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PRESENCE AND THE ACTOR'S CRAFT

By

Casey Richard Moulton
B.F.A., Florida Southern College, 2013

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2016

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A Thesis Approved on

April 14, 2016

by the following Thesis Committee:

Professor Nefertiti Burton

Dr. Baron Kelly

Dr. Ryan Schroeder

DEDICATION

This thesis or dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Frank and Lisa Moulton

and

my future wife

Larissa Town

through everything, you have always believed in me.

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I would like to thank my major professor, Nefertiti Burton, not only for her guidance and patience through this thesis, but for imparting me with a path for peace and strength. I would also like to thank Dr. Baron Kelly for his spirited Acting classes, and for those words of wisdom he imparted upon the students every day.

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ABSTRACT

PRESENCE AND THE ACTOR'S CRAFT

Casey Richard Moulton

April 14, 2016

The purpose of this thesis is to establish that Presence is essential to an actor's craft. This thesis makes considerable mention of my own work on Naomi Iizuka's Polaroid Stories, playing the part of SKINHEADboy, as well as making mention of the theoreticians and practitioners of Acting who have dealt with the subject of Presence. The parallels I draw between actor training and the sources from outside of the field of Acting feed not only into an understanding of how consequential Presence is for the actor, but also how Presence can affect the lives human beings. This thesis also contains my own observations of performances and practices that have affected my understanding of Presence as it relates between the actor and the audience. Most importantly, I am able to reveal my missteps as an actor for a better understanding of what prevents Presence when building a role for performance.

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INTRODUCTION ON THE CRAFT OF ACTING

Art is the product of the artist; an actor is the artist, and therefore cannot be the art. Theatrical artist and theatre-theoretician Gordon Craig suggested the actor be replaced with the “Übermarionette” (Craig 393-398). I believe in some ways Craig was right, but his personal understanding of Acting came out of a time and place where Acting was mechanical and clichéd (Craig 390-391). We currently live in a different world, where actors have many avenues through which to develop art. Acting is a craft, the product of which is a fleeting glimpse of composed human actions and expressions.

It took me seven years to understand that Acting is a craft; though I have heard those words and feigned comprehension, the truth of their meaning eluded me. When a performance is good, it appears deceptively simple. I know that I can prepare to act. I can score my script, perform the blocking, and hit the back wall of a theatrical space with my voice. However, the hardest part of the process is not merely in preparation, but giving up control. When I give myself over, put aside my ego, and immerse myself in imagination of the story, then I have achieved something that is worthy of being called art.

The point of acting is to tell a story, and therefore everything an actor *does* should support storytelling in one aspect or another. In truth, because there are many stories, there are varied ways in which to tell them. I, therefore, do not believe that acting is at all a “culinary” art. There is no recipe for the execution of work that will bring you consistent success in the development of performance. Over time, the formulas become

clichés, the vital moments between actors become filled with dead air, and the life of any well-composed scenes become boring. Yet, somehow through the actor's work, focus and awareness is renewed, contributing to a great performance that is consistently created night after night for an audience. It raises the question of whether or not acting is an acquired skill or an inherent talent within people. Acting is play, and imaginative play is part human development (Wilson, 22).

People have been misinformed about what the work of actor is. The commonly held notion is that Acting is "doing" or "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances". When Acting texts say this, I cringe, not because they are wrong, but because the reader is immediately satisfied with an academic definition. Acting is an art---the aim of which is verisimilitude! There has to be a desire on behalf of the artist to express truth, even when there is no accurate description for it. In the case of Acting, submerged elements of a script, or a story, must be retrieved by the actor through performing actions (Esper and DiMarco 21-23).

Acting should be considered above all things an art of both manipulation and collaboration. It is manipulative on one hand because audiences are pulled into watching and listening to actors. Their emotions and focus become malleable in relation to the performance. The manipulation works both ways; actors must manipulate themselves in order to achieve a connection with their audience. This manipulation consists of bending the perceptions of the audience to embody the reality of a story. They bring a character into performance in body, voice, and imagination.

Western actors are best described as pseudo-historians, whose work extends between a text, or story, and imagination (Thivat, Patricia-Laure). On one hand, the actor

is a creature of research. They dissect text for a plain understanding of a story's circumstances. Then they go further, plumbing a text for deeper thematic meaning. They search for the metaphoric tropes, and for the oppositional forces working within the story (all of which provide the major thought of the piece itself.)

On the other hand, actors are also dreamers. They relax their focus and allow their minds to wander internally. There they find the images of the piece, and all of the sensations associated with the movement of it; some are flowing kinetic movements, others are halting movements static in their nature. It is in this way that the actor develops a visceral and subjective relationship with the work in conjunction with the intellectual and objective comprehension of it.

All of the aforementioned work must be presented with clarity for an audience. This means that the actor must have, as Stanislavski put it, a well-tuned instrument for performance which consists of their body, their voice, and their "inner-life" (*Building a Character* 267-268). An actor must be vocally and physically aware (both for their own well-being and for the sake of getting the story across to an audience). Therefore, warm-ups for voice and body are a must for actors. Just as athletes stretch before a game, actors must constantly prepare their instrument for a performative experience. For the stage actor, this means being able to both project their voice and articulate consonants with ease. They must also warm-up their body to release unnecessary tension, which does a great deal to cut off vocal projection and inhibit natural movement.

Inner-life is a concept unique to representational theatre forms that deal with a style known as Realism. Realism was largely inspired by an era shaped by the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. There was less of an interest in

theatrical presentation of archetypes of mythic figures, and more of a desire to present the condition of the common man philosophically, socially, and psychologically. Hence, an inner-life relates to the internal psychological forces which drive a character.

Stanislavski, along with his pupils, developed this system for creating roles that fit into this new Realism aesthetic.

Realism emerged with the first director, George II the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, who put on intricate performances with the aim of achieving authenticity in theatrical design and Acting that represented the sort of human interaction one would see in the real world (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica). The style of Realism has pervaded Western theatre ever since, and has been greatly perpetuated by the American film industry (Demastes 1-5). Stanislavski's system of acting was the first to codify the work necessary for an actor to achieve inner-authenticity, and thus a realistic, and repeatable performance (*An Actor Prepares* 19). The style is *representational*, which means its language and setting are designed to describe the reality as best it can. Works of Realism are generally written in prose, with characters exhibiting natural human behavior.

To be clear, both globally and historically, most theatre is not representational but *presentational* stylistically. In these performances, truth is not elementally described through our familiar world, but through heightened modes of expression. In presentational theatre actors will often address and interact with audiences directly. In Realism, specifically through Stanislavski's system, the audience is placed outside the world of the play, with a concept known as the Fourth Wall.

I believe the best comparison between the forms was made by acclaimed director and Acting theorist Anne Bogart:

Theatre is one of the few art forms that moves easily between poetry and prose....Description is prose. Expression is poetry. Most pedestrian movement is prose while dance is poetry. Speaking is prose while singing is poetry. To switch modes, you switch brain function. But you can choose. You can access both sides of the brain to write in the language of the stage.” (*And Then, You Act* 38).

It is no small feat to do the work required for Acting. Not to mention there are many different avenues for performance training. Every acting coach or theorist has a different focus for the actor. For Sanford Meisner’s actor-training, the focus is on listening (Schiffman *backstage.com*). For Anne Bogart’s Viewpoints actor-training, the focus is on the relationship between movement and gesture (Drukman *American Theatre*). There are countless other schools and conservatories that interrogate other aspects of acting. Principally, you will find most training programs in the United States are derived from Konstantin Stanislavski’s system, imported by the Moscow Art Theatre during their 1920s international tour (Frithjof *The New York Times*).

The training an American actor generally gets is in script analysis, geared towards the style of Realism. You go through the script, read it, and read it again. The actor dissects the script according to the information offered by the playwright. This is what is known as analyzing “the given circumstances,” which involve answering the questions, “who, what, where, when, why, and how?” For a story to be earnestly translated from page to stage, the actor has to use the elements presented within the text to reflect the visceral layers that engage an audience. Things like time period, relationships, weather conditions, and regional accents all tell the audience a piece of the story. In short, the actor makes the invisible visible. The internal life of the character, their thoughts, desires, feelings are all performed for an audience to see.

Coupled with their synthesis of sensation, the actor trained in Realism must also perform an action to reach an objective (what they desire). An action must be clear, such as to *shame*, to *goad*, to *stroke*, to *uplift*. Often, the best way to determine whether or not an action is playable is by physicalizing it. For instance, to *love* someone is a weak action. Why? There are so many ways to *love* someone that without a certain and specific action of loving it never becomes clear or honest what an actor is doing, and how they are feeling. If it is to *approve*, they could physicalize this by tilting the head back slightly and looking into their partner's eyes to give a nod of confirmation. Of course, the physical action for *approve* could be a hundred different things, but it will always be consistent with the actor performing it, and grounded in in the reality of the story.

Actors trained in Realism often use a “beat analysis” to segment the text in order to understand when new information has made its way into a scene. A new beat signals a change in objectives within the context of what's going on. As the actor begins to work more in the scene in rehearsal (the time they spend practicing the scene with speaking it aloud and with movement), new beats will be uncovered, and more depth will emerge in the specific variation of the action.

I have heard a great many different answers as to how many actions and beats an actor should have within their scene. The best answer I have heard is to give every breath a different action. Every period, colon, semi-colon and ellipsis should be a new action; sometimes a comma should have a new action as well. Therefore, it is not only words being memorized, but also points of breath as the many playwrights intended for their characters. I am speaking primarily of the way many actors are taught to regard the text of their script, and this goes beyond Realism, you will invariably find any work written in

meter will involve a similar consideration. The punctuation exists in general, to give structure to thoughts grammatically. Realism directly confronts a character's psychological makeup, and therefore deals more in the consideration of punctuation from a standpoint of actor training.

Conservatories and college theatre programs train and provide young actors with opportunity to refine skills that can be applied to their craft. Beyond these, it is for the actor alone to learn and challenge themselves in performance. I once heard someone say acting professionally in America means knowing your brand, and being able to sell yourself as a commodity for entertainment. While that is true in relation to the business of acting, it is different from what the actor-artist is taught. Acting is not about looking the part. The great German Acting theorist Bertolt Brecht said it best,

The way people cast a play! As if all cooks were fat, all farmers tough, all statesman stately! As if all lovers were pretty! As if all great orators had beautiful voices! Yes this sort of Faust needs that sort of Mephistopheles, and some actors cannot play princes too convincingly, but there are many different kinds of princes.... in that respect Hamlet is a prince among thousands. (Brecht and Tabori 69)

The actor, too, is one among thousands with a dream of success. To be successful in the craft of Acting means something different than being a financial success or a celebrity. The work of the theatre artist is experimentation just as much as it is execution. Anyone can recite lines, anyone can look the part; the art of Acting is the representation of a story through "intentional presentation".

This does not mean that an actor trained in Realism has to be "real". That is not at all possible or even moral. One of the more infamous examples of where the world witnessed real-life performance was the brutal spectacle of the coliseum, where enslaved peoples were subjected to rape, murder, and the jeers of a psychotic empire obsessed with

indulgence and opulence (Kyle, 7). It is personally harder for me to consider *real-to-life* art at all. Any school of acting which emphasizes reality in practice is not grounded in reality for the craft of Acting.

Method Acting is the primary example of an Acting system that lacks a healthy attitude towards the development of the actor. The Method's aim is for the actor to "literally live the character in life" (The Lee Strasberg Theatre & Film Institute). It uses a Stanislavskian approach known as *Affective Memory*, or *Emotional Recall*, whereby the actor mentally relives an event that has occurred within their life, while trying to achieve an emotional moment in a scene. This is an unethical instrument for actor-training because it cheapens the life experiences an actor has actually had; it becomes emotional prostitution. How can someone experience the same emotional state in front of an audience the same way every night? That would be desensitizing and debilitating for the run of a show (eight shows a week.) Consequently, the Method is not theatrically viable.

Lee Strasberg, the man behind America's long affair with Method acting in Hollywood, was able to gather some of the finest actors of the 1950s to attend workshops and classes at the Actors Studio in New York City. If an actor like Marlon Brando, Eli Wallach, or Sidney Poitier paid a single visit, they were billed as being a legendary alumnus of the Actors Studio, and thus labeled as Method actors. In fact, Hollywood generally labels any actor with a system for Acting a Method actor. For example, Daniel Day-Lewis is often called a Method actor. In truth, he was classically trained at the Bristol Old Vic. His teacher, John Hartoch had this to say:

---when we talk about method acting we tend to be specifically talking about the school of acting developed by Lee Strasberg, developing the theories of Stanislavski. What Danny does isn't quite that – he just completely immerses

himself in a character, but that comes as a result of the incredible attention for detail he was already demonstrating when he was here in Bristol (Clensy).

While praise for the Method still abounds, there is general misunderstanding of what it is and how it truly affects the mental health of the Method actor. Any of those big stars who use the Method are notorious for their fits and absurdly large egos, all of which have nothing to do with creating a role at all (Zeke).

Diderot, one of the first people to write on acting (*Great Forum for Modern Language Studies*) pointed out that the best actors were not those who summoned emotion, but those who used imagination to embody the world of the play (Diderot 198-199). What he meant was that any kind of conscious attempt at achieving emotional manifestation failed to provide consistent quality in performance in the actors of his time. Memories are precious things, and when you manifest them again and again their meaning alters, and the fabric of the memory itself changes (Wimber et al.). I believe people should hold onto those memories for safekeeping; they should be shared only with loved-ones and trusted confidantes.

I have been training in the graduate Acting program at the University of Louisville for nearly three years now, and I feel as though I have developed many trusted confidantes here. Above all things in the work of the actor, two things stand out to me. First, I discovered good relationships are invaluable. One should avoid making collaboration laborious; the attitude you have should support your fellows. Second, that though technique can be taught, Acting cannot. Acting can only be learned. While that may sound mysterious, that has become very apparent in my own work and progress as an actor. Once someone understands that, I believe they have just begun their journey in

the work. My journey's end in the program is the beginning for me, and the work lies ahead.

My original belief in the purpose of this Acting thesis was that I needed to prove that I have progressed in Acting, and that I am ready to take on a professional career. I have come to understand that that particular scope for writing is limiting. It can easily lend itself to an attitude of failure, especially when factoring in the unexpected challenges of the thesis role. A person should never invest in the negative aspects of any enterprise, but use any experience to draw out the positive lessons which are truly of benefit. My interest has been in Presence, which extends beyond the craft of Acting into many aspects of life.

I could write forever about Presence in people and how it reveals, or determines power, status, health...but that is a different topic altogether. I am specifically interested in Presence as it is related to the craft of Acting. Since I am an actor, I can speak on that. Presence is essential to the craft of Acting because it is both the starting-point and the ending-point for a performance. An actor does not shrink away from revealing their inner life, nor do they thrust a facade upon the spectator. They must be seen and heard, and they must be connected to a world that is alive and vital. Otherwise, the work is moot.

I have come to a point in my life where I must now acknowledge and reveal what it is that makes me tick as an actor. The University of Louisville Theatre Arts Department has given me three years of an education in Acting, and I owe it to my school to give an account of what all of my training has amounted to as demonstrated by my thesis performance. I always gave as much of myself as I could performing onstage, and I will attempt to give as much of myself as a writer in this thesis.

The play that I performed in for my thesis role was *Polaroid Stories* by Naomi Iizuka. It is a modernized adaptation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* a collection of Roman poetry based upon legends from Greek mythology. Our production was set in 1987 and centered on a group of homeless characters whose names or storylines loosely paralleled those of the original text. My own character was named SKINHEAD boy, and although it does not sound the least bit Greek, he is in fact an amalgamation of several mythical Greek figures including Acoetes the Lydian Sailor, Iolaus, Pentheus, Prometheus, and Theseus (Iizuka). I thought that this would be a challenging role, and that it would allow me to show everyone what kind of "chops" I have. I wanted to showcase my ability to stretch myself in the portrayal of this disturbed character. I thought I could disappear into the part, but that was not the case. Thankfully, what we think and what we want are generally never those things that we need. Preconceived notions, bubbling desires, and questions often serve more to distract than enlighten the actor's mind.

Sanford Meisner, who was a contemporary of Strasberg's, developed an alternative Acting system to the Method. Rather than to ascribe the work of an actor as coming up with a character's psychological drives, Meisner asserted that psychology was not a problem for the actor to grapple with. The problem an actor should confront is fear. Everything that the actor does must support the "creative instinct" that gives vitality and awareness to the imaginary. Focusing purely on what is happening internally, and on "being" the character, an actor can withdraw within themselves and away from Presence that Acting requires (Soloviova, Vera et al. 147-153).

In approaching a role, an actor may observe what the great Chinese philosopher Laozi once said:

Thirty spokes meet in the hub. Where the wheel isn't is where it's useful. Hollowed out, clay makes a pot. Where the pot's not is where it's useful. Cut doors and windows to make a room. Where the room isn't, there's room for you. So the profit in what is is in the use of what isn't. (Laozi, Le Guin, and Seaton 17).

In the same way, the actor must ritually scrape away their ego which clings to their desires, and their urge to control the things outside of themselves. The real control is being able to let images, ideas, and sensations pass in and out of consciousness while retaining harmonious exuberance to be a conduit for art. Their mind, feelings, and will are driven by an inspirational force known as “character”. By this relinquishing and giving over, the spectre of character is given a temporary vessel of Presence in the actor.

CHAPTER ONE PRESENCE FOR THE ACTOR

Presence became the focus of my research about six months before *Polaroid Stories* opened. The question in mind came not during an Acting class, but in Tai-chi class for actors. Tai-Chi is a moving meditation, as well as a martial art, that opened many doors for me personally. In a moment of clarity, a voice in the silence of my mind asked, “Who are you?” I could not answer the question. I thought, “I am so many things, there is no way to answer this question.” It made me sad, actually, that I did not know who I was. I went into my office and buried my face in my hands.

My friend, with whom I shared the office, came in and sat in her seat. The temperature of the room changed from cold to warm. The space became filled with an energy that was not unfamiliar to me. I smiled and I looked at her---she was not doing anything remarkable, just surfing the internet, eating a little food. Her very Presence had changed me alchemically. It was the optimism with which she was holding herself, and the open comforting relationship she displayed with the space around her. On the wall above her desk, quotes of peace and joy; her workspace was tidy and becoming of someone who was headed on a certain course for success in their life.

When she left the room and the moment had passed, I knew that the power my friend held in that small office was enough to answer my question. The Presence we exude in a space as actors is the base for everything else in our training. More often than not, a character can remain nameless to an audience. It is only through how an actor

establishes Presence that the audience is drawn into watching and listening. It would be a fallacy to declare that Presence is something that some people have and some people lack. At any given moment, someone could be daydreaming and not Present, or listening to music totally set apart from a conversation going on behind them.

The origin of the word Presence is the Latin “praesentem”, which typically referred to one’s carriage or demeanor. It also acted as a word alluding to the proximal existence of a spirit or non-physical entity (dictionary.com). In that vein, throughout the history of theatre’s existence the actor has been regarded as being somewhat supernatural. “Actors used to be buried at a crossroads with a stake through their heart. Those performances troubled the onlookers that they feared their ghosts” (Mamet 6). Western theatre itself is still filled with superstitions: you cannot say “Macbeth” in the theatre; you cannot whistle on the stage; you cannot say “good luck” on opening night (either say “break-a-leg” or “merde!”).

Why is this so? Are actors possessed by spirits or demons? Is the theatre haunted by ghosts? I should say not. In a manner of speaking, actors are an odd bunch, but they are entirely human. In fact, actors have done everything from performing for the president, to shooting the president, to running for president. There is far too little to indicate something other-worldly when it comes to the actor; and yet, in the moment of a great performance, audiences are transported spiritually.

Even if audience members sit in their seats for an entire performance without doing anything but watching, they are still active participants. I say this because scientists have proven that in watching someone perform a task, neural receptors are activated, and

the brain behaves as though it is performing the task itself. (Winerman *apa.org*). One may reason that humans are affected alchemically from Presence.

Presence is ever-fluctuating for human beings, and that is good news for performers everywhere, as far as I am concerned. The bad news is that Presence is something that needs constant cultivation. I must admit, somewhere along the line, I lost that spark which gave me the energy and focus to do great things for an audience. As I grow older, I feel increasingly uninspired by what I do in performance and in rehearsal. I am most Present now when I am marveling at the incredible work others do, whether they are my students in class, or my peers. The challenge I have put in place for myself and others is this: be Present. Learn to cultivate Presence in whatever exercises or games inspire you in performance of the story you are telling. It is easier said than done; needless to say, I was not where I had hoped I would be in the work of *Polaroid Stories*. Distractions are around every corner, and excuses for mediocrity abound.

There is a fundamental question that directors ask when actors are not giving anything in their performance: “Could you do that with more purpose and intention?” When I hear that, I know I am guilty of not doing the most basic part of an actor’s job. A performer should always be in control of their work, and therefore never “phone-in” any moment within a production. That means the minute you step onto stage you should have focus. Being focused means that you are an artist, being unfocused means that you are an inconsiderate walking-statue. This is something that every actor will inevitably go through because actors are human, and err as such.

Focus is the starting point for Presence. It means knowing what is actually going on around you and being able to know where you are in the world of the story. In this

way, the actor is not isolated from either reality or fantasy. As adults, we have developed a filter in our perception of the world around us. If you walk down the street to get a cup of coffee, your focus is on arriving at the coffee shop. What happens when an actor focuses on getting to the end of the scene? They become immune to the circumstances within the story, and passive. Rather than seeing an active participant, we see a tourist of theatrics reciting words to no one.

The focus must be on “the now.” Directors have also referred to this as “being in the moment”. I assert that this is Presence. The actor does not merely take a stroll through the story, but fills it constantly with responses to their observations. What they hear, the audience perceives, what they see the audience believes. The focus of experiencing a journey--not arriving at the destination, is what opens the actor to an audience; thus, the actor endears their character to the audience by bringing the experience of their own personal truth.

From my experience, I have ascertained that for the actor to understand Presence, they must understand the two principles of its composition: first, that Presence is a force of life-energy from which vital sources of action emerge. Second, that in order for an audience to experience an actor’s Presence, the actor must be open and accessible. This means that an audience can see with clarity, an actor’s acute awareness and their vulnerability to that awareness.

A principal problem with Westerners, specifically Westerners with a Eurocentric cultural upbringing, is that they are quick to act and rarely take any time to experience awareness. That attitude comes out of a cultural emphasis which is most often placed upon the value individualism rather than collectivism. I have seen it in every Acting class

I have ever taught, or have taken a part in. Western actors often excel when concepts are attached to competition. They understand “win” and “lose”, “triumph” and “defeat”. Those are clear delineations for Westerners which represent the values held by their culture (Basu-Zharku 1)

Bad actors are nothing new to the theatre. Before Realism existed as a theatrical form there were bad actors; therefore, it stands to reason that if an actor is not believable it is not because they are failing to represent reality. Often, bad actors are directly associated with presentational acting because they are *showing* instead of believably representing the experience of sensation. One could argue that a bad actor is someone who does not invest fully in the vitality of their actions or in their awareness of the imaginary within their performance. Whether actor training focuses on the work of the individual or on the dynamic of the collective, it is up to the individual actor to focus their energy and effort into the craft. Presentational forms can inform representational, and vice versa. The trouble with training occurs when the actor is not aware, or made aware of what they are doing and how they are approaching their work. I would say the scope of that particular actor needs to be expanded within themselves using the techniques of interrogation that their training provided them with.

Stanislavski referred to traditional European Acting as “mechanical” because it dealt with the mimicry of clichéd movements and theatrical intonation of voice (Stanislavski *An Actor Prepares* 24-28). Interestingly, Stanislavski also qualifies the mechanical actor as someone who is especially capable of filling a space with rampant energy:

The very worst fact is that clichés will fill up every empty spot in the role, which is not already solid with living feeling (Stanislavski *An Actor Prepares* 24-28).

Audiences were attracted to the theatre at this time essentially for an actor's display of physical hysteria, rather than for something that was mindfully executed as a work of art. His point was not to discredit classical training, but to push the training further, so an actor was not expending energy needlessly, but purposefully to benefit an honest performance.

Stanislavski's answer to bad acting was to give the actor more to focus on psychologically. I would qualify the Stanislavski system as a potential doorway for an actor to find Presence. It can act as a vehicle for artistic immersion in that regard, and there are many professionals who swear by it. The problem is that script analysis is not the principle aim behind the system. In fact, the system has been largely bastardized by the West, since Stanislavski's full examination of text took from months to years of rehearsals. The training most current American actors receive is only a fraction of the system he developed.

Stanislavski would have his actors read a play over and over, discuss it, and then explore each scene with improvisation. He would actually discourage the actors from initially learning their lines, imploring them to find their inner-drives for the scene, and to experience the levels within it. He believed that actors who depended on the text alone were not committed to fully embodying a character (Merlin 20).

Although Stanislavski and his students were Westerners, they did not limit themselves to only exploring the Western-model of theatre. Eastern practices, both artistic and religious, made quite an impression upon Western Acting theorists. Stanislavski wanted his actors to gain a sense of self-observation in order to achieve the free-flow of prana, the Hindu concept of vital energy which runs throughout the body.

“What is muscular pressure or spasm except moving energy that is blocked?”

(Stanislavski *Building a Character* 60). His wish for the actor to achieve a body without

tension also extended into helping an actor arrive at a plane of being from which a sense

of artistic truth could be found, called the “*I am*” (Stanislavski *An Actor Prepares* 217).

That assertion is not something often mentioned when it comes to Acting in Realism, but

such an idea was espoused by the “father of modern Acting” himself. I cite Stanislavski's

acknowledgement of the “*I am*” state as evidence that Presence is essential to every actor,

Eastern or Western.

It is important to note, however, Stanislavski did not have all the answers for how to achieve a state of Presence on stage. His system of Acting was meant to be a launching point for the actor's own interrogation of performance:

Artists must learn to think and feel for themselves and find new forms. They must never be content with what someone else has done.... Create your own method, and it can be as true and as great as any method yet discovered (Logan and Stanislavski *Building a Character* xiv-xv).

In that vein, such artists as Vsevolod Meyerhold, Michael Chekhov, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Eugenio Barba, and Anne Bogart took up that challenge to redefine theatrical convention and to establish investigations of Presence, of how to access it, and of what blocks prevent the actor from having it.

After studying Japanese Acting theorist Tadashi Suzuki's physicalized school of theatre, director Anne Bogart was inspired by the mindfulness in performance that was demonstrated by his actors. She noted that rather than pandering to the taste and understanding of the lowest-common denominator of the masses, Suzuki's actors always held a quiet awareness that implied they were addressing a specific component of human experience in every audience member (Bogart *And Then, You Act* 41-42). In that vein

Bogart also suggested that the primary work of the actor is cultivating Presence rather than investing in formulaic and intellectual assumptions over character:

You cannot create results. You can only create conditions in which something might happen (Bogart *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* 124).

Bogart was not the first to question the validity of purely intellectualized methods. Vsevolod Meyerhold resented Stanislavski's convention of the Fourth Wall. He bolstered a call for new theatrical forms that harkened back to earlier presentational forms of theatre, especially in the fashion of Commedia dell'Arte. Meyerhold wanted actors of the stage to embrace the vitality of physical expression as it connects to the spatial relationship between the actor and a temporal audience (Meyerhold 414). Meyerhold believed in a theatre where the audience could connect to performers' Presence as if it was clear orchestration of images:

The actor must study *the plasticity of the statue* (Huxley and Witts 272).

In that regard, a statue has physical dimensions, and often holds permanent and dynamic Presence in stillness.

Michael Chekhov often related the work of the actor to famous pieces of art across the spectrum of disciplines, citing the work of painters, architects, poets, and musicians (Chekhov and Gordon). Chekhov was not concerned merely with a system of Acting, but with affording the actor an opportunity to find endless inspiration to stay engaged and present within their craft. Many of Chekhov's exercises in sensory experience are propelled by "body and imagination as a means of cultivating presence". They are derived directly from the Chinese traditional practice of Qigong (Mroz 300). Qigong, or "energy-work", is a form of moving meditation concentrated on vital energy

known as chi (qi, or ch'i). Qigong is not practiced as a singular form, but like yoga has many different styles, all of which emerged from various cultures within China (Mroz 300). Drawing then from both the theories of Western artists and the Eastern masters of the metaphysical arts, Chekhov sought to strip the actor of mental distractions that detracted from their Presence. "What is the reward for artists brave enough to acknowledge the objectivity of the world of the imagination? They free themselves from the constant pressure of their too personal, too intellectual interference with the creative process, the greater part of which is intensely personal and takes place in the sphere that lies beyond the intellect." (Chekhov and Gordon 3)

Much of the physical theatre that emerged in the 1960s sought to break the norms of Realism and find an Eastern solution to a declining quality of resonant performances. Eugenio Barba, director and Acting theorist, directly linked Presence as the key element uniting actors with audience. He, along with a group of penniless performance artists, created the Odin Teatret, where they utilized the skills of the actors within to develop training for the stage:

Using the training exercises, the performer tests his or her ability to achieve a condition of total presence, a condition that he or she will have to find again in the creative moment of improvisation and performance (Barba and Savarese 278).

Lack of finances to bring teaching artists to the Odin Teatret forced the group to develop their own theatrical training (Hodge 239); thus, it can be said of the actor, a cultivation of Presence must come from within. There are no specific formulas, there are no specific systems which are guaranteed to bring the actor a polished performance. Techniques are really an interrogation of limitation. If an actor knows what blocks them

from Presence, half the battle is already won. The actor who refuses to know is a victim of their own ego.

Jerzy Grotowski may have been the most famous, if not most infamous of the twentieth century theorists. He was one of Barba's most influential teachers, and world-renowned theatrical director Peter Brook said of Grotowski, “---no-one else in the world, to my knowledge, no-one since Stanislavski, has investigated the nature of acting, its phenomenon, its meaning, the nature and science of its mental-physical-emotional processes as deeply and completely as Grotowski” (Brook 11). In truth, it was actually the writings of Grotowski and his students that *forced* me to encounter the art of Acting as a craft. Up until reading Thomas Richards' *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, I had a warped sense entitlement that prevented me from truly growing as an artist and teacher. I believed talent and skill could be passed from teacher to pupil through harsh critique. Grotowski's words opened my eyes to what the work of the actor really is: an thoughtful interrogation, exploration, and participation. Grotowski presents a beautiful and humbling idea: the actor cannot leave themselves behind in the work, nor can they hide behind the work:

The point is not to renounce part of our nature—all should retain its natural place: the body, the heart, the head, something that is ‘under our feet’ and something that is ‘over the head.’ All like a vertical line, and this verticality should be held taut between organicity and the awareness. Awareness means the consciousness which is not linked to language (the machine for thinking), but to Presence (Richards and Grotowski 125).

While Grotowski may have sparked my personal interests in the subject of Presence, I believe it was Antonin Artaud who first invoked Westerners to create a stylized theatre of pure Presence:

It is called upon to address not only the mind but the senses, and through the senses to attain still richer and more fecund regions of the sensibility at full tide (Artaud 442).

Awareness and a connection to vital action constitute a present performer; Artaud was *trying* to point the path to a theatre of pure Presence. While he did not necessarily create a codified system for Acting, he believed that sentimental and loftily-crafted plays lacked the elements of awareness that harkened back to a primal man, as fully present in the fabric of the world as any animal.

Why does Artaud's theory apply to an actor's cultivation of Presence? I think it is clear that Westerners live in an age where the computer has merged with the cellphone to create the smartphone, capable of doing everything from making calls to summoning information at the swish of a finger. In short, Western countries and countries of economic wealth are accustomed to getting satisfaction very quickly. It does not take long for their attention or interest to wane, and this poses a large problem for actors performing onstage. Artaud is asking for actors to acknowledge the need for something more than intellectual faculties when approaching performance.

Live theatre is quickly becoming a slower and clunkier form of entertainment than Netflix or Hulu. Fewer and fewer people want to go pay for a ticket to see a show when they can have any film or television they want in a matter of seconds. The result does have a positive implication for working artists; with more forms of media, there is more opportunity for employment. The consequence of such innovations comes at a large cost; now, average people are less inclined to venture out to see live theatre. For the actor, this means that they need to get in touch with the primordial state of being that can

simultaneously connect their audience with their performance. They need to be able to generate Presence instantaneously.

I am not saying that humans need to behave like animals; there are certainly enough acts committed by people in this world that are inhuman. I am making a suggestion based upon Artaud, and all the rest of the Acting masters: acknowledge the limits of the intellectual and explore the drives of the subconscious. Cultivate a respect for awareness of mind-body connection and find vitality within the craft of Acting. Define and then defy the frame of limitations which impede upon Presence.

One limitation is the misinterpretation of Acting in cinema. The public is attracted to Presence captured through the camera lens, and fascinated by the lengths at which film and television actors go to obtain it. The myth of great film Acting is that it all relates to Method Acting, or vice versa. In truth, some of these actors follow the Method, but many do not.

Since the camera is often magnifying the actor, Acting for film and television only needs to take place from the neck-up. The Presence film actors generally need is within the “facial mask”. As a result of this, Presence has become known purely as *emotion* to the public. It is true that “the eyes are the windows to the soul” and that professional actors on camera should radiate innermost desire and thought through their eyes for all to behold. It is also true that the film actor spends most of his or her time sitting or standing, that they have multiple takes to “get it right” by the standards of the film crew and director, and that the camera reveals most of the story for the audience.

I am not suggesting that there is no craft in film Acting, but I am stressing the pitfalls that come from only observing actors in film. I am merely stressing that stage

actors need to be present for an audience from head-to-toe. Film and television are more readily available for the masses to watch than live theatre is. If actors of the stage observe the work of actors on film they must be wary of becoming sucked into a false reality imposed by the form. First, no one is purely focused on an actor's face or their head when the audience is sitting four feet or more away from them. Even on film, the actors are not moving their head around gesturing with their neck. It looks unmotivated and odd to people. Second, it does no better for emotions when a novice actor starts to furrow their brow and contort their mouth to convey emotion. Are they copying what they have seen on film? Absolutely not, but I believe their engagement with the Presence of film acting has manifested in a desire to connect energy with the head. I have seen this as both an Acting instructor of college undergraduates, and as the director of a special needs performance project. It is one of the hardest habits to break, especially when you encourage young actors to be bigger and use the space. They go right to their head.

In this case, the head is animated, but by "contrast", the body is stiff. There is a difference between stiffness and stillness; one supports a vital action in stillness, and in stiffness one is frozen with anxiety. How often do we really pay attention to an actor's body film? Generally speaking, when they are not wearing any clothes. Or they are wearing clothes which reveal a chiseled physique, like in action films. Besides that, the body is second only to the head. Beginning actors usually have a lot of trouble with knowing what to do with their arms. I know I have a habit of putting my thumbs in my pockets; I was told by my movement professor Erin Crites that this comes out of the human instinct to protect the most valuable part of our hands. It most probably related to unconscious habits of nervousness I had developed over the years.

It is important that Presence reaches the exterior limbs. Ryszard Cieslak, Grotowski's closest cohort and actor, suggested that the actor make an exploration of the body through Grotowski's exercises of the corporals. Through this self-interrogation, the practitioner not only develops a better awareness of their body's balance, but the way their entire body works in an attempt to attain it (Nfesette). Michael Chekhov also expressed similar sentiments, citing that the points of bodily movement for the limbs' impulses should stay connected to a "center" in the chest; thusly, allowing the body to become "powerful and harmonious" (Chekhov and Gordon 44).

Presence manifests itself physically through the actor's body, both in movement and voice. This does not mean, of course that it cannot be accessed through the mind. In fact, it takes a certain kind of mental focus to achieve Presence. This focus is not narrow, but wide. It encompasses a spatial awareness for both what exists in the physical space and in the imaginative space. The first thing to understand is that any amount of preparation an actor can take may still result in failure; technique will not save someone from what is out of their control. That does not mean that one should be ill-prepared, but it does mean that they must be open to new stimuli. Awareness is the first level of consciousness which informs an actor's Presence. In fact, without awareness, the actor falls into many traps which result in the passive regurgitation of words, rather than actively speaking to achieve a specific goal. A wooden and hollow performance occurs when an actor talks *at* their scene partner, or *at* their audience rather than listening and taking in the information around them. This could be listening, watching, smelling, tasting, touching---anything which is a participation of the actor's senses will give "life" to their work.

Awareness is categorically two parts: one part the actor, one part the character. First, the actor has a functioning topographical map of their literal space. The actor knows where they are located, and where others are in relation to them. They also are monitoring movement, speed, and intensity as it was prescribed from the director; for instance, if a director told an actor that they needed to avoid putting their feet on the furniture, and sit with a straighter posture, the actor should monitor themselves to always fulfill the physical adjustment. In the awareness of the character, the actor has developed relationship between story and perspective. There is still a focus on the functional elements, but there is a transcendental perception of the world around the actor as being the world of the play (or screenplay.) The space is encompassing, and the imaginary elements become a simulated reality.

Where does this exist for you, reader? There was a time in your life when a monster lived under your bed, when cooties were a deadly and contagious disease, and when tag meant “*Run for your life!*” An actor is performer who embraces the imaginary, as a child does, in their playing. Their awareness is open to the circumstances set by the unfolding story of which they are a part, and their hearts are open to the repeated experience of sharing the imaginary.

CHAPTER TWO THE ROLE OF MINDFULNESS IN THE ACTOR'S WORK

When it comes to structure of the actor's own instrument, it is important to research the functions of the brain to understand how our own psychology can inform presence. If we are looking to target the center for generating both Presence and art, the actor must make use of the hippocampus, which is the inner portion of the brain that functions for emotion, memory, and learning. It can be accessed through meditation, imagination, and play; all of which are rich tools to develop and enlarge the amount of function of this portion of the brain (Shulte *The Washington Post*). The amygdala, which resides just beneath the hippocampus, is the portion of the brain which the actor must avoid activating. It predicates fight or flight as part of a human's instinctive survival mechanism. This is a powerful force that aids in life preservation, but not in life cultivation. Aggressive or fearful forces are too real, too powerful, and too overwhelming to be grounded in Presence. Think of Presence through the analogy of water. Presence is like a flowing river and it follows a purposeful path to an ocean of creativity, whereas the amygdala acts as a flash flood crashing recklessly across space and time as onlookers stare with their faces aghast. (Schulte).

To avoid an encounter with the amygdala, I have developed certain rituals for my own performance practice; when use them, they put me in touch with the creative and empowering forces within the Hippocampus. I first start with meditation. Before my process for Acting can begin, I need to eliminate the other thoughts fluttering around in

my head, especially those thoughts which relate to the project (i.e. worries and concerns over a production's progress). The amount of time I spend worrying or being distracted is wasted time and energy, and I find it manifests itself vocally and physically in my character interpretation. By that I mean an actor's personal life runs parallel with the life they make manifest for their character. I find that if I am bringing anxiety or depression into a rehearsal, I begin to make subconscious choices that reinforce behaviors which close me off from my fellow actors.

I remember there was a time when I was going back and forth between comforting my then girlfriend over the phone because her dog was going through some major medical issues. I was playing Greg in *Sylvia*, which is a comedy about a man and his love for his dog Sylvia. We had just reached our ten minute break and my phone started vibrating. I picked up to the sound of sobbing and tears because the dog had just been put down.

I came back to that rehearsal, and something strange started to happen with my voice. When I opened my mouth to talk with the other actors I was pushing out this New England accent, but this character was a New Yorker. It emerged because I spoke on the phone with family, who originated from Massachusetts, mostly to console or sympathize with them. I was sympathizing with my girlfriend, and every time I spoke, I was speaking for her, to ease her pain. Part of this carried over into the production itself because I had never really shaken that event out my mind. My mind dwelled in a different place than in the story I was telling, and because of that my awareness had disappeared. *Sylvia* was not the first or the last time I would let outside distractions take me away from the Presence required for Acting.

I always try to give myself at least eight minutes of just breathing fully in through my nose, down into my diaphragm until I feel my rib cage lift slightly, and out through my mouth which moistens upon the exhale. In my mouth, my tongue is lightly touching the soft palette, and my jaw is hanging slightly parted, so that muscular tension which I find commonly occurs from eating food or chewing my consonants while speaking, dissipates. My awareness is on the journey of the breath. The energy of the inhale follows down my spine, and the energy of exhale travels up the abdomen. The inhale has cool sensation, whereas the exhale has warm sensation. This simple cataloguing before a rehearsal puts me on my way to a positively-charged mindset open to creativity and exuberance.

This exercise was developed out of my research of Tai-chi and other energy arts. It is not specifically for the actor; it is specifically for the human being. It really is a shame that actors and other artists believe they need to suffer in order to create art. Musicians do not *need* to shoot heroin to achieve a heavenly sound. Dancers do not *need* to destroy their bodies to generate beautiful movement. Actors do not need to throw themselves into an emotionally traumatized state to create the illusion of character.

Regard the tradition of improv-comedy troupes. How much time does one of these actors need to transition into a character that an audience can believe in? Virtually none. The improv-comedian puts on their character like a cloak, aware of their surroundings and the frame of circumstances set before them. This light-hearted attitude towards the work establishes life-giving energy to performance. This freshness and sustained vitality is something that every actor should aim for in their work. This is a part of why Presence is so essential to an actor's craft. The actor is engaging circumstance and

defining it. However, this also presents a major question for the actor working with a script: are they taking ownership of their role?

It is easy to see why some actors just stick to improv-comedy; it is easier to define something that comes from within than it is to give definition to someone else's words. This inhibits the Presence of many actors, who instead of opening and revealing themselves, are closing up to retreat back into their memory banks for their lines.

I taught my Acting students that when performing play, they should consider that the lines of their character have been carefully composed. "The words you speak onstage during the course of a performance reveal the character a playwright intended an audience to see." They balked at this. I just wanted them to understand that respect and artistic integrity requires an actor to perform their part honestly, memorizing the exact lines of their script. However, my students had anxiety over the memorization of just a few lines of text, and it became clear soon after that they were missing the point of what they were supposed to be doing altogether. I had a brave group of performers who kept dropping their lines return to their seats, and again made it clear that plays need players who will say the words written for them. "However," I shrugged, "I am not holding a script in my hand. I have no way of knowing whether the lines are incorrect. I am watching these scenes because you have something to share with me that goes beyond written words. Be an active participant in your scene, and utilize the layers of sensation at your disposal." After that little talk, they were able to say their lines without any difficulty. Their scenes improved, more than substantially.

Why is this so? The obvious answer is that people perform tasks better when they are not under pressure. If the mind is concentrating on "do this" or "get it right," it does

not exist in the awareness of the present; it exists in anticipating the future, or reflecting on the past. The actions of that person are no longer connected vitally but executed instead arbitrarily, inconsequentially, or half-heartedly. The saddest part about such a performance is not a disappointed director, or even a bored audience; no, it is the fact that the actor has cheated themselves out of a gratifying experience. They have deprived themselves of the happiness that comes from a job well-done, and they have treated themselves with disrespect. There is no sense in such self-abuse, all at the cost of Presence. If you drop a line, if you miss your mark, if you lose focus, acknowledge it. Then, find a way to move on. Do not sacrifice the power of Presence, for a “mistake”. There are no mistakes made in Acting; there are only those mistakes accepted by the actor.

I saw Goldoni’s *A Servant of Two Masters* when I was about eighteen years-old. It was a Commedia dell’Arte-inspired work, and over half of the cast members were in masks. I could not understand a single word being said, and the characters were lifeless and boring. It was supposed to be a comedy! I remember between the scenes that dragged on, they had curtains on a rope with the location painted on them. A non-speaking actor, with a white-painted face and period clothes, came out to make the scene changes. He had at one point made the error of unveiling the wrong scene. The audience laughed at the mistake, which was the most amusing thing we had seen up to that point. The actor turned to the audience with a wide grin, eyes brimming with excitement. He began to make a game of it reaching for one curtain, then going to another; his high-spirited attitude towards an error filled the play with much needed humor and liveliness. By the

end of the play, the audience was not angry or disappointed; they were giving a standing ovation to this actor.

I believe that this spirited connection between the audience and the actors is what Presence is all about. It is not generated by talent, skill set, or technique. None of those things matter if you have no accessibility. If one wears a mask onstage, it must be to reveal an unseen aspect of humanity. If one speaks with heightened language, it should be to expose the sacred and profane aspects of mankind. Many artists can hide behind their work, but the actor cannot. It is an art of pure exposure, and that is what makes theatre so inescapably human.

The mind and the body make up a human being. That connection is what defines the sort of Presence an actor brings into a space, and into their role. More can be done with less, and when one strips the elements of a role down to their simplest form, they can begin to create layers upon which to build the apparition of a character's soul. That is how someone with virtually no lines or stage time got a standing ovation. That is where my work for SKINHEADboy began.

CHAPTER THREE DEVELOPING ACTION FOR MY THESIS ROLE

My own process for *Polaroid Stories* began with solidifying a bond between text and imagination through the action analysis of SKINHEADboy. As a young actor, I was surprised by the amount of written work required when it comes to Acting. In fact, I have found that many undergraduate students are floored by the specific language one must have in Acting class versus their own college writing class. When it comes to making a deeper connection with Presence, the actor must give order and structure to their creative thoughts. By creating a character analysis, as Stanislavski prescribed, I can eliminate haphazard emotional Acting, and thoughtfully compose a fully embodied role. This means that the actor fills every dimension of their character with vital actions connected with their awareness. It is up to the actor to generate Presence through their manipulation of the imaginary.

If an actor is serious about developing a polished performance, they must be clear in their choices. The best way to do that is to write out what you are going to *do* as the character and use that written analysis to navigate a role throughout the rehearsal period and into performance. There must be a sense of purpose within the actor's development of the character, or they have no Presence.

The first step I take is to make an initial reading of the play. I highlight my lines as I go through; after that, I write down first-impression adjectives of that encounter. These are adjectives which relate directly to the sensations which arise from my residual

contact with the scenes of *Polaroid Stories*. Although this is not necessarily taught in Stanislavski's work per se, I find that sensation exploration for a role can give the actor a unique perception of their character. I believe that the initial sensations I experienced for SKINHEADboy revealed a great deal not just about the character, but about my own psychology:

Sight: Red fog, darkness, metal spikes, hellish flames, sewer rats, broken glass, rubber band snapping, hands clawing the earth in desperation, contorted bodies, a sad child, sores, an old stone well, dusty countryside, filthy city, buses flying past in transit, pieces of dirt-covered scraps of paper blowing in the wind, grinding metal gears, electric sparks, stars, celestial bodies, the roof of a tall building, a falling human body

Sound: sirens, car horns, cars, the jerking and rattling of public transit, the hum of electric streetlamp, distant gunshots, distant shouting and yelling, water dripping from a pipe, a woman sobbing, a crackling of fire

Touch: cold concrete wall, rusted metal pipe, fists beating me, wind, dampness

Taste: blood, sweat, acerbic chemical taste, cheese, potato chips, dirt

Smell: smoke, cat urine, human refuse, sharp chemical fumes, fuel exhaust

Emotion: fear, hostility, anger, pleasure, joy, excitement, frustration, anxiety, paranoia, happiness, ecstasy, embarrassment, rage, doubt, suffering

I read through the text a second time; I use this reading to start underlining the things which refer to the nature of my character. These can be found in the things I say about myself, the things other characters say about me, and whatever expositional information can be found in the stage directions. If I have an awareness of these elements, I can use them to fill my Presence through consciously creating atmospheres which SKINHEADboy can react viscerally to. Often times, there can be many clues about one's character in scenes which they have no part in.

In the first scene of the entire show D is talking about SKINHEADboy. The director decided to put me in this scene and show me huffing some spray paint from a dirty rag; however, in the script only D was present. I used the convention of the huffing to imagine my sinuses as being very sore. In this scene, D also outlined his relationship

with SKINHEADboy, explaining how and where they met, and also how and when they parted ways (Iizuka 7-8). In that particular case I discovered several things which I had not noticed being a part of this character's personality:

Manipulation "D: i found him up by port authority, scheming and scamming, nickle diming what he can---" (Iizuka 7-8). I had gathered from SKINHEADboy's interactions with both D and SKINHEADgirl that he was not at all articulate. The words SKINHEADboy uses to speak are almost completely devoid of intellectual prowess. They are mostly monosyllabic, which propels this character towards being emotionally-driven. Often, people I have met who are emotional have a difficult time thinking clearly. If SKINHEADboy is manipulative in addition to being emotional, I believe that is a coping mechanism he must have developed at a young age. He came from Grand Island, Nebraska, which is less of a city, and more of a farming community. He came from a home with a mother, but no father. SKINHEADboy gives a possible allusion to his mother having men come in and out of their lives, and cites that "some guy" who was an intimate partner of his mother's tied him him up with a rope and hung him in a well (Iizuka 50). The fact that this man, who was essentially a stranger to SKINHEADboy, committed this heinous act without any objections from his mother, leads me to believe his mother had a drug problem that distracted her from raising her son. He was in that well for eight days which would have left him severely malnourished and dehydrated. At seven years-old, that would take a significant toll on a child both developmentally and psychologically. That would account for his emotionally-driven nature. The manipulation, however, has to come from elsewhere. He speaks highly of his mother calling her a queen and never mentions her outside of his monologue at the end of the first act (Iizuka 50-51). If he is not bitter towards his mother, which I see no evidence of, then I believe he was forcibly removed from her care. He would have been put in foster care, which has been associated with creating manipulative youths, especially within the dynamic of group homes (Finkelstein et al. 32-33).

Next, I read and write questions about their relationships within the play. I write about the things they say and their interactions with the other characters. It is in this way that I found the objectives of the SKINHEADboy. An objective is what the character wants; however, it is not just a vague desire. An objective requires specific wording for its invocation and activation. The objective must be written with an performable action

attached to it, which is articulated by an active verb related directly to another character or characters in the scene:

I want to active verb (specific character(s))

I am a firm believer in personalizing the action of the character to the actor

I active verb (specific character(s))

I have seen it written otherwise:

To active verb (specific character(s))

I do not like this short-hand of action for my process because it opens me up to making general choices in the execution of the action. The active verb that defines the action being taken must be concise to be strong, and when I fail to connect the action to myself, it becomes distant and passive. This is an example of an acceptable grammatical structure for my objective:

I want to tease my girlfriend.

This an example of a way language can negatively influence me as an actor; this is what I would classify as an inefficient active verb:

To try to get my girlfriend to feel embarrassed.

Can I perform “get” as an action? It is not a very active word because it is vague; it triggers nothing in my will-force. How can I articulate “get” clearly in a performance? I

do not believe it invokes Presence, because it is a murky concept with no physical impulse attached to it inside of me. I cannot perform in a gesture, and I cannot even internally process an image that conveys “get”. When I come to this quandary in my written analysis of a character, I understand there is a stronger choice that needs to be made.

I found that the language behind the action itself must be positive and written in present-tense to work for me. I think of the actions which support my objectives as batteries, and that they must be full *now* to supply energy for my performance. Without the fullness of a positive and therefore performable action, I cannot do anything except say words.

Let me salvage that inefficient objective, keeping the alternative vernacular and grammar structure:

To embarrass my girlfriend.

That seemed better to me, and is certainly much stronger than before. The problem with that wording was that there was no fire beneath it. “Embarrass” may have made a good objective, but the action needed to be more specific in the language of the analysis. There are too many ways to “embarrass” and I needed to pick one way to that was repeatable. I think about what was being said between my character and my scene partner, and what they wanted from me. If the character I was creating did something outside of my own actions, I as an actor could only relate to that intellectually. The composition of language put responsibility of the action on the imaginary and theoretical, which contributed little more than develop an idea of what the action could be. I as an

actor had to be accountable for the action, not the character. The character only existed on paper; the actions I took worked to create the illusion of character for an audience to behold. If I had not made the action personal to myself, it would be flimsy. I respect the power language has to inform action; lawyers do, and so do politicians. Their phrasing of any speech could be the difference between someone going to prison, or a bill getting passed. I must add too, that even if words are not being spoken, I knew I had to perform the act of *listening*. That is a huge component to Presence within life of the imaginary. Therefore, even in silence with no words at all, I had actively made actions happen. Blocking, or the movement I took within a scene, had actions and drives within it; otherwise it would have been aimless wandering. I held myself accountable to perform actions; after all, actions are what make up an actor's vocation.

The next thing to do is to follow the arc of the character; examine where they begin and where they end, and everything inbetween. I go about that by breaking down my scenes into segments, called *beats*. A beat follows a set of specific actions in support of an objective. My rule of thumb is for an action to unfold at every piece of punctuation. That means every breath the actor takes must be a different action. An objective does not just change wherever, it follows at points where new information enters into the character's awareness. What qualifies as new information? An entrance, an exit, or something unknown which was revealed in what one of the character's said. It could also be something related to the environment, or to an object. It could be that someone or something has stirred a memory in the character----that is also new information. This is taken from my first scene with D in *Polaroid Stories*:

SCENE: ARIADNE IN THE LABYRINTH
FIRST BEAT

OBJECTIVE: **I want to belittle D**

D: behold my kingdom

SKINHEADboy: tss.----**I discredit D**

kingdom of shit----**I insult D**

D: behold my castle, my mansion, my taj mahal

SKINHEADboy: man this place is a pit.----**I accost D**

it fucking stinks in here.----**I inform D**

SECOND BEAT

OBJECTIVE: **I want to threaten D**

D: man, you stink

SKINHEADboy: hey, fuck you----**I challenge D**

THIRD BEAT

OBJECTIVE: **I want to debase D**

D: i stink too. yeah, i do, and that's the truth.

but, see, i like the stink. it smells of home.

SKINHEADboy: home?----**I ridicule D**

man this ain't no home.----**I negate D**

D: this is my home.

SKINHEADboy: that is so fucked up.----**I brush D**

anybody tell you how fucked up you are?----**I oust D** (Iizuka 19-20).

Now, I am not finished working on beats, objectives, or actions. Think of it in this way: the actor's breakdown of a script is like a dish being prepared for a potluck dinner that is taking place in four weeks. The actor whips something together, tries it out on their own time, and shares it with his fellow cast members (this is the rehearsal process). When you put your dish out for others to try, they may bite, or they may pick around certain elements because something else is grabbing their attention (hopefully they caught something significant I may have missed in my SKINHEADboy soufflé). By the end of this process, I know what other people are bringing to the potluck and what I must bring to complete the feast (the production). Of course, like with every event, you must expect the unexpected, and be able to improvise whenever necessary. In essence, what you see above is not the final product, but an initial encounter. It actually lacks specificity in relation to the way I am performing these actions. Michael Chekhov, who

was a student of Stanislavski, asked the actor to consider not only what action is being performed, but *how* the actions are being performed. Giving actions specific qualities reveal deeper psychological rhythms of how the character manifests within the Presence of the actor. Qualities are described in adverbs, and often influence the sort of *business* actors find when developing Presence for their character. Some famous examples of an actor's business in film include:

- Norman Bates (played by Anthony Perkins) chewing gum nervously in *Psycho*.
- Marge Gunderson (played by Frances McDormand) tilting her head inquisitively in *Fargo*.
- Ray Charles (played by Jamie Foxx) nodding his head side-to-side steadily in *Ray*.

I consider my character's personal qualities to affect a theatrical space as a particular instrument's music would affect a concert hall. I look at the qualities my character generates with their actions on the pages of my script, and then I look at what the other characters' qualities of action within the script as well. This is a mere pencil sketch of rhythmic composition because I do not know until rehearsal, or until the very night of a show, exactly what sort of rhythms are going to emerge from the other characters onstage. Therefore, my character's qualities are only solidified once all of the rhythms are established in a production. It is a working improvisation, because while there could be a scene which has been fully established and composed in its rhythms, an actor may drop a line, or lose a prop, or jump a cue. If I permanently fuse specific qualities or particular features to my actions, I set myself up for failure. However, if I allow myself to mentally follow the story, while still allowing what is happening around me to affect my inner-drives and sensations, I have insurance on my work as an actor. I

still maintain Presence, I do not allow myself to panic or break awareness. The character does not have to disappear over the trifles of consistency.

Throughout the run of *Polaroid Stories*, I found a great deal of difficulty in composing SKINHEADboy's qualities to fit with the qualities of D. I saw their relationship as hierarchical; D had the godly power, and SKINHEADboy was a lowly mortal who craved power. All SKINHEADboy's business of picking sores into his face not only alluded to his crystal meth addiction, but to how he was *always desperately grasping for power to defend himself*. That was my through line of actions that stimulates all of the actions of SKINHEADboy through the journey of the play.

Unfortunately, the rhythm of D as enacted by the actor greatly deviated from what I had originally envisioned. In my mind, I saw a flamboyant and playful D who wanted to share the pleasures of his lair with SKINHEADboy. Instead, I discovered a sinister D, one that used pauses and intonation to halt my high-strung energy; this D would be seducingly touching, or lustfully leering.

The intensity I gave to my actions as a result marred the rhythmic relationship that would have better served the play's story. I realize now that I had married the choices I made outside of rehearsal. It became less about really receiving what D was giving me, and more about radiating my character's intention. My performance was an assault upon the audience that I had never anticipated. Both the actor and character of D trusted me, but I did not trust them. If I had, I would have instead been open to the possibility that SKINHEADboy was more secretive about his desperation.

Desperate people can be very manipulative and it would have been a stronger choice to have used my aggressive language to entice D, to arouse D, and to fool D into

taking down his guard so I could rip him off. I instead chose to bombard and press D with harsh force. This is how the first through the third beat unfolded as a result (qualities are described with adverbs):

SCENE: **ARIADNE IN THE LABYRINTH**

FIRST BEAT

OBJECTIVE: I want to belittle D for making me believe he had a nice place for me to stay

D: behold my kingdom

SKINHEADboy: tss.---I *discredit* D ****BRAZENLY****
kingdom of shit---I *insult* D ****PLAINLY****

D: behold my castle, my mansion, my taj mahal

SKINHEADboy: man this place is a pit.---I *accost* D ****DISGUSTEDLY****
it fucking stinks in here.---I *inform* D
****REPRIMANDINGLY****

SECOND BEAT

OBJECTIVE: I want to threaten D for audaciously ragging on me for my body odor.

D: man, you stink

SKINHEADboy: hey, fuck you---I *challenge* D ****HARSHLY****

THIRD BEAT

OBJECTIVE: I want to debase D because he still thinks he has power to sway my feelings.

D: i stink too. yeah, i do, and that's the truth.

but, see, i like the stink. it smells of home.

SKINHEADboy: home?---I *ridicule* D ****SCATHINGLY****
man this ain't no home.---I *negate* D ****INCREDULOUSLY****

D: this is my home.

SKINHEADboy: that is so fucked up.---I *brush* D ****CARELESSLY****
anybody tell you how fucked up you are?---I *oust* D
****BOLDLY**** (Iizuka 19-20).

Once I had that understanding of how SKINHEADboy's objectives shaped the scene, I connected together all of the beat objectives to form what Stanislavski called the "super-objective", or "spine," of this character. The super-objective clarifies SKINHEADboy's psychological state within the play at all times by what he is doing, and how he is processing the information within his field of awareness. The super-objective of the character is effectively the character's *raison d'être*. To be *acting*

SKINHEADboy, I as an actor have previously extracted his encompassing goal from the text of *Polaroid Stories*. I had to ascertain, what was propelling SKINHEADboy? What was that impetus behind everything he is doing?!

I found that a good way to trace the spine of a character is to note where they begin and where they end up at the close of a play. The first objective SKINHEADboy had in *Polaroid Stories* was “I want to belittle D”, and the last objective he had was “I want to defy D”. I note that the first objective leading SKINHEADboy into the world of this play was aggressive, and tantamount to squashing D like an insect. SKINHEADboy wanted to feel superior to this foppish psychopath. How did his actions achieve this effect? SKINHEADboy gets D to *acknowledge* him.

SKINHEADboy’s childhood was spent travelling between foster homes where he had to be acknowledged in order to manipulate other children and adults for their attention. His relationship with SKINHEADgirl was also clearly manipulative in that he would go between scaring her and asking her to acknowledge his role as her protector. She used him to get drugs, but that just proved that she was *dependent* on SKINHEADboy, and she had been the manipulated person within their relationship’s dynamic (Iizuka 35-37).

SKINHEADboy returns to D’s lair after he had secretly stolen D’s stash of drugs; which was a very risky choice, considering SKINHEADboy had no discernible payoff for coming back. I decided that SKINHEADboy was following the through line of action, and that it revealed more of the inner-psychological drives of his unconscious desires, rather than anything he might have planned deliberately. SKINHEADboy was headbanging in a long platinum wig (Iizuka 45). This actually alluded to elements within

book three of *Metamorphoses*, where Pentheus is mentioned (Ovid 79-80). The donning of the wig is something that alludes to Euripides' play adaptation of Pentheus' story, *The Bacchae*, where King Pentheus disguises himself as a woman to watch the ritual-orgy of Dionysus' female followers; the Ovid version makes no mention of the disguise. I feel it is interesting that SKINHEADboy, who parallels Pentheus, should be spied upon by D. In fact, SKINHEADboy is performing a sort of ritual "dance" with the music.

It became apparent to me that odd parallels followed throughout that scene (**THE STORY OF PENTHEUS (Book III)**, which concluded Act I). D beat up SKINHEADboy for the theft rather than killing him, as Dionysus' followers had killed Pentheus. I believed this pointed to a closer proximity in their relationship, that was likely one of sexual favors. D had a certain infatuation with SKINHEADboy, despite the aggressive behavior SKINHEADboy displayed towards his advances. SKINHEADboy alludes to this, calling him a "faggot" and insinuated that his only interest was to get far away from D, and to take a bus back out to the country with SKINHEADgirl (Iizuka 46-48). The only way he had articulated any feeling towards D was through his harsh language and empty threats. There was a struggle for power that he was not winning; thus, I asserted that he acted defensively when his masculinity was put into question. Earlier, when his tattoo does not impress D, he added he was beaten to the brink of death for wielding it (Iizuka 20). When he was caught headbanging in a perceivably feminine wig, he became deeply embarrassed and lashed out at D with generalized accounts of murdering men who had taken a sexual interest in him (Iizuka 46). This "challenging" of D did more to resemble the Pentheus legend, since Pentheus challenged Dionysus' status as a god.

The action of challenging had existed in his relationship with SKINHEADgirl. He challenged her criticism by stirring fear in SKINHEADgirl. Thus, she would have to acknowledge him as the provider and protector. His interaction with her was abusive, to say the least. It was the most apparent way he dealt with his social anxieties, all of which related directly to his lack of adeptness and his insecurities over power:

girl, for real, you are so lucky i'm around....hell yeah. cause i'm the man of your dreams girl. i'm the shit (Iizuka 36).

This is echoed again at the point where D had beaten him (at the end of Act 1). He spoke directly to the audience about the most traumatic event he had experienced in his childhood, but denied being afraid, even though he was at the brink of death:

when i was seven, some guy my mom was shacking up with tied a rope around my middle and put me in the well out back. he wasn't angry. he wasn't nothing. it wasn't like that. i stayed in the well for eight days. i couldn't see in the dark. i didn't never think about dying (Iizuka 50)

The details of why his mother's lover hung him in a well are also vague; in my opinion, he was inadvertently alluding to sexual abuse (Iizuka 50). He wanted to assert that he was fearless because men are fearless. However, he is really a boy, as his character-given name would suggest. Iizuka invoked the image of SKINHEADboy's mother holding to her broken son together at the end of the first act, which is telling for two reasons: first, it reveals that a woman was the closest thing to a hero that he had had growing up. His mother rescued him from the well and embraced him tenderly and emotionally----those are things which SKINHEADboy avoids conveying throughout the entire course of the play. Second, it is a contrast to Ovid's story of Pentheus, where King Pentheus was torn apart by his mother, Agave, who was possessed by Dionysus' madness.

I also believed that the fact SKINHEADboy's last scene, **THE STORY OF SKINHEADBOY the transformation of iolaus**, where he paralleled the Greek character of Iolaus, was evidence that he had given D sexual favor, being that Iolaus was the charioteer and male lover of Heracles, something substantiated by Lois Crompton's *Homosexuality and Civilization* (123). Iolaus is the fastest charioteer in the legends of the ancient Greeks, and he was noted for being magically endowed with youth; in essence, that was a direct parallel between the name SKINHEADboy and Speedracer (another name that SKINHEADboy was called.) While D's final monologue unveiled SKINHEADboy's suicide from a bridge, the director of our production, Laura Early, worked that event into SKINHEADboy's final monologue. The monologue was direct audience address, where SKINHEADboy denied having any knowledge of SKINHEADgirl's death or whereabouts, and where he challenged the audience to acknowledge that there is no avoiding the fact that things happen without any God or gods calling the shots. The moment after the speech was completed SKINHEADboy took a jump off of the steam vent he was standing on, which implied that he had jumped off of the bridge mentioned in D's later monologue. The lights shifted and turned a somber blue and SKINHEADboy starts to go off when D stopped him from leaving the stage asking me "where you goin?" (Iizuka 72-74). SKINHEADboy turned and ran off into the darkness deliberately defying D's request so that he could pass on from his hellish reality into the hereafter.

That informed me that SKINHEADboy's super-objective was to escape from his grim reality, whether that be weaving narrative about taking the next bus out of town, altering reality with drugs, or ending his life on earth altogether. Escape was the right

idea, but not the right word for me to use as an actor in my analysis. If SKINHEADboy had really wanted to escape, he could have done it at the beginning of the play; that super-objective would have been a weak one to choose because “escape” could very well have translated into actions which withdrew and pulled me away from the scenes I was meant to engage with. The inverse of escape would be to confront, and I already had enough evidence of inversion as theme in Polaroid Stories (i.e. the Pentheus parallels). SKINHEADboy as a character himself was confrontational on all fronts. He looks like a racist thug, but he does not get along with racist thugs (Iizuka 20). Every interaction he has is confrontational, including his tender moments of reminiscence (which were a confrontation of his past.) Therefore, the spine for SKINHEADboy was “**I want to confront my city allies, so I can distract them from my own fears and insecurities**”. SKINHEADboy feels like he is an outsider in every regard. He travelled all across the country to this city that he hates, because he does not fit in anywhere. He thinks he would be happier out in the country away from the thieves and perverts, but he can never seem to get around to actually leaving (Iizuka 48). He is held in this city by his addiction; however, his drive to confront everyone defensively holds him back from changing his life the way he wants to.

CHAPTER FOUR DEVELOPING PRESENCE FOR MY THESIS ROLE

My work on Presence for the role of SKINHEADboy did not begin in graduate school. By that, I mean my process for this kind of character development really began in my senior year of my Bachelor's program. One of the chief issues I have had as an actor is actually a problem I have had in my own personal life. I was very clumsy, a veritable bull in a china shop. I swung around, I knocked things over, and I tripped on a daily basis. My knees are even scarred from how many falls I have had. My theatrical peers found that quality endearing about me, even cute. I have been considered equivalent of a big Saint Bernard puppy. I used to be happy to hear that because I love dogs---and I wanted people to love me. Over time, I came to the realization that no one took me seriously, and even worse, no one took my work seriously as an actor.

Why was I stuck in this goofy-life role that followed me into auditions and rehearsals? Why was it impossible for people to take me seriously? I got very angry about it over time. I started snapping at people, and arguing over aesthetics all to get people away from associating me with this image of the clumsy puppy. It did not work. People still did not take me seriously, and they lacked trust in me as well.

I never trusted the work at that point. I would write very detailed analyses for my professors in classes, but none of that work had made its way into the rehearsal hall. That is not to say I never wrote my actions, or took notes of the questions my directors gave me. I was great at taking notes. I just naively asserted that the real work was putting in

“emotional” effort and physical exertion. I prided myself on my ability to get thrown, pushed around, and beaten-up in a play (everyone would agree, I was quite good on the receiving-end of stage violence.)

I took this emotional-physical effort everywhere with me in rehearsals, and almost every note I received was about my exertion. It disrupted the clarity of my actions and my inner-life as a character. I would try to manifest an image to work with, and force my imagination to produce something that would affect my emotion. I was essentially operating with a volume knob on my brain for my director to adjust the intensity of my performance. This kind of experience left me with a very good gauge for physical intensity; however, I must say it left me at a disadvantage in the Presence of character.

I was exerting myself far too much physically in my performances onstage. I was closing off awareness of the vital forces which surrounded the physical embodiment of the role. The result of all this pushing and tension was devastation. I am not talking about my craft; my mistakes as an artist pale to those in my life. In the Fall of 2011, I herniated a disc in my lumbar (the lower portion of my spine), which left me with many restless nights, and a very odd-gait. I ignored it for a while, but it just became more apparent that I needed medical attention. I did not want to sacrifice missing out on performing, or classes, so I waited until the end of the school year to resolve the issue. All through that time I kept pushing myself further and further physically.

Nine months had passed before I was told I needed surgery on my back. The disc was removed, and four anchors were attached to my vertebrae. It was an unpleasant experience, but my pain was infinitely less by comparison. Shortly after, I needed to attend physical therapy. My hamstrings in the right leg were atrophied for not being used

for nine months. Although the pain was lessened, my gait was still terrible. I was surprised my physical therapists were baffled by my limp. They watched me as I hobbled about the room, and then they asked me about something completely unexpected, “Why are you walking flat-footed?”

I was stunned. I had never considered that walking a certain way would have health-consequences. I was confronted with more: my abdominals were far too weak. My posture was terrible. My weight, which my doctors had never remarked on as being heavy before, was a problem. Physically, I was out of alignment. They warned me that if I did not take care of my physical body, exercise every day, and approach my physical movement with more finesse, the result would be a wheel-chair.

That struck me, and really affected something inside of my heart. I felt this supreme depression because I never realized how little I had taken care of myself. When I gathered my faculties, I realized that this issue was directly correlated to the quality of my work as an actor. This stage-based hysteria was connected to my refusal to give attention to my body and my mind. That disconnect between my body and my mind translated into tension and insular awareness that did not serve the kind of spirit of collaboration that is vital to live theatre. I would almost qualify it as self-serving, except that I was not even serving myself. It was self-abuse for entertaining an audience.

My desire to change did not just take place onstage; it occurred outside of theatrical work in my recovery. I felt like I was going crazy doing the exercises I was given for physical therapy. I would huff and puff my way through them, doing the thirty repetitions required for each. It was during this process that I discovered what I was

lacking in *my* life, which left me empty in the life of my character: the *throughline of action*.

Stanislavski codified that concept within his system, but it exists with many other names in other systems of Acting. A character's throughline of action is what they are always showing an audience, and also what is driving their humanity. What was driving me, as a human being, before these revelations? To always be pleasing others. To always be sacrificing, to give to others. To punish my body, and my mind, to entertain an audience. It was an unhealthy, and it was not helping me to be a better actor. I needed to find the love for myself that I had never been able to afford with just giving. I think I started to affect the greatest change in my life and in my Acting when I started receiving and opening that awareness to share the beautiful experience of living and *being*.

I began to run outside twice everyday in the morning and afternoon. I filled the run with a desire to run towards a better life. I wanted to physicalize an action of moving forwards towards health and vitality. The Florida summer (which always had been so generally hot and miserable to me), became unexpectedly tantalizing to my senses. Growing up in Florida, heat and humidity were annoyances which kept me indoors watching television. The only sensations I understood were pleasure and displeasure; I never paid attention to the spectrum of sensory experience available to me: the smell of lemongrass; the feeling of a soft breeze caressing my flushed face; the chorus of cicadas rising and falling with every cloud's passing of the sun. The feeling of knowing where I was going, and being a part of the world around my person centered me and brought me peace.

This did not last, however. About a eight months later I injured my knee, and between schoolwork and play rehearsal, I was too busy to focus on anything else. I took no time for myself, to center myself in body and mind. It did no good for me, and my Acting suffered as a direct result. I know this because the first show of that semester was a miraculous piece of work for me. I played Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, and throughout the rehearsal process, I felt myself opening within, taking in all of the sensations of my surroundings; the people, and the story of this family all resonated within me. I even felt as though I had invoked the spirit of my paternal grandfather in my creation of Keller's playful nature. I never had to push for anything; I still radiated life from the character. Such was the power of Presence.

I wanted to craft SKINHEADboy with the same essence as I had crafted that role. I felt that I was well prepared to take on the challenge of *Polaroid Stories*, and when it was announced as part of the season, I was relieved. My Acting class had worked on various scenes of the play, to put on a sampling of what the story had to offer. Sex, violence, gods, and relationships forged a strange and yet familiar myth of modern times. The piece seemed pensive and deep while also presenting cutting-edge dynamism.

Polaroid Stories as a play was about damaged characters. I felt that SKINHEADboy and SKINHEADgirl were the most unique in the fact that their names had nothing to do with the Greek myths which they paralleled. SKINHEADboy was originally billed as "The Lydian Sailor" when the play was workshopped through The Playwrights Center in Minneapolis and when it was workshopped at En Garde Arts in New York at PS 122 (Iizuka). *Polaroid Stories* was not only an adaptation of Greek myths, but an examination of real interviews made with homeless youth in Minneapolis.

That spoke to me as an artist because I felt that there were two enormous themes at play in *Polaroid Stories*. The first, I would say was the theme of disenfranchised youth, and the second being these tales of ancient lore that were embraced and ingrained in much of Western culture.

It is noteworthy that Iizuka used the text of Ovid, a Roman poet, rather than simply using using Greek myths as her source. There was a reason for this, I believe; it was to parallel the relationship between the way we treat myths in our time and the way the Romans treated myths in their time. The Roman Empire at the time of Ovid was in the age of Pax Romana, at height of Emperor Augustus' reign. The Romans were extremely powerful, and the West was in a time of peace. The gods and mythical of the greeks were the same for the Romans in everything but name.

Iizuka followed this, either keeping the Greek names or condensing the original name to allude to their origins as mythical characters. I did not feel that was the case with SKINHEADboy. I felt Iizuka's use of the multiple mythical figures in the story arc of SKINHEADboy pointed to something structurally different in his composition. An interesting element of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was that the last few stories were actually pseudo-historical accounts which included the assassination of Julius Caesar and momentous rise of Augustus Caesar to the throne of the Roman Empire. It validates and reveals Iizuka's confrontation of myth with reality. The character of SKINHEADboy is directly inspired by the contact Iizuka made with the homeless youths of her own time, and the myths of Acoetes the Lydian Sailor, Iolaus, Pentheus, Prometheus, and Theseus act as the vehicle for that confrontation.

I watched several internet documentaries on crystal meth addicts at that time. The most objective and interesting of them covered drug use in San Francisco (Treat "Drugs Inc 401 San Francisco Meth Zombies"). The reason it resonated with me was that it specifically covered drug use in the gay community---homosexuality is a prevalent motif that emerges in the relationship between SKINHEADboy and D. One of the users in the documentary dressed in BDSM (Bondage & Discipline / Domination & Submission / Sadism & Masochism) gear, that resembled the sort of punk neo-nazi gear a skinhead would wear.

There were other parallels between this man and SKINHEADboy. He was homeless. The difference is that he is able to afford both drugs and hotel rooms with his online streaming site where he performs sexual acts upon himself. *Polaroid Stories*, at its latest, takes place in the nineties and at its earliest, the eighties (our production took place in 1988). If SKINHEADboy could have, I am sure he would have done the same to support his addiction, and therefore that supported the relationship dynamic between D and SKINHEADboy.

I did not stop looking for connections with the role there. I also had the opportunity to meet a young man who was quite possibly a SKINHEADboy in the making. I was trying to make a little money over the past summer working for Debora A. Blake Support Services, which specialized in working with special needs clients to provide socialization and in-home assistance. I was sent, by coincidence, to work with a young man in foster care. I cannot give his actual identity, but will call him Steve.

Steve was the first client I had as a caregiver. I was surprised to discover that his last name was documented improperly in his paperwork. His age I was told was twelve,

but he was in fact sixteen years-old. Steve was intellectually disabled, but what he lacked in intelligence and social skills, he made up for with skills in manipulation. He stole from me several times while in my company. He verbally assaulted me to appeal to my greater sympathy. He was quite possibly one of the best young actors I have ever seen. It was not entertaining, however, but tragic. He was disturbed, and he had no one constant in his life. He did not even have a house to stay in during the day, and when he was not in school, he was at the library using the Wi-Fi for his computer. His anger manifested into violence. He was fighting with the other boys in the house for attention. That was the last Steve saw of me because I felt I was doing very little to alleviate his damaged condition.

I wanted to make contact with SKINHEADboy, as well, for the influence of this character. I feel it takes a certain kind of person, a special kind of actor, to work in this way. What I learned from experiences interacting with the homeless in Louisville is that to do real objective research, you have to remove yourself emotionally from the work. One of the pervading emotions I encountered within myself was fear. I was afraid to get too close, and to go too far with any of the homeless I talked with. My fear and lack of faith in what I was trying to accomplish made it hard to access many of these people who dealt with being ignored, shunned, and in many cases beaten by strangers.

In my most noteworthy interview, I took a homeless man to McDonalds to sit and have a meal. The entire meal he was thanking me, and trying to explain and defend himself to me. He was very adamant that he did not like to take advantage of people, and that he only was taking this food because I offered. He talked about how mean strangers could be on the street, and how he never hassled nice people like me. He told me about his family, and he told me about some of the health problems he was facing. It was clear

to me that although this man was not a drug addict; he clearly had mental health issues. Steve had mental health issues as well. I could not help thinking how many people ended up on the street because they were either self-medicating their mental issues with narcotics, or as in the case of this man, they could not support themselves with their mental disabilities.

I could not ignore mental health issues as a significant element within my development of SKINHEADboy's character. It was a reality that I needed to confront the myth that homeless people choose to be homeless. I needed to confront the myth that these men would rather sleep on the cold concrete than in a warm bed; that they would rather beg for money than to have a sense of self-stability. The America we live in today, just as when Iizuka wrote *Polaroid Stories*, chooses to believe in the myth of good versus evil, and right versus wrong. I believe those things are only real for the people who have the ability to make choices for themselves. When people find themselves without the power and privilege to make choices, then their morality is limited to life versus death. That is the thread which runs between Ovid and Iizuka.

SKINHEADboy's origins pointed to a troubled childhood. He was being raised by his mother, and he never his father. He was clearly mistreated by at least one of his mother's lovers, and that mistreatment could very well have caused his mental problems. He was hung in a well without food or water for eight days, and at the age of seven, his starvation and dehydration would have had a large impact on this important time in his brain's development (Fliess).

Because so much of SKINHEADboy's circumstances dealt heavily with psychological focus, that put a pressure on me as an actor to physicalize these things for

an audience. I began my work with the feet of the character. I wore thick-soled hiking boots because those had a weight and shape to them which would parallel the sort of boots a skinhead-looking character would wear. As I have mentioned, in my past, I have found great difficulty in balance, and I wanted to counter that head-on in the development of the role. I would do much of the work I had done in my Tai-chi class that dealt directly with balance, and the correlation between movement and breath. That is, I started slowly, stepping heel-to-toe, balancing the weight of my body's frame on each leg. That way, I was able to purposefully make my way over whatever ground my character had to tread.

After the feet, I had to consider what my body was doing to support the psychology of instability. His super objective was to confront, and the energy behind that physically took me forward. In my effort to keep the character grounded, I avoided leaning forward because that left me with less balance. I had to work out a way to support myself physically and vocally while in performance. The director gave me the note of working on making my body of a lower-class status. Suddenly, I encountered an interesting problem in splitting the difference between the shape of a homeless drug addict and a body that could support precise intentional actions. I failed to allot myself the time to find bodily support, and instead hunched my shoulders and let my head pull forward. It made me very sore physically to do this, and when I would leave a scene, I would stretch to alleviate the pain my lower back and the fascia of muscles between my skull and my neck.

I also found his voice came from a place that was pushing out the sound when he interacted with D, specifically. In those scenes, he was trying to be a dominant and masculine personality to belittle D. That voice disappeared when it was just

SKINHEADboy and the audience, because there was something about what he was saying that was so honest and empty of invention. That he was seeking to confront honesty within himself and understanding within the audience. It was less assaultive, and more open; even the language was different in that it was more complex, and involved more imagery.

As the production made its way closer to opening for the public, the transition from the rehearsal room into the Thrust Theatre taxed me personally. The director had been watching and listening to the actors in a room that small and quite crowded. What I worked on in that room to serve Presence for the character did not satisfy the needs of the Thrust. It was simply too cavernous for the concentrated circles of awareness and energy I had developed throughout rehearsal. For the first time I began getting the notes which said, “Be more high,” and “---more drugs, I am not getting enough drugs”. It was at this point that I knew bolder and bigger choices needed to be made, and volume of intensity needed to be raised as well.

In response to the need for a heightened high, I added physical tremors. I felt that that would make it clear that my character was craving another speed fix. I had read up on the subject and found people who are addicted methamphetamine experience withdrawals that leave them tired and sluggish. The tremors actually arise from having speed circulating through the body. The picking of the skin I simulated was also a result of a meth high. I felt that showing the effects of the high would relate better to how meth addicts behave as addicts on the drugs, rather than how they behave differently without the drugs.

I also explored the depth of the new space, employing a sense of distrust in the outer fringes. The paranoia served as another layer to SKINHEADboy; he is forced to find an ally in D, who so obviously has his own agenda. I treated every seat in the audience with suspicion. I had the fear of manifesting demons arising from the dark, or junkies creeping from dark corners to slit my throat. In that way, I had widened my awareness to reveal a deeper relationship with my space. The Presence SKINHEADboy was dealing with was connected to the big city and his survival in that climate.

I found walking outside late at night in Louisville had afforded me the chance to encounter the kind of atmosphere SKINHEAD boy was experiencing in his scenes with D. I remember on one such outing, there was a man following behind me shouting. I was frightened, but I just kept walking at a steady clip. The man did not stop he got about ten feet behind me, when I turned, and he stopped. I was on a dilapidated sidewalk, whose smoothness and straightness was broken up by the roots of a large magnolia tree. I felt that if I needed to, I could grab a piece of the broken sidewalk and chuck it at this man's head. He did not continue his approach but sized me up. "Sorry man, I thought you were someone else." He trudged away in the other direction scanning the street for whomever he was searching.

By the time *Polaroid Stories* had opened, everything in the show had become about the movement of the story in relation to picking up the pace. The energy was never quite where it needed to be throughout the entirety of a rehearsal. Usually, the energy would decline in the second act, which is typical for a production that has such a long first act and then breaks for intermission. One of the greatest difficulties I encountered in my process for developing SKINHEADboy was sustaining energy while also emitting

energy. This character was not centered in physical health and wellness, and neither was I. After months of rehearsal, I found myself having no time to sleep and not enough time to eat. While that may have actually paralleled the reality of what a homeless person goes through on a day-to-day basis, it was not something that would carry me through into performance. Somehow it did.

CHAPTER FIVE MY INVOCATION OF PRESENCE

I crafted this role out of desire to please my director and to please an audience. I made a sincere effort to do everything required or inspired throughout the rehearsal process. It did not work. I lost a huge part of what I had set out to investigate in the first place, which was Presence. I was not actively interrogating, opening, and revealing for an audience; that seemed to be less important to me the busier I became during the rehearsal process and into the production. Many things were working against me as far as time was concerned. I had no time for myself, and I made no time to maintain my mindful practices like tai-chi or qigong because I wanted to punish myself for not getting far enough into the role. I did not take time for myself or try to take any pleasure in what I was attempting.

I spent a lot of time after the role was over beating myself up, and ripping my work to pieces. I was disappointed with how unclear I was physically and verbally, but that was not what actually bothered me. I was upset that I had nothing to show for all of the training I had been afforded for the past three years. I felt like a failure, and I felt like I made an awful mess of my thesis role. The truth is that I had no faith in myself, or in what I was attempting to create. I allowed myself to become consumed by feelings of hopelessness. I failed to give myself the permission to succeed, because I held onto my insecurities. That does reflect upon the sort of work that goes on inside my classes, but rather what goes on inside of myself.

I am even more acutely aware of the critical attitude which I used (and use) to determine what an acceptable performance should be. That attitude has been cutting me off from approaching the work in a healthy way. I force myself to get things right, and I struggle when I feel I am incapable of achieving my goals. In essence, I lived my entire life with this sort of self-abuse. I have been out of touch with the gratification of artistic experience far too many projects. *Polaroid Stories* was not a gratifying or validating presentation of the best work I can produce. I am sure there were people who did not view it that way, but the experience was not an example of the sort of work I was prepared to do. It did not matter what kind of work I gave to my audience, that experience took more than it gave to me. I allowed the work to become burdensome and harsh to my own health and wellness.

The word “accumulation” best describes what happened to me during the process. I allowed every note and every mishap to fill the character. I felt like a pilot without a landing strip; I wanted to touch upon something significant in the work, but I had no way of knowing whether I was at the threshold of where the character was meant to be. I was playing from the standpoint of empathy with this damaged soul, and the director would stop me and try to reveal what a conniving and evil entity I was within the scope of the play. She told me how many nasty men just like my character sat in the courtroom on trial for murder and drug offenses. I did not see SKINHEADboy in that light. I saw him as damaged, but powerless to effect real harm himself.

I let the questions I was dealing within the rehearsal process interrupt my of telling the story in a way that satisfied the needs of playwright and director. My mind was overflowing with the details of this character. I was filled with fear that held me back

from truly accomplishing the work, and I held onto that fear rather than facing it head-on with vision and faith for my work.

Presence has nothing to do with working hard to achieve anything. It has to do with *being* and faith in being. It has everything to do with giving yourself permission to acknowledge the life that exists within you and to let go of the notion that you need to control your life. It brings stillness to restless minds that are always trying to intellectually classify and filter the experience of life itself. I am not certain that I can explain that idea, and break it down for greater understanding. The more I try to write that in words, the more I trivialize what Presence actually is. It is yielding, opening, and giving oneself over to let go of controlling behavior and habit.

If I could give one piece of advice to anyone who wanted to pursue Acting as a career, I would tell them to treat the work with a light heart at all times. Taking the craft of Acting with a critical mind is absurd, and if an actor is not committed to taking care of themselves, they have no business trying to listlessly fabricate something. What one makes as an artist can only bring them joy if they are happy. It is a waste of energy for an actor to craft a character with the intention of resonating within others if it does not resonate within them first.

I made the mistake, too, of not dedicating enough time to the research for SKINHEADboy. Instead of taking the opportunity my time afforded me to really empathize and absorb relevant information from the homeless, or from drug addicts, I held myself at a distance. I cannot say exactly how I would have done the role differently as a result. That is beside the point. My character was not something that was just dreamed-up in the playwright's mind. Homeless people are real. When an actor has the

opportunity to give their Presence over to presenting real issues facing society, it is their responsibility to immerse themselves in their research. That is not topic of this thesis, but it is an ethical issue of appropriation which must be addressed for the reader's understanding.

Even on a plane of pure artistry, I passed up the opportunity to be more open for an audience. Michael Chekhov had a great philosophy when it came to role development, that would have served me well if I had used it to develop SKINHEADboy. He called it *the four brothers*, and if an actor opened themselves to *the feeling of ease, the feeling of form, the feeling of beauty, and the feeling of entirety*, then they protect themselves from many of the pitfalls an actor can make in closing themselves off, and sacrificing their Presence (Powers xxxix-xl). If an actor finds ease in their movement, they remove the physical tension that prevents the body's ability to synchronize itself with creative flow. By acknowledging form, they understand how their body is moving through space, and they can fill every movement with specific intentions. Finding beauty in the character, no matter how ugly they may be, opens an actor to a depth of expression that goes beyond the apparent choices gathered from an intellectual examination of given circumstances. The "feeling of entirety" gives an actor a beginning, a middle, and an end for every action they take; thusly, an actor with a familiar sense of a character's journey need not become anxious over whether or not the role has been developed to completion (Chekhov and Gordon 48-57).

I plan on only continuing to share joy with others in my life and work. I am still trying to develop a healthier sense of self, and a healthier sense of what it means to be an artist. I have the experience of *Polaroid Stories* to serve as a reminder of what does not

serve the craft of Acting. If I wish to achieve a long and fruitful career, I cannot let the details bog down the work I know I am capable. A painter must wash their brushes; a violinist must rosin their bow. For me to sustain and support my work as an actor, I must practice mindfulness to renew an open path to endless inspiration. Sharing that inspiration, and opening it for others to see, that is Presence for the actor's craft:

Everything we do changes us a little, even when we purport to be indifferent to what we've done. And what we witness, we do also (Chaikin 55).

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