

rethinking performance:
a cognitive journey toward excellent play

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ABSTRACT:

Perfectionistic traits, which have both cognitive and behavioral facets, can have negative effects on a performing artist's psychology and/or their ability to perform at their best. A review of literature was undertaken, focused on psychological research studies that identified best practices in both sports and the performing arts. This review identified two types of practices - the cultivation of resilience skills, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy strategies - as the most promising means of addressing perfectionism while under pressure to excel as an actor in a theatrical performance. These practices were implemented in training, and rehearsals and performances of a thesis role in a university master's program. Both types of practices were effective in, first, identifying environmental and individual stressors, and then creating behavioral replacements for perfectionism that were actionable, growth oriented, and engendered ownership of artistic process. These strategies have potential long term benefits in actor training programs, and deserve further attention.

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Chapter One.

Artistic Challenge.

Cognitive Play:

“All true artists, bear within themselves a deeply rooted and often unconscious desire for transformation.”
Michael Chekhov

On the raised wooden flats in the deep of late summer, I stood holding a large gnarled staff, conjuring the spirits of a magical island and as I lifted my staff, as the pink hues of the setting sun were filling the sky, as my voice echoed through the crowded lawn, a flock of migrating geese flew in angular beauty overtop of us. In that pinnacle moment, all spheres of life conjoined and our story was transformed... Actors live for moments like these. Strive for moments like these. Study and practice and push ourselves so that exceptional moments like these happen. As often as possible. Yet to me, it wasn't enough. It was merely a glimpse of what my performance could be and would spend the rest of the show striving for that taste of magic. I pulled out my notes, listened carefully to my vocal inflections, watched my gestures as I made them in hopes to find the perfect position where magic was supposed to align. As each scene progressed, I was becoming angrier and more and more anxious. By curtain call, I could barely contain my tears of failure and walked home. Alone. Thinking, I should quit being an actor.

Striving for the perfect performance can have negative effects on the actor's psychology and/or their ability to perform at their best. The investment in gaining mastery through learning and practice to achieve an exceptional performance requires

high standards (Ericsson 363), but when those standards are coupled with overly critical self-evaluation, and achievement is conjoined with self-identity, Perfectionism overtakes an actor's process and performance.

Perfectionism is, as defined by the Canadian Psychological Association, "a multidimensional personality style that is associated with a large number of psychological, interpersonal, and achievement-related difficulties." Which simply means that perfectionism itself is not a disorder, but a personality trait that can manifest concurrently with a disorder. Studies have identified nine markers of this trait:

(1) High Standards, or the tendency to set high standards for oneself and to push oneself to work hard to attain those standards; (2) Order, or the tendency to prefer organization, neatness, and order in one's environment and physical surroundings; (3) Perfectionism toward Others, or the tendency to expect high performance and perfection from others and to strictly evaluate others' performance; (4) Reactivity to Mistakes, or the tendency to experience negative affect in response to having made, or perceiving to have made, a mistake; (5) Perceived Pressure from Others, or the tendency to feel that others have high expectations, expect one to be perfect, or are critical of one's performance; (6) Dissatisfaction, or the tendency to feel that one is not meeting one's standards,

to feel that something is never 'good enough' or 'right', and to feel that something is always 'wrong'; (7) Details and Checking, or the tendency to be thorough, to be concerned with details in one's work, and to check and re-check one's work;

(8) Satisfaction, or the ability or tendency to experience satisfaction and positive affect when completing something or having accomplished something; (9) Lastly, Black and White Thinking, or the tendency to think that if something is not perfect, it is all bad or a failure, and that if one cannot do something perfectly, there is little point in doing it at all. (Stairs 146)

In the acting world, we often see the consequences of perfectionistic thoughts and behaviors: stage fright and performance anxiety; depression after “bombing” an audition or not getting a role; self-sabotage in the form of either over- or under-preparation; dissatisfaction with one’s performance even when successful; feelings of self-doubt when comparing one’s performance to others’ or to a self-imposed ideal; hypersensitivity to criticism; hypervigilance to form and/or technique.

Even though certain sports require athletes to achieve perfect performance outcomes, the tendency to be cognitively preoccupied with the attainment of perfection often undermines performance. (Marano 80)

My desire to attain the perfect performance is so great that I use technique as a way to assure that I will achieve it. Yet, the more I focus on sculpting my work, the more self-conscious I become about the work I do. I have come to realize, this hyper-focused strategy no longer serves me as an artist. Through personal exploration and academic research, my artistic challenge for this MFA thesis, is to learn new psychological skills and seek complementary acting methodologies that reflect those skills to address this aspect of perfectionism.

Ground Control:

Since perfectionism has both cognitive and behavioral facets, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) was an appropriate therapeutic process to start with. According to several case study outcomes, not only has CBT been proven effective in alleviating perfectionistic traits (Anthony; Egan; Schuler), but there are other effective methods which are centered on concentration, goal-setting, imagery, mental rehearsal, relaxation, and self-talk (McCharles and Stirling).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy focuses on the realisation that clinical perfectionism is undesirable, on the dispute of negative automatic thoughts and on the replacement of unfunctional cognitive schemas with other, more functional ones. In the therapeutic process, one individual can learn how to set specific and realistic goals, to focus on the process of a task instead of its result, to organise activities in a hierarchy depending on their significance and, finally, to feel fulfilled even if they have not brought a task to completion.

(Papadomarkaki and Portinou 61)

CBT is very much a hands-on approach to changing how you think and how you behave; therefore, CBT worksheet exercises are integral to the therapy. Psychological research on perfectionism shows that it is strongly correlated with the anxiety disorder spectrum (Handley 99; Hewitt 1317; Mor 208) so, for this research project, I chose specific worksheets that address anxiety and negative automatic thinking from “The Wellbeing CBT Skills Training Book” from Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (pp: 61, 49, 44). By identifying triggers for anxiety and negative

thought patterns, using inquiry and self-talk to find strategies and solutions to problems that are active, employing deductive reasoning and factual evidence to challenge negative thoughts, and setting a designated time for worrying about things, I can potentially change the way I think and behave.

In conjunction with CBT worksheets, I used adaptive techniques based on the clinical work of sports and performing arts psychologist, Dr. Beth McCharles. Dr. McCharles' protocols focus on addressing performance anxiety by setting achievable goals to build confidence and lay foundations for a growth mindset to achieve an "Ideal Performance State" (McCharles). Growth mindset thinks of "talents and abilities as potentials that come to fruition through effort, practice, and instruction" (Dwek 4).

Dr. McCharles states that performance anxiety occurs when we are uncomfortable with some aspect of the process and/or execution of performance. By having healthy coping strategies and by creating a positive impact loop, pressure and stress become manageable; thus, an ideal performance state is achieved (McCharles). Strategies for reaching an ideal performance state include identifying your personal motivations for doing a task, identifying types of emotional support to achieve that task, setting short- and long-term goals on the path to completion of said task, and then identifying the steps needed to feel confident in doing said task. Dr. McCharles offers these confidence-building steps, which also alleviate perfectionist thinking by keeping the focus on process instead of result:

1. Learn new skill or technique.
2. Practice it, so that you understand it.
3. Perform it, so that you feel it.
4. Reflect on the practice: what went well, what needs work?

(McCharles)

Future Imperfect:

Having established a framework for psychological health, I applied this framework to my continuing actor training in Stage Combat: Basic Actor/Combatant Certification, and The Batdorf Technique (TBT).

Basic Actor/Combatant Certification training involves high endurance conditioning and the acquisition of highly detailed technical skills along with a rehearsal and performance process. Certification in Stage Combat assesses your ability to acquire compulsory knowledge and skills through performance and are rewarded with “pass” or “fail” as a result.

This training style was an opportunity for me to assess how my perfectionistic traits manifest and to test out the effectiveness of applying new tools that fostered personal growth while under pressure to perform.

Through the CBT worksheets, I learned that most of my anxiety was centered on negative automatic thoughts, comparing myself to others, dissatisfaction, and detail/checking. CBT and Ideal Performance State protocols were incredibly effective

in replacing those maladaptive strategies with positive ones through constructive problem-solving and self-motivated focus on personal growth. By keeping my focus on the process through setting incremental growth goals in the classroom, I was able to reduce my perfectionist behavior, make more realistic choices that supported my needs, reduce my performance anxiety, and remain present during the certification test (which I passed). Even though I made modifications in my thinking process and approach, my determination, commitment and passion were still present. I found that building confidence by reaching my own goals rather than through someone else's validation was far more rewarding.

The Batdorf Technique (TBT) uses a series of exercises to strengthen interoceptive awareness, which is “the ability to feel sensations from the involuntary systems of the body; breath, blood flow, temperature, pain and pleasure” (Batdorf). Once interoceptive awareness becomes conscious, TBT uses it as a creative and performative tool.

Interoception refers to the process of how the brain senses and integrates signals originating from inside the body, providing a moment by moment mapping of the body's internal landscape. This crosstalk gives rise to urges, feelings, drives and emotional experiences under certain conditions, highlighting the importance of interoception for the maintenance of homeostatic functioning, body regulation, and survival. Interoception encompasses both non-conscious and conscious levels of information processing, and the processing of painful and non-painful stimuli. (Khalsa and Lapidus 121)

Batdorf states that dissociation and numbing expressed in the body takes us away from our healthy animal state, and therefore makes us less able to access our creative and authentic selves. This authentic, present self is not only compelling in performance, it also can transfer our state of being to the audience which Batdorf calls KTP or Kinesthetic Transference in Performance, thus creating audience empathy. KTP is the cornerstone of TBT:

KTP trains performers to juggle exteroceptive (conscious muscular skeletal [sic] movement), sensory (smell, taste touch, listening and seeing) and interoceptive awareness, allowing for the development of compelling performance work. The technique organizes the practitioners' access to specifically located awarenesses (blood, breath, gravity, pain/pleasure, temperature...) while doing other things - working with structured movement, memorized text, making eye contact. This can eventually be consciously modulated to vary the kinesthetic state (physiologically based emotion) being communicated to the audience or scene partner. KTP systematizes the full scope of a performer's work from the early stages of interoceptive awareness to the complicated juggling of this somatic work with layers of external structure (sensory input, exteroceptive muscular skeletal movement, eye contact, memorized text, choreography, blocking, singing...). (Batdorf 2018)

Knowing that interoception is also used as a therapeutic practice, I was interested in The Batdorf Technique (TBT) as a way to explore my performance anxiety

from a kinesthetic perspective, and to become more comfortable with vulnerability in performance.

This was an emotionally and cognitively challenging intensive. Overall, not only were my psychophysical experiences negatively emotionally charged and physically painful, but I was also confronted with negative feedback that challenged my sense of self awareness and exacerbated my perfectionistic tendencies. Several maladaptive layers of thinking were triggered which included black-and-white thinking: *if i can't do this right, what's the point?*; reactivity to mistakes: *i'm not a good person if i'm not doing the work correctly*; detail/checking behaviors: *internally scanning my body and fixating on areas that need correcting or fixated on research related to judgement of my work*; perceived expectation from other: *if my work is disappointing, inauthentic and i don't really experience what i say i experience, what can i do to make the teachers change their minds and validate my work?* These patterns of thought in conjunction with emotional and physical distress pulled my focus to external sensations, motivations, and validation.

During this intensive, utilizing CBT and Ideal Performance State protocols allowed me to re-center my focus onto my own motivation and emotional needs. I was able to finish the class having achieved personal growth, even if I did not successfully learn all of the techniques' criteria or gain the instructors' approval.

By applying CBT and Ideal Performance State protocols to my work in both Actor/Combatant Certification and TBT, I was able to reduce my performance anxiety,

and gain genuine confidence through a growth mindset while acquiring new psychological and performative skills.

Where the Sidewalk Ends:

Based on the cognitive and behavioral work as applied to Stage Combat: Actor/Combatant Certification and TBT, I was interested in finding acting tools that reflect a sense of creative flexibility so that my mind wouldn't fixate on "getting something right," and to connect an internal focus with the act of storytelling.

Although there are elements of the Stanislavsky System which hone in on process through internal and personal motivations, it was the principles of Stanislavsky's protégé, Michael Chekhov, and his Chekhov Acting Technique that seemed like the best fit:

We want to be led into our work by our imaginations and not our intellect.

Chekhov said the intellect is a kind of enemy to the artist; he called it the 'little intellect'. We know this little intellect, it is the critical, judging, discerning and divisive part of us. It protects and guides us in many things, but does not help us in the creative state. So we try to subdue its influence by engaging the imagination. (Petit 32).

My introduction to the Chekhov Acting Technique was with The Seven Siblings Theatre Company, a young Toronto based theatre collective dedicated to the ideas and principles of Chekhov; led by Artistic Director and Chekhov Acting Technique certified teacher, Will King. Though there are similarities to other methodologies like Laban,

a movement-based system that relates basic characteristics of movement with inner intentions and external relationships, and Viewpoints, which are a set of principles of movement (Bogart, Landau 8) that bring a compositional awareness to internal and external stimuli, what sets the Chekhov technique apart is that the actor begins their work from an intentional sense of joy.

The Michael Chekhov technique offers an intuitive approach to space through use of elements such as atmospheres which unite all the spatial influences into images that stimulate the actor and generate the soul of the performance. It is tremendously powerful and can be instantly created through the actors imagination. All of the tools bring the actor into awareness of time, space, levels, dimension, planes and dynamics by training the mind, the body and the creative spirit simultaneously. Often the non-Chekhov techniques separate out the mathematical, geometric, analytical or purely physical element from the feelings and psychological richness which Chekhov cultivates. Also, because Michael Chekhov techniques are so spatially connected, they can be used in performance without sending the actor in to their head. (Kilroy, Dalton)

The actor's creative choices are derived from a wellspring of conscious energy that radiates directionally which commingle internal/external stimuli. Action and meaning have already synthesized in the artist, so the primary tool that needs to be sharpened is the imagination.

Chekhov gives the actor permission to follow impulses, and each exercise is merely a container that the imagination fills. This type of work threads process and performance together through feeling and action. Not only did I find this process positively energizing, but it released me from fixating on mastery of particular details within the technique. The result was that my creative experiences were powerfully rich in imagination and I was transformed by the interrelation of energies, real and imagined.

I explored Chekhov's Qualities of Movement in my Actor/Combatant Certification class, to help release anxiety, to think with more ease, and to experience the story of the choreography. Chekhov states that actors get caught up in the *WHY* or *WHAT* rather than the *HOW* of action. Chekhov's *HOW* is explored through archetypal qualities of movement: *earth, air, fire, water*, which allows us access to the flow of action without resistance in thinking. By asking *HOW*, the actor stays focused on process rather than result.

The similarity of TBT's Kinesthetic Transference in Performance (KTP) and Chekhov's Three Sisters Sensations (Dalton 2), which are his principles of inner movement: *falling, floating, balancing*, bridged my understanding and ability to access psychophysical triggers found in the body through asking *HOW*. This bridge allowed me to experience KTP. Both Chekhov and Batdorf make connections among action, quality, and sensation that result in expressed emotion, but it was Chekhov's principles that kept my focus on process rather than result.

The Chekhov Acting Technique harmonizes with psychological tools to reduce anxiety, and build positive growth, through imagery, mindfulness, and concentration. By focusing on receiving impressions, impulses, sensations, and intentions (Petit 81) spatially, internal motivations are brought out into the external environment without ever changing the internal motivation.

Best in Show:

In the upcoming months, my plan of action is to incorporate CBT, Ideal Performance State protocols, and the Chekhov Acting Technique to my role of IRMA in Jean Genet's "The Balcony." Genet's visceral language, use of symbolism, and duplicitous juxtaposition of inner and outer realities demands a flexible, yet potent imagination liberated from the pressure to perform perfectly.

True art always retains a certain elusiveness because the emanations of the artist's unconscious project beyond the control of his will. - Harold Clurman on Jean Genet's *The Balcony*.

Having experimented with externally- and internally- derived forms of creative expression along with applying strategies to reduce perfectionistic behavioral traits, I learned that my central focus needs to stay within the realm of personal development and personal desire. By cultivating my imaginative brain, I cultivate a growth mindset as well. By honing in on my emotional needs, I experience emotional range; by concentrating my attention on how my intentions will be realized, I circumvent my attention to outside validation. By investing my passion incrementally, goal by goal,

I create a meaningful space in which to work. By connecting my body and mind through both reason and imagination, I free myself.

Chapter Two.

Artist at Work.

Poetic Action at Play:

We actors work backwards in a lot of ways—or, perhaps, like forensic archeologists, we build from the clues that others have left us or that we have unearthed. When we are given a role to play, we seek clues littered about by the person who wrote the play, by the play itself, and then by those who have envisioned its embodied meaning in time and space. We collect all these pieces together and begin assembling the world of the play through its inhabitants' eyes.

My research on *The Balcony* by Jean Genet is akin to a three-minute sketch in a model drawing class; it finds the essence of character and essential outlines of gesture so that the primordial form emerges. It is a study, merely, in preparation for the full-scale painting of the future: our production of *The Balcony*. As an actor, delving into Genet's life, the style/personality of his writing, and the literary criticism and documentation associated with his work is one of my ways to discover the integrity of the playwright's voice and the world and characters created therein.

Considering that the play takes place in a brothel, and that my role is Irma, the madame of The Grand Balcony, my research brought me to historical markers of the sex industry in France that resonate within the play and character. The Grand Balcony, the clients (*visitors*, as Irma calls them), as well as the Revolution that takes place outside of the brothel during the course of the play all have historical roots.

Embedded in it, therefore, are the elements of the French Revolution, both World Wars and the occupation of France, and role-play rules of sadism and masochism (S&M) which help create the environment as well as Genet's literary construction of *The Balcony*.

Genet's writing is consistently autobiographical and confessional, and his quest for poetic action is keenly shaped by his collaborations with fine artists and knowledge of aesthetic philosophies. Because of these, I looked for clues from Genet's personal life and era that might resonate or appear within the play. It is in these that the playable action and atmosphere, as well as the silhouette of character, can be found.

In examining his work from this lens, Genet is not simply shocking us by showing how we play out power structures in conflict, neither is he creating an atmosphere that is absurd and unrealistic, nor is he using heightened language to remove characters from their commonality. Rather, he is seeking a dramatic form that is active, compositional, and expresses divinity and consequence, in real time. I call this his Poetic Action. In addition, if theatre does not resolve conflict, hence remaining in present tense, would this incite a call to action from his audience? "Genet argues that the fictional representation of a subversive act has a tendency to prevent us, the spectators, from carrying out that action in reality" (Lavery 222).

In the latter half of this paper, I will expound on how I will create my performance using this concept of poetic action and aspects of the Michael Chekhov Technique. I will also clarify the use of the visual form of Leonor Fini, who was an artist, artistic

collaborator, and personal friend of Genet's, which will serve as a base tone for my portrayal of Irma. In addition, I will discuss my findings on how integrating CBT and Ideal Performance State protocols works within the rehearsal/performance process.

The Playwright:

Jean Genet (1910-1986) has inspired many artists over the years, from the likes of filmmaker Todd Haynes and musician David Bowie, to Butoh founders Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno. For many, he represents the rebel outsider and is considered a pioneer queer voice of arts and letters of the pre-Stonewall modern age:

Jean Genet's life and writings have done more to distinguish and uplift the French homosexual identity than any other man's in the last fifty years. The key homosexual author of his time, Genet's literature unequivocally pushed the French homosexual towards unashamed self-identification and representation between 1942-1981 [sic]. Largely shaped by his own homosexual development under the laws, as well as his learned cultural embracing of sex, Genet's literary focus is always on the sexual. His fiction embraces the sex act by presenting male characters that unabashedly describe their sexual fantasies. Genet's focus on the sexual encounter is also an act of political resistance. (Veith 76)

True Lies/Biography:

Genet was simultaneously a fabricator and revisionist of his own history.

He rarely told the same story twice about formative life events, yet his formative events were also central themes in his body of work. Biographer Edmund White does a thorough and detailed job in his 1993 book, *Genet: A Biography* with a concise chronology by “leading French authority on Genet’s manuscripts”, Albert Dichy (White IX).

There are some definitive biographical markers: born of a mother who worked as a prostitute; given up to the State; raised by a foster family; sent to Mattrey Reformatory; out-gay identified; tooled around Eastern and Western Europe as soldier, deserter, traveller, and sexual tourist; spent time in jail for stealing, forgery, and indecency; accumulated enough charges in France to have been sentenced to a lifetime in jail, but the intelligentsia of France rallied to have him pardoned on the grounds of being “a very great poet” who was “protecting the honour of a martyr of the Resistance” (White 335) and eventually was pardoned; later charged with pornography, attack on public morals, and indecency for *Querelle* and *La Galere*; supported various political groups such as the Black Panthers and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization); developed throat cancer and died alone in a Paris hotel.

Genet lived in France during the time of both World Wars. He spent critical developmental periods in institutional systems: military reformatory, state psychiatric facility, penal colony, prison, and military camp. Then he became a deserter. From this, it is no surprise that Genet’s work explored the juxtaposition between, and the hypocrisy

of, power and shifting gender codes, as well as the melding of national and personal identity, which helped shape a “sexual as political” point of view:

The history of sexuality became part of the history of nationalism in two ways: nationalism not only helped to control sexuality, to reinforce what society considered normal, but it also provided the means through which changing sexual attitudes could be absorbed and tamed into respectability...But nationalism also received a sexual dimension of its own through its advocacy of beauty, its stereotypes of ideal men and women. The beautiful body as the personification of the beautiful nation was supposed to transcend its own sexuality...Above all, beauty symbolized order, healed a sick world, and made time stand still. The function of beauty and of the male national stereotype was to prevent chaos...Abnormal sexuality, exemplifying chaos and restlessness, threatened to upset this order, and private vice increasingly became a public matter. Physicians and educators became obsessed with the personal sexual habits of those in their charge. (Mosse 222-3; 225)

While some painted Genet as an artist seeking perfection by constantly revising his work and reshaping ideas, others saw the portrait of a grifter pawning off sole rights to original manuscripts to multiple people for profit (Kennelly 21; Plunka “Rites of Passage” 56), disregarding contractual rights and stealing rare editions of poems dedicated to Genet’s earliest editor, Marc Barbezat (Stewart and McGregor 304), and stealing Giacometti’s drawing of Matisse (White 410). Genet also ended his friendship with Leonor Fini when she refused to go in on a gift with Genet and his lover, Java,

which involved her portrait of Genet and her wealthy patron (White 357). If things didn't go his way, if there was any indication of betrayal (real or imagined) or lack of interest in a particular piece of writing, the punishment he meted out was erasure: physically destroying original work or threatening to; refusal of publication rights; denunciation of endorsement of productions; termination of friendship/contract. Genet's English translator, literary agent, and confidante of almost twenty years, Bernard Frechtman, experienced this kind of termination in 1967. Frechtman committed suicide that same year (Plunka "Rites of Passage" 267; Stewart and McGregor 304).

Social punishment, as well as expressions of illusion, of deceit, of ritual, of masochism within the constructs of power and sexuality—all of which emerge frequently in his writing and in his relationships—can be construed as indicators of a psychological disorder. Genet's history of theft before the age of fifteen; his psychological assessment, hospitalization and treatment with neuro-psychiatry before the age of eighteen; his unpredictable emotional/violent outbursts when he was criticized or did not get his own way; his inability to maintain long-term relationships; his disregard for others; and his failure to conform to social norms all fit the psychological profile for antisocial personality disorder (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health; Stewart and McGregor 299):

...he was in fact required to submit to a psychiatric examination by Dr. Claude in May of that year [1943]. On the whole, the results of that examination, deposited in Genet's legal dossier in the Archives de la Seine for 29 May 1943, closely parallel the description of antisocial/narcissistic personality as described in the

International Encyclopedia of Psychiatry and DSM-111. (Stewart and McGregor 302)

Whatever the case, Genet sculpted a multi-dimensional reality out of the clay of his own humanity for us wonder at:

What led me to it has first of all to do with my personal history which I don't want to tell you. That's not interesting. Anyone who wants to know more about that can read my books. That's not important. What I do want to tell you, however, is that my previous books—I stopped writing about thirty years ago—belong to a period of dreaming, of day-dreaming. Once I had passed through this dream, this day-dream, it was time to take action in order to reach something like fulfillment in my life. - Genet (Wischenbart 39)

The Writer (or, *true I talk of dreams*):

Genet's philosophical battle with illusion and reality, with being and action—components of his poetic action—finds a magical pairing with visual and written mediums. He consistently melds text with sight, and sexual with political. His homoerotic poetry, such as *La Galère*, *Vingt lithographies pour un livre que j'ai lu*, and novels like *Querelle de Brest*, were paired with illustrations by fellow artists such as Fini, Calliaux, and Cocteau. He wrote the ballet scenario, *Adame Miroir*, as well as screenplays, including the silent film which he also directed and produced, *Un Chant D'Amour*. These pairings of medium and content create an erotic charge with a sense of poetic action, “the performative body in Genet's work is not simply a blank surface or an empty vessel

through which meaning is transmitted, but rather something which plays a pivotal role in the construction of meaning, thereby challenging and expanding traditional notions of corporeality” (Stephens 166).

Genet continues to build his concept of poetic action based on his connections to the Existentialist and Surrealist movements. His essential literary style is influenced and bolstered by their metaphysical explorations of internal and external human topographies, which become catalysts of change through art. The Existentialists

believe that, under certain conditions, freedom grants the human being the capacity of revealing essential features of the world and of the beings in it. Since artistic practice is one of the prime examples of free human activity, it is therefore also one of the privileged modes of revealing what the world is about... [Existentialists] thought that the form that best enabled the revelatory potential of art was the theatre, followed by the novel. (Deranty)

And from the Surrealists:

Man proposes and disposes. He and he alone can determine whether he is completely master of himself, that is, whether he maintains the body of his desires, daily more formidable, in a state of anarchy. Poetry teaches him to. It bears within itself the perfect compensation for the miseries we endure. It can also be an organizer, if ever, as the result of a less intimate disappointment, we contemplate taking it seriously. The time is coming when it decrees the end of money and by itself will break the bread of heaven for the earth! There will still be gatherings on the public squares, and movements you never dared hope

participate in. Farewell to absurd choices, the dreams of dark abyss, rivalries, the prolonged patience, the flight of the seasons, the artificial order of ideas, the ramp of danger, time for everything! May you only take the trouble to practice poetry. Is it not incumbent upon us, who are already living off it, to try and impose what we hold to be our case for further inquiry? It matters not whether there is a certain disproportion between this defense and the illustration that will follow it. It was a question of going back to the sources of poetic imagination and, what is more, of remaining there. (Breton 15)

Genet takes to heart this idea of poet as provocateur and theatre as their vehicle. Theatre becomes the central place of expressing provocation through language and aesthetic. In *The Balcony*, inciting action through eroticism and politics does not solely emerge from the imagination of Genet, it stems from a vein of cultural activism in French history, *theatre populaire* and *political pornography*, arising out of the French Revolution (Lavery 223). Genet plays with the conventions of both— and as a rebellion against—policing sexuality, and the resurrection of theatre populaire in Vichy and post WWII France:

Popular theatre offers a unique insight into political communities in both theory and practice. The imagined, theoretical construction of the masses as ‘the people,’ whether on stage or in the public space, was of inescapable importance across Europe in the years 1870-1940, as war and revolution tore apart nations and empires and radically redrew mental and physical boundaries. It was in the people that leaders, movements, parties, and nations sought ideological

coherence, legitimacy, and support. Not only did these people matter as the electorate, or as workers, soldiers, and citizens, but they also mattered as a body politic, re-imagined for a new world. In this imagination, politics went beyond the pragmatic to the ideal, as party leaders, militants, writers, and intellectuals looked to – and sometimes sacralized – collective experience as a source of transcendental belonging. (Wardhaugh 2-3)

The seeds of undermining political power through pornography are seen through the lens of 18th century literature and the French Revolution:

In fact, the French Revolution and pornography had some very intimate connections, both on the personal and the social levels. At least two leading revolutionaries— Mirabeau and Saint-Just—had written pornography before the Revolution, and some of the leading pornographers, of whom Sade is the best-known example, participated directly in the Revolution itself. Politically motivated pornography helped to bring about the Revolution by undermining the legitimacy of the Ancien Regime as a social and political system. (Hunt 301)

18th century political pornography aimed at the Queen, Marie Antoinette, was particularly effective:

Democracy was established against monarchy through pornographic attacks on the feminization of both the aristocracy and monarchy. It was accelerated in and after 1789 by especially vicious attacks against the leading female figure of the ancien regime, the queen herself. At the same time, the fraternal bonds of democracy were established - in pornography, at least and perhaps more broadly - through the circulation of images of women's bodies, especially through print

media and the effect of visualization through pornographic writing. The fantasies of multiple sexual partners and of sex across class lines, like other privileged preserves of the aristocracy such as hunting, were now available to everyone, but especially to every man. Women were thus essential to the development of democracy and, in the end, excluded from it. (Hunt 329)

To create social change through art was the poet's responsibility. This fundamental principle was something that gnawed at Genet. In his essay *A Note on Theatre*, although he furthers his literary connections between action and aesthetic by referring to Catholic ritual and suffering the frustrating limitations of theatre as a medium for his word paintings of experience, it is his conflict between being and doing where his own poetic action desires transcendence but lacks means:

But any poet who tried to realize this dream would see the haughty stupidity of actors and theatre people rise up in arms...The manners, way of life, and environment of poets are often depressingly frivolous, but what is to be said about those of theatre people? If a poet discovers a great theme and starts developing it, he must, in order to complete it, imagine it being performed; but if he brings to his work the rigor, patience, study, and gravity with which one approaches a poem, if he discovers major themes and profound symbols, what actors can express them?... A performance that does not act upon my soul is vain. It is vain if I do not believe in what I see, which will end—which will never have been—when the curtain goes down. No doubt one of the functions of art is to substitute the efficacy of beauty for religious faith. At least, this beauty should have the power of a poem, that is, of a crime. (Genet/Frechtman 37; 39-40)

In the 1960 publication of *The Balcony*, Genet included a note, *Avertissement au*

Balcon:

The imaginary representation of an action or an experience usually relieves us of the obligation of attempting to perform or undergo them ourselves, and in reality.

‘When the problem of a certain disorder—or evil—has been solved on stage, this shows that it has in fact been abolished, since, according to the dramatic conventions of our times, a theatrical representation can only be the representation of a fact. We can then turn our minds to something else, and allow our hearts to swell with pride, seeing that we took the side of the hero who aimed—successfully—at finding the solution.’ This is what a conciliatory conscience is always suggesting to the audience. However, no problem that has been exposed ought to be solved in the imagination, especially when the dramatist has made every effort to show the concrete reality of social disorder. On the contrary, the evil shown on stage should explode, should show us naked, and leave us distraught, if possible, and having no other recourse than ourselves. It is not the function of the artist or the poet to find a practical solution to the problems of evil. They must resign themselves to being accursed. They may thereby lose their soul, if they have one; that doesn’t matter. But the work must be an active explosion, an act to which the public reacts—as it wishes, as it can. If the ‘good’ is to appear in a work of art it does so through the divine aid of the powers of song, whose strength alone is enough to magnify the evil that has been exposed.

A few poets, these days, go in for a very curious operation: they sing the praises of the People, of Liberty, of the Revolution, etc., which, when sung, are rocketed up into an abstract sky and then stuck there, discomfited and deflated, to figure in deformed constellations. Disembodied, they become untouchable. How can we approach them, love them, live them, if they are dispatched so magnificently far away? When written— sometimes sumptuously—they become constituent signs of a poem, and as poetry is nostalgia and the song destroys its pretext, our poets destroy what they wanted to bring to life.

Maybe I'm not making myself clear? (Genet, *Hands and Wright* xiv)

This *Avertissement* in conjunction with *A Note on Theatre*, for me, clarifies what poetic action means. His declarations, “this beauty should have the power of a poem, that is, of a crime,” along with, “the imaginary representation of an action or an experience usually relieves us of the obligation of attempting to perform or undergo them ourselves, and in reality,” are the crux of his dramatic conflict. How can his theatrical characters delve into the mythos of humanity while maintaining the tension of present experience — or in acting terms, moment to moment reality? This is the delicate balance that *The Balcony* teeters on. It is not some high-minded abstract ideal, but a playable need that also is of an aesthetic construction which translates as a spiritual need. Not only does this quest for poetic action thread Genet's entire oeuvre, but it speaks to my own artistic challenge, in regards to acting methodology, which encompasses the corporeal marriage of image and text as a means of agitation to create an authentic theatrical state in present tense.

Although the characters of *The Balcony* are representatives of ideas, they honestly live in a dangerously unstable world. Therefore, symbolic ideas must have personal meaning. Poetic action for the actor translates to: We are what we do, and relationships to objects, real or imagined, are a potential of action from moment to moment.

The Play (*Le Balcon/The Balcony*):

Yes. In *The Balcony*...well, in *The Balcony* we're also dealing with entertainment. Besides, I had to fulfill a contract. You know I was commissioned to write that play. I was paid a lot of money so I had to write it. But, I didn't just sketch a portrait of any old world, it was a portrait of the Western world. Do you remember the themes of *The Balcony*? It's about a bordello and every dignitary, every client of *The Balcony* comes to look for his dignity, a visible dignity. -Genet
(Wischenbart 44)

Genet's literary history shows that he recycled certain dynamics within his stories, and made modifications based on the receptivity of his audiences and his own sense of artistic integrity. His modifications of *The Balcony* seemed to have been predominantly motivated by getting past censorship with Genet's final 1975 draft being, perhaps, an opportunity to reinstate ideas that were deemed too risky at an earlier date of publication/production.

Revision/development history can be an important part of an actor's research. Earlier drafts can show how a character arc has shifted or been clarified. They can be used as reference for when a director has made cuts or adaptations that disrupt the

character's particular story arc, or has made word changes that potentially stilt the rhythm and style of the writing. It can also clue us in to how the playwright thinks by revealing changes in dramatic structure.

Redux:

Genet was commissioned to write a play (Wischenbart 44). Between 1952 and 1956 (Plunka "Rites of Passage" 190), he took source material from his 1945 novel *Querelle de Brest* (Burnell 266), and the play *Le Balcon* (*The Balcony*) emerged. It was first published in 1956.

In 1957, French theatres refused to produce the play for fear of being shut down by the police, "the satirical paper *Le Canard enchaîné* explained that the police were threatening to intervene because they had information that performing the play would lead to a breach of peace" (Kustow 107). In 1958, a theatre in London finally agreed to produce it. Genet hated the production, was banned from the London theatre, and rewrote the play between 1957 and 1959 (Plunka, "Rites of Passage" 194).

In 1960, Peter Brook was slated to direct the Paris premiere, but still no theatre would touch it. "If you were the real Prefect of Police you would not be best pleased with Genet's Police Chief" (Kustow 107). A grande dame of the classical theatre, Marie Bell, wanted to play Irma and agreed to provide the Théâtre du Gymnase. Brook designed the sets and costumes, and he and Genet revised the play to avoid censorship. The Brook/Genet version of *The Balcony* was published in 1960.

Genet made more rewrites in 1960 and re-published it again in 1962. "Genet rewrote *The Balcony* constantly, almost obsessively; between 1955 and 1961 he published five different versions," with his last incarnation being in 1975 (White 417-18):

A scene in which three handsome young men represent sperm, tears, and blood was cut. Excised also were closing scenes that showed the Bishop, Judge and General in the ruins of their whorehouse sets. Many changes in various versions occur in the sixth tableau. In one version, for instance, Roger appears alone with Chantal and begs her to lend her popularity to the revolution. In a subsequent version we encounter other revolutionaries - Armand, lost in self admiration, and Marc, who orders executions on the spot and a propaganda 'carnival' that will rival the one promoted by the state. In the 1975 version Genet cut out almost all the scenes that take place outside of the brothel. (White 417-18.)

The knowledge of Irma's lost dream sequence of Blood, Tears, and Sperm and of the excised scenes which take place outside of the brothel clue me into the importance of conflict of both internal and external environments that Genet had initially laid out. It clues us in to Irma's mythos: Are intangible things just as valuable as those that are tangible? Does identity equate with one's occupation? Irma connects her identity with what she does, with her ability to create illusion, and if these are burned to the ground by real war, who is she? Irma's house of illusion, which supposedly heals the physio-psychic wounds of men, is deemed useless in the real world with real wounds of the flesh. Her intangible skills become obsolete in a tangible world which, in turn, renders her meaningless/dead.

-BLOOD-

We are all three of us wounded, and we thought that we'd best be looked after, here in this house. You have everything...bandages...Hurry up.

-IRMA-

There's no iodine or antiseptic, and my hands are dirty. My house is empty. Except for the costumes and masks.

-SPERM-

Don't say anything against masks. You owe everything beautiful on this earth to masks. (Genet, "The Balcony" 50)

In playable contrast, Blood, Tears, and Sperm call upon Irma as the divine female to help along the fate of man, specifically, the symbolic death as transformation of the Chief of Police. Irma fights against this call to the divine which further hollows out the divinity of illusion through masks and costumes:

-BLOOD-

Madam, we never stop flowing. Torrents, rivers, basins, torrential rains, cataracts, geysers that we exhaust ourselves to fill, whose source...

-IRMA-

...is hidden, like that of the Nile, and multiple... Go away! Criminals, go away, get out!

-TEARS-

The image I now invest you with is heartbreaking, if the face of a man crucified...

-IRMA-

Be quiet! Go away! If you don't leave, gentlemen, I shall wake up.

(Genet, "The Balcony" 50-51)

At the end of this dream sequence, she acquiesces by literally bandaging their wounds. Her actions ground her to her mortality; her materiality. It shows her fear of divine power and of losing mortal power within the community structure. This dichotomy in Irma can easily be applied to scenes that remain in the script.

The Grand Balcony and the *Maison Closes* of France:

Although Genet mentions Franco's Spain as his impetus for the play, Irma and her brothel more closely parallel historical and experiential knowledge rooted in French culture. The Grand Balcony is the brothel where the majority of the play takes place. It consists of many rooms — studios, as Irma calls them— all thematically decorated to suit the fantastical desires of a varied clientele:

-IRMA-

...my studios, my famous studios: my Harvest Room, with its rustic scenes, my Torture Room, splashed with blood and tears, my Throne Room, with its leopard-patterned velvet, my hall of mirrors, my State Room, my Perfumed Garden, my Urinal Cottage, my Amphitrite's Glade, my Funeral Parlour, with its marble urns, my Moonlight Terrace- it all becomes airborne. Studios! -Ah! I was forgetting the Beggars' and Tramps' Salon, where the filth and poverty are

glorified...And of course, the most magnificent of all, the culminating point, the crowning glory of the edifice- that's if it's ever actually completed- my Studio of Solemn Death, the Tomb! The Mausoleum... (Genet, "The Balcony" 31)

This fictitious luxury brothel resembles the famous French *Maison Closes*, which opened during the Belle Epoque (1870-1914) and continued through the German occupation of France until the demise of legal prostitution in 1946. *Maison Closes* were so called because

brothels had to remain discreet: a red lantern and/or large number next to its door were sufficient to indicate this; shutters had to remain permanently closed.

Such discretion went hand in hand with tight police control. In order to open a brothel, one had to submit a written request to the police headquarters in Paris, or to the mayor in the provinces. The direction of the facility was entrusted to a woman, of whom the police expected the capacities of authority and morality.

(Carol 276-77)

The Grand Balcony, with its numerous, sumptuously decorated rooms; its supply of fake and real props; its clientele, representing all classes; and the fact that it remained open during a military conflict mirrors real establishments, like *Le Chabanais* and the *One Two Two*, as well as *the Sphinx* and *Chez Marguerite*. All of these had famous artists, writers, heads of state, and monarchs as their regular guests.

The Chabanaïs, Paris, 1878-1946:

The Chabanaïs was a lavish brothel with all the rooms designed with international cultural themes, such as the Moorish, the Hindu, the Pompeii, and the 1900 World Fair/ L'Exposition Universelle du Paris award winning Japanese room (Clarke 261). For the 1889 World Fair, French and foreign dignitaries were invited to *Le Chabanaïs* with a special invitation to “visit with the President of the Senate” (Lomazzi).

The One Two Two, Paris, 1924 -1946:

The One Two Two was opened by a former employee of the *Chabanaïs* and her husband. She was replaced as Madame in 1939 by Fabienne Jamet. By the mid 1930's, four extra floors were added. Each of the twenty-two rooms were magnificently decorated; among them was the room of mirrors. Rooms — also referred to as sets or studios— featured scenic props to add touches of authenticity to scenarios such as real straw for the hayloft or sea water for the pirate room. Some catered to fetishism, including BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism) and crucifixion. The One Two Two also had a restaurant and after-hours cigar bar.

For more extreme fetishes, clients had to continue climbing the stairs.

As *Fabienne Jamet*, wife of Marcel and maitresse of the establishment, said, “*Plus on allait vers le ciel, plus on se rapprochait de l'enfer*” (The closer one got to the sky, the closer one got to Hell). On the higher levels were the torture rooms, places where visitors could be humiliated or even reenact the crucifixion! (Roberts)

Some brothels catered to special interests. The *Chez Marcelle* and the *Chez Sabine* were strictly BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism), and at *Chez Adele* coffins were the feature. *Chez Sevolinc* catered to couples, and *Miss Betty's* was known by taxi drivers as "the Vatican," and catered to clergy (Sante 124).

There were brothels solely dedicated to gay clientele such as the *Hotel Marigny*, which Marcel Proust frequented, and then there was the *Claire de Lune* and the *Hotel Madeleine*, which Genet frequented (White 350). There is very little historical documentation about these places.

When the Nazis occupied France, over two hundred brothels, including luxury ones like *Le Chabonais* and the *One Two Two*, were also occupied. They became dedicated brothels which served German officers (Sebba 67):

The brothels, nightclubs, and gentlemen's clubs all offered various kinds of entertainment important for the German sense of wellbeing. Some were even called *maison d'illusions*, an acceptance that they were places where all the social and moral rules were dropped, and the girls were trained to make even the guiltiest man feel cleansed." (Sebba 68)

Sadism and Masochism/S&M:

Dominant/submissive fantasies and role-play games are featured throughout

The Balcony: pony play, corporal punishment, ecclesiastical penance and reconciliation, as well as fetishized death. One might even argue that these games extend beyond the actions on stage by including the audience/actor relationship:

-IRMA-

(direct address to the audience)

Any minute now we'll have to start all over again...put all the lights on...
get dressed...get dressed...oh, all these disguises! Cast all the parts again...
play mine...prepare yours...judges, generals, bishops, chamberlains,
revolutionaries who let the revolution congeal...I'm going to prepare my costumes
and my studios for tomorrow...You must go home, now - and you can be quite
sure that nothing there will be any more real than it is here...You must go...

(Genet, "The Balcony" 96.)

Sadism and masochism (S&M) rose in popularity at the fin de siècle and correlates with industrialization, modern military warfare, and the fascist ideal of masculinity (Benadusi). It also marks the beginning of modern psychology, and sexology's theories on perversion and fetish which examines the relationship between subject (self) and object (other):

Lacan stresses that the constitution of an object, and by extension the subject-object relation as such, is always based on an attempt to reduce a primitive lack, and that this relationship to this lack is constitutive for the subject's drives and for the subject's reality. The basis Lacan starts from, is the idea that every relationship to an object is characterized by three factors: the way in which

the object lacks, the lacking object and the agent who installs the lack. Each of these factors can be imaginary, symbolic or real. Lacan calls real lack privation, imaginary lack frustration and symbolic lack castration. (Hendrickx 86,103)

Genet's symbols of desire (Hendrickx 106), of castration, of death, of transcendence, object/ subject and dominance role-play (e.g. the general, the judge, the bishop, the queen, the chief of police, etc.) all derive from the masochistic construct:

Since woman occupies the space of Other onto which man projects his own narcissistic ideal, it is man who thus stages in its most theatrical possibilities his own servitude. From here he derives the importance of disavowal...The masochist remains at all points the stage director of his own fantasy, but without thereby destroying the illusionary quality of his game. (Stewart 5)

As stated earlier, role-play rules of S&M permeate the fabric of *The Balcony*. The studio is the place where events are enacted, and where identity is invented. "Instead of regarding identity as the socially sanctioned and institutionally codified performance of fundamental hidden desires, Foucault sees desire as the product of sexual performance" (Noyes 220). The sadist and the masochist are in set agreement about what the balance of power is and how far the experience will go. It is a game of virtual reality:

Borderline experiences and experiences beyond the everyday are what the masochist is paying for when he gives the dominatrix her fees and takes his punishment. But in the process, he is also repeating the forms of punishment that have brought great suffering to many people. When the dominatrix hangs up her

chains and clamps, and removes the uniform...and switches off the lights, and leaves the studio for home, she may be discarding cruelty and torture. But the uniform stays there behind in the dark, waiting for someone to change into it and thereby bring it back to life. Will it be she or an actual policeman? Is the whip waiting for just another working day in the world of S&M or for a return to reality? In a world where identity is increasingly played out as simulated identity, and controls become increasingly erotic, maybe no one will know the difference. And maybe there is no difference. (Noyes 221)



Fig. 1: Pony Play. Biederer Studio, Paris, 1930's Photographer, Jacques Biederer

The Prostitute Spy/Horizontal Collaborator:

The Grand Balcony's current and former employees, as well as some of the visitors, work as agents and double agents in the military conflict taking place outside of the walls of the brothel.

In the 1930's, there was a wave of popular films that depicted the heroine as the prostitute spy. Some were based on actual historical figures, such as France's Mata Hari and Marthe Richard.

The 1931 American film *Mata Hari*, starring Greta Garbo, was based on real life exotic dancer and courtesan Margaretha Geertruida Zelle, aka Mata Hari. Mata Hari was accused of being a double agent during WWI and executed by firing squad in France in 1917.

The 1937 French film *Marthe Richard au service de la France* was based on a fictional account of Marthe's involvement as a prostitute spy in WWI, recruited by the same captain who recruited Mata Hari. Marthe's real story is far more convoluted than the fictional one. She was famous for her "horizontal heroism" in WWI, for which she received the Legion d'Honneur, but became infamous for being a horizontal collaborator in WWII—"horizontal collaborator" was a term used for French prostitutes and prostitute-spies that collaborated with the enemy in WWII. After WWII she went into politics and supported the anti-brothel campaign, which succeeded. In 1946, the Loi Marthe Richard (Marthe's Law) abolished the regime of prostitution regulated since 1804 (Blume).

Raymond Bernard's ambitious exploration of the career of the spy Marthe Richard (1937)...In its treatment of the spy genre's key themes of deception, single combat and vengeance, the film celebrates high patriotic endeavour and embraces Americophilia. However, it sets itself an impossible task: the destruction of the Mata Hari myth (which Greta Garbo's remarkable performance had consolidated across the world), and in its place the hoisting, Joan of Arc-style, of a new legend, the virtuous national secret agent. With its strong popular appeal, *Marthe Richard, espionne au service de la France* belongs to a series of works which not only reinvent and dramatize events from the Great War, but reflect the heavy climate of impending hostility during the inter-war years. Marthe Richard herself was not destined to become France's new Marianne, and her own complicated legacy reflects the film's qualified success.

However, the international spy mania of the 1930s which gave starring roles to women also witnessed a great deal of agitation regarding their emancipation. Attempts were made to suppress women's liberation, though more subtly than they had been during and immediately after World War I, when, irked by the notion that the fairer sex was living it up or at the very least not going to war, men rounded on the feminist movement, which they deemed to be undermining patriarchal society. The female spies of World War I were therefore seen as figures of strength, but ultimately subversive, a threat to the masculine status quo. (Lethier and Laurent 64, 67)

The Libertine Whore vs the Virtuous Courtesan:

What can be challenging about female characters in a play is that they may serve as structural anchors for the male character's journey toward transformation. Without male desire, what is the function of women in this play?

The prostitute can function as social barometer and indicate new attitudes toward old political hierarchies. Depending on the author, the prostitute can ridicule or celebrate her clients, who encompass everyone from old aristocrats to upstart bourgeois. She can be either social critic or complacent observer, and her boudoir can be a place of political agitation or simple dalliance. At the same time, the prostitute reveals a great deal about attitudes toward women, female sexuality and women's social role. The sexual politics of the time can be made evident by whether the pornographer chooses to paint her as a victim or a predator. (Norberg 225-6)

The women of the Grand Balcony reflect differing ideologies which, again, stem from 18th century literature. Irma appears to be classified as a Libertine Whore:

This whore is independent, sensual, sensible and skilled. She is healthy and possessed of a very healthy - that is, normal - sexual appetite. She is a businesswoman and an artist who provides "varied" sex for men who can afford it. She is a courtesan who lives in luxury and abides by "philosophy," usually materialist philosophy. Intelligent, independent, proud and reasonable, she is not diseased or monstrous; she is not humiliated or victimized either by life or her clients. She may have come from working-class roots, but she overcomes them

through her education and intelligence. An arriviste, she can scoff at social distinctions and hoodwink the rich and powerful. (Norberg 227)

In opposition to the Libertine Whore is the Virtuous Courtesan. In *The Balcony*, Chantal, a former employee, is the reverse of Irma. Chantal leaves the brothel to be used by the revolutionaries as the ideal Marianne —the French Republic symbol of Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité — and is killed as a result.

The virtuous courtesan was born in approximately 1760, though her antecedents could be traced back to Manon Lescaut. The 'virtuous courtesan' [whore with a heart of gold] is a hapless victim, an impoverished working-class child who is dominated and abused, diseased in body and sometimes in spirit, doomed to endure the sadism of both men and society. (Norberg 227)

The visitors of the Grand Balcony who enjoy S&M role-play games, also echo the clients in 18th century pornographic literature:

The libertine whore's clients do have "peculiarities," special tastes that the successful courtesan must satisfy, but these are more frequently bizarre or comical than deadly. Some clients like playacting, and Javotte has a client who asks that she dress like a lady of quality and virtue and yet talk like a fishwife. Another lover insists that he court her, and goes through the motions of a romantic courtship. La Duchapt has a client who likes to be spanked like a child. Virtually all of the courtesans gratify clergymen, whose foremost passion is to be beaten; in fact, it is a cliché of eighteenth-century pornography that ecclesiastics can only become erect when slapped on the behind with "a handful of steel rods [une poignée de verges]." Old men, too, sometimes need this stimulation and a

pamphlet from the revolutionary years considers the "steel rods [verges]" a necessary part of the average whore's equipment. (Norberg 232)

Building Character:

In Part One of this paper, I detailed psychological strategies to overcome my artistic challenge, perfectionism. Those strategies include CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), and Dr. McCharles' Ideal Performance State protocols. This section will specifically explore acting tools used for creating character.

Having researched the cultural context of the play, gained familiarity of the writer's style, and discovered the importance of symbolic representation through personalization, I have enough information to start building my role.

Silhouette of Leonor Fini:

"I always imagined that I would have a life very different than the one imagined for me, but I understood from a very early age that I would have to revolt in order to make that life." – Fini

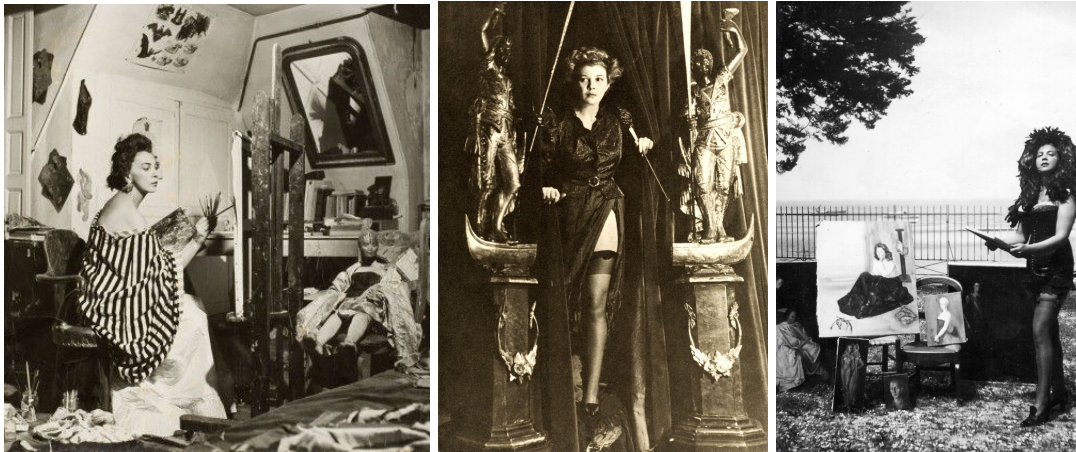
Visual representations of character inspire my imagination as well as help me formulate how my character might move through space, what their physical status and stature might feel like, and what personality traits would emerge in embodiment. I was quite struck by the photographic image of artist, artistic collaborator, and one-time friend of Genet's, Leonor Fini, and will use her silhouette as my physical foundation for Irma.

Fini was an arresting painter and designer—she designed sets and costumes for Balanchine, Fellini and Genet. The art world categorized her as a surrealist, but she didn't want to be associated with a group of men who didn't value women artists. She was conceptual in both her art and her life, and truly embodied poetic action. Her exploration of female mythology was both spiritual and theatrical. Her personality and artistic point of view were unwavering in the sea of the male dominated art world and the world at war. There is a certain essence about her coupled with Genet's first critical art essay, *Mademoiselle: A Letter to Leonor Fini*, that caught my attention when looking for clues to Irma:

If you hold so fast to the bridle of the fabulous and misshapen animal that breaks out in your work and perhaps in your person, it seems to me, Mademoiselle, that you are highly afraid of letting yourself be carried away by savagery. You go to the masked ball, masked with a cat's muzzle, but dressed like a Roman cardinal – you cling to appearances lest you be invaded by the rump of the sphinx and driven by wings and claws. Wise prudence: you seem on the brink of metamorphosis. (Genet and Mandell 10)

Leonor Fini once said she liked to have her apparel torn somewhere visible to suggest a sense of passion. I love this idea. One secret, but intentionally visible sign disrupts the spectator's purview. Her silhouette is both constructed and curved with one leg always in front of her torso. This presented image is both composed and active. For Irma, I am interested in exploring this image through using direct motion of the body in space, but with one indirect and curved element — the leg. This choice reveals

expressions of masculine and feminine identified gesture, as well as displays Irma's present role as Madame and her previous history as a sexual object.



From left to right:

Fig. 2: Paris studio 1952, Photographer unknown

Fig. 3: Paris 1936, Photographer Dora Maar

Fig. 4: Arcachon 1940, Photographer unknown

Chekhov and Atmosphere:

Michael Chekhov's use of Atmosphere connects all the components of acting in space. "Chekhov sees atmosphere in the hands of actors, in the way their bodies interconnect within the circumstances of a given space, rhythm of the action, the objectives of each particular character, and the psycho-physiology of each stage mask;" stage mask refers to character (Meerzon 261). This sensory use of imagination in space will require regular practice to build and maintain this kind of skill set. My specific work

on this is dependent upon what the director chooses to illuminate from the script and staging, as well as what other actors bring to the proverbial table.

Practice/Theory/Imagery:

Working with imagery, and then imagery with text will be a primary focus of my preparation and acting methodology. It is also where I will re-incorporate my psychological skills sets and conjoin them with my artistic tool kit.

Thus far, applying ideal performance state protocols of setting a goal and figuring out what I need to do in order to achieve said goal, so that I feel comfortable, confident, and able, to my acting work in a classroom setting has been extremely beneficial. It keeps bringing my focus back to the present action of the work rather than on the future external expectations of what my performance will affect. When I stay focused on my personal motivation, I experience a sense of ease and true appreciation of the journey that the playwright/director has sent me on.

CBT self-talk has also been applied, in doing so I have found that it is most needed when there are interpersonal interactions surrounding the work; e.g. studio rehearsals, or feedback about my work. There has been some marked progress in identifying and alleviating anxiety triggers, however, from this progress deeper layers have surfaced. The intention for working on *The Balcony* is to identify a few deeper anxiety triggers to alleviate perfectionist behaviors in the rehearsal room.

The application of Imagery and Radiation have been the most creatively rewarding thus far. Radiation has been the most elusively challenging. Radiation, briefly, from the pedagogy of both Stanislavsky and Chekhov, is the presence of energy and the “indescribable, unspeakable things that the actor has accumulated in his soul while working creatively on his part,” (Chekhov 116). What I have been learning about my process as an actor, regarding Radiation, is that I use effort in great force to generate energy on stage. This effort personally translates to getting it right —perfectionism— which is an external motivation, rather than the internal motivation of simply being present in the given circumstances of the character. Letting go of the body memory of effort while cultivating my sense of presence is an ongoing game of tug-of-war.

Imagery has been my semiconductor of sorts. It threads personal meaning together with spatial relationship, so that an internal motivation becomes externally visible. My mind can specify rather than fixate on an idea, word, or phrase, and the result of that specificity creates a sense of ease and a flow of ideas in moment to moment reality. This process makes the space for Radiation to exist without effort.

What I have discovered is that using imagery connects me to my emotional availability while letting go of rooting myself to text. I don't think of imagery as a subtextual undercurrent that adds a double meaning to text, nor as a static picture attached to a word, but rather, by clarifying where I see myself in space and how I feel about that space I see, I am able to bridge the liminal space between action and

meaning in real time. It also allows me to keep my emotional state present and palpable by connecting a visual context to specific words/phrases.

In the coming months, I will continue integrating psychological skills with acting methodologies. I will add David Smuckler's body/voice exercises which engage the breath, release the throat, and lift the soft palate to support the psycho-physical concept of Radiation. And in the studio, I will explore Michael Chekhov's concepts of Radiation and Atmosphere.

Chekhov proposes to move from experiencing or feeling of an atmosphere to creating it in visual forms on stage by employing a certain spatial tensions between characters, between actors as partners, actors and objects, actors and set, actors and audience. For Chekhov, atmosphere is to build and radiate the energy and its meaning of a situation as it is envisioned by actor's inner eye. The structure of atmosphere always presupposes a certain rhythmical score or a pattern of interchanging pauses with actions, silence with sounds, motionlessness with movement. Hence, for Chekhov the relationship between the dramatic text, its theatre presentation and the audience is always dynamic. (Meerzon 276)

Production Script:

Note on script samples: it is rare that I make detailed notes in my script anymore. However, I do make a shorthand of significant places at various stages in the rehearsal process: 1. Circles around words, phrases, direction, etc. indicate places of action, poetic nods from playwright, moments I want to look at more closely, as well as cues my character responds to. 2. A straight line or filled in dot in front of a word or sentence indicates a transition in thought, beat or pause. 3. Arrows indicate how the flow of thoughts move, or are attached to more detailed notes and questions. 4. Lines connecting words together (sometimes with circles) indicate poetic components, motivation of a line, or other shared ideas between two or more characters.

Q
Carmen You're gentlemen aren't afraid of bullets when they want to come here. And I'm not afraid of bullets when I want to see my daughter. *hey law*

Irma Aren't afraid! Fear excites them! Their nostrils dilate- they sniff the orgies going on behind the wall of fire-Your orgies go on in your heart... *rainy god damn*

Carmen But they don't help, Madam. My daughter loves me.

Irma You're like a fairy godmother to her. She thinks you come from heaven. That's really over the top! That's marvellous- at last someone thinks my brothel- which is hell- is heaven! Your kid thinks it's heaven. Are you going to make a whore of her when she grows up?

Carmen Madam Irma!

Irma You're right. I must leave you to your sentimental brothel, your secret *Think back we* whorehouse. You must think I'm cruel Don't you? The revolutions getting on my nerves too. Sometimes I feel the main aim of the revolution is not so much to take the palace as to sack my studios. I'm afraid Carmen. And I've tried everything- even prayer. Like the man you used to heal so miraculously. *Jake*

Carmen Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. I used to have to appear as the Immaculate Conception of Lourdes. All that meant to you was money in the bank, but to me, a believer, it was...

Irma You didn't seem to mind...

Carmen Mind? I was happy.

Irma Well then, what was so bad about it?

Carmen I saw the effect I had on him. I'd watch him go into a kind of fit, break out in a cold sweat...

Irma He doesn't come anymore. I wonder why not? Because of the danger I suppose. He could be dead. Perhaps his wife found out.

Carmen Who cares? All I can think of now is my daughter, Madam Irma. She's in a real garden. *you can't go*

Irma You can't possibly get there. The town is full of corpses. All the roads are cut off. Even the peasants are going over to the revolution. Contagion, perhaps. The revolution's an epidemic. Whatever happens, we're going to be more and more isolated. The rebels are anti-clergy, anti-army, anti-law and they're even against

me, Irma, mother of bawds and madam of brothels. As for you- you'll be killed and disembowelled, and your daughter will be adopted by a virtuous rebel. We shan't any of us escape.

There is a brake here in page at the end of the page.

A bell rings.

Lady's at J/C FABRIC

General

Carmen Is it the Chief of Police?

Irma It's the heroic legionary who falls. And that idiot Rachel has hit him in the ear with an arrow. He might have been disfigured for life. Rachel's giving him first aid and he's looking very pleased. I shouldn't be surprised if he decides to change his script: From now on he'll probably want to die in a military hospital being tucked in by a nurse... Another costume to buy! Oh, I don't like that. I don't like the way they're looking at each other at all- it's much too clear-eyed. It would be a catastrophe if my clients started exchanging friendly smiles with my girls. I'm getting worried about Rachel. She better not pull a Chantal on me. Any news of Chantal by the way?

FILE 1/25

did it police story.

Carmen No. None at all.

CL of perch

Irma A bell rings.

Revolutionary Roger

Irma False alarm. It's the Plummer on his way out.

SLC Fannie

Carmen Which one?

Irma The real one.

does Carmen know?

Carmen Which one is the real one?

Irma The one who fixes the taps. Hm. Just as I thought, those two or three drops of blood from his ear have inspired him. Now she's kissing it better. He'll be in great form at his embassy tomorrow morning. *[knows]*

Carmen He's married, isn't he?

does she trust Carmen? really?

Irma I usually make it a rule not to talk about my visitors private lives. The Grand Balcony is known all over the world as the most sophisticated and the most respectful House of Illusions.

Respectable

Carmen *Respectable?*

discreet

are these two supposed to be different or same? translations/typo?

what am I + where I go at?

his choice

dream FTB.

Irma Discreet. Still, to be frank, they're almost all married. *perch.*

Carmen When they're making love to their wives, do they still carry with them the joys they find in a brothel?

Irma Bitch. *why? more brothel detail*

Carmen Sorry... a house of illusions.

Irma Yes. Like a fairy light left over from last year's carnival, waiting for the next.

Machine gun fire.

Do you hear that? It's getting nearer. They're still after me. They'll have surrounded the brothel by the time George gets here. *TRANSITION to? death*

Carmen In a real house... it must be really nice.

Irma If all my girls started getting ideas like that into their heads, it'd be the ruin of the brothel. I believe you do miss playing that apparition. Listen- there is something I can do for you. I did promise it to Regina, but I'll give it to you instead. If you want it. Someone rang me yesterday and asked for a Saint Theresa... Yes, well, of course Saint Theresa is a bit of a come-down from an Immaculate Conception, but it's not that bad... Think about it.

Carmen What'll be the authentic detail?

Irma The wedding ring. You know that nuns all wear wedding rings, because they're God's brides. *Carmen = STAY seduce -> trad. her ideals*

Carmen And the phoney detail?

Irma Same as usual: black lace under the homespun skirt. They all want everything to be as real as possible... Minus an indefinable something, so that it's not really real.

Carmen You have been able to organize a fabulous theatre around your loveliness, a celebration whose splendour envelopes and masks you from the world. I too have had my hour of glory- standing erect, sovereign and at the same time sweet, matriarchal, yet so feminine, my blue veil, my blue dress, my blue apron, my blue eyes-

Irma Brown!

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Arthur Not with her, you're the only one I love. But a job's a job. And I'm a conscientious worker.

Irma I'm not jealous of the girl, I just don't want you damaging the personnel; it's getting harder and harder to replace. By the way, tell her to scream quieter, will you? The house is being watched. *new info*

Arthur I know. All the northern districts fell last night. But the Judge will have his screams.

Irma The Bishops less of a problem. He's content to forgive sins.

Carmen The best of the lot is the one you have to swaddle up and spank; then you whip him, then you coddle him, and then he snores.

Arthur Do you give him the breast?

Carmen I'm a conscientious worker too.

Irma *ASIDE CUT ASIDE* What about Saint Theresa then; will you do it? *(in front of Arthur)*

Carmen Give me time to think.

Arthur How much did you take today?

Irma Carmen and I haven't finished the accounts yet.

Arthur The way I work it out it'll be a good three thousand. Three thousand! All the wars, revolutions, machine-guns, hail, rain and shit in the world won't stop them. People are killing each other out there, but they still come charging right on in. *WAX WORK*

Irma I've got to finish the accounts with Carmen. Now you simply must go and meet George. *ARRIVE? QUE PROTECTION NEW IDEA*

Arthur I beg your pardon, beloved? *get him up XDCSL*

Irma You've got to go and meet George. All the way to the Police Headquarters, if need be: and tell him that I'm absolutely relying on him. I've got to have protection. *}*

Arthur You have me! *— Lorraine — delusional*

Irma I've got to protect my jewellery, my studios and my girls. The Chief of Police ought to have been here half an hour ago. *XDC to window*

Real Shop

Irma Yes, but tell me- didn't you have any reservations? *whom?*

Carmen No. To enter a brothel is to renounce the world. My reality consists of your mirrors. Which jewels will you wear? *Q STILL EXISTS*

Irma The pearls. My jewels. They're all I've got that's real. Who's the traitor? You hesitate.

Carmen None of the girls trust me. I listen to what they tell me. I pass it on to you. You pass it on to the police. Looking at it here- where men come to lay themselves bare, life seems so fathomless, that it has the unreality of a film.

A bell rings. *Genet*

Is it the Chief of Police?

Irma No. It's Christ leaving. *A VLL Frank*

Machine gun fire. *WTR*

Did you hear that?

Carmen The army's putting up a good fight.

Irma The rebels are putting up an even better one. I won't say there's a price on my head- that would be too much to ask, but it's known that all sorts of prominent people come here. So I'm one of their targets. And there are no men in the house. *one note*

Carmen Arthur will be back soon

Irma He's not a man, he's one of my props.

Carmen Assuming the worst...

Irma That the rebels win? I'll have had it. They're workers. No imagination. Prudes- possibly even chaste.

Carmen They'll get used to a little debauchery. Wait till they start getting bored. *v?*

Irma They won't get bored. They won't allow themselves to be one target. No! I'm their number one target. It's different for you. In every revolution there's the fanatical

escalates
from red hair to #1

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prostitute who sings the battle hymn and turns herself back into a virgin. That'll probably be you or Chantal. After which... they'll marry you off.

Carmen A ring... a veil

Irma To you marriage means masquerade!
make a few points
 Anyway, what they're really interested in is murdering us. We shall die a beautiful death, Carmen. It'll be terrible and sumptuous. They'll break into my studios, smash my crystals, slit our throats.

Carmen They'll have pity... *polish novel*

Irma No. They'll destroy us with fire and sword. We have no right to aspire to any other end- and you're thinking of leaving.

Carmen I may have thought of taking a day or two off, but you know why, don't you?

Irma Your daughter? But your daughter's dead...

Carmen Madam! *Little flower*

Irma Dead or alive, your daughter's dead. Think of her charming grave, with its daisies and artificial wreaths, at the bottom of a garden... and think of that garden in your head, where you'll be able to tend it.

Carmen I'd have liked to have seen her again. *personal advice of an enemy*

Irma You'll keep her image in the garden, and keep the garden- in your heart, under Saint Theresa's blazing robe. I offer you the most sublime of deaths, and you hesitate? Are you a coward? *persuasion / stay manipulation to stay*

Carmen You know I'm devoted to you.

Irma Are you trembling? But darling, all isn't lost. We shall crush them. George is still in complete control- providing he can get through.

Enter Chief of Police.

CoP A Chief of Police always manages to get through. (to Irma) Sweet warmth, such beauty.

Irma I knew you were on your way, so I knew you were in danger. I was waiting for you.

Rehearsal/ Performance Journal:

Jan 30th:

Last night was our first night. Ensemble games, playing with staging ideas. Some simple, beautiful images emerged.

Feb 1st:

Table work consisted of letting everyone talk about their personal feelings and definitions of certain words from the text. Context and character were not considered.

Feb 5th:

We still have not read through the play, have not heard what the directorial lens or style will be. Tonight, someone finally asked what story are we telling. The answer was: "worship of institutions leads to social unrest."; looking at the youth/rebels and the "beautiful love" Roger has for Chantal as the main focus of the play.

When I asked what Roger's castration meant to the director, it was the ultimate fuck you to institutional power. When I asked her who she thought the institutional power was, it was maybe the Chief of Police and those we never see. When I asked her what the Grand Balcony was, her response was it is neither institutional power nor rebel territory. It is a place where both exist. The Envoy, she stated is the only other character besides the rebels who carry compact mirrors. When I asked her why the Envoy, she wasn't quite sure, but played with the idea that the Envoy is this all knowing all seeing entity. If so, this is no longer Genet's play.

The director is also very concerned about ensemble behavior.

Feb 13th:

first day of blocking. The plan, as I understood was that we'd continue to shape, widdle and shape until at last we'd get to the Actor's work.

Feb 15th:

The director clarified that the heightened language between Carmen and Irma, is really the only place where Irma speaks in such a way, because this is how Carmen speaks.(?)

I asked for clarification on what she means by intimacy. What kind of intimacy does she imagine for Irma and the Chief of Police? What kind of specific action does "intimacy" entail? That as soon as they see each other they shake hands? They kiss? She wants to see in our physicality that we've had a sexual relationship. Ah! So a certain quality of sexual tension?

Feb 24th:

Was told I have to let go of my process and to stop talking about the structure of things. That the director is building something one step at a time. I said that I need to build too and need to know stuff.

Feb 26th:

New information: envoy breaks the fourth wall to the point of breaking the artifice of the theatre itself. And I [Corey] and/as Irma give the reduced final monologue. When I asked for clarification of how does the build from the Chief of Police gaining his final moment- his scenario being completed, what does this mean for the Envoy, for Irma? Did we orchestrate this, and for what? What is the pay off? Where do we go next? And if all of this was just to break illusions of power, who are Irma and Envoy that they can do this? Why did they need each other for this event and how does being involved in a nightmare that then reoccurs as the climax of the play allow the resolution to break all theatricality? The response was, let's do the run on Saturday and if I don't understand my function in this role- then we'll talk.

Feb 27th:

I have been thinking about Ideal Performance Protocols and what can i do so that i feel confident and prepared. Doing my own script analysis is one. James Thomas' book, "Script Analysis for Actors, Directors and Designers"

Tracking information from Irma's knowledge:

Scene 1: the bishop says there are rumours that the brothel is going to be surrounded.

Fact: the rebels have crossed the river. Time: It is late. And leaving the brothel is dangerous. There is a scream.

Scene 3: the general says s/he took great risks getting to the brothel. Fact: explosions of dams which flood several districts of the city. Time: must be similar to scene one because the screaming is still heard. Assumption is the judge with arthur and marlyse.

Scene 4: the chief of police is late and this is a cause for concern. Arthur is done with judge and marlyse and says the northern districts of the city fell under the revolution's control last night. War is good for business. Arthur is afraid to leave the brothel to go seek the chief of police at his headquarters at irma's insistence. The brothel girls don't want to give carmen information about the revolutionaries because it goes to irma which goes to the chief of police. The war between the rebels and army is of a relatively equal match, but the revolutionaries are winning. Irma is concerned that the brothel is a target because of the status of the visitors who come- ie heads of state etc. and that the brothel is not protected with military enforcement. That if the rebels win, she'll be murdered. Several men suggest that irma has rigged every room to be listened in on. The chief of police suggests that war is a game just as the scenarios in the brothel. Irma is more concerned about this revolution than at other times past. The chief of police says the police are guarding the brothel. Chantal said the power station will be occupied by 3am tonight/morning. There is an andromeda network which seems to have a higher status than the revolutionaries. Perhaps have joined forces?

Scene 6: according to scene 5, the palace has blown up. The envoy arrives and arthur is dead. There is an explosion. Is the queen dead? Commander in chief has gone

mad. The attorney general died of fright. No one knows what happened to the bishop. Rumoured that he was beheaded. All that's left is the chief of police. There is another explosion. Which the envoy suggests COULD be the palace. Irma uses her costumes to create the potential dead and missing in action: queen, judge, general, bishop. Revolutionaries first fought against tyrants, then for liberty and soon for Chantal. Chief of police suggests the symbol of Chantal can be used against the rebels. Envoy tells chief of police to get the last of his men ready for battle.

Scene 9: Time, it is dawn. Chantal dies.

Scene 10: falsifying the picture of order/political status quo. Then the revolution timeline gets murky and becomes a scenario of mythic proportions.

And then, I am lost. I don't understand the rest.

March 2nd:

Our stumble through yesterday made it clear that the revolution is the new event that changes the status quo of these people's world. It does not clarify the metaphorical layer.

Mar 7th:

Having intimacy/fight director in the room reminded me that telling stories is fun and that specificity of context and action elevates storytelling from page to stage. It was evident that working with the text is tantamount to discovering action, intention, and stakes and working with someone else who has a shared vocabulary and approach made me feel supported.

Mar 8th:

Being given notes such as, "we don't need indulgent pauses," gives me the sense that my work is being judged. To me, adjustment in communication which identifies what is being done, rather than how what is being done is perceived would be greatly desired.

Mar 10th:

I don't know what to make of this moment. "I want power" suggests that power isn't had yet. It is desired to be gotten. She has already appeared to the public as queen. Has given her speech, has handled the death of Chantal, has already expressed to the envoy that she will never be herself anymore and that equates with death.

In the original script the power struggle is between the false images of state and church, but as it stands it seems to be a response to what George says: "you seem to be showing signs of wanting to act. But your role was merely one of appearance and I intend it to remain so...our queen. It is from her that, for the moment, I derive my power and my rights..." His statement, I derive my power and my rights from the queen. And Irma is the queen. How is that not already power?

I conclude that a justification needs to be made here in order for the line to make sense. This must be a personal statement to George where Irma drops the Queen's facade.

Mar 13th:

New information: the envoy is no longer in the "first nightmare" sequence.

Mar 15th:

Saint Theresa aka: Little Flower- the whole discussion/dialogue and imagery about Carmen's daughter and the garden is all in reference to Saint Theresa's life and family. The garden at the bottom of the hill refers to Saint Theresa's father's house and place of pilgrimage: *Les Buissonnets*. "Are you trembling" perhaps even refers to Saint Theresa's tremors. The more I read about Saint Theresa, the more of her and her work, her imagery I see in Genet's. The arrow, the Eucharist, the Catholic symbolism is its own book of research. The golden arrow is part of the prayers of the Holy Face which is what Saint Theresa was. The Legionary who falls and Rachel are part of that specific Catholic imagery of the Holy Face.

New information: the envoy now sits in the audience for the entire show.

Mar 18th:

New information: places of gunfire. New sounds cues have been added between lines. Most of the time, the actors were not informed of these changes, but learned of them after the sound was heard. They change the motivation of a line. For instance: “ no. and anyway i think it’s too late. (Gunfire) let’s talk about something else.”

Every day reassessment of a scene or a moment does not allow the room to build upon an idea. Rather than creating depth, it is a constant re-working for clarity. “If anyone’s out of the loop and continues marching in a direction that has since changed, it leads to frustration and wasted work.” justin rosenstein

Mar 20th:

At the end of scene 6, the director wanted george to have some kind of sexual/violent way to express his elation and wanted him to put his hand on my throat. Which we did. But there was something about how she wanted his hand on my throat, but we didn’t understand her. She wanted it to be threatening, but not to where it was violent. Before it becomes violent. So i used my forearm and wrist as my neck and other hand as george’s hand and started showing different examples of physical choices and discovered that what she wanted was for me not to tilt my head back when he puts his hand to my throat. Specifying action is really important.

Mar 24th:

As tech concludes. “If something of significance is at stake, then this is described as a stressful encounter, for which there are three main meanings (also known as transactional alternatives): threat (possibility of future damage), challenge (an opportunity for growth, development, or mastery), or harm/loss (damage has already occurred)”

Appraisal is constant and pivotal for the performer. "that to function optimally, three basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be satisfied. Autonomy reflects a need for individuals to feel volitional and responsible for their own behavior. Competence reflects feelings of effectance and confidence in achieving desired outcomes. Finally, relatedness concerns the degree to which individuals feel connected to and accepted by significant others."

Bartholomew, Kimberley J., et al. "Organizational stressors and basic psychological needs: The mediating role of athletes' appraisal mechanisms." *Scandinavian journal of medicine & science in sports* 27.12 (2017): 2127-2139.

Mar 25th: Preview

My primary focus was on the text- scene by scene, so that whatever could potentially happen, i at least could stay on course. And if some acting was happening, or honest active listening, that would be a boon. More changes with envoy were made.

Mar 27th: opening night My primary focus was on joy.

Mar 28th: my primary focus was looking for flow in technical places.

Mar 29th: my primary focus was on staying present

Mar 30th: closing night. Chekhov reminded me that a part of radiation is the acceptance of artifice. The actor and audience exchange energy and that you do not have to put it upon yourself, rather allow it to be experienced. I took that to heart and made this my focus. Very liberating. Glad to be done.

Mar 31st: I slept for 12 hours. Letting my body undo what was built.

Conclusion:

The rehearsal/performance section of my thesis relied heavily on personal resilience due to environmental demands that challenged my ability grow artistically and maintain a healthy sense of self. These obstacles also illuminated for me, that acting methodologies, such as the Michael Chekhov Technique, require a context in which to work. It is what anchors and connects the actor to the mise en scene. Without context, the actor loses a foothold and other coping strategies are used as a substitution.

The combination of dramaturgical changes made to the script without addressing how it affects the story, focusing the majority of our rehearsal time on the composition of the play, along with the director's authoritarian approach left actors without much sense of creative agency, and a lack of clarity or incentive for working toward a shared vision.

My work as an actor is to serve the playwright first and foremost. We spend years studying how to glean from the playwright clues within the text that have a reasoning and logic that then manifests through behavior, through action. We move from an objective logic to an embodied (subjective) logic through text. I look to the director to set the parameters of the world of the story and create a partnership as I continue my journey toward embodiment with my fellow actors. I need to converse with my scene partners to share knowledge about the context, the given circumstances, and discover

specific moments as well as detail them as we deepen our experience within the world being created.

Cuts made to the script not only forced quick leaps in emotional states and logical thought, but also undercut the symbolic structure built into the play. By using the Envoy character as the magical orchestrator of a world that had no free will to shore up the dramaturgy, the trajectory of my character became convoluted. Irma's transformation into the Queen, the events which followed and subsequent final monologue, a direct address to the audience, were confusing.

Rehearsal time was primarily spent looking at the compositional framework of the play without having a meaningful discussion about the story itself. This made my job building personal and interpersonal meaning difficult and engendered end gaining emotional substance and states of being. I felt as though I had very little creative autonomy and that my only recourse was to rely on technical construction. I used CBT to work through automatic negative thoughts and clarify my personal needs, and Ideal Performance State protocols to create a personal work space to address my artistic needs.

Context was an important building block for me, so I referenced James Thomas' book *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*. I focused on tracking the revolution, as it seemed to be the consistent event that slowly progresses from an experience happening outside of the brothel, to infiltrating the brothel itself.

I then looked for Irma's point of view on the revolution and discovered how her actions are motivated by this event. She realizes that, even though the revolution is a fantasy scenario for the Chief of Police, it is on such a scale that the fantasy could get out of control, and real irreparable harm would be the cost of executing such a scenario. She solicits support from Carmen, by giving her incentives to stay (promotes her, offers her a dream role as Saint Theresa, and convinces her that she cannot leave to see her daughter). She commands Arthur to run to police headquarters because she needs armed security of her property. She confesses to the Chief of Police that she thinks this fantasy is getting out of hand. To give her a sense of emotional comfort, she recalls a time when the two of them experienced authentic love. For Irma, death and isolation are fearful ideas.

This analysis brought me to the third focus— how other characters' behaviors change due to the revolution and how that affects Irma. Her clients are scared, her brothel girls have been indoctrinated by insurgents, boundaries of fantasy and reality become emotionally indistinct. The death of Arthur and Chantal matter to Irma.

When the Envoy arrived and dramaturgical elements became muddied, I used Thomas' suggestions on analysis for absurd and non-linear narratives: When plot may not be evident, "The question to ask is how the characters come to terms with their reality at this point in time?" [sic] (Thomas 91). With this in mind, I focused on singular moments without concerning myself with building long form logic. The Envoy was able

to raise the dead, puppet Irma's physicality, take Irma into a realm where the fourth wall is broken and she could see the audience, and persuade Irma to replace the Queen.

This strategy of focusing on context and given circumstances not only stopped me from ruminating on potential performance outcomes outside of my control, but it also created space to find meaning and places of playable action within the text which gave me grounding and the opportunity to make independent artistic choices.

Externalized scene building without role clarity put me in a position of crafting results. This aspect created a great amount of anxiety. Going back to Ideal Performance State protocols, I decided to explore how I could use my technical skills not as an end result but as a placeholder, as a physical reminder of moments I wanted to give depth and grow into— placeholders like the death of Arthur. The end result was to exhibit an urgent and deep grief over his death, but I could not generate this feeling organically in rehearsal. So, I gave myself permission to create the gestures required, and I explored all the way to the end of performances how I could fill this moment with meaning without pressure of personal expectations to succeed.

As performances were underway, my Ideal Performance State strategies allowed me to experience moments of organic meaning and creative ease, as well as, in conjunction with CBT, hone in on problem solving perspectives that continue to give me agency and a sense of personal growth. Knowing that is most certainly excellent, indeed.

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