradigm is a win for everyone.

Thus, the actors' dramaturgy is born. The pedagogue and the student acknowledge that any meeting of the actor's body and outer element or fictious event constitutes an act. (Tuisku, 73) The stage is wherever the actor is and what they have to bring to that stage is as important as what the stage or script brings to them. (Tuisku, 84) Tuisku's observations of artistic freedom in youth theatre education coincide with the tensions between traditional teaching perspectives and more modern approaches. She writes, "'Artistic Freedom' has not been one of the most common phrases with youth

theatre education. Rather, I find the students inclined to think that the actor's part is to do what the teacher/director tells her to do." (Tuisku, 83) Again, giving actors artistic freedom is the core of corporeal dramaturgy. Without it, the freedom, spontaneity, and "loss of control" that is necessary in the creation of embodied training within the higher education acting curricula can never realize it full potential for training actors.

But what about technique? Technique, as Tuisku translates from Zarrilli's work, "…begins to evolve on the level of comprehensive embodiment." (Tuisku, 70) She goes on to suggest that the actor that engages in embodied work learns how to trust the seeming "loss of control" that the technique lends itself to and learns how to access it at will *and* repeat it. (Tuisku, 70, 79) Thus, the actor's innate sensibilities create an experience which they can trust. Tuisku continues writing, "…experience turns to repeatable technique." (Tuisku, 70) Despite its seemingly topsy, turvy style, the being/doing of embodied work lends itself to repeated access to the actors' instincts and impulses, thus, generating a craft that suits the individual actor. In a sense, through embodiment, one becomes.

Although the student greatly benefits from this method, what do professors get out of the deal? Especially those who has been entrenched in conventional teaching forms and are comfortable with such methods? The truth is, if the teacher does not want to change, neither will their pedagogy. The term "master teacher" is one many professors in the field aim for. Seth Barrish reassures eager students desperate to get his knowledge on his "method" that he is not a master of anything. He, once again, is simply "anti-screwing people up." The seemingly significant loss of control and authority forfeited by professors adopting an embodied approach is replaced by far greater influence. The

educator can now empower the student to drive their own development and career which lends to a superior, long-lasting, and substantive impact. Ultimately, the benefit that professors gain is an exponentially more effective classroom environment for acing equipment.

Perry and Medina expand on embodiment's deviation from conventional methods as a "fluid uncovering of experience as opposed to a labeling and defining of results." (64) If open to it, acting teachers may find that a path through corporeal dramaturgy is not only a relevant approach to acting but also, as Ellsworth writes, a way for the teacher to "relearn the objects through studying them with their students." (Ellsworth, 306) Professors of performative pedagogy who challenge themselves to move in the direction of spontaneity and freedom through embodiment will experience new creative inspirations in the classroom and on stage for their students and themselves. The benefits of the empathic teacher/student relationship that embodied pedagogy offers are an additional advantage to the innate sensory-somatic connection the body and mind create. Such connection ultimately leads to a more ethical classroom, effective training, and most likely, more fully embodied acting.

4.

I would be remiss not to address the limitations involved with embodied practices. First and foremost, not everyone is talented. This is the first limitation to embodied pedagogy. The culmination of embodied techniques in the acting classroom does not guarantee that an actor will be more talented or even good at acting. Nor does it ensure that a bad professor will become a better professor. Embodied acting techniques will only

take what is already there and make it better. Recently, I was on vacation at the beach with some family and friends. One of our family friends asked, "Can you *really* teach people how to act?" I immediately replied, "No. I can only give them the tools to *maybe* learn how to act." I explained how I teach techniques and tangible aspects of the craft but cannot by pedagogy alone make anyone an actor. Some people just are. Others learn. And some never will get the gist because maybe they are meant to do something else. None of that is up to me. My job is to simply teach. I cannot work miracles and neither can embodiment.

However, if a student is not equipped to be an actor, at least in the serious pursuit of acting as an artform, the investigations of methods surrounding corporeal dramaturgy could help that student become more comfortable with themselves and who they are in the world. Tuisku mentions that personal growth is a side benefit to the approach. However, no matter how you explain it, acting is a mystical and magical profession. As Richard Kemp suggests, embodiment only helps the magic to seem even more so. He writes, "When I began researching the material that I've described, I feared that cognitive science would remove the magic from theatre. But now, I think that it will enable theatre practitioners to be better magicians." (Kemp, 190) We cannot make magicians, but at best, we can continue to encourage those who are not to discover where they can bring their own magic to the world.

Another limitation of embodied practice is the potential for stereotyping and oversimplification of characterization. As a fan of investigative theatre, a lot of the techniques that generate authentic representations in this genre can easily be misconstrued. Similarly, embodied techniques rely on streamlined exercises and tools

(like clenching a jaw) to transform the way a character is physically interpreted. The silent improv is often used to loosen the actors and the action on the stage. Unfortunately, without proper guidance and context, these tools can be misinterpreted and rendered shallowly.

I worked on a project during my graduate studies where I designed a curriculum for a class called Performing Ethnicity. The class was designed with many of the embodied techniques that I address in my thesis. However, similar pitfalls to performing characters of a differing identify than one's own prove to have analogous challenges that embodied techniques could encounter in a more traditional acting classroom. The danger of minstrelsy or caricatured performances can easily be created instead of embodied representations of unique individuals or beings. Through their representation/performance of recently discovered natives, Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Coco Fusco spectacularly proved how stereotypes can be misinterpreted as an accurate depiction of culture and identity by the audience.

In Diana Taylor's "Couple in a Cage," she purports that, "There was no more interiority to their performance of the stereotype than in the stereotype itself and nothing to know, it seemed, that was not readily available to the viewing eye." (Taylor, 164) So, although the effort of discarding psychology in promotion of physical representation was successful in effectively portraying their 'subjects', Gomez-Pena and Fusco's lack of authentic portrayals was undetectable to much of their viewing audience. Consequently, stereotypes about savages were purposefully perpetuated and not challenged by their performance (albeit to prove a point in their case). However, student actors and

unenthusiastic professors of embodied approaches could easily have an analogous outcome.

Another example is explained in Joyce Green Macdonald's essay on "Acting Black: Othello, Othello Burlesques, and the Performance of Blackness" when she discusses the various portrayals of Othello by white actors in blackface. She quotes F.W. Hawkins in writing, "Edmund Kean's 'tawny' Othello of 1814 revised this tradition, formally linking erasure of the Moor's black body to his successful impersonation of 'those minute and delicate shades which constitute the very essence of character.'" (Macdonald, 232) Kean's acting ability in embodying a black man were obviously effective for the time, yet the history of dominant white culture exploiting black bodies for entertainment purposes are too deep to discard its contextual meaning. Again, the potential pitfall of stereotyping and complexity of engaging in diverse perspectives cannot be denied or go unaddressed.

Besides for talent and stereotyping, textual responsibility is another limitation. As previously discussed, a classroom centered around artistic freedom does not negate the necessary attention to textually fixed circumstances. For example, in the original script of *The Glass Menagerie*, Laura has a limp. The origins of the limp, the severity of the limp, the type of limp, the cadence of the limp can all be decided on by the actors and participants involved in the scene or production. However, even if the play is fully reimagined, the limp (or some reiteration of it) must remain. It has to. It is part of what the character needs to be in *that* particular story by *that* particular playwright. Although embodied approaches give the actors more freedom to interpret scripts with more creative

breath than a traditional approach, the parameters of a written work do need to live within the absolute necessities of the script.

The last limitation with regards to embodiment is temperament. Embodiment is not for everyone. I am a person whose professional and creative aesthetic is inherently egalitarian. During my year teaching first year acting at VCU, I ran my classroom with the empathic perspective that embodiment requires. I assumed that giving young actors the autonomy they deserved from day one would create the collaborative classroom that I craved as an artist. Although the atmosphere was positive, arriving on time to an 8:30am acting class proved to be a challenge for some of the students. Because it was my first course with first year university students, I made mistakes. My desire to create a safe and equal space lacked structure and at the close of the first semester, I paid a price for my structural miscalculations.

After some regrouping with my faculty and the class, my embodied aesthetic returned but with an age/class appropriate balance. The class and I designed an acronym called R.A.K.E to hold us accountable to our professional standards as well as our creative goals. It stood for: Radical Transparency – Accountability – Kindness – Excellence. We decided that these four words created a healthy standard for academic and professional structure while still maintaining a creative space that was safe, inclusive, and open. I held the students to the same standard that they held me to. The effort was a success and the class was changed for the better. I learned that my students needed a balance between accountability and freedom and in the end, that balance helped them to be successful.

In the same token, embodiment is not for all professors. There are acting teachers who like to wield power over students and enjoy the oppressive, authoritarian atmosphere they create. It is what I call an 'old' school approach but an approach that nonetheless continues to exist in acting classrooms today. The idea that a student must be 'broken down' and built up again is still common among teachers of the craft who learned similar methods in their training. Embodiment is not for these people. Even if this type of teacher wanted to integrate embodied approaches into their classroom, the desire to maintain control over every aspect of acting outcomes, training, student perception, and synthesis of the material would get in the way of the teaching practice, if not damage the student/teacher relationship all together. To be fair, I have seen teachers who structure the students' learning in a traditional style achieve success. However, after observing talented students under their tutelage, their success in integrating their training is often short lived. They are not able to repeat or even articulate the process that they were taught. Once again, embodiment would not be a good fit for such teachers.

5.

Despite the limitations, I believe the possibilities to embodied performative pedagogy are endless. My proposal to theatre practitioners of performative pedagogy is simply this: we let the actors' dramaturgy lead us as educators to *their* truest and most authentic stories. I am not aiming to disqualify the works of Stanislavsky, Meisner, or any other dramatic practitioner or theorist. I am merely offering a way into acting work and character study that is simpler and more direct. If we begin with the perspective that acknowledges the actor's body which contains a history, identity, culture, and personal aesthetics, as the primary authority in the acting space then we can examine how new

words and texts, activities, and actions play on that body and mold the story. Only then, do we look to the analytic elements of the narrative and use those facts to enhance the world that has been created through physical play with the body in the performative space.

In is simplest form, embodiment pedagogy is teaching students how to inhabit character and the world of the play through our brilliant body's mind-eye. This approach leads us to a place of the unknown. The unknown is a scary place for educators to venture and is potentially racked with failure. What will we discover? How does a particular movement/sound/spacial relationship affect me and my body differently? How will the story of someone with a different culture and history be told through me? If we do not give students the ability to venture into texts with the openness and flexibility to not know everything at the start, how can we ask them to dare in other areas?

I echo Charles Mingus in my plea to make the complicated simpler in our acting classrooms. Let us give the life lessons we bring with us to the classroom and let art imitate it. *An Actors Companion* is a great place to start. In fact, Seth Barrish begins many of his classes with a question. He asks the students, "How many years have you been acting?" They usually answer with a response ranging from "I just started" to "Twenty plus years." He draws a simple graph on the chalkboard with the line of years an actor states as their training time. He then asks, "How long have you been alive?" The students pause. Again, various answers pop out from the crowd. He chooses one. He draws a line next to the acting line. "So, it looks like all of you have been living much longer than you have been acting. Start there." Mic drop. Barrish through this exercise

emphasized the reality that every student brings a life history to be utilized in the acting classroom and that history is an invaluable asset in the creation of unique characters.

Richard Kemp also distills his research and belief that our living bodies and extraordinary mental capacities give us all of the information we need to succeed in our jobs as actors and acting pedagogues. In short, he writes:

> Drama depicts change
> Change is effected through action
> Action is expressed through words and gesture
> Words and gesture arise from impulse
> Impulse is a neuronal process
> Neuronal processes follow the same pathway for fiction as for daily life
>
> (Kemp, 187, 188)

Sounds simple enough.

Makoto Fujimura, or Mako as he likes to be called, is a renowned painter and founder of the Fujimura Institute and International Arts movement. He retells a poignant story about Martin Luther King Jr. in his book *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for our Common Life*. The preparations for the March on Washington in 1963 were so overwhelming that writing the speech Dr. King was to give at the event was simply not a priority. In fact, the organizers gave the task to a few aides. (Fujimura, 47) Clarence Benjamin Jones said, "on the evening of Tuesday, August 27, [twelve hours before the March] Martin still didn't know what he was going to say." (Fujimura, 47) During Dr. King's reading of the prepared speech given to him by the aides, Mahalia Jackson, gospel star and dear friend to Dr. King, sat a few seats behind his podium. She kept yelling to him, "Tell 'em about the dream, Martin! Tell 'em about the dream!" (Fujimura, 47) So,

after completing the prepared speech, out of his exhaustion and from deep within his being, Dr. Martin Lither King Jr. told the crowd about his dream and spoke words that changed the world from that moment forward.

Where would we be without the "I Have a Dream" speech? What would have happened if Ms. Jackson did not urge her dear friend to go "off-script" and share the deepest recesses of his soul? Mako writes, "Imagine that…it took another artist to recognize the artistry that was being held back by the context…Sometimes we may need to remind them to put down their prepared text…(artists) can exhort in this way, in and out of a prepared tribal language into a visionary, extemporaneous "jazz" language of the heart." (Fujimura, 48) Mahalia Jackson knew something that was ingrained in her being. Gospel, like jazz, is born from a place that sings beyond the notes and outside of the page. You can't write about it. You can only feel it. Hear it. See it. Know it. Be it. Do it. Become it. That is embodiment. This is where acting pedagogy should live.

It is as simple as that.

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