2022

Considering Queerness - Actor Training's Issues and Alternatives

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CONSIDERING QUEERNESS: ACTOR TRAINING'S ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVES

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

by

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May 2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank many people for getting me to and getting me through my M.F.A. program. My parents, Christopher and Monette, who instilled just the right amount of delusional confidence in me to believe I could be anything in this world. My brothers, Matt and C.J., for their examples of hard work and tenacity against big odds. Samantha Abshire, Shelbie Savoie, Breon J. Cobb, Ashley Thacker, John-David Brumfield, and Matthew Rhodes for seeing the possibility in me and nurturing it with love and patience. Dr. John Fletcher from Louisiana State University for offering steady guidance as I trek deeper into higher education. My faculty and staff in the Department of Theatre at Virginia Commonwealth University, especially Dr. Keith Byron Kirk, Dr. Jesse Njus, Dr. Aaron Anderson, Karen Kopryanski, and Wes Seals, for seeing a teacher in me. And finally, my fellow classmates of the 2022 graduating class of the Performance Pedagogy M.F.A. program. Despite so many odds, we have reached the end together. My love to you all.

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CONSIDERING QUEERNESS: ACTOR TRAINING'S ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVES

By Jacob G. LeBlanc, M.F.A.

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Virginia Commonwealth University, 2021.

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Educators in academic theatre programs, whether queer or non-queer, trans or cisgender, may not intentionally consider queerness in their pedagogical practices. What follows is an examination of current issues in academia that can affect queer students negatively and disproportionately. Anecdotal evidence is provided to demonstrate different issues that may be present in the classroom experiences of queer students. The Stanislavski system is critiqued through a contemporary, queer lens to locate possible shortcomings in the acting technique when it is applied by queer performers. Queer alternatives to the Stanislavski system are vetted and offered to queer students who might seek something beyond Stanislavski with a special emphasis on camp as queer parody. Perceptions of queer theatre are challenged both from an art market perspective and a high art/low art perspective. The final chapter proposes ways in which educators can reframe how they think about the work of queer students in the performance classroom. It also extends a few suggestions on pedagogical practices that can be adapted for the queer students in any performance classroom.

Prologue

Embarking on this journey, I have one goal in mind: to consider queerness more intentionally as we have conversations about the places of inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility within higher education theatre programs. What follows is an examination of personal experiences, mine included, which shed light on larger issues queer actors face when they make the decision to study theatrical performance in college. While my own anecdotes are inherently individual, they are also like the stories of other colleagues and classmates as well as indicative specific gaps that need to be filled as we deconstruct and reconstruct our programs. The conversation around IDEA (inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility) is necessary, yet even after these initiatives have existed for years at the point of writing this thesis, I have not seen the trickle-down of these initiatives. For other teachers and I, who are faithfully attending workshops and seminars on how to be anti-racist, how to be mindful of others' experiences, we often come out of these learning experiences with a lot of theoretical knowledge and little actionable solutions. I cannot pretend to have all the answers at this point, but I can offer ideas of things teachers can try, things that I would have appreciated hearing from my teachers during my college training.

The Stanislavski system is the topic of contention lately when we speak of considering marginalized identities. Though, there are other pedagogical practices commonplace within college actor training that should be examined, too. Things like what scenes and monologues are offered to students, how students are cast in these pieces, and how we tend to perceive correctness when assessing student performances. Essentially, we are determining what sparks joy for us as an educational discipline, and what must be thrown away. Whether the Stanislavski system should be done away with entirely or not is a discussion worth having. My paper argues

for a consideration of a specific marginalized identity, that is queerness, and what we can do as teachers to circumvent inequitable difficulty that queer students may face when practicing Stanislavski's teachings. Therefore, it does not take a stance on the topic but merely promotes awareness about the specific challenges queer students can face using the system. Then, each teacher can move forward, re-shaping their pedagogical practices responsibly.

The conversation within this paper also seeks to legitimize acting techniques outside of Stanislavski's system. As an actor in training, I was primarily exposed to the Stanislavski system in acting classes. If it was not Stanislavski himself, it was Stella Adler, Uta Hagen, Sanford Meisner, William Esper, or Lee Strasberg. For an undergraduate college student who assumes that the teacher is the expert in the subject being taught, I tended to take their word as law. I would say this is common for many students going through undergraduate training. What this does in effect is create a false belief that the Stanislavski system is virtually the only system of acting available to us. While time constraints prevented me from delving into every acting technique beyond Stanislavski, there should always be a push in performance classrooms to expose students to everything available to them as they pursue their art. This is not merely to add variety to the classroom; it is a tactic to prevent students, especially marginalized students, from feeling confined by an acting technique that does not work for them fundamentally. After all, a system that arguably supports adherence to heteronormative gender performativity can be compromising for queer students.

Considering queerness in the academic sense is ultimately a means to an end. During my MFA program, I was able to help co-facilitate a queer youth program where young theatremakers were able to devise a show from scratch to highlight topics in which they wished to engage their families, friends, and local community. Devising is often unconventional because

it parts ways with traditional methods of writing and staging plays. The students we were working with had various levels of experience with acting as well. It is also worth noting that every single individual who worked on the piece was queer or trans. This open process of making theatre and performing roles allowed us all to put on a production with nothing but our experiential knowledge. Working in this way where queerness *had* to be considered showed me as a teacher/facilitator that queerness can inevitably benefit any theatrical work. The problem is that queerness as an identity, culture, and/or experience is thought of as a genre of art.

This is counterintuitive for queer people. We do not come home after a long day of being queer, take off our special queer socks, and become someone else. This is as much of who we are as heterosexuality and cisgenderism is who non-queers are. Queer theatre is not a style like Restoration theatre or Brechtian theatre. It transcends the boundaries of mimetic forms. Theoretically, if we acknowledge this, we can come to understand that queerness has a place everything. If this is true, then an actor's education must hold space for queerness, too. We must allow queer actors to fully bring themselves to the process of making theatre, just as we allow non-queer actors to do the same.

Introduction: Artistic Aims

Experiences of Queer Students in Higher Education Actor Training

The experience of queer actors in higher education is not a monolith. Sexuality and gender arguably are two identities that are only welcome into the acting process when the role has something to do with either identity category. There have been numerous instances of students who, over the course of their actor training, have experienced a denial of identity by their training, whether intentional or not, based on their queerness. The anecdotal evidence provided anonymously over the introduction of the thesis aims to paint an admittedly limited picture of where training, especially Stanislavski's system and its offshoots, fails these students precisely because they do not account for queerness. At what point does the Stanislavski system fail queer actors? How does this failure affect them? How can we begin to think of our roles as teachers in this process of failure?

Stanislavski System

The Stanislavski system, until recently, has remained fairly uncriticized over the course of American actor training's history. Currently, higher education has a focus on finding other acting techniques created by marginalized individuals with consideration for other marginalized individuals. There is, unfortunately, a shortage of such acting techniques that address the performance of realism in theatre and other media. While we envision a future beyond Stanislavski, it is equally important to look at the technique with a critical eye, especially as it comes into conversation with queer actors and their pedagogical needs. By criticizing the Stanislavski system in an academic sense, space can be created for adaptation of the system in ways that begin to consider the psychology of the queer actor. There are obstacles specifically

experienced by many queer individuals that must be acknowledged and addressed in any given acting technique if it is to ultimately consider itself universally useful, if such an acting system even exists. Through this discussion, we can start to recognize how much is left wanting by the Stanislavski system in the training of queer actors.

Camp and the Acting Classroom

One way in which trainers can learn to welcome queer interpretations into monologue and scene study is by familiarizing themselves with the arsenal of visibility at the queer individual's disposal. One such weapon of visibility is camp as theorized by Moe Meyer, who reclaimed the term from Susan Sontag's own defining theories outlined in *Notes on Camp*. The camp I refer to is inherently queer parody where a queer individual reads aspects of queerness into dominant culture. This is a practice that queer individuals have done for decades, be it noticing a queer-coded interaction between characters on a popular television series or listening to a drag artist parody a popular song in a way that uncovers queerness in unexpected places. Camp is a queer tradition that has little to do with aesthetics and more to do with subversion of heteronormativity. Noticing queerness within art does not stop at the examples I have given. There have been many instances where, as a student, I have picked up on moments in monologues or scene studies—be they big or small moments, one moment or several occurrences—where I have drawn clear parallels to queer experiences from my life. I have also recognized more universal queer themes in dominant culture's dramatic literature that are not necessarily my own experiences, as well. The playwright may not be writing with queer culture in mind, but queer artists pick up these cues, nonetheless. Camp gives permission to place queerness *upon* something, regurgitating a text, for example, and spitting out something intrinsically queer. Most people in dominant culture don't even realize this process has taken place; that is the covert beauty of camp. However, these

subtleties may be things actor-trainers pick up on. They may not realize that the difference is queer translation, but they recognize deviations from the theatre industrial complex when they see them. Plainly, a queer actor is deviating from tradition, and their teachers notice these deviations. The problem may not even be that the deviation is inherently queer, just that the actor has deviated at all! It is not how the piece is normally done. Here, the queer artist is tricked. They have been told that what is primarily needed to act well is to bring themselves and their experiences to a dramatic piece, yet when they do, they are often met with dissatisfaction from their trainers. In fact, one of the most integral parts of themselves, their queerness, becomes undesirable for employment. They learn traumatically that the name of the audition game is how well they can be what someone is looking, which may mean suppressing one's identity, because what is most often looked for is certainly not queer.

Queer Alternatives: Suzuki and Viewpoints

Suzuki method and the Viewpoints technique, as theorized by Mary Overlie, are alternatives to the Stanislavski system that, whether intentionally or not, take into consideration queerness as both a culture and a marginalized identity that presents unique obstacles to the embodiment of a role. Suzuki method concerns itself with the center of the body and its relation to the earth rather than being overly fascinated with the abilities of any given body. If you can breathe and shift your weight, you can participate in Suzuki method. Suzuki method ultimately develops in opposition to the concerns of modernism and the focus on the psychological inner life as chaotically accessed through spontaneity. Emphasis is placed on control, which may arguably make many queer actors feel safer.

Viewpoints is also specifically post-modernist; it concerns itself with artistic experimentation without initial judgment of the product that arises from the process. Instead, there is a re-

questioning of what we think we know artistically with a focus on noticing differences and letting it exist in conversation with other experimental discoveries. Nonhierarchical attitudes towards process are quintessential in the Viewpoints technique. Unlike heteronormative techniques of acting, Viewpoints encourages a de-construction of what we believe we know about making theatre, and re-building only after everything is taken apart and looked at with new appreciation for the materials they are. Viewpoints technique recognizes that the raw materials of theatre garner only as much value as we as artists place upon them according to what we prioritize and when.

High Art/Low Art

In all art forms, there exists a dichotomy between high art and low art. High art refers to the more socially valued products of the artistic process, and low art is the direct opposite of that. Whole mediums of art may be considered high art (sculpture, dance, painting) while others are considered low art (comics, tattoo, animation). Theatre, as a form, falls into the low art category. Yet, even within the form, there are genres of theatrical performance that are more accepted than others. Queer theatrical art, because of biases about queerness as perhaps deviant, inform where it is located on the spectrum of artistic value. The effects of the paradigm are escaped by no one until we become aware of the arbitrary values we impose on art. The discussion will lead teachers to consider how they value queer art along the spectrum of high art/low art and if the spectrum is causing unrecognized harm in their classrooms.

Theatre Industrial Complex

This term, coined in part by Nicole Brewer, seeks to name the capitalist, pro-homogenous strategies employed by actor training programs and the industry-at-large in commercial theatre

that tends to holds no space for BIPOC, queer, neurodiverse, or disabled stories and/or performers. The complex demands certain things from its keepers (i.e., anyone working in the industry); most notably, this refers to the ownership of stories and who gets to tell them. Unsurprisingly, the theatre industrial complex favors white, heterosexual, cis-gender, able-bodied, neurotypical narratives *and* performers. Audition techniques are formulated with these demographics in mind and are supported by financial capital because most Broadway shows are either looking for heteronormative performers or performers who can easily conform to heteronormativity. Those who conform are rewarded with jobs, connections, offers to study in better programs, etc. Either unaware or simply unwilling to challenge the industrial complex, actor-trainers pass down the legacy of conforming-or-else. And it works. There are many queer actors, for instance, who make a living playing non-queer characters. They even pride themselves on being a "chameleon" actor. Audiences and the industry praise these actors for it. Spectators are much more comfortable this way, tolerating queer actors on their screens and stages so long as they aren't telling queer stories. What ways can we begin to recognize the influences of the theatre industrial complex in our own classrooms and higher education at large?

Actor Trainer Awareness

First and foremost, the research here provides space for acting teachers to examine our own biases. This includes all teachers, even those who identify as queer. One of the most subtle ways we are taught to hate our queerness is through internalized, queerphobic narratives that tell us queer stories are low art, cheap, kitschy, and/or lewd. This cultural bias is pervasive in queer and non-queer communities. Secondly, subconscious distaste still exists as implicit bias and, as enlightened or refined as we think we may be, we must understand that these biases can reach

our art. If a student interprets a scene or monologue that we feel just isn't right for some reason, we should be asking ourselves why that is. Is it because the piece objectively wasn't clear in its intention? Or is it because it simply doesn't fit our expectations? Are these expectations informed by heteronormative preference demanded of us by the theatre industrial complex? How can we reframe the ways in which we think of actor training to reflect the larger, idealistic goals of the academy?

Chapter 1: Issues in Higher Education

Derek trained in a four-year undergraduate BA acting program in West Virginia. Throughout his performance classes, teachers paid expert attention to personal habits such as walking, talking, mannerisms, gestures, and so on. This is typical. Part of a performance teacher's work, be they acting, voice and speech, or movement professionals, is to help an actor extend their awareness of their own habits. By being conscious of habitual vocal and physical behaviors, an actor may make more informed character choices that are intentional and connected to the dramatic material.

However, the motivation behind Derek's critiques from his teachers felt different from cisgender, heterosexual classmates. Firstly, it was clear to Derek that his behavioral habits as an actor were a problem in his teachers' eyes. Their criticism was not an acknowledgment of Derek's physical and vocal tendencies; it was berating and shaming. Secondly, the problem was that Derek's teachers perceived a so-called "misalignment" between his identity as an assigned male at birth and the way he held his wrists. In their opinion, it was not how a "man" held his wrists…at least, not a heterosexual man. Unfortunately for Derek, any character not explicitly queer was cisgender and heterosexual. This presumption of a character's non-queerness is a

direct result of the tendency to presume heteronormative ways of performing gender as that character. Queer and non-queer trainers are guilty of heteronormativity as default interpretation.

Derek's wrists weren't the only problem. He also had a distinct way of walking that did not align with their expectations for a cisgender male. Likewise, he spoke in a higher pitch and this, too, was unacceptable. Apparently, these were feminine behaviors that had to be cut out at the very root, a kind of behavioral weed in the garden of Derek's potential to work in the entertainment industry. The message was clear: being assigned female or male at birth dictated the parameters of gender expression; what category you fell into dictated the heteronormative expectations placed upon you to perform gender on behalf of your character, and cooperation with this message equaled casting.

This was one area where Derek enjoyed some privilege. During auditions for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Derek auditioned alongside an individual who identified as non-binary for a male role in the play. The non-binary person expressed their identity by way of colorful hair and non-conforming dress daily. Due in large part to this, the role was given to Derek. The judgment of potential to play the role rested solely in the perceived ability of one actor to conform to gender normative behavior more skillfully than the other…never mind that identifying as non-binary does not void an individual of their masculinity.

Peter attended his undergraduate program in the early 2000s, majoring in musical theatre. He identified then, and still does now, as a gay man. He lived as openly gay during a time when it was not as safe to do so. Peter was lucky enough to have several role models, including two professors in the program who were openly queer, as well. Their openness helped other queer students, like Peter, to feel comfortable being themselves in their classrooms.

Peter participated in several musical theatre shows put on by the department. While performing, Peter was never made to feel like he could not be himself in the rehearsal room and there didn't seem to be any kind of heteronormative mandate that provided clear guidance on how a man or a woman should behave. Peter, in part, credits this confidence to the fact that they largely played character roles, notorious safe havens for those who wished to "queer things up."

The only moments Peter ran into issues regarding his queer identity were in straight acting classes. Sometimes, when working on a love scene with someone identifying as a woman, they would be told, "I don't believe that you really love this girl," language that Peter believes to be coded (the double meaning being, "I don't believe you're a straight man."). While these occasional comments came with smaller doses of harm, Peter recalls his undergraduate years fondly as a queer actor-in-training.

Yet, there remained a problem: throughout his training, Peter may not have had heteronormative expectations placed upon his performances by his faculty, but he still struggled with them. The culprit, strangely enough, turned out to be himself. Something in him, despite having the ideal training, experienced hesitation at that thought of putting his queerness into work beyond character acting in musicals.

Rachel, who identifies as a trans woman, went through her undergraduate training while still in the closet. Even so, trans-ness lived inside of Rachel regardless of who she told or did not tell, including herself. Rachel trained extensively in both Meisner and movement. While Rachel enjoyed Meisner she pinpointed a tenet of the technique, impulsivity, as an obstacle for her. For Rachel, and for many of us, impulsivity (the desire to act despite consequences) tends to be masculine-coded. Because of this, the more she practiced her craft, the more she had to constantly confront the contradiction between the technique and her own gender identity and

expression. The problem for her was not necessarily impulsivity itself, but a kind of impulsivity most notably associated with cisgender, straight men.

In her movement training, Rachel took a special topics course focused on period styles (think Restoration), where actors would learn how to carry themselves in accordance with the time period in which the play was written. At one point, the instructor asked the students to separate into two groups based on gender for the purpose of an exercise. The gender binary is very commonplace in historical acting practices, according to Rachel's experience in the classroom and as a movement professional. Rachel faced a dilemma: although she was still figuring out her own gender identity, she was inevitably relegated to the men's side of the room. For the first time in her life, she truly felt what it was like to be "on the wrong side." This binary would follow Rachel as she attempted to score acting roles that reflected her gender identity at the time, too.

Through these experiences, it was clear to Rachel that one of the biggest certainties in her life at that time was that her acting teachers were not equipped to cater their pedagogies to those actors who were not on the binary. She recognized that, on some level, they knew what to do with trans individuals in terms of casting them or grouping them by gender during class activities. Yet if the individual actor did not identify *themselves* by way of a binary, they would be stuck, waiting for a moment where their teacher would fully consider their gender identity, that never would, like Estragon and Vladimir.

During a sophomore acting class in my undergraduate theatre program, I was assigned a scene from Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* in which my character, Chris Keller, was slated to kiss his love interest, Annie. Chris is presumed to be masculine-of-center while Annie is presumed to be feminine-of-center. The parts were traditionally played by a cisgender man as the masculine

character and a cisgender woman as the feminine character. Because of my gender expression alone, I was assigned to be the male character, the aggressor of the kiss in my acting teacher's vision. Although there was a very brief, one-time acknowledgment that stage intimacy can be scary, my teacher never bothered to consider if I was okay playing along with his heteronormative vision for Chris and Annie's kiss scene. For whatever reason, be it his assumption that I was cisgender or heterosexual, or some deeper complicity in an industrial system I was far too inexperienced to fully comprehend, it was not a thought that crossed his mind. He saw man, he saw woman, and thus, he saw the possibility for Chris and Annie.

And so, I had my first ever kiss with a woman in my entire life. It was a breaking point for me in my beginning career as an actor. As someone who was just gaining their footing as a gay person, there was a kind of trauma hidden deep in this moment for me. My heart tried to leave little red flags on the pages of the scene, urging me to speak up for myself, but I didn't listen. I couldn't. My teacher at the time had a reputation for asking things of us, and receiving what he asked for. He was the authority figure in the classroom, the professional actor, the voice for the larger world waiting for us after graduation. The weight of such a mantle was more than enough to keep me from voicing trepidation. Instead, like any actor under an unspoken ultimatum to conform or die (professionally speaking), I went through with it.

I thought this was a win on my part. The discomfort I felt would surely be a necessary evil as a queer actor. If I did not swallow the pill now, I would always struggle to find a place for myself in an art form I needed like oxygen. I kept swallowing the same pill for the rest of my undergraduate training. The worst part about it was that I came out of that program with nothing to show for it except an artistically stifling discomfort about my queer body, my queer voice, my queer mannerisms and gestures, and the noticeable absence of a space at the table of my acting

process. At the same time, I dreaded being jammed into the heteronormative box of Straight Cisgender Male Ingenue Number 3,758 for the rest of my days.

It would be easy to blame on my younger self. Perhaps I should have been more outspoken about what I wanted. As educators, the fact remains that we will receive learners at a variety of stages in their journeys to self-discovery. There will be some students who are happy to tell us what they need, and who have been supported in doing so from a young age. However, there are just as many learners who will not have the language to put words to their experiences. They will struggle to know what they want, who they want to be, and what they want to say as artists. This goes double for the queer individual, who is always in transition.

All of these stories exhibit, to a certain degree, the special problems that queer actors face in their training within higher education settings. Derek faced outright prejudice from his faculty members. Peter could not get past his own blocks and invite his queerness into his work, despite being surrounded by love and acceptance. Rachel slipped through the cracks of her teachers' pedagogies and remained stuck for some time on her artistic journey. I was never able to muster the courage to self-identify. I question if it would have even mattered if I was able to identify myself to my teacher as queer. This is not to say that he would not accept me; rather, the industry would not accept me, and he was merely the messenger.

There are hundreds of stories like these. One anonymous interviewee for an article in *The Guardian* speaks of their time in drama school as an actor (Kheraj, 2021). During their education, they were told by a teacher that their voice was "too gay." Their vocal behavior resulted in one-on-one sessions with their voice teachers to, as the interviewee refers to it, "de-

gay" their voice. They even paralleled the experience to a kind of "conversion therapy." Ever since then, their main goal has been to shove their queerness away, to bury it deep and expel it from their work as an actor.

Even accomplished queer actors have made it a point to mention the gaps in training that swallow queer potential whole. In a roundtable for *The Hollywood Reporter*, a group of trans actors gathered to discuss their experiences in Hollywood ("Variety's Transgender in Hollywood Roundtable," 00:00:00 – 01:00:32). Part of the questioning during the segment led to a moment where three actors, Laverne Cox, Trace Lysette, and Brian Michael Smith, highlighted a significant absence of queerness in their work over years of acting classes. It was only until they found ways to embrace and incorporate their queerness into their craft that they experienced new levels of personal success in the art they created. Brian Michael Smith even said that accepting his transness in a training environment was critical for his success as an actor.

This logic can easily be applied to other queer actors: to fully know a role is to fully know ourselves, first. Identity plays a big part in American actor training. Acknowledging this, it makes sense that Brian was experiencing a severe block by refusing to bring his transness into his work, and that he felt stifled. One common theme across all of the stories here are moments of artistic stifling, and what seems to be clear is that personal identity is most often welcome to the work when it is heterosexual and cisgender. This may be in part because the heterosexual, cisgender intersectional identity is treated as the default in theatre, and in life and identities not in alignment with the default are denied access to the work. It is not that queer roles are absent from acting classes, for instance, that require queerness in the preparation of the role. Rather, it is that queerness is only seen as an aesthetically valid choice *when* the role is queer. However,

queerness is not a personality feature that can be channeled or tapped into for one role or another, then put aside. It is an experiential filter through which all stories pass.

Anyone with empathy is capable of connecting with the stories shared and doing something about this. As teachers in education systems with clear guidelines for creating diverse, inclusive, accessible, and equitable learning environments, it is within our best interest to take action and create change. Wanting to do something requires first that we know exactly what it is we're up against, and each one of the scenarios here has specific queer issues that require further exploration. These problems have eluded queer and non-queer teachers alike, so the obstacles cannot be understated.

Derek's scenario involved an outright assault on difference in behavior from the heterosexual norm. What is important to note is that, most likely, these teachers were not even fully aware of the behaviors they were policing. They saw a student not meeting expectations, and the necessary corrections as logical steps forward. Regardless of the intention, Derek left the program with an understanding that his habits, which are tied to his queer identity, are an obstacle to acting truthfully. In essence, his queerness becomes the enemy to his passion.

Peter found himself in quite the ideal undergraduate program for a queer person in a decade not yet in step with diversity and inclusivity to the level we enjoy presently. He had wonderful teachers and wonderful opportunities performing in academic theatre with only minor queerphobic incidents here and there. Yet, Peter still struggled to merge his queerness and his acting process. For Peter, he needed an environment which was more intentional than circumstantial.

Rachel, in the process of discovering her trans identity, found herself very much uncertain of which side of the room worked best for her. Unfortunately, the performance pedagogies Rachel ran into via undergraduate classes did not account for gender identities along the spectrum. Instead, she had to grapple with the binary's tight hold around acting and movement techniques when she should have been able to enjoy the same creative safety and freedom as her cisgender, heterosexual peers.

Arguably one of the simpler scenarios, I was never given the chance to intentionally claim my queer identity in my performance classes. There was no part of me that was comfortable doing so, and any potential to feel less afraid through my learning environment was absent. It was simply something that was not on my acting teacher's radar. Therefore, I spent the years of my undergraduate program questioning if it was even relevant to address my queerness in my acting, to find a middle ground where both could comfortably exist. All I knew is that heteronormative masculinity was an itchy sweater I kept having to put on again and again. For so long I went back and forth with myself, theorizing how I could make the complicated relationship work. In one moment, acting is the greatest discovery of my life. In another moment, it is my worst nightmare.

A big lesson from these scenarios is the location of the blocks queer actors face when engaging with performance techniques. On the one hand, there are internal concerns. Coming into the classroom with gender baggage, no matter where it comes from, spells trouble for the actor. On the other hand, there are external concerns. For one, faculty may be directly involved in the harm caused to queer students, whether intentional or not. The language used is especially important when bringing awareness to certain habits in these given scenarios. Secondly, intentional space is not being created for students to identify as queer. Thirdly, present-day

performance practices tend to be set up for actors who settle comfortably within the gender binary. This inevitably results in slippage where non-binary, non-conforming, or fluid individuals are held at arm's length. Again, this is not out of disdain; rather, teachers may genuinely not know how to approach fitting queer individuals who aren't on the binary, sexually or based on gender, into their pedagogical practices.

Under these conditions, finding growth as an actor while queer is exceedingly difficult. There are some examples that can be pointed out. Zachary Quinto, Matt Boomer, and Neil Patrick Harris are a few names that come to mind. However, arguably, each of these actors have innate qualities that lend themselves to heteronormative expectations placed upon acting. While they live their lives openly queer, I question whether the success they have achieved is truly indicative of the queer actor's experience overall. Many of us do not naturally settle into leading man qualities, much of which is informed by performative masculinity. This notion can be equally applied to the female ingenue. Femininity, once filtered through queerness, can look very different from the performative femininity expected of those playing "female roles."

There are a few ideas of gender at play which may be informing performance pedagogical practices unconsciously. In *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler, the author states that "It would be wrong to think that the discussion of 'identity' ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that 'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility (*Gender Trouble*, 22)." To have an intelligible gender is critical in the discussion of performance classes because intelligibility lies in the beholder. Gender intelligibility exists insofar as the teacher in question is concerned. Therefore, the teacher can only help you as far as they can understand you. The limitations of the teacher's knowledge of gender identity, specifically,

means inadvertent limitations upon their students who are gender variant. What is understood is acknowledged and dealt with; the rest is ignored. In Derek and Rachel's scenarios, this resulted in resentment towards Derek's "feminine" behaviors and Rachel's internal ultimatum.

Gender intelligibility, therefore, exists as a prerequisite for actors-in-training. The onus, in part, is placed upon the actor to find the box in which they will be stuffing themselves for the duration of their careers. Again, the teacher is merely the messenger. Teachers take on varying levels of responsibility when it comes to helping the actor pick out their box. The boxes are also made within a "heterosexual matrix," meaning that these pre-generated sizes are products of a heterosexist, heterosexual system. Therefore, cisgender, heterosexual, and even some queer actors, have an easier time conforming to the phenomenon of typecasting; they know how to meet the demands of heteronormativity, whether by innate comfort or focused practice.

Does this mean that teachers operating around gender intelligibility only sufficiently deal with the "persons" whose gender identities they recognize and understand? To be clear, signing a document committing to foster diversity and inclusivity does not immediately result in recognition and understanding of diverse students. If so, this means that gender intelligibility as a concept must be challenged. Sometimes, our students may not even fully recognize or understand themselves and the extent to which their gender breaks from the binary or is in total opposition from the identity they thought of themselves as all their lives. Butler goes on to state that, "Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time (*Gender Trouble* 22)." This suggests that gender identity and expression is always in transition. Queer people are those who have the courage to ask questions of themselves about their gender identities, knowing that this could lead to them breaking from the normative. Instruction based on binary was not made for us. Therefore, scenarios like mine occur, where the

onus was placed upon me to make it known that I am queer. Only then will instruction be thought of more consciously to support and celebrate queerness. Or, in the case of Peter, the actor-in-training may spend years in self-reflection, questioning their artistic abilities, never being able to put to words their dissonance. Instead, they conclude that their art is no good, and they're not worth much as an actor.

Butler later clarifies the notion of gender performativity in their book *Bodies That Matter*. An oft-quoted section, and one relevant for this discussion, says, "In no sense can it be concluded that the part of gender that is performed is therefore the 'truth' of gender… (*Bodies That Matter,* 234)." This is in reference to earlier writing within the same chapter this quote is pulled from that refers to gender performativity as "citational." This means that gender is always referencing something in order to make itself clear, to signify femininity or masculinity through what is performative. While Butler makes the distinction between performance and performativity, I would argue that theatre, because it needs to be more intentional, *does* think about performativity in relation to performance. How performativity can be leveraged is part of the conversation, whether actors realize we're inviting it into the work or not. What happens, though, is that the conversation tends to stop before it becomes a critique on gender performativity. We engage in performativity only to recognize what behaviors signal gender, use them for that purpose only, and then end the conversation. What queering potential is there, though, to put performativity in conversation with itself through the creation of a role? Queer actors potentially start to think about performativity, the arbitrary relationship between a hip sway and femininity, or a deep voice and masculinity. Yet being able to include this thought process practically is something that has yet to happen widely.

There are clear issues performance educators must now face head on. The easy road would be blaming the student for refusing to shed their "bad" habits or simply not having the talent to make it in the theatre industry. In the spirit of equitable learning environments, though, performance educators must now call into question their pedagogical practices and the validity of those practices in training queer or trans students. In order to do so, we must understand first and foremost that intentional pedagogy is the way forward, not performative. Much like de-colonizing the syllabus or the curriculum, there also must be a decoupling of the gender binary and actor training in all its forms. This will only happen through honest and open exploration into the legacy of the gender binary in American actor training, beginning with the source of it all: Konstantin Stanislavski.

Chapter 2: The Stanislavski Legacy, A Binary Story

The Group Theatre's endeavors into psychological realism ultimately resulted in the proliferation of Konstantin Stanislavski's system in the United States. Whether a fan of Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, or Sanford Meisner, the source material for their techniques can be traced back to Stanislavski's acting philosophies; they have all cited their practices as separate understandings of his teachings. The prevalence of Stanislavski in American actor training is so pervasive, many higher education institutions are now actively searching for faculty members with experience in acting techniques that are explicitly "non-Stanislavski based."

The aim of the following argument is to critically examine Stanislavski's system and encourage responsible, more informed use of it in the future. To do so, concern will be placed not upon the symptoms of the "system" (i.e., the magic "if," actions, bits), but on the very framework considered contingent for any actor using Stanislavski's methods.

Stanislavski states in his now seminal text, *An Actor Prepares*, that "…it is always best when an actor is completely taken over by the play. Then, independent of his will, he lives the role, without noticing *how* he is feeling, not thinking about *what* he is doing, and so everything comes out spontaneously, subconsciously (Stanislavski 18)." Later, he cites one of the primary goals of his acting technique is the "…subconscious creation through the actor's conscious psychotechnique." Through some technique that is by conscious will, actionable steps an actor can take in the process of preparing a role, they will presumably be able to enter a kind of subconscious state that may or may not be aroused by the conscious technique. By these means, a connected performance may very well occur where the actor is only conscious of their actions and behaviors insofar as they need to be to not walk off the stage or run into a set piece. What is ultimately prized here is spontaneity. An actor is not mechanically choosing their tactics and inserting them into the play in a way that is representational, but instead, they respond in a way that is natural and unplanned simply by making themselves vulnerable to the text by way of the "conscious psychotechnique."

Stanislavski goes on to add another layer onto the fundamental nature of his technique: "…our prime task is not only to portray the life of a role externally, but above all to create the inner life of the character and of the whole play, bringing our own individual feelings to it, endowing it with all the features of our own personality" (Stanislavski 20). Most off-shoots of the Stanislavski system in America center the experience of the actor, their own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and opinions, as the starting point for their techniques. This source material, inspired by the actor's "personality" is the means by which spontaneity is ultimately achieved. For anyone, the demands of the Stanislavski system are deeply personal. Never mind having to be vulnerable on stage in front of an audience to serve a character, it was also a necessity in

Stanislavski's eyes, and those of his interpreters, that actors bare their own souls in the service of the character, too. This is a tall order for anyone. The psychological presuppositions are often flippantly regarded by performance teachers as "not therapy," yet the successful Stanislavski actor is the one who seemingly is comfortable with divulging the most about themselves. The one who is comfortable "going there" until some arbitrary line is reached, drawn by the teacher to denote what is actor preparation and what is "therapy."

About acting as the "art of experiencing," Stanislavski believes it to be "thinking, wanting, striving, behaving truthfully, in logical sequence in a human way, within the character, and in complete parallel to it (Stanislavski 20)." Questions follow: What is truthful in the context of "behaving truthfully?" How is something recognized as the truth in acting? Who gets to choose what is truthful? What about logic? Who defines the logic of a given scene, monologue, or play? When are we, as actors, being illogical in our interpretations? For answers, look to the way one experiences the "art of experiencing."

When we watch actors perform, what we are digesting as viewers are behaviors, gestures, mannerisms, vocal qualities, body language, and more. Things that can be directly seen or heard. In *Consciousness and the World,* Brian O'Shaughnessy defines this as the cognitive phenomenon of perception, where "perceiving is of *things* rather than truths or facts or states of affairs. Perception is as such of objects, events, qualities, and relations" (O'Shaughnessy 332). Therefore, when we witness a theatrical performance, we are first and foremost perceiving the performance as an "event." O'Shaughnessy distinguishes perceptual experiences from thought-experiences, which come more so from the witnessing of the text as it is spoken rather than the speech patterns themselves.

O'Shaughnessy further establishes what they refer to as “propositional objects,” or objects capable of generating judgments or opinions based on the person perceiving the object. There are simple objects, such as a whistle or a domino, and there are complex objects made of several parts such as a tree or, for the purpose of this argument, a human actor. The author goes on to qualify perception, saying “…the full interpretational variety of seeing of a complex object cannot occur without the simultaneous occurrence of beliefs concerning the structure of that object” (O’Shaughnessy 323). Therefore, in the case of perceiving a human performer, there is a two-step sequence of events that happen. At a simple level, we perceive that the actor is acting. Audiences see the body move, hear the voice work. Then, the context for what is perceived floods in. This is the “propositional” nature of the event, where, based on what is seen or heard, judgments are then made.

Truth, by which we mean perception, is one product when an acting teacher witnesses a performance with their reliable senses, and engenders judgments based upon what has been witnessed. When Stanislavski refers to “behaving truthfully,” he envisions a kind of truthfulness that is universal.…except that there is no possible way to perceive truthfully. Meaning is generated through individual perceptual experiences, and the propositions generated are as varied as the number of perceivers in the room. There are, then, multiple versions of the “truth” as it pertains to acting. Yet, when approaching a text, actors and their teachers tend to believe that there is one truth, a universal truth, within the text that everyone is trying to take stabs at. While this leaves room for interpretations, they tend to exist within a limited, creative bracket. If interpretations arise that are outside of this bracket, they do not reflect the “truth.”

If we return to the idea of the gender binary and heteronormative expectations embedded deeply within individual behavior, there is a heteronormative “truth” that many teachers take on

without recognizing this has happened. This perception of performance in a sense disallows choices that do not align with heteronormativity. It is simply not the "truth" for Chris Keller in *All My Sons* to walk with a sway in his hips. This is illogical according to heteronormative perception. A man walks like a man. A woman walks like a woman.

Let's go back to the Chris Keller example. Suppose I, as an actor, made the choice to give Chris Keller a sway in his hips as he sauntered up to Annie. From a heteronormative standpoint, perception will work on the actor as follows: there is the perception that a masculine-presenting individual is walking across the space with a sway to his hips. The heteronormative perceiver engenders the performance with judgments regarding the misalignment between body expression and behavior. A masculine body is walking femininely. This is not within the bracket of "truth" regarding Chris Keller.

Again, this is operating within the parameter that the actor is making a conscious choice as opposed to resting on a habit unknowingly. It is clear based on the treatment of Derek in his undergraduate program that stereotypically feminine intention placed upon a masculine-of-center body is not a valid choice from the start. In the other scenarios, there are no opportunities to explore queering "truth," either because those opportunities have not been intentionally built into pedagogical practices or because an actor has not been assured that this kind of "truth" is valid in their work.

Harkening back to the mention of spontaneity and subconscious choices as a result of the Stanislavski system, there is a clear hesitation that goes beyond the natural difficulty of being vulnerable about one's personal life. For queer people, acting upon spontaneity, revealing our personalities, beliefs, opinions, behaviors, and other potentially telling signals of queerness is dangerous. Many of us have spent lifetimes attempting to become comfortable with showing the

world our true selves. The process of stepping into a role and "everything comes out spontaneously, subconsciously," is directly counterintuitive to our internal messaging that tells us to hide who we are. This makes engaging in the Stanislavski systems and its numerous branches of understanding exceedingly difficult for queer individuals.

Stanislavski himself acknowledges the fickle nature of the subconscious when he says, "Immediately the subconscious, which is apprehensive, fears it will be attacked and takes refuge once more in its secret depths (Stanislavski 19)." This is referring to the moment an actor becomes disconnected from their subconscious spontaneity. As challenging as it is to get in touch with the subconscious by its very nature, the queer actor must wrestle with the question of if it is even safe to do so in the first place. The issue at hand becomes larger than nailing down the "conscious psychotechnique." There is a level of safety that must be engendered in the learning environment for queerness to take part in the acting process, and the queer actor-in-training is often left to their own devices in order to make this happen.

What we're faced with is an equity problem. While it is an uncomfortable problem for anyone to do the work needed to welcome the "psychotechnique" into their practice and tap into a natural, unconscious spontaneity, the problem seems insurmountable as a queer individual who may not wish to behave heteronormatively. The queer community is an expansive one. Not everyone will run into this problem; some of us have had to learn, or may actively wish, to conform to heteronormative standards. Yet, for anyone who expresses their non-cisgender, non-heterosexual identities in ways which break from normative behavior and seeks to bring it into the making of all kinds of theatre, there is a clear disadvantage.

Beyond isolated gestures or mannerisms is interpretation of text and character. Perhaps, as an actor, it is my understanding that Chris Keller is a closeted gay man in the 1940's

navigating the mistakes of his father and the impact of those mistakes on his immediate family. If this is so, and this conscious artistic choice has colored the rest of my preparation as an actor, then maybe I would decide to incorporate a kind of walk for Chris that is queer-coded. The delivery of his lines might become rich with queer subtext. This is queer interpretation at its core. Queer students may not ever grasp the opportunity to read their beautiful, valid identities into dramatic literature the same way non-queer students get to if their habits are marked and berated from the beginning of their training as unnecessary or unwanted.

And queer students do have their own interpretations of dramatic texts. In part, queerness as a culture comes out of the concept of "queer temporality." Jack Halberstam addresses forgotten temporalities and geographies of the global and local queer in *In a Queer Time and Place*. Halberstam theorizes that "queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification (Halberstam 1)." One of the more brilliant examples of queering the use of space/geography given by Halberstam involves XXX-rated theatres in New York City, in the years prior to the development of Times Square. Various individuals from different classes in society would come together in these venues for erotic purposes, completely contradicting the standard impulse of capitalism to maintain clear dividing lines between social classes. Similarly contradictory are the ways in which queer people often choose to spend their time, especially in relation to societal expectations born of heteronormativity. These "queer temporalities" influence when and how queers plan families, how they spend their time, especially as we think of perceived mature ways of spending time, when they get married, and so on. Queer people may sometimes be thought of as immature because of how they choose to spend their time, especially as they age. Many queer people

choose never to have children or choose never to get married. Instead, they might spend their time going out to participate in leisure activities at night during the week when their non-queer counterparts are staying in. This is in direct opposition to the idea of waking up early, go to bed early, thought of as necessary for child-rearing societies. Queer ways of spending time challenge normative social narratives of family, love, and maturity.

Halberstam states shortly after that "…part of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description…has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space (Halberstam 1-2)." Queer people often find themselves in unique positions, because they exist outside of the paradigms of capitalist, heteronormative society (though they are not immune to the effects of it), and are able to build lives for themselves that can look very different from their heterosexual, cisgender peers. Perhaps they do not feel the same burden that their non-queer peers do to have children or settle down and get married before buying a house, etc. Endless possibilities may result from exploring these "alternative relations to time and space." Whatever the possibilities may be, they are not easily recognized by people who do not queer their uses of space and time.

It is important to note that, according to Halberstam, "…all kinds of people, especially in postmodernity, will and do opt to live outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production (Halberstam 10)." This is especially so as one thinks of feminist aims in the wake of postmodernity, which may inspire non-queer individuals to take a cue from queer counterparts and wait a few more years than their parents did before having children or consider not getting married at all. These uses of time and space most certainly come up in dramatic texts. Halberstam cites *Waiting for Godot*, an obvious theatrical reference for alternative uses of time. The absurdity of the time spent waiting for someone who never comes

in the play in part takes on this quality because it is in juxtaposition to the viewer's sense of time as influenced by global or local capitalism. Queer time and space seek to exist outside of capitalist pressures, too. It should come as no surprise, then, that adaptations may crop up regarding a temporally queer *Waiting for Godot*. Queer interpretations can arise from any moment where a queer individual recognizes something of themselves or their community in text not intentionally written for them. Believing that a play like *All My Sons* was never meant for them, the possibility of queer interpretation is squandered, never given a chance. In this process, queer individuals, whether by external or internal reasons, are denied partaking in their heritage of queer subversion known as camp.

Chapter 3: Queer Alternatives

Part 1 - Camp

Simply, camp is "queer parody (Meyer 1)." To be clear, this definition, which originates from Moe Meyer's *Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp*, is in opposition to Susan Sontag's straight, cis-washed assertion that camp is a "style" or "sensibility." What is left after these two opposing notions of camp are parsed apart is an "oppositional critique embodied in the signifying practices that processually constitute queer identities (Meyer 1)." The "oppositional critique" at play here is one directly against compulsory cisgender heterosexuality as the "default." A distinction should be made about the practices of signification in that Meyer believed queerness to be much more than the sexual acts one participates in. Instead, there are queer-coded signals which make queerness visible to the "dominant culture" that is heteronormativity. These signals are part of an identity that is always in the process of being created.

Meyer goes on to say that, "queerness contains the knowledge that social identities, including those of sex, but especially those of gender, are always accompanied by some sort of public signification in the form of specific enactments, embodiments, or speech acts…" (Meyer 3). Queerness and its visible markers extend beyond witnessing physical intimacy between individuals of similar gender identities and the "nonsexual" facets of queerness nearly always take priority over the sexual. Ways of walking, talking, and gesturing become the grounds on which queers "constitute queer identities." In fact, "postures, gestures, costume and dress, and speech acts…" are the very source from which queer identities arise (Meyer 3). Being queer does not automatically make everything you do an act of queerness, but rather the performative signals of queerness make queer identities visible. These acts rely on repetition to signal queerness and a seemingly harmless critique or comment by an acting teacher about queer speech patterns, vocal pitch, or a sashaying walk can, therefore, threaten the very methods in which queerness creates itself. Unwanted critiques are intentionally oppositional, critical of compulsory heterosexuality, and dismissive of the gender binary. When the act of performing one's queerness transitions from the subconscious to the conscious state, this is when queer performativity becomes parodic.

"[P]arody is an intertextual manipulation of multiple conventions…" (Meyer 7). Meyer was clear about the kind of parody camp utilizes in the process of enacting itself, and it is important to mention that comedy is not a pre-requisite to create queer parody. It can be funny, but it is not necessary. Instead, the process begins with an original text with which a queer actor (someone who is partaking in the act of being or doing, not a performing artist) comes int o contact. This queer individual serves as a kind of adaptor, taking the original text and queering it with all their "enactments, embodiments, and speech acts," so that by the end of the process,

what has come into being is a new text entirely. Meyer also believed camp to only be accessible to queer individuals, meaning that any attempts at camp by non-queer individuals would result in queer appropriation that dominant culture has come to recognize as camp but are actually misguided attempts to reproduce Sontag's "style" or "sensibility." It is only through the interaction of a queer performer and text that camp comes to be. "Therefore Camp cannot be said to reside in objects, but is clearly a way of reading, of writing, and of doing that originates in the 'Camp eye,' the 'eye' being nothing less than the agent of Camp" (Meyer 9).

A final feature of camp is its subversive quality. Meyer believes that "dominant culture," which is a term that represents bourgeois compulsory heterosexuality and cisgender identity, is the authority on generating meaning in society. The dominant culture also believes that the queer community does not have the power to unseat them from their metaphorical throne. Instead, to claim rights to signification, the process in which meaning is generated, queers must enact camp to pass along queer identity through social visibility. By taking a form of media, enacting camp upon it, and generating a "parodic alternative," queer individuals can hypothetically release this new alternative back into "dominant culture" in a way where that very same culture does not recognize the queerness coded within the new product. Thus, "dominant culture" accepts the alternative as their own creation. While this does not seem ideal, it is a way in which queer individuals are allowed to participate in discourse they otherwise would not be welcome to.

In the case of queer performers in higher education settings, space must be made for camp, especially if it is the strongest tactic by which queer performers may generate meaning. While non-queer individuals may not be permitted to enact camp, they are able to recognize and appreciate camp once the process is made known to them. I have witnessed undergraduate and graduate students within my department at Virginia Commonwealth University—who do and do

not identify as queer—be able to cite examples of camp. These identity-constituting behaviors that are shunned in queer actors are the same behaviors queer individuals rely on to be visible to the world. Queer actors, myself included, recognize these coded behaviors in the theatre, whether they have been intentionally written for the queer experience or not, precisely because camp has been successful as a "subversive operation." Thus, queer actors can tap into narratives of plays or interpretations of characters not accessible to their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts.

Camp is a sophisticated process; perhaps it must be in order to survive. It utilizes subversion expertly, and the queer subculture transmitted by camp has the last laugh despite "dominant culture" believing otherwise. Yet, due to influences outside of the queer community's immediate control, the product of the camp process is not often looked at with the same respect. Subject matter regarding queerness, especially themes of a sexual nature, are looked upon as countercultural, tawdry, cheap, and lewd. Instead, camp is a very old tactic containing historical and artistic value. Part of bridging the gap between process and product is recognizing, even in small ways, the deep traces of camp in daily life.

Cardi B is a perfect example of camp. Not the artist herself, but a specific speech act she has become iconic for. Cardi B will often say the over-emphasized word, "Okuuuurt." If the lineage of the word is traced, there is televised usage of this same speech act on RuPaul's Drag Race, originally popularized among the queer community by Laganja Estranja, a drag queen who competed on season six of the reality television competition. Yet, even then, the word goes farther back in history. Ballroom culture was the original birthplace of the word. In this case, queer people of color from the ballroom scene enacted camp upon white queer people who, technically, had more privilege. This shows that even among queer people of different intersecting identities, "dominant culture" is a relative term. For many in the community, social

visibility engendered by camp is subverted through other demographics in the queer community with more access to privilege and generating meaning; this, in turn, gets passed higher up the hierarchy. Therefore, intentional awareness must be paid to the process so often taken for granted and the fruits such a tactic bears for the queer individual.

Part 2 – Suzuki Method

The Suzuki method of acting is another potential queer alternative for actors. Japanese director Suzuki Tadashi realized that there was not daily training for actors in the same sense that musicians or dancers train every day. In certain theatrical forms where singing and dancing are required, there were methods to support those tasks, but not one for acting. He decided that the company of actors on his stage would need to train their physical instrument as other performers do. From this need, the Suzuki method was created.

To get a sense of the groundwork laid before the actual technique, it is useful to examine Suzuki's view on theatre as a jumping off point. Suzuki writes that, "…it is the actor's live human energy, what I like to call 'animal energy,' that has sustained the social and cultural survival of theatre for thousands of years (Suzuki 34)." Clearly, this kind of energy is of great importance to the director and his technique. Reading this, the word "animal" is worth noting. The implication is a primal, maybe even primitive, idea of what it is to be a human being who exerts energy in pursuit of something with great intention. The term also has no gender connotation. Arguably, when words like primal and primitive come up, there are masculine associations, especially for Americans. However, the identity of "animal" is one shared across genders and sexual identities. In theory, this energy is woven into the fabric of each human being, waiting to be accessed in service to theatrical performance. This language is significant; a

queer person who reads this phrase may notice a universal concept that does not include the psychological obstacles of Stanislavski's system.

Instead, the method offers to lift acting approaches out of the obsession with everyday life. Accordingly, "…when an actor begins to move through his performance, he is not going through an everyday emotional or psychological experience, but rather the euphoria and revelation of being onstage in an artificial environment (Suzuki 37)." Here, there is a clear recognition of the stage as a place for heightened imagination. The behaviors or speech patterns from everyday people actors and audiences in America tend to fawn over are, in fact, only one, albeit limited, option for the actor. There is a shift of focus that allows for actors to come as they are and concern themselves with the interaction they have with circumstances they know to be fabricated as opposed to hitting certain behavioral marks which often involve a gender performative nature that is equally as arbitrary as the "artificial environment" that is the stage. The understanding is that this only works when an actor brings themselves entirely in conversation with theatre and its challenges.

Suzuki reinforces this analysis by stating that, "The actor's job is not to return to an everyday reality in acting, but rather to use his contemporary life as a springboard for discovering an alternate reality or fiction (Suzuki 38)." Furthermore, speaking about actors Suzuki says, "His method does not demand a recreation of known experiences pulled from our socially repressed quotidian life, but rather a surprising discovery of unknown, subconscious phenomena that are deeply personal and unique (Suzuki 38)." What Suzuki advocates for is parallel to camp in essence. Thinking of a queer actor, they are free to use the subject matter of their lives including gender and sex, and their manifestations, resulting behaviors, and so on. This is critical, taking priority over the obsession with "quotidian life." Suzuki recognizes that

something like gender performativity at its core is surface level. These are behaviors put on by actors to mimic mundane psychology of men or women, respectively. It is important to note that Suzuki still focuses on the subconscious as a topic of interest, but the way in which that is reached is through an embrace of the self. There is no need to put on behaviors that are not one's own in the process of discovery. Rather, a student in all their queerness may use their very same identity from which to make art. It is demanded of them, frankly. Bring yourself, not "quotidian" notions of who you think you are or what someone wants to see. "…Insisting that the primary goal of acting is to make the human behind the language tangible tremendously confines its potential" (Suzuki 42). Whether someone believes that Chris Keller might feasibly walk with a sway in his hips is de-centralized from being the primary concern (even though swaying hips is obviously not a behavior that transcends gender identity). The importance is now on seeing beyond our individual perceptions of tangibility in human behavior. In fact, there is no real concern with where "tangible" behavior comes from. In this case, the term "tangible" could be interchanged with "believable." If believability comes from a sense of the daily habits of human beings, that is merely one interpretation of believability in Suzuki's viewpoint. This completely expands the possibilities beyond limited views of cisgender male versus cisgender female versus transgender male and so on. Even if a character is a cisgender, heterosexual male, the Suzuki method challenges base, initial interpretations of what it means to be someone with that identity. It pushes the actor passed notions of gender performativity and into something far more universal.

"Since actors embody the essence of the theatre, acting must celebrate the inner states of the body" (Suzuki 46). The physicality of the Suzuki method often results in the technique being miscategorized as "physical theatre." Yet the idea of approaching the subconscious through

something more controllable like the body still exists in Suzuki method, much like the intentions of the Stanislavski system. The important difference is how the body is incorporated. Stanislavski's system focuses on everyday habits, either bodily or vocally, that are nothing more than performance to begin with. To reach these "inner states," starting with "quotidian" behavior would be counterproductive since this behavior is, according to Butler, performative enactments to signal identity rather than choices which have manifested through the stimulation of something deeper within the human body. Suzuki method, on the other hand, does just that. The body is not assigned value based on how closely it can mimic pedestrian behavior; instead, the method engages with athletic practices to hone processes like "energy production, breath calibration," and "center of gravity control" (Suzuki 57). These processes are concepts arguably not restricted by the gender binary. Queer actors approaching Suzuki work likely will not feel the same heavy decisions about which parts of their identity to leave behind for the sake of the work and which parts of themselves are okay to invite into the acting technique. Much like "animal energy," these features of Suzuki method connect the actor with something older than the concept of a gender binary.

Suzuki method, taking notes from Noh and Kabuki theatre, "struggles to create a kind of eternal flower or continuity…(Suzuki 53)." The eternal flower metaphor calls back to an earlier comparison in *Culture is the Body* where Suzuki recognizes a problem with many modern acting techniques. These techniques are often either centered around a theatrical genre (like Stanislavski's system, which is heavily influenced by realism) or do not make daily, rigorous demands of actors in the same way that dance or music training makes of its practitioners. Both produce results incapable of standing the test of time. Especially techniques hinged upon theatrical genres, the focus is on the demands of a fad. Even behaviors that signal masculinity or

femininity in contemporary times are not the same to those behaviors used to do the very same thing throughout history. If the Stanislavski system is concerned with outward product, a misunderstanding of the system to begin with, it will miss the larger point of acting as a technique. Suzuki method, theoretically, seeks to get at impulses that are "eternal," that transcend perceptions of daily life as is, including what we currently believe about gender and the ways in which bodies who take on certain gender identities behave. There is a blissful, physical freedom waiting within Suzuki method for queer actors who may be increasingly frustrated with prescriptive acting choices projected upon characters based solely on gender.

A final distinction should be made between the Suzuki method practiced by the Suzuki Company of Toga and the SITI company in the United States. My experiential knowledge comes from the latter company, who has worked tirelessly to support the Suzuki method in America. During my lessons with the actor-instructors who facilitate virtual classes on Suzuki and Viewpoints technique, they made it clear that SCOT may occasionally offer ways of completing certain exercises that differ based on binary gender. For instance, I was told that the exercise known as Basic #5, in which actors travel across a room by engaging in different kinds of stomps or glides of the feet, offers those who identify as female different ways of placing their feet depending on how they are travelling. In my experiences with SITI company, my instructors of Suzuki have never made us choose, or given gender-based modifications, when completing exercises. The concept of gender-based modifications in feet placement was brought up briefly, more so as a recounting of historical practice within SCOT rather than an option built into the method.

Likewise, there is a now dated belief that Suzuki method or its instructors do not allow for modifications based on physical access needs. This would obviously pose a problem for

physically disabled individuals (including those within the queer community). However, the instructors at SITI have adapted to allow for physical modifications when partaking in the method. What is understood most importantly about Suzuki method is that it is an oral tradition. Exercises are not written down with detail intentionally. This is to allow for adaptations, with permission to modify exercises. It is a living, breathing acting technique that continues to evolve with the times.

Part 3- Viewpoints

Viewpoints may serve as a potential queer-friendly alternative for those looking to train as actors. Specifically, I refer to Mary Overlie's Six Viewpoints as originally theorized in the book *Standing in Space*. This is separate from Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's later book on the same technique. The distinction must be made because Bogart and Landau wrote a book, according to some SITI company members, which serves as an extension of the original Viewpoints technique. This later iteration requires prior experience with Viewpoints to be most helpful and is not as exhaustive as Overlie was about establishing the foundational theory of the technique.

Viewpoints concerns itself with going back to theatrical basics, investigating the fundamental features of making theatre. Overlie refers to these fundamentals as "materials." The six materials are space, shape, time, emotion, movement, and story. The materials are noticeably abstract concepts. Overlie muses about the primary concern of the Viewpoints, which are "…to bring a perspective to the materials of the stage and of performance, allowing the elements to take the lead in a creative dialogue (Overlie 3)." Before obstacles, objectives, beats, or tactics, priority in the Viewpoints is given to the basic materials of the theatre. These materials have no inherent traits. They do not demand an immediate perspective on how someone walks or speaks

or holds their hips or their hands. Instead, an actor is in conversation with spatial relationships between themselves and other objects or people in the room. Perhaps the actor takes inspiration from the space in which they train. They explore lines and curves the body can make. They concern themselves with the duration of actions and how quickly or slowly they happen. The actor moves while leading from new and exciting places in the body that are often forgotten about, like the tailbone or the nose. They learn to recognize emotions already waiting for them in different poses or different physical influences in the space. They also deepen their understanding of the logic of setting all these materials in a sequence and how different sequences generate different meanings. None of it is necessarily good or bad, it simply is. When theatre is broken down in this way, there is no option to superimpose something like gendered behavior. The material of the Viewpoints is not recognizable to human beings, at least not at first. A full human experience is built from a much simpler starting place, an abstract, fluid place.

Focusing on the correct-incorrect dichotomy, Overlie discovered a way of experimenting with the Viewpoints that is innately non-judgmental called "News of a Difference." "News of a Difference is…noticing difference on finer and finer levels of the structure you are investigating (Overlie 71)." The implication is that when you work on the Viewpoints and allow them to, in turn, work on you, there should be an awareness of the discoveries the actor makes along the way. However, there is no necessity on behalf of the actor or the teacher guiding them to assign value to what is produced, especially negatively. If a student is not exploring fully, then this can be critiqued, but the point is to experiment with the Viewpoints knowing that one is safe from having their experimentations judged as final products. This is an incredibly freeing experience for any actor, even more so for queer actors who have trouble exploring theatre making with

their entire selves. A conversation between a queer student and, say, time, is as valid as a non-queer student's interaction with the same material. Neither holds more value because of their gender or sexual identity. By this account, Viewpoints is an equitable playing field.

Overlie goes on to say, "'Reading' the art becomes about one's own perceptions being challenged to evolve (Overlie 71)." While having a conversation with the materials of theatre, hypothetically, the actor is also having an intimate conversation with themselves, understanding their artistic sensibilities and preferences more deeply. Being allowed to evolve artistically alongside queerness is not a privilege extended by every acting technique, as has been demonstrated. An actor could potentially come from a place of queerness as they interact with the Viewpoints, meaning their experimentation and eventual products of exploration will be queer-coded. The actor at work might even begin to employ the materials in a way which is inherently queer. There has been discussion so far about queer temporality and geography; it is not out of the question that queer actors might experience materials such as space and time differently from their non-queer colleagues. For queer actors, a feedback loop may be established where they become more intimately aware of how they use time and in what ways they take up or hold space. These discoveries in turn are validated by the technique through features like "News of a Difference."

The Viewpoints are as non-hierarchical as they are non-judgmental. The reason for this is found in the relationship between the technique and postmodernism's influence on Mary Overlie at the time of researching the Viewpoints. Overlie posits a view of postmodernism that goes beyond the aims of modernism to respect every detail of a system or structure as equally critical to its overall existence. Much like the benefits of Suzuki method, Viewpoints does not prioritize any one way of looking or perceiving. "The beauty of the Both/And philosophy is that there is no

need to destroy what has been given to us by Classical and Modern eras" (Overlie 95). A distinction between destruction and deconstruction is useful here, for Overlie does not ever suggest that something like realism or acting systems influenced by the genre should be discarded. Rather, they should be deconstructed and appreciated for the stuff which they are made of, but they should also be acknowledged as one potential hierarchy in a world of many hierarchies.

Speaking of hierarchy in theatre, Overlie uses the example of taking apart a shirt. She says, "When a shirt is taken apart in this manner, the information about how the shirt is made fully available. The person doing the deconstructing is then in a position to make calculated and significant contribution by improvising with the parts to discover a new design logic (Overlie 77)." When thinking of realism and its influence on contemporary preferences in theatre, there is a clear hierarchy at work: realist plays, and arguably naturalist, too, prioritize emotion and story more so than any other material made available by the Viewpoints. The non-hierarchical stance of the Viewpoints sees realism as one hierarchy available to the theatre artist. However, there are many other ways of prioritizing the materials. Space may be one production's primary material, while movement may be another. All the Viewpoints could be used equally in another production.

Continuing, "…hierarchy, necessarily present in any structure, is seen as temporary. Construction of hierarchies can come and go as rapidly as you need. In other words, the assumptions that accompany hierarchical thinking (the pressure to be right, the pressure to be original, the assumption that it is your job to adopt a chosen structure as soon as possible) is set aside (Overlie 81)." This is precisely the pitfall of the Stanislavski system. When an actor, especially marginalized individuals sensitive to the hierarchies of society and the impacts these

hierarchies have on their lives, is faced with conforming to yet *another* hierarchy, it can be daunting enough. Add to this the clear indication that the hierarchy they will be conforming to was not made with them in mind means discomfort, at best. The Viewpoints offers a one-way ticket out of the realism hierarchy, and thus an escape from the gender and sexual binary. Maybe not all queer actors need this, but many do. The fact that the option is given at all is significant. It should not be taken for granted. Being allowed to work from a place of queerness is not a given in every acting technique. Being intentionally encouraged to incorporate gender and sexuality into artistic development is often unheard of. Having such privilege means permitting more queer actors to step into their power. It means queering the materials of theatre, the very stuff of which the art form relies upon. Inviting queerness into the conversation from the very beginning could mean that there will be far fewer moments where queerness is not consulted in the process of acting.

Chapter 4: Art & Business

Part 1- Art

Despite having queer alternatives to developing an acting process, there is still the issue of product. Through making theatre with queer alternatives, especially those analyzed above, it extends an invitation for the queer "enactments, embodiments, and speech acts" to enter performances. Due to the visibility of artistic product, performance teachers in educational settings may see the deviation of queer artistic product from the norm and recognize this as incorrect. Intentionality plays an interesting part in this. Some teachers may have overt biases towards queer behavior in acting. These teachers deny the artistic value of queer art altogether. Other teachers might only recognize that a part is not being played how they are used to seeing it. Perhaps they have played the part themselves. They might know the play cover to cover. As

opposed to how they would play the part, the queer actor might bring a different interpretation altogether to the character. Their teacher sees the deviation and does what they can to fix it by guiding the student to the "correct" given circumstances or objective of the character. Both instances, regardless of intention, can be harmful.

I believe there are two main influences on these types of teachers. The first has to do with artistic value. Going back to binaries, there is a tendency for human beings within and without artistic communities to separate artistic mediums within something called a high art/low art binary. Whole fields of art, such as visual arts, might be looked at as high art. There is a perceived set of skills and sophistication associated with the high arts. Then, there are the low arts. Theatre as a field is often viewed as a low art form. Low art may be looked at as unsophisticated, low brow, tawdry, crass, or possessing insignificant artistic value.

Interestingly, within theatrical arts, people still tend to subject subsections of the art form into high art or low art. Opera might be considered high art, even though it is within theatre. Musicals and straight plays, in turn, would be considered low art. And even then, straight plays containing queer artistic products would be considered to have less artistic value than something like *Hamlet* or *All My Sons*.

Part of queer theatrical art's categorization as low art could be due to its reliance on camp. After all, camp is queer parody, and though this does not necessarily mean comedic artistic products, often it does. Comedy in its own way is thought of as low art. It is irreverent much of the time, like queer irreverence towards dominant culture. Camp purposefully takes quotidian heteronormative behavior and turns it on its head at the expense of itself. Drag artists are exceptional examples of camp as it works on gender expressions. There is something undeniably queer when stereotypical feminine clothing is place on masculine-presenting bodies,

and vice versa. There are many artists still who elect to blur gender visually through the costumes they create and the stage makeup they employ. The entire art of drag sets its sights on rigid gender roles, norms, and behaviors.

At times, camp as a reclaimed form of queer discourse can be viewed as derivative. Moe Meyer addresses this in their article, too. Yet, those who make such a judgment call miss the power dynamics at play between queer individuals and dominant culture. Considering, if it is to be believed, our lack of power to generate societal meaning, camp is a clever asset to leverage. Camp as a process is clandestine. There is much to be appreciated about a process which produces queer artistic product that infiltrates a culture meant to keep every trace of queerness out. Such a process could be thought of as sophisticated. However, when queer art is produced, whether camp is used as a tactic or not, and the art is visible, this is when some may take issue.

This brings up subject matter of queer art. If queer alternative acting techniques encourage queer actors to explore creating theatre by means of their entire personhood, including their queerness, queer culture and experience will come up in the product. Queer actors might use their experience of temporality to filter through stories of building families or romantic relationships, finding career paths or reconciling with being in different places in life than their non-queer counterparts. They might read their experiences into certain geographies that non-queer individuals take for granted (including experiences they've had in clothing stores, restaurant restrooms, night life, and so on). These spaces tend to mean vastly different things for queer individuals. Queer actors might want to talk about their sex lives, the nuanced experiences of what it means to find love and physical intimacy while trans, explaining to partners where they fit (or do not fit) into the gender binary and what this means for their gender expression going forward, the potential, unfortunate cruelness faced from others on dating sites or apps.

They might want to express their experiences with parents accepting or not accepting their identities. They might wish to engage non-queer communities in queer discourse. They might want to make clear statements on how political and legal decisions affect their bodies, their access to spaces and jobs, their right to marry or vote or keep their lives. They also may want to reject institutions like marriage, re-conceptualize the notion of "surviving" in capitalist hellscapes, or point out futility in trying to make change within systems that were never made to produce the desired change in the first place.

Arguably, what makes non-queer audiences most uncomfortable are conversations queer artists wish to have regarding sexuality and gender, even more so than cultural values that are deeply anti-capitalist and seek to de-stabilize entire ways of being and doing. Nothing makes cisgender, heterosexual people shift weight in their seats more than important conversations queer people have regarding things like their relationships with their genitals, the fat distribution they were born with versus the fat distribution they seek, or who they find sexually attractive, especially when those partners do not fit into the gender binary. Put plainly, sex and sexualization seems to be painful for non-queer individuals to explore. Certainly, this is not painful in the same sense it is for queer people who are having dialogues with their bodies, who are advocating for others to do the same, who are struggling to adopt queer resilience in the face of non-queer domination. In short, the pain comes from having to sit through a conversation about sex or genitals. For them, the theatre is a place to watch cats dance around and sing in a fantasy world. It is for hyper-realism, where queer joy cannot possibly exist so openly despite the amount of queer people playing roles on stage, calling sound cues, dressing actors, and programming lights in their theatres and the world's theatres. The theatre, for these people, is not

a place to talk about something so base as genitalia or who someone cruised in Central Park last week.

Part of the stigma projected upon queer conversations is that they are inherently lewd. Yet, when queer individuals talk about sexuality and gender, these ways of using time, of inhabiting space, of expressing intimacy, have the potential to uproot normalcy across all areas of life. They are significantly countercultural, transgressive, sophisticated conversations that hold high artistic value. If someone non-queer becomes overly concerned with the subject matter besides the larger messaging behind what the content is symbolic of, they might be missing the point of the language of art in the first place. There are naked bodies with exposed genitalia doing suggestive activities in most genres of visual art spanning several historical periods. The problem, then, does not simply lie with this. The problem lies with the added ingredient of queerness. Human beings have been fascinated by sexual proclivity and the nature of their own bodies for millennia. Only when the subject asking questions of their own body and preferences is queer do any of us bother to look down upon the same artistic exploration as low art.

At the crux of the high art/low art debate is the phenomenon known as "approval matrices" published weekly in *New York Magazine.* Towards the back of the magazine, readers find themselves looking at a grid: the x-axis, from left to right, is a scale from despicable to brilliant. The y-axis, from top to bottom, is a scale from highbrow to lowbrow. There, the magazine publishes what they call a guide for their readers to help them form opinions about current trends. Some of the events ranked in the "approval matrix" happen to be art, both visual and performing mediums. Every week, these judgments are passed by the magazine. In one sense, it seems in the same vein as what art critics do. Yet, in another sense, there is a value practice at play. The magazine is pre-determining artistic value for their readers. There are

several questions that follow for me: who decides what is highbrow and lowbrow at this magazine publisher? Who is included in these conversations and who is not? What are the criteria for something brilliant versus something despicable? Is this kind of practice informative or persuasive? Part of me believes the "approval matrix" to be informative; there is no place for discussion. There are no fleshed-out arguments or points-of-view, just quick information to be digested on the go. I cannot help but think about trends and fads as well. Is queerness a fad that will fade out for some?

Taylor Mac's career is a brilliant example of the contrast between highbrow versus lowbrow. They have produced queer plays, musicals, and operas, not all of them being received with the same open arms as their recent Dadaist opera, *The Hang*. *New York Magazine's* approval matrix for the week of January 31, 2022, places the theatrical piece at the highest position possible in the quadrant shared by the categories of highbrow and brilliant. Something about the show qualifies itself in the eyes of the editorial team at *New York Magazine*, apparently. Taylor Mac's other theatrical works are, arguably, on par with *The Hang*, yet many of them were never recognized by the magazine in this way; there is an almost indistinguishable line between highbrow and lowbrow, brilliant and despicable, and queer artists should beware of crossing it, lest they end up in the wrong quadrant of the "approval matrix."

I would argue that queer artistic value should ultimately be decided among our peers. Queer subversion tactics are actively at play in the arts, meaning that the cultural practices and viewpoints of queer artists might go unrecognized by the larger artistic community. To understand and place value on queer artistic product, someone would have to be conscious of why the product is or is not visible, or why the product appears the way it does, temporally, geographically, culturally, and performatively. Otherwise, the system of values in which the art

market passes judgment upon works of art remain entrenched within a normative and repressive dominant culture.

Trainers of queer actors must collectively question the system of values in which they look at products of acting. High art has looked like something specific to us because it was "decided" long ago what constitutes good art and what does not. Queer art may never qualify as high art, and perhaps, it was never meant to. What queer artists value can and will look different from their non-queer colleagues. At the heart of the conversation is bias. Someone's personal taste can be said to be influenced by personal biases, after all. One of the most powerful suggestions in moving forward is to examine why we, as teaching artists, like certain student performances and may not like others. This is equitable and inclusive work that runs deeper than putting statements in syllabi or including a couple of class sessions on forgotten queer theatremakers. It requires radically terrifying introspection on our part in service of the artists we have promised to develop every single day.

Part 2 - Business

Then there is the arguably more obvious influence on higher education's structuring of actor training: the art market. Much like any industry, money talks in theatre. Theatre as an art form is less crucial to American society than it is in countries like England and Germany and Japan. Therefore, the survival of theatre has been closely dependent upon capital earnings. There is an entire theatre industrial complex, as popularized by Nicole Brewer, which has its own set of demands for those who work within it. As much as any of us want to engage in art, high or low, industry casts a shadow over whatever individual artistic aims we might have. So long as the industry models itself after capitalism, it will be a factor to give attention to.

Arguably, at the head of the complex are the Broadway houses. To "make it" as a stage actor is to be on Broadway, or, at the very least, off-Broadway. This is where actors generate the most capital for the larger industry. Generating capital also means generating social worth. Therefore, operating as a cog within the theatre industrial complex is just as expected as heteronormative behaviors and speech acts are for any character not expressly labelled as queer. For many, making it to Broadway is an unquestioned expectation for ourselves.

If Broadway is the pinnacle of achievement for the professional stage actor, it is also important to consider what spaces are held for queer actors on Broadway to create queer performances. Out of fifty-four plays and musicals either presently being staged, or expected to open within the next few months, there are currently only two productions centered around queer stories on Broadway: *Take Me Out* by Richard Greenberg, and *A Strange Loop* by Michael R. Jackson. Other than these productions, there may be a gender-bent role here, or a queer role written into the original text there. There are no significant opportunities for queer actors to engage in queer performances unless they were to, through their own private means, code queerness into a character through processes like camp. In some ways, even those few queer roles that are present on Broadway feel like performative quotas being filled; all Broadway knew was that it had to put diversity somewhere. This phenomenon occurs across all marginalized identities, not just regarding queer characters or stories.

Putting this information on the backburner, we now turn to higher education programs for training actors. The biggest bragging rights of the country's most popular college programs for acting, such as New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, Carnegie Mellon, and Yale, is not necessarily their world-renowned faculties or advancements in research around performance studies or acting theory. Rather, the claim to fame for these programs, as well as other programs,

is how many of their students have performed on and off-Broadway. The draw is the promise of a successful career, if one defines success as performing roles on the Broadway market. Students who attend these universities expect to be funneled from their training directly into thriving careers on Broadway. Therefore, these expectations shape entire curricula all the way down to the individual expectations of the teachers in acting, voice and speech, and movement classrooms. A pipeline exists within higher education actor training where the priority is to create training and assessment around readiness for auditions, often to showcase the graduating seniors to casting agents who have ties with the larger, commercial theatre market (like Broadway), and hypothetically, the next step would be scoring jobs working in Broadway houses.

Indeed, if success for an actor means getting on Broadway, then never being able to perform on Broadway would, hypothetically, mean one was a failure. This is the mantle bestowed upon actors-in-training by their teachers who insist on pushing them through the training-to-audition pipeline. Teachers in performance training programs may sometimes perpetuate the messaging of the industrial complex that performing on Broadway should be what everyone measures their success as working actors against. Training actors internalize this messaging and pass it onto others they know who may not even be in the same program. The idea of Broadway as the only set of professional venues worth any actor's time then becomes naturalized and, once again, unquestioned. College curricula often leave space for Broadway seminars and audition technique classes aimed at creating the actor who might just be hirable for Broadway or off-Broadway gigs.

This is not to suggest that queer actors do not get work on Broadway; that is simply untrue. Rather, the argument here is that there is not much space held for queer narratives or

queer performances that challenge heteronormativity by critiques of gender performativity where queer actors are not only permitted but encouraged and affirmed in their decisions to code queer behavior and speech into character creation on Broadway. With only two productions of queer plays currently running, this is expected. Queerness is not often explored outside of moments of designated queerness. If queerness is not blatant in a play's narrative, it is not always thought about. What this can mean is that queer actors may develop a personal disinterest in ever being on Broadway. They do not see themselves on those stages. How could they? They see queer actors, not queer characters. They see occasional gender-bent roles, not full narratives centered around queerness as a subculture. Arguably, any artist seeks to filter what they create through their own set of aesthetics. It is not a stretch, then, to recognize that there may be feelings of alienation on behalf of queer actors looking to Broadway for work. They may find personally meaningful work elsewhere in fabulous regional theatres or community theatres, but much like anything capable of exerting pressures of conformity and normalcy, like feeling as though marriage must be something queer individuals should participate in, queer actors might never be able to look upon their careers with pride only because they were never able to work on Broadway.

Yet many performance teachers insist on preparing their students for these specific job markets. Teachers may even recognize the lack of queer narratives and queer characters available for newly working actors. They may notice the lack of queer-coding in interpretations of characters in non-queer plays. It is with this information in mind that the same teachers may assess students accordingly in the classroom. Non-heteronormative behaviors while acting a role that is not queer could spell danger for the job prospects of the training actor. It is up to the teacher, as part of the student's education, to also pass down the expectations of the theatre

industrial complex to them as well. Often, this process is with good intention on behalf of the performance teachers; they do not see the possible harm they wreak on their students as they trim away the sway in the hips, break the habit of the sibilant "s" sounds, or correct posture to be more ladylike, whatever that means.

There was a time in an undergraduate performance class where my teacher felt prompted to have what my mother calls a "come to Jesus" meeting. These are meetings where someone lays out harsh truths that need to be heard then and there, and it is all out of love for the person(s) being addressed. The meeting took place because my teacher, after covering her eyes, asked a class of nearly twenty actors how many of us read the plays our monologues came from as we were closing in on monologue performances. Their teaching assistant did not close her eyes and sadly witnessed only three or four of us, thankfully me being one of them, raise our hands. At the end of the next class, the same teacher held up a paper with statistics on it. The numbers reflected the actors currently working in the United States, then in our state, and then what their average salaries were. She used employment and capital as motivation to convince us to commit deeply to our training. Wanting the students to read the plays their monologues come from is not problematic. Rather, what interests me most is the implication that the ultimate punishment for any actor is losing out on paying gigs if they do not follow standard steps of preparing for scene study.

Yet again, worth regarding training and acting is tied to capital, how much actors produce for themselves and how much they produce for the larger art market. One is only taking their training seriously if they train towards the audition pipeline. One is only successful if one lands financially significant jobs. If this is true, successful futures for queer actors are grim, especially those who do not actively employ aesthetics of heteronormativity. For those of us who want to

tell queer stories, want to play queer characters, want to read queerness onto dramatic literature, finding success within the theatre industrial complex's parameters is extremely difficult.

In some ways, the art market is beginning to recognize the financial power behind marginalized identities, but queerness as a subculture is, relatively speaking, still a niche market. If this is the case, and if capital equals value to higher education training programs, queer performance interpretations which challenge the market norm is kitschy, but financially worthless. It may be written off as avant-garde, low art, a nice idea but a financial gamble that many simply are not willing to take. Employability is instead the paradigm at work in teacher perception of student work. Queer Chris Keller is cool and all, but not marketable.

Chapter 5: A Reframing

Moving forward is daunting when the road is not yet cleared for us. Instead, we must be the ones to clear the road. The collective actions of performance teachers decide what actor training will look like for queer students going forward. To begin clearing the way, there should be questions we ask ourselves to shift our frame of mind when teaching queer students. These questions are by no means to generate prescriptive pedagogical practices; the prescriptive nature of popular American techniques of acting and auditioning are arguably what has gotten us in trouble to begin with. They are meant to consider queerness as an identity in the performance classroom and a way of reading experiential knowledge into dramatic art with the hopes of bringing awareness to change pedagogical practices that do not consider queerness and its value to making theatre.

In what ways do we, as teachers, expect heteronormativity in performance?

There has been a lot of groundwork laid so far regarding the disconnect between queer interpretations of characters and narratives and what many teachers, non-queer and queer alike, expect when they are about to witness a student play a character like Chris Keller in a scene. When we think of realism, especially American realism, there are clear expectations that come to mind. We expect a confident, macho, idealistic version of a mid-century man to come into the play and swoop their love interest off their feet. We might have seen versions of *All My Sons* done time and again by actors who have become iconic for their performances. In perceiving student performance of such a role with a critical eye, a teacher might find themselves dissatisfied because the performance is not at least somewhat like how the role is usually done. They repaint the picture for the student, preaching about very specific given circumstances, that, ironically, are not as given as they think (like Chris Keller's potential status as a closeted gay man). They create in a sense, on behalf of the performance history of the character, the kind of mental image a student should have when playing Chris Keller. Often, this image is heteronormative. It may not bear any immediate importance to the queer actor who is working on the role.

With many roles not expressly written as queer, there are always these legacies of heteronormative stage performance that follows them around. As these legacies go unexamined, they squander any hopes of alternative interpretations. Therefore, intentional space should be given for queer actors to explore themselves and their queerness through roles, even if we as teachers do not necessarily see the queer potential that is waiting in the wings of the performance. These moments of exploration may not always be visible to us, yet we must affirm the notion that these choices are not inherently invalid simply because they break from tradition. It is a special kind of privilege that cisgender, heterosexual actors enjoy to assume that all

characters are like them unless specified otherwise. Teachers have the unique opportunity to shatter these assumptions by connecting notions of actor identity with aesthetic choices in performance. Should queer actors choose, they must have clear messaging from their teachers that their queerness in conversation with their acting is ripe with brilliant possibilities precisely because it may be completely different from their non-queer classmates. Difference in interpretation is arguably the "magic" that keeps audiences coming back to theatres to see the same plays again and again.

Do we subconsciously assign more value to heteronormative work over queer work?

It is important to recognize both where heteronormative performance and queer interpretation falls in the spectrum of high art to low art, no matter how contrived the spectrum might be. Dismantling the spectrum is an eventual step in the process, but first, as a collective of educators, we must acknowledge that the high art/low art binary exists and that it has prominent effects on how queer art is received. The work available for us to participate in that is presented by this question is especially individualized. Each teacher has had their own repertoire of dramatic works they have been exposed to that were likely formative in their aesthetic preferences. In this line of questioning, we must ask ourselves why we enjoy the things we enjoy about theatre and why we do not enjoy other things. Aesthetic preferences can seem innocuous. However, because queer art may often contain similar uses of time, space, shape, and so on, these aesthetic choices can be lumped together. It would be reasonable to suspect that many queer aesthetic choices may simply not be someone's own preferences without the individual recognizing the queerness within the choices or questioning why they might not prefer the choices. It could be that breaking from heteronormative-informed aesthetic choices is the issue for many people, even without realizing this is so.

The art market's expectations of actors, passed down generationally from teachers to students, inevitably informs critique. Teachers have likely worked in the larger professional industry, and may have been indoctrinated to the demands of the theatre industrial complex. Whether they necessarily agree with them or not is separate from the conversation. In my experience, teachers who disagree with industry expectations often adopt the "that's show business" mentality. This mentality is offered, in turn, to their students, under less controversial expectations like work ethic. To deal with lack of preference for queerness in theatre has been conflated with, to some degree, this idea of work ethic. Effectively, this means that dealing with people not wanting someone's queerness in conversation with the artistic process during auditioning or rehearsing equates to having a good work ethic. We are asked to accept the industry for the way it is if we want to work professionally. We, therefore, must weigh the pros and cons of participating in a system ourselves and passing along the industrial complex as an inevitable component of actor training. In my opinion, this is not a decision we should be making for our students. We should not be force feeding students "truths" about the industry because the industry is changing constantly. Our students must be allowed to naturalize their own expectations of the industry before having pre-implanted narratives of what life will be like after graduation. Otherwise, the "that's show business" mentality is normalized for another generation, then the next generation after that, and the industrial complex runs uninterrupted, no intermissions, no curtain call.

How can we support the aesthetic choices of queer actors who wish to break from heteronormative realism?

This also centers around teacher expectations of actor interpretation during scene study or monologue study. There is another normative legacy of expecting every actor in our classrooms

to be on board with realism's acting techniques, namely Stanislavski. Realism, though, is arguably heteronormative. The goal of the mimetic form is to depict the world exactly how it is presently. While queer people have tactics to subvert realism (such as camp), the reality of the world is still steeped in patriarchal, heteronormative traditions. Realism, in some ways, continues these traditions. Queer tactics often involve reclamations of words and behaviors with negative histories, so it is entirely possible for camp to interact with realism *if* it is given the space to occur. Part of this relies on actors knowing that camp and other queer alternatives exist for them to utilize. Teachers should do what they can to offer alternatives to their students alongside the Stanislavski system as well as being critical of the shortcomings of the system that may exist for queer individuals. Teachers must also hold space for the interpretations that come from queer alternatives in conversation with realist texts. Considering paradigms of high art/low art and the theatre industrial complex, though these are both contrived, adaptation has a rich history in theatre. Part of doing theatrical productions over again is looking at them from different points of view within the mimetic form that originated it and without that same form. If a queer actor discovers a performance that is not characteristic of realism when studying a realist scene or monologue, this should be looked at by the teacher as a welcome step in the process of creating for the queer actor. In utilizing queer alternatives, critiques of realism, if not entire breaks from the mimetic form, may occur. In a way, this is an opportunity for us as teachers to learn from our students. We must break from realism's acting traditions when we can to open space for more inclusive alternatives that could also satisfy the requirements of the genre even more than the Stanislavski system.

Going back to camp, we know that queer performativity will sometimes involve enactments, embodiments, and speech acts that look vastly different from heteronormative

gender performativity. Heteronormativity has close ties with realism, so our expectations of these performances have been conditioned accordingly. Queer alternatives are going to produce other realities, queer realities. These realities will look different, but it does not make them any less real for the queer who has experienced it and the same queer who elects to bring it to their work. Likewise, I have found a tendency in my own work to imagine a queer future by queer coding realism. If realism is not written for us, we can then take it upon ourselves to invite our pasts, presents, and futures to the narratives.

What does training look like when it is neither focused on creating high art nor "hirable" actors?

The argument, ultimately, falls on how much harm the current paradigms of higher education actor training concerns itself with. In many ways, I would argue that the harm greatly outweighs the benefits of such a system of training where "high art" is the most prized form of theatre or where capital dictates what work is worth our time and what work is not. There is so much artistic work left out of the conversation when only considering these paradigms. Especially when acknowledging that many, if not all, productions of queer theatre are considered "low art," and that there is a perception that queer theatre, like other queer media, does not sell, we are left with few options if we desire to participate in making theatre that reflects our identities and experiences.

Now, we must imagine an actor training in higher education beyond these paradigms. First, to do so, we must collectively agree to go without them. The task of envisioning a future within the confines of current practices is nearly impossible. Just as we have intentionally invited considerations of the art market and "high art" into our classrooms, we must intentionally remove them from the party. Only then will the future of actor training in the academy become

clearer. The damage that they do is indiscriminate in application, meaning that non-queer actors suffer from these paradigms of training, too. Queer actors potentially suffer even more. By imagining training without the influence of the art market and the "high art" nomination, we lift constraints on all actors, not just queer. If we do not, queer actors arguably have much more to lose.

As a field, theatre has had to work in higher education to defend its inherent value. The field has chosen to do so by citing product. "Look at how many theatre graduates have made it to Broadway. Look at how many of our graduates have been involved in productions that are well-known." It is only through parameters of capital generation and contemporary societal impact that we derive value. What if there is a shift to process? What if the questions we begin to ask ourselves as acting instructors revolve around what is learned in the doing of the thing, not in the thing itself? Collaboration, focus, imagination, presence, creative problem-solving, childlike innocence, emotional connectivity, body and voice awareness, spontaneity, experimental mindset, memorization, theatrical research. These are all skills and values imparted by actor training that transcend anything that is produced on stage. These are things that have stuck with me far beyond my opportunities to perform. This is how I have determined the worth of my undergraduate education, and I do not believe I am a special, rare case. Students who attend college may seek to be transformed in ways they could never imagine experiencing without higher education. If we, as teachers, begin to conspire with them, to chart out a whole human transformation mapped by courses and daily lessons, we have done our jobs. We should assist students in envisioning and reaching for the person they wish to be tomorrow, not the job they wish to have for a moment. Queer students have always been more in tune, arguably, with life outside of capital, outside of heteronormative significance. When we learn from their

experiences, we leverage lives that are unscripted. As teachers, we find moments to go off-script, too.

Closing

Now, the conversation can shift from theory to practice. There are a few practices I have been utilizing in my classroom with this research in mind. What I offer is not an exhaustive list. My hope is that this work leads to a collective effort among all theatre teachers to think of pedagogical practices which consider the queer students in front of them. Therefore, even my own suggestions may need to be tweaked to fit different classrooms.

The Stanislavski system's popularity among theatrical programs in higher education is undeniable. Besides a commitment to be critical of the system in our own research, I have found that having honest conversations about the absence of queer consideration in the system to be beneficial. Mentioned before, teaching only Stanislavski in the classroom can give the impression that this is the only acting technique available to students. Not only should we be having active conversations about other techniques, but we should also be open about how the cisgender, heterosexual perspective on acting was foundational to the Stanislavski system. Queer students should be made aware of the possibility that some facets of the system may not work for them because of what Stanislavski had in mind when he created it. Likewise, they should be encouraged to have a conversation with the teacher should they find some demands of the Stanislavski system harmful. This precedent should be established the first week of class if possible.

During the semester, if there is an opportunity to demonstrate a lesson through a media example such as a video or audio clip, I recommend choosing media of queer theatre makers

who have filtered their work through their queerness. For example, Leigh Bowery is an Australian artist known for many different talents and performing was certainly one of them. Bowery performed in dance, club concerts, and performance art installations. Taylor Mac, mentioned earlier, is another example of someone who has achieved critical and commercial success without parting with judy's queerness. Judy has produced many of judy's own shows that highlight queer reading of dominant culture. Then, there is Kent Monkman, a Native American two-spirit visual and performance artist. Monkman has also created their own theatrical pieces that view living in North America through an intersectional lens. There is also Lisa Kron who wrote the first musical with a lesbian protagonist to make it to Broadway. The Broadway credit aside, the musical has become a staple for queer and non-queer audiences. Cherrie Moraga also creates theatre frequently in conversation with her identity as a lesbian and Native American. The list of queer theatre makers is quite extensive when one looks for them. Though many queer theatre artists have had to work for years, even decades, unrecognized, many of them have eventually become important names in the theatre community. Introducing queer students to artists working in the theatre industry while queer can be affirming, especially when these individuals may not be as visible as other non-queer people we normally think about as important to theatre.

In choosing scenes for students, I do what I can to allow them into the deciding process. I may send an email or make an announcement in class that if anyone wishes to work on a scene that involves certain identities that reflect them. Both options, they must send me an email This is helpful in three ways. The first way is that it allows students to self-identify privately to me in case they are uncomfortable doing so in front of the rest of the class. The second way allows me to take the burden off the students to find their own scenes, especially those with little to no

knowledge of dramatic literature. At the same time, they are choosing to an extent what they want to work on as artists. Thirdly, it means connecting queer and other marginalized students with stories that are more likely to resonate with them. If a student does not wish to go through this process, I verbally encourage them to interpret the scenes their way; all I am here to do is make their vision as clear as possible. That way, if someone reads queerness into a text that is not blatantly queer, they know they will be supported in doing so.

I have intentionally considered queerness for one semester of my teaching. In that time, these pedagogical practices have formed. Most of the argument here revolves around promoting this intentional consideration, a practice that very well could replace simple awareness. To consider is much more active. The frustration I felt from not having concrete strategies to use in the classroom to protect and support the experiences of my queer students has since largely evaporated from this simple shift in mind frame. The most powerful place to start is with the student right in front of us.

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Appendix A: Definition of Terms

Camp – The term will be utilized in accordance with Moe Meyer's resulting research through their reclamation of the term from prior trends of aestheticizing the phenomenon. The focus here is placed more on camp as an interpretative, subversive tactic as opposed to a political technique to participate in discourse, although the process of using camp during interpretation can and may lead to political statements. Camp will also align with Meyer's conceptualization as an inherently queer practice that is not accessible to non-queer individuals. The phenomenon relies on the queer identity as catalyst. Meaning, if non-queer individuals attempt to participate in the enactment of camp, they will ultimately be participating in the appropriation of the tactic, which does not result in camp as interpretation taking place. To be clear, the operating definition for Meyer's and my own purposes for my thesis are in direct opposition to Susan Sontag's infamous definition of camp as a kind of aesthetic or sensibility accessible to anyone regardless of the presence of queerness in the actor. The operative definition here also rejects the notion of camp as not inherently queer. Most significantly, camp operates as a method for queer acting students, regardless of skin color or ableness or other intersectional identities, to read themselves into theatrical texts in potentially new and unconventional ways, subverting notions of one right way of performing a scene or monologue, thus shifting ideas of successful executions of scenes or monologues in acting classrooms to something new. A focus on clarity as opposed to a "right" way of interpreting and delivering the text. Meyer's also specifics camp as a kind of queer parody. I would like to give more space for camp to operate as a concept not inherently intended for being humorous, much like improvisation. This gives queer actors the capacity to bring camp as a tactic to any theatrical text regardless of its comedic, tragic, or tragicomic nature. It very broadly serves as a way of looking at the worlds and circumstances of plays as well as the traits

of characters within those worlds and circumstances. It remains a critique since it subverts the common process of interpreting scripts as inherently heterosexual and cis gender unless specified or written as otherwise.

Compulsory Heterosexuality – A tendency to view the world in heteronormative terms in such a way as to make this perception the default, thereby treating the lenses of other sexualities as secondary or mirrorlike. The mirroring effects of compulsory heterosexuality led to viewing same sex relationships as inherently identical to opposite sex relationships. This is where assumptions such as one partner in a lesbian couple, for instance, assuming the role of "the man" while the other partner inevitably falls into the role of "the woman." Specifically, compulsory heterosexuality will be analyzed in relation to its influence over the expectations acting teachers have when it comes to critiquing scene study. It will be vetted for the potential obstacles it causes both in students and their teachers.

Gender expression – The way in which gender identity may or may not manifest itself physically, behaviorally, or socially in someone's life. Gender expression does not have to align with someone's gender identity. This includes things like how someone walks or talks, how someone dresses, what name and pronouns they may choose to go by, and medical decisions to meet the needs of gender expression such as hormone replacement therapy, facial surgery, vocal surgery, and other procedures that affirm gender identity.

Gender identity – An acknowledgment of one's internal psychology as it relates to gender, in which someone might feel that they are man, woman, transgender, non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, and so on. What someone feels their gender is on the inside does not have to align with how they present themselves on the outside. Gender identity is largely a

psychological phenomenon but can extend to the physical, behavioral, and social areas of one's life.

Gender performativity – The process by which gender is signified through body politics inscribed with meaning. The performativity here focuses on perceived behavior exhibited by characters within dramatic literature. The conceptual suggestion is that behaviors do not make someone man, woman, non-binary, etc. yet human beings still attempt to participate in a performative discourse to reveal their gender interiors through a physical exterior, either in how someone walks, talks, dresses, and more. This also implies that the signification of gender by certain behaviors is both arbitrary and transcendental.

Heteronormativity – A term stemming from compulsory heterosexuality which operates on a gender binary and the assumption of opposite sex attraction as the most desirable romantic outcome. To work, the concept requires a total collaboration between gender roles, gender norms, gender identities, and sexual orientations. A society that prioritizes heteronormativity privileges the straight, cisgender individuals who do not behave or express themselves outside of the expectations of gender norms and roles. In turn, this means individuals not aligned with living such lives (namely queer individuals) suffer to some extent as their entire lives are structured in a way that has not taken them into consideration. Heteronormativity will be applied to popular techniques of script analysis as influenced by the industry in which actors work to reveal the ways in which the most common interpretations of dramatic literature are those which satisfy the heteronormative theatre industrial complex.

Queer – a term to signal a potentially non-cisgender and/or non-heterosexual identity. The term will go against standard labeling practices on bases of gender and sexuality. Anyone identified as queer inherently has access to the practice of camp as an interpretive while anyone who is not

identified as such will not. Being queer does not indicate biological sex, gender, or sexuality. Instead, it is an umbrella term to denote sexualities, gender identities, and biological sexes not part of dominant, heterosexual, reproductive culture. It is the form of the term that has been reclaimed from its once derogatory roots. It cannot be stated enough that this definition extends beyond simply a labeling tactic for gay and lesbian individuals.

Queerness – The idea of a culture that comes along with being queer in which certain signifying behaviors, gestures, walking, and talking, among other things, signals covert queerness to other queer identities. This also encompasses certain life choices that align with a queer culture in which the queer individual chooses to plan families, build relationships, spend time and money, and generally live out their lives in a way that is counter or unconventional when compared to heteronormative conditions.

Theatre industrial complex – A term coined by Nicole Brewer to encapsulate the idea of theatre as an industrial machine which relies on several certainties to continue functioning, one of them being the silence and oppression of marginalized identities in favor of a heteronormative, compulsory heterosexual framework. Brewer uses the term for the sake of highlighting the disadvantages and subsequent harm and trauma caused by the theatre industrial complex to black, brown, and indigenous people of color. However, the term also serves the purposes of discussing queer issues in the acting classroom since the queer identity is a marginalized one. The theatre industrial complex compels acting teachers regardless of their identities to conform through audition and script analysis techniques that are satisfactory to its heteronormative requirements to continue functioning.