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FLOW THEORY IN THE ACTOR'S PROCESS
CAN THE PURSUIT OF OPTIMAL EXPERIENCE ALLEVIATE ANXIETY?

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts Acting
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ABSTRACT

Using techniques from acting scholars and practitioners, this practice as research study seeks to lesson anxiety in actors by measuring the actor's preparation, rehearsal and performance process against each of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's conditions of flow.

Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory describes flow as an "optimal experience" in which a person is so invested in their goals, there is "no threat for the self to defend against" (M. Csikszentmihalyi 76). His research identified conditions that when present, can induce a state of flow. However, actors can be plagued by negative thoughts and self-consciousness. While a certain amount of anxiety is expected and normal, for some actors it can become debilitating, preventing them from entering a state of flow. Why? What causes this anxiety and how does it interrupt flow? Is there a way to stay in flow and stop anxiety from effecting performance? In rehearsals, directors guide actors on a quest to enter flow. However, few known pedagogies use flow theory as a basis for training. This thesis documents one actor's quest to create conditions that will allow a higher frequency of flow, thereby stopping anxiety from overtaking the process.

For my children who believe in me even when I can't:
I am always in flow when I am with you.
WE did it!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to my parents who taught me to stay curious. This work would not have been possible without your unending support.

To my thesis committee: Vivian Majkowski, Tamur Tohver, and Christopher Niess for your guidance and lessons in pedagogy and in life.

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INTRODUCTION

“It is how we choose what we do, and how we approach it, that will determine whether the sum of our days adds up to a formless blur, or to something resembling a work of art.”
(M. Csikszentmihalyi)

Acting requires vulnerability. In order to create realistic characters, actors must empathize with, and put themselves in the worlds of, people who are in heightened circumstances. Actors may even recall emotional experiences from their own lives in order to truthfully portray the character. To do this, actors spend years training in various acting techniques that are largely geared toward opening the mind and body so they can focus on the here and now – what some call “living in the moment.” And when they get it right, actors describe feeling a sensation of “flying,” or “being in the zone.” Grandfather of the American acting system, Konstantin Stanislavski called this “the creative state:” a state of higher consciousness where actors are free to act on impulse (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work: a Student's Diary* 295). Hungarian Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi studied this phenomenon across people of all walks of life. He concluded this moment-to-moment experience is a key to happiness and he coined it the state of flow: “a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* 16)

The goal for actors when performing is to be so invested in the given circumstances¹ of the character, that they can improvise freely within the imagined world. When we are living moment-to-moment in flow, we are free to follow our instincts and deliver exciting performances rooted in truth. We can “play” without self-judgment. But vulnerability opens actors up to fear of judgment and anxiety may ensue. Therefore, flow can be difficult to attain in performances and rehearsals. While a certain amount of anxiety is expected and normal, for some actors it can become debilitating, stopping flow with all-consuming negative thoughts. Why? What causes this anxiety and how does it interrupt flow? Is there a way to stay in flow and stop anxiety from effecting performance?

While anxiety is a common occurrence, it has many definitions and varying degrees of discomfort. “Stage fright,” or “performance anxiety” as it manifests in athletes, public speakers, singers, dancers and musicians has been the subject of scientific study for decades. However, there is not much clinical study on its effect on actors. In her book *Stage Fright in the Actor*, Dr. Linda Brennan speaks to how destructive high levels of anxiety can be to actors stating, “Stage fright diminishes or even extinguishes the expression of talent and creativity” and “robs the actor—and the audience—of what could be” (Brennan xi). According to Brennan, this destructive phenomenon has no one clear cause. But can there be a clear prevention?

¹ Given Circumstances were first explored in Konstantin Stanislavski’s *An Actor’s Work* and consist of the context given by the playwright or writer that tell the actor who their character is, their relationships and where they are in place and time. The proverbial “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “why,” is a simplified version of questions an actor must answer to fully understand the playwright’s intention and therefore to master that of the character’s.

Stage fright seems to have several causes. Its presence will be unique to each actor and unique to each performance. Depending on one's theoretical point of view, stage fright can be thought to be caused by unconscious forces, negative beliefs, specific attacking thoughts, specific fears, past relationships, past criticisms, and past performance issues. Some actors may carry unconscious beliefs that will affect them. Others will still be carrying the emotional burden of destructive words or actions from a significant person from the past. (42)

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi found that when in a state of flow, the individual is void of self-consciousness. Does this mean, if actors enter flow, they will not experience debilitating levels of anxiety? Csikszentmihalyi also found the more the people he studied were in flow, the more "in the moment" they were, and the happier they seemed to be. So, Is there a way to induce flow for actors thereby lessening the effects of anxiety in performance? His pursuit of the psychology of the optimal experience² revealed four conditions that when met, can and often do, lead to flow. These conditions are: (1) clear goals, (2) skills that are challenged yet able to reach the goal , (3) focus free from distraction, and (4) immediate feedback (Csikszentmihalyi 164-177). Using practice as research, this thesis will measure the actor's preparation, rehearsal and performance process against each of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's conditions for flow in an effort to lesson or alleviate debilitating levels of anxiety.

² Csikszentmihalyi defines optimal experience as "a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like" (M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* 14)

CHAPTER 1 THE INTERSECTION OF FLOW AND ACTING

*“Find a way to express what moves you.”
(Csikszentmihalyi 501)*

For nearly half a century, the late psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (MC) studied the psychology of enjoyment and motivation. He pioneered the field of positive psychology³ and perhaps is best remembered for his work in identifying the phenomenon of flow. He published numerous books chronicling his research, which consists of interviews and feedback on optimal experience from hundreds of professionals across many sectors – business, sports, medicine science and the arts. Like the late Stanislavski, his work was ever evolving. In his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Csikszentmihalyi identified that although the people he studied were from vastly different backgrounds and had different activities that gave them an optimal experience, they all described the conditions of flow identically. He concluded that “...optimal experience, and the psychological conditions that make it possible, seem to be the same the world over” (Csikszentmihalyi 91). MC’s identified conditions of flow, he found, lead to the characteristics of flow which his participants described as: (1) a merging of action and awareness, (2) a sense of control, (3) a loss of self-consciousness, (4) loss of perception of

³ According to *Psychology Today*, “Positive psychology is a branch of psychology focused on the character strengths and behaviors that allow individuals to build a life of meaning and purpose – to move beyond surviving to flourishing. Theorists and researchers in the field have sought to identify the elements of a good life. They have also proposed and tested practices for improving life satisfaction and well-being” ([mailto:https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/positive-psychology](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/positive-psychology)).

time, which ultimately makes the activity autotelic⁴ (M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*).

But is there a case for applying flow theory to the creative field of acting? Some scholars believe so. While MC's numerous studies throughout his lifetime covered many personal and public sectors, this thesis will concentrate on his analysis of flow in "creativity." First, do actors fit within MC's definition of "creativity?" He names three "phenomena that can be legitimately called by that name": Brilliant people, personally creative people, and people who have "changed our culture in some important respect" (Csikszentmihalyi 38). While MC acknowledges a distinction between people who are socially brilliant and personally creative, his study concentrates on individuals who have publicly changed their fields in some way through discovery and/or invention. For this reason, his case studies focused on individuals who had discovered new things about their fields such as scientists, inventors, musicians, and poets. These individuals have documented and tangible changes made to their fields. By these parameters, can Actors be classified as "creatives?" Actors are creators, discovering brave new insights into each new role. They must discover new things about themselves, their characters and the stories they engage in. Furthermore, they must make new "discoveries" on stage each performance to trick themselves and their audiences into thinking this is the first time their character is experiencing and reacting to the circumstances of the play. These discoveries are public, as the actor's product must be engaged by the public for it to be complete. While every actor may not directly change the field of acting as a whole, each role does require new

⁴ Autotelic=rewarding in and of itself.

discovery and often changes the perception of the artistic piece. Therefore, I will conclude that actors *do* fit MC's definition of creative.

The case for viewing the acting process through the lens of flow theory has been made by several scholars. Cambridge scholar Marc Silberschatz studied the similarities and differences between flow theory and the Stanislavski system in his document *Creative State/Flow State: Flow Theory in Stanislavsky's Practice*. Silberschatz believes Stanislavski's technique was a way to prepare actors to enter the "creative state" – "a state of 'subconscious creation' where 'the actor's whole creative apparatus , all its separate parts, all its, so to speak, internal "springs" and "knobs" and "pedals" function superbly, almost the same as, or better than in life'" (Stanislavski 295). Silberschatz implies that Stanislavski is describing flow – an automatic process devoid of self-consciousness. He draws a link to positive psychology's phenomenon of flow – "a harmonious experience where mind and body are working together effortlessly, leaving the person feeling that something special has just occurred" (S. A. Csikszentmihalyi 5). While related, Silberschatz concluded that "although Stanislavski's creative state and flow share this basic similarity, it is impossible to determine if they are analogous. In spite of this, when examining Stanislavski's practices, significant correspondences with flow theory emerge." (Silberschatz 13)

While some scholars document the intersection of flow and acting, is there evidence that the conditions of flow can help actors keep anxiety from derailing their own creative processes? This question requires a definition of what is meant by "anxiety." Dr. Brennan notes that the terms for anxiety differ across research, however for her own study she differentiates between anxiety, performance anxiety, and stage fright. Brennan's analysis used *anxiety* as a

broad term to describe the fear of something that could potentially happen in the future and states that some levels of anxiety are normal. She also chronicles a lack of consistency in studies between anxiety and performance anxiety stating they are often used interchangeably in research. Ultimately, Brennan decides to use the term *stage fright* as her descriptor for debilitating anxiety in actors (Brennan 5). She decides that the term *stage fright* “because it is more evocative and less technical. It has historical standing and is more likely to be identified with and used by actors” (5). However, this study will investigate correlations between the ego’s defense mechanisms and the fight, flight, freeze and faun responses which more closely relate to Freud’s signal theory. Dr. Karen Horney (1885-1952), Psychiatrist and author of *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Towards Self-Realization*, differentiated between *normal anxiety* (a normal reaction to a threat), and *neurotic anxiety* (a reaction that requires use of Freud’s defense mechanisms) (27). Since *stage fright* implies a fear of physically being on stage, I will use the term *anxiety* for what Horney called *neurotic anxiety*. This is anxiety that interferes with an actor’s process, often resulting in unwanted physical responses.

Can pursuing a state of flow alleviate anxiety as it is defined for this study? Some scholars think so. Director, actor, educator and PhD candidate Tamur Tohver has developed a practice based on Stanislavskian theatre craft, yoga and self-cultivation coaching to alleviate anxiety between actors and directors founded on his finding that concentration in acting can keep the actor in a state of flow. He believes “Stanislavski’s main personal problem was how to maintain the performing flow” (Tohver, Zero Zone in Stanislavski's Practice). Through his own action research, Tohver also presents proof that maintaining the concentration needed to

achieve flow, can alleviate anxiety⁵ (Tohver, Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation).

MC discovered, creativity and happiness go hand in hand. So can flow lead to happier people and therefore better actors? Acting instructor John Britton bases his Ensemble Physical Theatre approach on Flow Theory believing:

...placing pleasure at the heart of training can offer insights and mechanisms to enable work to become increasingly detailed, complex and embodied and that contemporary research in the realm of 'positive psychology' might radically inform our understanding of how to design and engage in training processes (37)

MC believed the key to Optimal Experience is related to how often people experience the state of flow. But is there proof that *actors* experience flow? Jeffrey J. Martin and Keir Cutler believe so. They studied 40 acting students to correlate the occurrence of flow in actors as it relates to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They concluded that, at least within their limited test group, flow indeed was achieved for participants on average just under four times per year, which they concluded was "neither common nor rare" (Cutler 350). This Study documents occurrences of flow in actors.. So can practical application of flow theory quell anxiety? While some studies now correlate incidents of flow with increased objective performance quality, is there a process for actors to achieve flow more consistently? Lynn Marie Boianelli believes so, and she believes actors who loose flow can find it again. She draws on MC's studies of enjoyment In her thesis

⁵ Zero Zone Praxis reference here is based on my own interpretation of personal sessions with Tamur Tohver applied to an individual practice. Tohver's praxis, however, was created to address anxiety between actor and director which he states He states: "This is the second phenomena, which can destroy performing flow: hesitations and evaluations as they appear as revolving disturbing thoughts (monkey mind) and additionally, certain resistance could appear from actor's side against creative solutions. Of course, keeping your concentration strong helps avoid or replace these thoughts- but they return. Therefore- these thoughts and confrontations can be prevented by balanced actor-director exchange" (Tohver, Notes from private Zero Zone session)

“Achieving Flow in Theatre Performance,” she examined Csikszentmihalyi’s steps to reach optimal experience within theatre rehearsal and performance. She believes:

In addition, this understanding of flow can reignite pleasure in an actor no longer experiencing flow when in performance... acting becomes a pressure filled internal struggle; no longer a flow experience. If actors understand their initial flow experience, they may once again reach that state and may rediscover their initial love for acting (4).

Dr Brennan’s research supports this notion that an actor’s connection to the reason they initially started in the field can increase joy and limit anxiety. She suggests actors return to the moment they were “called to act.” The actors Brennan interviewed, all had a “Why I wanted to be an actor” story. She suggests the actor go back to the moment they discovered this calling, “the moment, event or time you knew that you desired – needed – to be an actor (Brennan 177).” In his book *An Actor’s Work*, Stanislavski illustrates an actor’s frustration with trying, but not succeeding, in recreating flow without proper guidance. The fictional actor in his book was unaware of the conditions needed to induce performance flow and therefore returned to external gestures which connected them to extrinsic input as opposed to internal conditions (Stanislavski 7). The actor’s enjoyment was replaced with frustration and anxiety.

Can connecting to the joy of the *work* prevent anxiety in the acting process? According to MC the answer is “yes.” His research found that though the creatives he studied all had different socio economic, geographic, and educational backgrounds, they all did the work for the sheer enjoyment of the *process* and would continue their work regardless of measured success or failure (Csikszentmihalyi 218-254). They worked on an intrinsic reward system where joy came from their own curiosity as opposed to an externally motivated or extrinsic system

where praise came from outside sources. Therefore it is plausible that if actors can create more occurrences of flow in their process, they will find more enjoyment in their work and experience less anxiety. This, in turn, could create a cycle of positive reinforcement – the more the actor finds enjoyment, the more they will experience flow which leads to more enjoyment of the process and the probability of a longer career.

Finding an actor's initial "why" is an important step to achieving flow. Despite the expectation that actors "leave it at the door," they bring their own backgrounds, biases and baggage to a room. A commonality in some actors is that they began acting as a form of escapism from their own lives. Musician and actor Lady Gaga spoke of her own escapist mentality:

I invented myself, Lady Gaga—I curated my life to be an expression of my pain. This is how I overcame my depression, by creating somebody that I felt was stronger than me. No matter how much success you have, no matter how many opportunities, fame, fortune—no matter how many people accept you, to your face, the person that really needs to accept you is you. (Gaga)

Like Lady Gaga, actors often become actors to escape expectations and feel heard in a room full of people. The actor may describe a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves on stage – a sense of community not experienced in everyday life. But actors often must put themselves into traumatic, even violent given circumstances. And acting students in academia must do this under a grading and hierarchical system that can open a possibility of perceived judgement and control. Without proper guidance and sensitivity, this can heighten

distress, depression and anxiety in students. Although clinical research on actors is only just beginning, the stories of Method actors going so deep into their character's lives that they suffer emotional consequences are numerous⁶. While much modern training works to build an actor's self-awareness and seeks to safely build vulnerability, the setting can still be promotive of anxiety and pressure.

With increasing study between the fields of positive psychology and actor training, the timing is ripe for application of flow theory to an actor's individual practice. Using my own practice as research, I will demonstrate how flow theory can shift the paradigm of acting from an anxiety inducing to a positive experience. Silberschatz concluded that:

The sum total of Stanislavski's practice, when viewed through the lens of flow theory, is an approach to acting that creates conditions in which most, but not all, flow dimensions can be fulfilled. That correspondence is so high opens a tantalizing avenue for future research (and is the subject of my doctoral research). Research along these lines would help develop an understanding of how theatre might best facilitate flow and how flow might best facilitate theatre (Silberschatz 22).

⁶ Some examples of the extent actors go to in method acting can be found here <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/03/the-method-acting-isaac-butler-review/621310/>

CHAPTER 2 GOALS

*“the self expands through acts of self forgetfulness.”
(Csikzentmihalyi 162)*

In his book *CREATIVITY: Flow And the Psychology of Discovery And Invention*. Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi studied 91 creative people in the hopes he could chart commonalities between creatives and, potentially recreate it in others. Interviewees included well known artists, scientists, writers, mathematicians, writers and musicians. He calls creativity “a central source of meaning in our lives” (Csikzentmihalyi 9). He believes this for two reasons: individual ingenuity is what makes us human, and we feel most fulfilled when creating (Csikzentmihalyi 9).

American biologist, teacher and activist Barry Commoner is one of MC’s case studies. Commoner expressed that creativity takes discovery and hard work and the need to develop “...a personal approach, an internal model that allows them to put the problem into a manageable context” (Csikzentmihalyi 170). Commoner is describing the first condition needed for flow: clear goals. How do actors set clear goals when each new role is different? Csikszentmihalyi recognize that goals for artists can be difficult, “For artists the goal of the activity is not so easily found. In fact, the more creative the problem, the less clear it is what needs to be done”(165).

An actor’s ultimate rehearsal goal is to show up open and ready to explore the given circumstances of the character. In rehearsal the actor’s goal is to identify the given circumstances and actions of the character. The actor’s goal in performance is to create and

discover new and truthful performances each night. By doing so the actor should enter a state of flow. Therefore the first step for optimal experience, clear goals, must be identified for each phase of an actor's process: preparation, rehearsal, and performance.

Preparation Goals

If Stanislavski's belief that actor training is what "prepares the soil" for the growth of the creative flow state is true, and flow theory dictates that clear goals must be present, it stands to reason that clear goals must be set in the actor's preparation process. Director and scholar Anne Bogart agrees with Stanislavski, "the preparation is what gives one the permission to take up space and make wild, surprising and untamed choices" (Bogart, *What's the Story: Essays About Art, Theatre And Storytelling* 27). If the actor wishes to arrive to rehearsal open and ready to send and receive impulses subconsciously (make choices), then the mind and body must be free of any creative blockages. Therefore goals to release habitual tension in the body, and to free the breath are essential to an actor's preparation process.

These mind, body and breath goals can be reached in a consistent actor warm-up. Truthful acting is realized through continuous work and technique. Actors must be ready to receive surprising new thoughts and impulses, and to act on them without judgement. The actor can do this by releasing habitual tensions, reaching a state of "relaxed readiness" (Majkowski). Stanislavski's work spanned over 40 years in search of the "conscious means to the subconscious," a way to circumvent the conscious so that the thoughts and tasks of the actor become that of the characters. Just as the memory is a muscle that needs to be

trained, so too is our connection to the subconscious (Moore). Fitzmaurice Voicework™ and John Britton's Ensemble Physical Theatre methods recognize blockages to this connection and work to deconstruct them, while Tamur Tohver's Zero Zone Praxis builds concentration on the task at hand through concentration and focus guiding techniques. John Britton uses improvisational physical exercises as a positive psychological redirect to the task at hand, while acting voicework innovator Catherine Fitzmaurice believes that freeing the breath also frees the mind, body and imagination of the actor. Fitzmaurice does so with a series of induced tremors that release habitual tension and unblock impulse in the body. Her groundbreaking work is a holistic approach to freeing the body and the breath through exercises that are broken into two phases: Destructuring and Restructuring. Tremorwork™ activates the primal fight or flight system through a series of physical positions that cause the body to shake uncontrollably.

The Destruction work consists of a deep exploration into the autonomic nervous system functions: the spontaneous, organic impulses which every actor aspires to incorporate into the acting process. The tendency of the body to vibrate involuntarily as a healing response to a perceived stimulus in the autonomic "fight or flight" mode (as in shivering with cold or fear, trembling with grief, anger, fatigue, or excitement) is replicated by applying induced tremor initially through hyper-extension of the body's extremities only, thus leaving the torso muscles free to respond with a heightened breathing pattern (Fitzmaurice 2).

University of Central Florida Voice and Speech Professor Vivian Majkowski believes that tremor induces flow stating "If you go into the chaos – release tension – you can start making choices

outside of your habits. Your action palette⁷ then is at your readiness” (Majkowski). As the autonomic nervous system takes over, past and future thoughts are released and the actor is able to react to the body’s impulses instead of fighting to consciously control them . Central to the experience is finding the “surprise breath.” This is breathing uninhibited by conscious control. “It is the initial moment to be seen/felt so that you can then drop into the chaos” (Majkowski, Interview). This chaos allows the actor to truly surprise themselves. Tremorwork™ is an excellent addition to an actor’s warm-up routine. Majkowski also teaches destructuring through a series of physical stretches adapted from Harvard professor Nancy Houfeck⁸. These warm-ups are designed to release tension in the body that can block the breath and consequently the voice. The warm-up stretches hips, shoulders, neck, stomach, tongue, and Jaw, lips and soft palate (Majkowski, Stage Voice I). Many of the stretches are derived from yoga and Traditional Chinese Medicine practices and are a good partner to Tremorwork™.

Tamur Tohver’s *Zero Zone Praxis* consists of three stages designed to alleviate anxiety between actor and director. While stage one of his praxis uses physical exercises to build trust and “evokes the body mind experience of absolute truthfulness,” stage two he calls the “preparative and preventive stage” (Tohver, *Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation* 17). Stage 2 works to dissolve negative thoughts by guiding focus and building concentration on the task at hand with meditative exercise. These exercises consist of “Pillar⁹,” “AIM

⁷ Action palette refers to the set of actions characters use to achieve their objectives.

⁸ As documented in student notes from Vivian Majkowski’s Stage Voice I course at University of Central Florida on November 13, 2020 [APPENDIX A STAGE VOICE I NOTES].

⁹ “ The exercise Pillar trains flexible focusing, AIM exercises to establish strong focus and concentration, and Wave is a body-scanning exercise rooted in Buddhist Vipassana and releasing unneeded psychophysical tension. Concentration happens when focusing on a specific object (can also be non-materialistic), and focus-guiding happens when shifting the focus to a different object” (Tohver, Interview).

(Appropriate Intention Mark),” and “Wave,” draw from yoga practices to build the mental fortitude to enter the state of flow more often and to stay there longer, to achieve “absolute absorption into the performing activity” (Tohver, Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation 1) Tohver says, “sufficient absorption allows the performer to release excessive mental control to enter a higher state of performing flow” (Tohver, Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation 3). Like positive psychology’s body scanning¹⁰, all of these meditative exercises require hyper-focus on a specific part of the body which leaves no energy for external thoughts, “If we don’t feed them, they dissolve” (Tohver, Interview). Studies have shown that body awareness meditation decreases the amount of time participants spend in the fight or flight mode therefore decreasing anxiety (O'Bryan). Such work conditions the actor to achieve higher levels of focus, another condition of flow. An actor participating in Tohver’s praxis known as Christy reported using these exercises as “a kind-of entering-the-character point before the show” (Tohver, Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation 18). This further supports using exercises like these to prepare the actor for flow in performance. In my own experience, I have used Tohver’s exercise in daily warm up as well as rehearsal and performance. During a performance my character was directed to sit in silence until she felt the “need” to stand and speak directly to the audience. The silence was unnerving and I felt negative thoughts begin to creep in causing anxiety. I used this concentration exercise to redirect thoughts of “you (the actor) are going to forget your lines” to “I (the character) need to

¹⁰ Body scanning is defined by Positive Psychology as “as specific form of mindfulness meditation that requires the practitioner to focus all of their attention on the body. The mind is guided to focus systematically on various parts of the body, redirecting it back to the practice if you become distracted” (O'Bryan).

welcome the community to this meeting.” I was then able to clear my mind of future thoughts and concentrate on the goals of the character.

If destructuring and meditation create a deeper connection to the here and now and have proven to open impulse thereby decreasing anxiety, it is reasonable to suggest a warm-up including Fitzmaurice’s Tremorwork™, Majkowi’s tension releasing stretches, and Tohver’s stage two exercises, would fulfil the goals of an open mind, breath and body [APPENDIX B FLOW-READINESS WARM-UP].

Rehearsal Goals

The goal in rehearsal is centered around exploration and identification of the character’s self and given circumstances. In Stanislavski’s later work, he described a merging of the actor and the character’s goals as a way to reach a more truthful performance (Stanislavki 145). Identifying these goals is achieved through understanding the characters circumstances, what they want and tactics¹¹ they use to get it. Given circumstances for each character can be identified through script analysis. Uta Hagen’s¹² Nine Questions is a succinct set of questions actors use to identify these given circumstances [APPENDIX C UTA HAGEN’S 9 QUESTIONS]. Having an understanding of these circumstances will allow the actor to have a more in depth conversation with directors and scene partners regarding the decision making and actions of the character.

¹¹ Tactics or “playable actions” are different ways the actor will attempt to reach their objective or try to get what they want from their scene partner.

¹² Uta Hagen was a Tony award winning actor and drama teacher. She authored *Respect for Acting* and *A Challenge for the Actor* <https://americantheatrewing.org/legends/uta-hagen/>.

Roles an actor play will vary in size. A lead or principle role may have a clear character arc and appear throughout the story, while a character role may appear only once or for very brief moments throughout. However brief or extended the appearance of the character on stage, an actor must understand the significance of the role to the overall story. How does this role move the story forward or what is the significance of the role to the message the director and or writer intend to send audiences? This goal can be answered by simply asking “why” is this scene or character here? This knowledge will drive beats¹³ and overall objective¹⁴s.

I was cast in a very small role as the Irish Captain Macmorris in Orlando Shakespeare Theatre’s gender fluid¹⁵ production of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*¹⁶ edited and directed by Carolyn Howarth. The character is in one scene, seemingly only to quarrel with three other Captains in the English guard: Captain Gower, Captain Jamy, and Captain Fluellen. My initial circumstances were that Macmorris was outside the mines waiting for further instruction but really wanted to get back to war. However, all of the Captains are on the same side, leading the English. So why did Shakespeare include arguments between the people we should be rooting for? At our table session, the director asked the same question. “Why is this scene here?” It was significant that at the end of the scene the town the English had invaded, surrendered yes, but the argument between these four captains – why? We rehearsed the scene for a week before the director

¹³ The plots of dramatic works are composed of a number of scenes: “smaller units of actions, each of which has its own pattern of rising energy, crisis, and release; Each scene is composed of yet smaller units of action, which we call beats, and beats are in turn composed of moments. In this way, any large action is a compound rhythm, a collection of smaller actions linked in a purposeful way so as to create one larger compound pattern” (Benedetti 24).

¹⁴ Objectives in Stanislavski system are what the character “wants.”

¹⁵ Male roles were played by female actors. As a female, I played a traditionally male role of Captain Macmorris.

¹⁶ Henry V is one of William Shakespeare’s history plays-ten plays that cover English History over the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. <https://nosweatshakespeare.com/plays/types/history/>

had an epiphany – she discussed how *Henry V* may be a historical telling of true events, but it was really commentary on the hardships and terrors of war. How war affects all walks of life, from the aristocracy to the poor civilians, Captain Macmorris and her troops in the mines. Realizing this changed my own given circumstances. Now, instead of a blow hard captain who just wants to prove herself, Macmorris became a message from the working class during a time of war. The anger she felt was born out of helplessness. With this information, I now had an objective of giving the working class a voice. This made my contention with the overzealous Fluellen have much higher stakes than if I was simply full of my own self-righteousness. I then could break my speeches into three very specific beats. The first was to express how we have no control, second was a call to action – let’s do something, and the third then was standing up for all of my people. This made it clearer for me, that Macmorris is more a commoner with the frustration of no voice in the war.

The goal in rehearsal is a merging of the character’s objectives and tactics with those of the actor “...the tasks must not solely be part of the actor, they must be similar to the characters. For this to happen, the actor must use his life-experience, put himself in the character’s place, so as to understand the way it lives” (Stanislavki 144). This then allows the actor to concentrate on the “task at hand.” Stanislavski believed this is achieved through physical actioning.¹⁷ Since Csikszentmihalyi believes clear goals are essential to achieving flow, an actor must have clear actions defined for each scene which will bring change. If actions are not well defined for the actor, they will find it difficult to recreate any fleeting moments of flow.

¹⁷ Physical Actioning is a Stanislavski exercise of breaking the script into units of thought and assigning specific, performable actions to each unit.

It is common during note sessions for actors to tell directors “I don’t know what I did,” in response to a suggested change. However, if an actor sets clear objectives, they will know exactly what they did, and why. To test if these goals are complete, an actor can use Tohver’s “Playback” technique (Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation 18). After rehearsing a scene, the actor will individually play back in their mind, what they have done (Tohver, Notes from private Zero Zone session). If done before director feedback, this conscious reliving of the character’s actions can solidify which goals were met and which perhaps need further specificity.

A few dangers do exist in actioning that can decrease the likelihood of flow. First, if the actions are simply written on paper and not fully practiced outside of rehearsal for efficacy by the actor, then the actor’s skills will not meet the challenge in rehearsal. The second possible danger is in the potential for actors to become stuck on their chosen actions causing them to stop listening to their scene partner. This can create stagnant reactions that are rehearsed, not spontaneous. This will keep actors from entering flow by distracting them from what the *character* wants with thoughts of what the *actor* wants which becomes focused on recreating what they had done before. Therefore actors must balance individual practice of actions with spontaneous application in rehearsal.

Once given circumstances and physical actions are discovered, an actor must set a goal of accessing the breath. While the actor has a goal of letting go of their own habitual tensions to access a free body and breath in warm-up preparations, the actor must then identify and live in the tensions of their character during rehearsal and performance. As actor Meryl Streep says “Acting is not about being someone different. It’s finding the similarity in what is apparently

different, then finding myself in there.” In other words, actors must identify similarities with their character and then solve the “problem” of their differences. How to identify those differences comes only by knowing and shedding one’s own habits. Then taking on the habits of the character becomes the goal. However, every character is vastly different with different habits to identify and merge with the actor. These differences live in physical tension which is linked to breath. Each tension, will require a different level of breath impulse. As illustrated in Jacques Leqoc’s¹⁸ seven tensions, each level of tension in the character will require a different level or inspiration of breath. University of Central Florida Professor of Movement Christopher Niess explains this as breathing in a thought, putting energy behind it, which then creates the impulse to communicate (Niess). Niess describes Leqoc’s seven tensions related to breathe:

1. Catatonic: Barely conscious. There is a lack of tension in the body and no focus in the direction of communication.
2. Cowboy: Long, easy release of energy. Just enough tension to deliver a message.
3. Neutral: A balance between inhale and exhale. No excitement or need to communicate. This is where exposition¹⁹ lives.
4. Surprise: Quick inspiration of breath and a release of tension upon exhalation. An “Oh yeah!” moment, surprise revelation or paranoia. Curious.
5. Suspension: A quick inspiration of breath and held tension in the body. Encountering an obstacle that changes the thought.

¹⁸ Jacques Leqoc was a French actor and movement coach. He created an acting method focusing on physical movement.

¹⁹ Exposition is the early part of the play when the characters, setting, and events leading up to the story are summarized. In Greek theatre this is typically delivered as a monologue from the chorus.

6. Passion: Delivering tragic news to a scene partner. A larger intake of breath. The breath and tension are delivered to the scene partner.
7. The Gods: The greatest intake of breath possible with the same amount of breath released. There is great tension on inhale and great release on exhale as if shouting to the Gods.

Using levels of tension can physically root an actor in new habits of the character.

I experienced this while playing the role of Soccer Mom in Theatre UCF's 2021 production of *The Wolves* by Sarah DeLappe directed by David Reed. The character has one monologue at the very end of the show. It is a series of cut-off sentences and half thoughts that ramble through grief, guilt, and self-awareness. I was having a very difficult time connecting fully to what I was saying and the result was a pushed and overly-controlled performance. An observation the director made was that someone stricken with grief, who at any moment could lapse into complete mania, would need to consistently catch their breath to redirect overly emotional thoughts (Reed). I applied breath energy in conjunction with Leqoc's tension number 4 – curious with some tension, fidgety and indecisive with a quick inspiration of breath for a thought that is then redirected, to 5 - suspicious where the tension is clear in the body and breathe inspiration is quicker, more sporadic and sparks quick, intended image shifts. This breathing pattern sparked a rush of new images in my mind with each quick inspiration. The text came gurgling out sporadically and I allowed myself to go with each new impulse. This exercise allowed me to enter a state of flow.

Performance Goals

Once the given circumstances of the character are discovered and action palette solidified, the actor's goal becomes truthfully living within these parameters which, when all other conditions are met, should lead to flow. But can an actor performing in the same show eight times a week repeatedly enter flow? Stanislavski recognized in his studies that an actor who consistently tries to recreate flow by focusing on the end product (what they created before), will not be living in the moment and therefore will not create a truthful performance. This is supported by MC's finding that in order to stay in flow, the participant must find enjoyment in, and stay focused on, the process NOT the product. The creatives MC studied enjoyed the process of discovery-finding new things in their own process was part of what lead to flow. These new discoveries keep increasing skills in incremental steps as well as creating new, attainable goals. This occurs in theatre when addressing obstacles. Anne Bogart believed obstacles and resistance "should be considered allies not hindrances," in the theatrical process and "produce thought, curiosity, alertness and eventually result in elation" (Bogart, *A Director Prepares* 142). If flow is reached because creative people enjoy their own process of discovery, it stands to reason that in addition to following Stanislavski's rules of given circumstances, objectives and actions, actors can increase instances of flow by setting new goals each performance. Combine this with Brennan's theory of reigniting an actor's reason for acting, an actor can set clear goals to increase enjoyment which can create a repeatable state of flow. For example, the actor who finds the communal aspect of acting as part of their joy, may set a goal each night of connecting to their scene partner(s) in new moments. Achieving this goal can also increase the actor's skills, and decrease distractions – two more conditions of flow.

Because I was concentrating on rekindling the joy in my own performances, I applied this strategy to my first long running theatre for young audiences (TYA) show at Orlando Shakespeare Theatre in the fall of 2022. The show, directed by Nick Bublitz, was E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* dramatized by Joseph Robinette. We performed up to two shows per day, six days a week for a full month. One specific performance I found my mind wandering to the audience and I thought I saw one of my professors in the house. My mind began wandering to everything I perceived I could be doing or would be doing wrong. The very next monologue, I lost any connection to my character and switched several words. I had to stop and start the passage over again. The next day I set a goal to find more moments to connect with my scene partners. In one specific moment during the next performance, I noticed one scene partner's supportive smile and slight wink. I had never seen this from them before as I never paid any attention. This one shift brought substantial improvements in my level of enjoyment. I was listening more closely, my breathe was free and spontaneous, I began speaking to be heard by my scene partners, and actively looking for connection. A side benefit of this goal, was that I became more rooted in the world of the play. These realizations allowed me to merge my actions with those of my characters and while I was always conscious of the fact that I was a player on the stage: I did indeed reach a state of flow. I also experienced what I had forgotten I needed: the joy of belonging to a community of storytellers.

CHAPTER 3 SKILLS VS CHALLENGES

*“When a person is bombarded with demands which he or she feels unable to meet, a state of anxiety ensues”
(M. Csikszentmihalyi, Play and Intrinsic Rewards)*

As Csikszentmihalyi documented, creative people do not always share the same education or backgrounds. They also are not necessarily labeled as “talented” or “gifted” in their fields. “In our sample, some individuals were talented in mathematics or in music, but the majority achieved creative results without any exceptional talent being evident” (Csikszentmihalyi 43). Shared by all participants, however, was an abundance of curiosity and objectivity in their work. People who create find enjoyment in the process of discovery. They keep asking questions, they keep learning and can objectively evaluate their own progress. They keep challenging themselves in incremental, achievable ways “To keep enjoying something, you need to increase its complexity...Nor can you enjoy the same activity over and over, unless you discover new challenges, new opportunities in it” (484). This aligns with an actor’s life. Each role is a new creation that requires new skills and is built upon many failures in the rehearsal and preparation process. Csikszentmihalyi found in order to reach flow, our skills must teeter on the edge of ease and challenge. If we feel our skills cannot meet the challenge, we become anxious. However if we find the challenge too easy, we become bored. Therefore in flow, we are “balanced on a fine line between boredom and anxiety” (161).

Actors consistently train and work toward an ever changing set of skills. Since each role will present each actor with different challenges, it is safe to say that their abilities are

consistently challenged and expanded. An actor will need to acquire skills they do not yet possess. Film actor Natalie Portman reportedly practiced and studied ballet for a full year before tackling her role as a ballet dancer in the film *Black Swan*. She said “It was a rude awakening to get there, and to be, like, I don’t know what I’m doing. If I had known how not close to ready I was, I never would have tried it” (Bloom). This anxiety can be heightened in an academic setting when actors are continuously learning new skills with varying degrees of application and repetition. For example, an actor who learns how to create new accents with International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)²¹ may practice building a few dialects in the classroom and then need to use this skill in rehearsals or performance before fully mastering them. This can be a block to flow for actors in rehearsal and performance as they have yet to fully define the parameters of the skill.

To illustrate the correlation between skills and flow, I will use my experience of learning a new dialect. In the 2022 Orlando Shakespeare Theatre production of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens adapted and directed by Jim Helsing, I needed to learn a Cockney accent for my character of the Char Woman. I did all of my preparation work, identified our differences, analyzed the script, I knew what I wanted and had some ideas of tactics my character would use to get what she wanted, I had even written out the IPA for my scene and listened to primary sources²². The first rehearsal was a joyful and fun exploration with the two other actors. There was freedom in new discoveries of intention and actions. I was able to create

²¹ International Phonetic Alphabet was developed in the 19th century to “accurately represent the pronunciation of languages. It provides a unique symbol for each distinctive sound in language. It is the most common example of phonetic transcription” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/International-Phonetic-Alphabet>.

²² Primary Sources are videos or sound recordings of people who speak in the accent the actor wishes to learn.

freely within the given circumstances. I had a perception that my Cockney dialect was passable and my skills were up to the challenge. However, the director did not agree and gave the actors numerous notes on a lack of authenticity in the Cockney dialect. The next few rehearsals I was acutely aware of my failure to deliver a believable accent. My actions were no longer clear, I stopped listening to my scene partners, and I was hyper-focused on the sounds my mouth was making. I now KNEW that my skills did not yet meet the challenge. Enjoyment went away, leaving space for much anxiety over not “getting it right.” The scene was suddenly a source of dread. The actors worked with accent coach Vivian Majkowski to identify areas of improvement. She worked on melody and oral posture and shifts of consonants and vowels. The director worked with the actors to slow line delivery down and really “chew” on the words with the objective of really enjoying the language. The director gave feedback to the actors that their work was improving in the session. However, I still found myself concentrating on my shortcomings during rehearsal. The week of opening I was still dreading this scene I once adored. I asked a mentor of mine for advice on how to continue working on this dialect AND stay in the moment on stage. Her response was “you cannot do both things at once.” What my mentor was expressing, is the limitations of the cognitive system of “working memory.”

Psychologists describe working memory as the function of the brain that works on important information of the present, without losing track of what we are doing. PhD cognitive scientist Sian Beilock studied the role of working memory in anxiety.

Another way to think about working-memory is as a flexible mental scratch pad.

Working memory helps you keep relevant information in mind (and irrelevant information out) when you perform a particular task. When worries flood the brain,

whatever these worries may be, they deplete working memory resources that would otherwise be available and your performance can suffer. (P. S. Beilock 169-170)

By consistently worrying about getting the dialect “right,” I was unable to focus working memory on the other aspects of my performance needed to create flow and it led to anxiety and choking (freezing). Beilock calls this “paralysis by analysis” (P. S. Beilock 17). To stop this from happening, I had to redirect my working brain by concentrating on the goals the actor knows can be achieved and save the dialect analysis for outside of rehearsal. This process worked and by opening night I was able to once again enjoy the scene and my connection to the material as well as my scene partners. I was able to reach flow. Even if my accent was not perfectly Cockney, I perceived that my skills met the challenge. By not thinking about the dialect, I was able to achieve optimal experience. Even when I tripped on stage and fell face first at the feet of an entire audience, I was able to stay rooted in the moment as the Char Woman, turning to my scene partner and exclaiming “you pushed me!”

CHAPTER 4 FOCUS

*“Flow is the result of intense concentration on the present, which relieves us of the usual fears that cause depression and anxiety in everyday life.”
(Csikzentmihalyi 162)*

Flow requires concentration on the activity without distraction. In order to create realistic experiences on stage or screen with honest action and reaction, actors must maintain a focus on their given circumstances, their scene partner, and their objectives. Stanislavski recognized that while concentration is essential, it takes training, “You must use regular exercises to help you hold your concentration. You must develop a special technique which will help you focus on an object in such a way that the onstage object will distract you from what is offstage” (Stanislavski 91). Offstage distractions for the actor can be physical: cameras and a room full of crew members on a film set, or emotional: worries about personal life or negative self-talk. Tohver believes concentration is the key to maintaining flow, “If practitioners cannot guide their attention and regulate their personal emotions, they will be continuously scattered. These processes occur automatically and can be stopped only by prior training, focusing on changing somatic reactions” (Tohver, *Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation* 11).

But can too much concentration be a bad thing? Sian Beilock thinks so. In her book *Choke* Beilock studied anxiety in athletes that lead to highly skilled practitioners freezing at pivotal moments. She gives examples of an NBA basketball player missing a game-winning free throw and a golf-pro unable to sink an easy putt to win the PGA after multiple tries. Beilock says

that a person chokes when the working-memory is focused on the worries of what can go wrong, “It’s really important to be focused, but you have to focus on the right things. The working memory can get in the way. The key is to have brain power at your disposal but also be able to turn it off and let things go” (S. Beilock). Beilock is describing the negative thoughts associated with anxiety. For the actor these can be thoughts of not being good enough or worries of forgetting lines, or, as was the case with my work as the Char Woman, worries that skills will not meet the challenge. Dr. Brennan agrees that these negative thoughts can derail concentration and induce anxiety, “during a stage fright episode, these kinds of thoughts feel so true. And our ego insists that we be right, so there is no being “talked out” of them. Self-critical thoughts such as these are central to the stage fright experience (Brennan 42).

Tohver believes these thoughts can be redirected with exercises in the third stage of his praxis, “‘The Shift’ cuts the cause-and-effect relationship on the emotional plane to eliminate loss of focus and to prevent sliding into unneeded emotions” (Tohver, *Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation* 18). The Shift technique allows the actor to recognize distracting emotions but to not allow anxiety to take control. I was able to use the Shift in rehearsals for University of Central Florida PlayLab’s spring 2022 production of *Affinity Lunch Minutes* by Nick Malakhov. I was having difficulty fully connecting to a monologue in which my character, Jill, headmaster of a Quaker school was to give a speech at a Quaker meeting. The speech needed to convince students, faculty and donors alike to rally together around questionable decisions made by herself and other faculty. She needed to unite a divided constituency, but the text seemed stern and controlling. The audience served as my scene partner (the

community of Quakers) so the monologue was to be direct address²³. I discussed with the director Roberta Emerson that I was struggling with keeping actions clear while still allowing for spontaneity based on any reactions I would receive from the audience themselves. I was also getting secretly anxious every time I delivered the monologue and was thinking negative thoughts about myself. Emerson gave me a task –with this monologue, convince everyone in the rehearsal room to stay in the room. If they did not believe me or were not swayed, they would walk out the door. The *only* task was to keep them in the room. I began my monologue with the clear action “to gain control.” Very quickly, however, people in the room began to walk closer to the door. The closer each person edged to the door, the more desperate I became. I remember thinking “why can’t I get this right?” “Why am I such a bad actor?” As I watched one person place a foot out the door, Emerson said “You are angry, it’s not working. Try something different” (Emerson). In that moment, I recognized I was concentrating so hard on what I, the *actor* wanted that there was no room for what the *character* wanted. Kimber, the actor, was frustrated at herself for not being able to convince the others to stay and therefore was projecting that frustration on to the very people she needed on her side. No wonder they were leaving. I was seeking achievement, not a connection. My focus was on my inner voice, not the reactions of my scene partners. Anxiety welled up inside of me and soon all I could think of was the anxiety. The only thing I could do was repeat the same action over and over again. But, with Emerson’s one note, I took a moment to use the Shift technique. As Tohver had instructed, I did nothing for a second. Then I breathed- in the people in the room. I

²³ Direct address is a convention in theatre whereby actors speak directly to the audience as if they are also in the play.

focused, really focused on their faces. They had furrowed brows. They were as unsure as I was. And they wanted to be invited to stay. That instant I accessed a completely different action palette. I began to comfort them, to praise them, to cajole them and finally to unite them. With concentration, I was able to comfort my inner self, redirect negative self-talk, and bring my focus back to my scene partners. I also found new objectives based on feedback from my scene partners.

The Shift worked for me in rehearsal, but what happens when an actor is triggered and does not necessarily know why they are reacting a certain way. What if they don't just choke, they freeze? According to Brennan, "The task of performing or the content of the performance can trigger unresolved past traumas in the actor, exacerbating their stage fright experience." (Brennan 38). When trauma triggers a response, often the ego will step in as a defense mechanism and the actor is distracted. Csikszentmihalyi recognizes that distractions can be triggered by trauma responses within the actor "if a person is concerned with protecting his or herself, practically all the attention is invested in monitoring threats to the ego" (Csikszentmihalyi 120).

The ego plays a very important role in anxiety. According to Freud's signal theory²⁴ anxiety can be a response to the ego's perception of a threat. When triggered by past trauma, these defensive reactions are usually unconscious recognition of past threats to the person that may have never been fully reconciled. According to Dr. Leon F. Seltzer, "the original fear or

²⁴ Signal Theory/Anxiety is defined by the American Psychological Association as "in psychoanalytic theory that arises in response to internal conflict or an emerging impulse and functions as a sign to the ego of impending threat, resulting in the preemptive use of defense mechanism" <https://dictionary.apa.org/signal-anxiety>

panic linked to that memory compels you to react to the current-day trigger as though what happened in the past is happening all over again” (Seltzer). Licensed Clinical Social Worker Sherry Gaba, lists the most known responses as: Fight, Flight, Freeze or Fawn. Fight response taps into a person’s aggression, Flight a person’s need to flee or run, Fawn the need to please others who present a threat, and Freeze the person is unable to move or respond (Gaba).

Brennan believes symptoms of anxiety can be helped by analyzing the actor’s specific trauma triggers “by addressing a performer’s specific symptom presentation” (Brennan 41). It is important for actors to recognize their own triggers in order to avoid trauma responses taking over the mind. It also needs to be said, that this self-diagnosis is in no way a substitution for psychological help, of which I am also still undergoing.

Can an actor decrease distractive trauma responses by identifying their own triggers? While working on a monologue at UCF in Fall 2021 Graduate Acting II, the professor gave me a few rapid fire instructions. His feedback, albeit curt, was normal and well-intended. Instead of enjoying a new direction and playing with these options, I immediately shut down. It was as if a wall had come between me and the text. My vision went dark and I did not hear what anyone in the room was saying. I not only choked....I froze. Why? A deep dive into my own history revealed a correlation between my anxiety and past trauma. It is important to note that if trauma response is triggered, that trigger and response is unique to each person. My experience, will not be exactly the same as another actor. When searching for reasons I choked in the classroom– I realized the professor had a very similar vocal delivery as other men in my past. Looking through a Feminist Trauma lens, I could recognize my past trauma has much to do with patriarchal systems and abuse [APPENDIX D FEMINIST TRAUMA CONNECTION].

Throughout my life, I have experienced one abusive relationship after another. Some were violent and physical, some were quiet and emotional. I also spent my formative years during the third wave of feminism²⁵ which created a paradox of social norms for women-expecting them to take positions of power then treating them with outright hostility when they did (Yarrow). I was fired from a corporate marketing job because I questioned the male CEO. I was the victim of gun violence, stalking, and too many “stand up and show me what you are wearing sweetheart” comments to count. I spent much of my time planning escape routes and adjusting myself to keep the peace. I learned my voice was only valuable if it was in agreeance with the majority. I also learned that if I did complain – I was overly emotional, blowing things out of proportion, *crazy...hysterical*. So when my professor shot rapid fire suggestions at me, my ego told me that everything I had to say was wrong, and if I spoke up I would have to pay a price. And then I froze. Since identifying this trigger, I have been able to use the Shift technique to prevent my own freeze response. It should be noted that the techniques and exercises I used in my research were combined with past psychological help to recognize when my ego defense mechanisms were getting in my way.

²⁵ The waves of feminism are used to differentiate women’s rights movements throughout history. The third wave emerged in the 1990’s when women sought resolution on issues like sexual harassment, inequality in pay and leadership roles in the workplace. Issues of sexism, abuse, racism and rape were more publicly addressed by women. (Pruitt)

CHAPTER 5 FEEDBACK –YOUR OWN BEST CRITIC

“To overcome the anxieties and depressions of contemporary life, individuals must become independent of the social environment to the degree that they no longer respond exclusively in terms of its rewards and punishments. To achieve such autonomy, a person has to learn to provide rewards to herself. She has to develop the ability to find enjoyment and purpose regardless of external circumstances.”

(M. Csikszentmihalyi, Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience)

Feedback is an essential component of flow. However, in a field that has a never ending supply of critics, how can an actor stay open to external feedback, yet build their own internal critic that is constructive, realistic, and positive? Csikszentmihalyi recognized this is a tough ask for artists: “Many artists give up because it is just too excruciating to wait until critics or galleries take notice and pass judgement on their canvases” (Csikszentmihalyi 167). He also found that creative people must know the parameters of their field, but know when what they are doing is on the right track. So creatives are able to decide when the work they are doing or have done is worth keeping, and when they need to throw it out. Actor Cate Blanchett agrees, “You have to be quite brutal with yourself – you need to have a brutal, tough inner critic. When your instrument is a human instrument how do you maintain that same sense of rigor and brutality but do it respectfully” (Blanchett)? To begin to answer the question of feedback, we must first examine the type of feedback found in Csikszentmihalyi’s creative case studies. The people who experienced flow described the process of creating as autotelic: the process is rewarding unto itself. “The term ‘autotelic’ derives from two Greek words auto meaning self,

and telos meaning goal” (M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* 120). Feedback should be objective based on the creative’s knowledge of their own field.

Rehearsal is a messy process. Yet some actors are driven to expect perfection from themselves from the very first day of rehearsal. Acting is also an industry of intense competition so the need to prove oneself can be overwhelming. It is difficult to be self-reassuring when you know you can and will be replaced at any moment. But this reality can also be very freeing. Afterall, if one can be replaced at any moment, you may as well throw everything you’ve got at the wall and see if it fits the director’s vision. If flow is enjoying the process, then actors should be able to measure success not only by director feedback, but from their own standards. So how can actors develop their own inner champion?

Zero Zone offers a practical feedback practice that can be used by individual actors. In the third stage of the praxis, Tohver describes “The Reduction” technique. After each rehearsal, the actor journals five perceived positive and five perceived negative things about their involvement. This very simple quick list not only highlights positive self-reflection, but intentionally lists the things the actor feels they can work on. Over time, an actor can build a self-assessment tool. It also can help set goals for preceding rehearsals and performances. This can also serve as a springboard to writing one’s own set of feedback measurements. By recognizing patterns of reoccurring positive and negative statements, an actor can create a set of feedback parameters. As I journaled my negative and positive responses for *A Christmas Carol*, I found all of my own feedback can be categorized within conditions of flow: Goals (G), Skills (S), Focus (F), and Feedback (FB). To illustrate this, we will use one of my six charts from A

Christmas Carol rehearsals as an example [APPENDIX E REDUCTION METHOD TABLES]. I will

mark the flow categories next to each feedback statement:

Table 1 Reduction Method Rehearsal 11/19/2022

Negative	Positive
Un-focused. (F)	Vivian helped with accent. (S)
Accent mistakes-Director notes on this. (S)	Found a FUN moment of connection in Fezziwig scene. (G)
Forgot some lines. (S)	Nailed the choreography. (S)
Negative self-talk .(F)	Landed a specific action for Char Woman – Audience laughed. (FB)
Out of breath during dance. (S)	Director likes new direction of Charity Worker (my actions are clear and she is genuine) (FB)

Here we see all conditions of flow are measured in my own feedback. This visualization shows what areas of flow are met and which need modification or attention. While in this rehearsal I did attain some goals, received some feedback, and had some skills match the challenge, I still had skills lagging behind and was distracted with negative self-talk. Subsequent charts over two rehearsal periods, revealed similar patterns. This suggests an actor can use these measurements as consistent feedback by asking these questions:

1. Were my skills up for the challenge (i.e. lines, songs, choreography, accents)?
2. Did I meet the goals I set for myself?
3. Was I distracted by offstage things (i.e. negative self-talk, audience noise, cameras, etc.)?
4. Did I get feedback (from scene partner, director and/or audience)?

Using my French role of Alice in *Henry V* as an example, I was able to implement this self-evaluation tool.. Here skills took some time to elevate to the challenge of learning a different

language and accent. My working brain focused on the accent and therefore was not available to fulfil my goal of connecting to my scene partner and finding an element of fun. In rehearsals there was not much feedback from my scene partner as we were unable to listen to each other and focus on what we were saying. Armed with this knowledge, I worked on my accent and French language outside of rehearsal and redirected my focus to my scene partner. Also returning again to Brennan's call to remember why I became an actor in the first place, I asked how I could make more connections to my scene partner. I began conversations with her off stage – "I noticed you tried a new action and I really felt that." She in turn responded "Oh! I noticed your truthful reaction!" I told her about my wish to reconnect with the joy of acting for the sense of community. I began saying each night to both of us "let's have fun!" This indeed DID result in increased enjoyment for both actors. Each night we would high five each other and talk about what was fun and perhaps what we felt we could do even better the next night. While some talk centered around audience response mostly in the form of laughter, the large majority was about our own individual discoveries. We were able to share in the communal aspect of storytelling while supporting each other's autonomy. This was excellent feedback. Ultimately in this role, I did experience flow during many of the performances.

CHAPTER 6 INTRINSIC REWARDS OF FLOW

*“When distractions are out of the way and the other conditions for flow are in place, the creative process acquires all the dimensions of flow”
(Csikszentmihalyi 174).*

When an actor can set clear goals, ride the balance between skill and challenge, concentrate on the task at hand, and know how they are doing, all of the conditions for flow are met and the actor can reap the rewards of flow. Csikszentmihalyi’s participants universally described these rewards as: a merging of action and awareness, a distorted sense of time, a lack of self-consciousness, and enjoyment of the action regardless of outcome. “The combination of all these elements causes a sense of deep enjoyment that is so rewarding people feel that expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to be able to feel it” (Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience 91). Actors may describe flow as “living in the now,” or being “in character” (Brennan 192). There are no thoughts of failure, concentration is on the objectives of the character, time slips away, and the actor’s physical actions are linked to what they are thinking. Katherine (pseudonym), one of the actors Brennan studied described flow:

If we dare use the word “transcendent.” I have transcended my own self. As Hamlet says, “I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things it were better my mother had not born me.” My own frailties, my own inadequacies have been transcended through the power of those words in front of the audience. (Brennan 192)

MC found the more an individual can achieve flow, the more autotelic the activity becomes and the more the person wishes to do the activity. This is because the activity is intrinsically rewarding: enjoyed for the process itself and not for external (extrinsic) rewards. The more flow we experience through optimal experiences, the happier we are and the more we want to experience it again. This is why creative people can keep seeking to discover new things even when the outcome is not what they expected. But can acting stay autotelic when actors can go long periods of time without working? A 2019 study at Queen Mary University of London found the unemployment rate for film and TV actors hovers around 90% and a measly 2% actually make a living with their craft (O.E. Williams 1). There is also much rejection in the field. So how can actors stay motivated when they will often be without work?

Acting is like any other field. Practitioners must keep practicing if they are to maintain and expand their skills. Actors do this through master classes, improv studios, scene studies, workshops and more. They create content like YouTube videos and podcasts. However this work can be solitary and actors must have a drive to keep creating. MC recognizes another force at play that can be even more powerful than the urge to create: psychic entropy²⁶. “We are generally torn between two opposite sets of instructions programmed into the brain: the least-effort imperative on one side [entropy], and the claims of creativity on the other” (Csikszentmihalyi 150-159). MC notes giving in to psychic entropy is often a stronger reward for most. However, studies show that people who are intrinsically rewarded are also more

²⁶ Psychic entropy is defined by Csikszentmihalyi as “a condition of inner disorder, or psychic entropy, a disorganization of the self that impairs its effectiveness. Prolonged experiences of this kind can weaken the self to the point that it is no longer able to invest attention and pursue its goals.” (M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* 72)

intrinsically motivated (Cutler). The people who enjoy challenging themselves and discovering new things typically remain intrinsically motivated and therefore experience flow more frequently (Csikszentmihalyi 160). Could it be that the more the actor challenges their own practice, the more rewarding the process will be therefore creating more instances of flow and less instances of overwhelming anxiety? Furthermore, how does an actor keep discovering and expanding these skills during periods of unemployment? Can flow theory also be applied to the audition process?

To test this, I applied flow theory to my own audition process. Self-taping, the process of recording one's own audition to send to casting agents, can be an arduous task. And it is a new post-COVID industry norm that requires more time and effort from actors than in person auditions ever did. Not only does the actor prepare for the audition using all the same parameters as preparing for a performance, they also must set up lighting, find a backdrop, set the camera and sound equipment, record, edit and submit the video. Auditions can take days and it is easy to abandon a self-tape for the comfort of entropy-especially if the audition is anxiety inducing. But can an actor build intrinsic reward into a self-tape process? To test this, I applied the conditions of flow to my own self tape audition process for a non-union tour of the musical *Come From Away* (book, music, and lyrics by Irene Sankoff and David Hein). Singing auditions typically induce anxiety for me. I first worked my skills up to the challenge by rehearsing the piece on my own for several weeks. I analyzed the lyrics and set goals for my character. Once I had the song memorized and actions practiced, I began recording myself and giving feedback for each practice run. I could watch the video and see that when I was not focusing on my objectives, my head would begin to nod repetitively and my eyes would wander. I recognized that I was focusing on

the wrong thing – what my voice sounded like. I lost my objectives. I redirected my focus to the character’s objectives. I then set a goal of finding moments to have fun. I recognized with this goal, that I hadn’t decided who I was talking to. I made a choice to talk to my best friends. I took time to focus on what their faces look like when I tell them a story they relate too. When I did record the final audition, I did not feel anxious, and I actually did enjoy the process. When I watched the final recording back, I made new, exciting discoveries: my head was no longer nodding, my eyes were focused, my body movements were connected to my thought and not pushed, I held no tension in my neck. I was a person telling a story, not an actor struggling through a song because it was what I had too. I left that particular audition session, ready and excited to sing even more. I was motivated to recreate that experience.

MC essentially says to be happy we should do more of what we love. This is not surprising, “When a person is able to organize his or her consciousness so as to experience flow as often as possible, the quality of life is inevitably going to improve, because...even the usually boring portions of work become purposeful and enjoyable” (M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* 77). As Brennan explored, stage fright and self-worth are intertwined (Brennan 43). Therefore if an actor improves their self-worth outside of the theatre, they should be able to lessen occurrences of anxiety and enter flow more frequently. Tohver believes this is true. His meditative practice helps individuals achieve inner peacefulness by dissolving negative thoughts and concentrating on the moment. However he also states meditation is an exercise that needs daily repetition in order to become technique (Tohver, Notes from private Zero Zone session). Increasing instances of optimal experience in the actor’s career development activities involve consistent personal and professional development.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

Happiness, in fact, is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is a close as any of us can come to being happy”
(M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* 13)

Using practice as research, this thesis set out to test the effects of flow theory on the actor’s preparation, rehearsal and performance process with the goal of alleviating debilitating levels of anxiety. The acting process was dissected using Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s conditions of flow: Skills, Goals, Focus and Feedback in an attempt to induce the state of flow. The results are promising but need further exploration. While I was able to decrease instances of anxiety in my own acting process, it is difficult to calculate if instances of flow occurred at a greater frequency. It is also notable that I did not measure the duration of each flow experience. And while other scholars have begun looking at the intersection of flow theory and acting, there is no quantifiable evidence that a larger population of actors would see a decrease in anxiety if following the same parameters.

Entropy is also a large hurdle for actors. More research should be done to see if there is a correlation between application of flow conditions and increased motivation and productivity. Current research does suggest actors reach flow an estimated 4 times per year, however this research is limited to 40 undergraduate and graduate students. The study also concluded that graduate students are less motivated to participate in acting than their undergraduate counterparts (Cutler). A statistical study on the number of times professional actors experience

flow with a larger test group is advisable. Flow theory could be applied and instances of flow analyzed for increase or decrease in frequency.

Another important discovery, is the need for personalized feedback systems for the actors themselves so they do not rely *only* on input from directors, which often is not given. Feedback is a must to enter a state of flow. While directors do care about every actor's performance, they may not always have time to give individualized feedback. Given the demands of producing a show such as aggressive timelines and staff management, immediate and consistent feedback from a director is not a realistic expectation. Creating one's own feedback system can not only help actors achieve new goals in rehearsals and performances, but can also give actors more agency to use their voice in the rehearsal room – if the actor has a clear picture of what they are doing and why, communication with a director can be positive and succinct. This combined with Tohver's Playback system, can promote more constructive conversations rooted in concrete events. These are teachable techniques that not only help the individual actor, but also improve communication between actor and director, as Tohver's Zero Zone Praxis is designed to do.

As a graduate student re-entering the professional world of acting later in my own career, I intend to continue using flow theory as a measurement tool and will chronicle the number of times I reach optimal experience [APPENDIX F KIMBER KING CREDENTIALS]. I hope this process helps me remain curious about my field and that I can use flow theory to help others find and keep the joy in acting. As an actor, educator, and human, I will do as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi suggests: "Try to be inspired by something every day. Try to inspire at least one person every day."

APPENDIX A STAGE VOICE I NOTES

Notes from Stage Voice I

Vivian Majkowski, Professor of Stage Voice and Accents

University of Central Florida

November 13, 2020

The Warm-Up

Destructuring

1. Get on alignment/ check in
2. Shake out fingers and toes enlivening the body, rolling arms, kick legs up and back, shake it all about.
3. Big X
 - a. Check in with breath
 - b. Release
 - c. Let go of past and present thoughts
 - d. Bring self-present
4. Look at planes of breath – this is where the present lives
 - a. Up and down breath
 - b. Side to side breath
 - c. Front to back breath
5. Beachball breath – what initiates what lags – see and feel the lungs.
6. 4 parts of breath – ribs, belly, belly, ribs.
7. Explore the Vocal line
 - a. Drop in to pause, create image in dantien, point up 5,12,7 vertebrae
 - b. Tap third eye open to allow bones to vibrate.
8. 4 things muscles can do
 - a. Contract
 - b. Stretch
 - c. Shake
 - d. Release
9. Wake up the 5 senses with an image then back to the room.
10. Open up-specificity
 - a. Shoulders-arm circles
 - b. Hips-knee flop, iliopsoas stretch, hip circles, modified pigeon
 - c. Ribs-arrow and bow
 - d. Stomach-bridge or cobra
11. Choose a Tremor position

Restructuring

1. Vocal support – transversus “huh”
 - a. Labial Dental Fricative while in healthy cow “blow out birthday candle”
 - b. Huh pebbles to the ceiling

2. Wamp up tweeter – in child’s pose
 - a. Bilabial trill.
 - b. Professional yawn
 - c. Transversus support breath to “paint the bones of the skull.”
3. Open the Flood Gates
 - a. Neck and shoulders
 - b. Jaw
 - c. Lips
 - d. Tongue
 - e. Soft Palate
4. Warm up Woofer-standing
 - a. Breathe into ribs – create “cave breath”
 - b. Pat body awake.
5. Finger Paint Blending woofer and tweeter
6. Forward Placement
 - a. Chew an M
 - b. Release on a bilabial trill
 - c. Add a “huh” at the end of trill.
7. Articulation
 - a. Least amount of muscularity for most amount of clarity
 - b. Voice and unvoiced Pa, Ba, Ta, Da, Ka, Ga
8. Images
 - a. Paper Poppy/Baby Bubble
 - b. Tongue twister

APPENDIX B FLOW-READINESS WARM-UP

The Actor's Flow-Readiness Warm-Up

Adapted from exercises from

Stage Voice I, Vivian Majkowski Professor of Stage Voice and Accents at University of Central Florida

PhD Candidate Tamur Tohver's Zero Zone Praxis

Destruction Exercises – 15-20 minutes

Planes of Breath Inhale:

- Side to side
- Front and Back
- Up and Down

Opening Stretches:

- Hips
- Shoulders
- Stomach

Open the Flood Gates:

- Neck/Shoulders
- Jaw
- Lips
- Tongue
- Soft Palate

Tremor 1-2 minutes

Choose from one of Fitzmaurice's tremor positions:

[John Melton, PhD Fitzmaurice Voicework for Singers and Actors](#)

Pillar, AIM, or Wave Meditation – 10-20 minutes: [Tamur Tohver Zero Zone Praxis](#)

Restruction – 5 minutes

Transversus – huh a pebble to the ceiling

Vocal Warm Up (Woofer, Tweeter, Full Range)

APPENDIX C UTA HAGEN'S 9 QUESTIONS

Uta Hagen's Original 9 Questions

Published in *Respect For Actors*

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Who am I? | Character. |
| 2. What time is it? | Century, year, season, day, minute. |
| 3. Where am I? | Country, city, neighborhood, house, room. |
| 4. What surrounds me? | Animate and inanimate objects. |
| 5. What are the given circumstances? | Past, present, future, and the events. |
| 6. What is my relationship? | Relation to total events, other characters,
things. |
| 7. What do I want? | Character main and immediate objectives. |
| 8. What's in my way? | Obstacles. |
| 9. What do I do to get what I want? | The action: physical, verbal. |

APPENDIX D FEMINIST TRAUMA CONNECTION

EXCERPT FROM ESSAY BY KIMBER KING

Trauma Under the Elms

O'Neill Under a Feminist Trauma Theory Lens

Written for: Dramatic Theory and Criticism

University of Central Florida, December 1, ,2021

Dr. Joseph D'Ambrosi Instructor of Record

In her book *Trauma Recovery, The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Dr. Judith Herman explains feminist trauma theory stating that throughout the history of psychology, scientists “generally failed to recognize the impact of victimization” on women. (Herman 14). Trauma associated with the social oppression of women was not publicly recognized. Before the first wave of feminism, any mental disorder in women was lumped into the term “Hysteria.” This grew out of the republican anticlerical political movement of the late 19th Century. During this time, women were beginning to question the social construct that they were properties of the home or the church. Women exhibiting Hysteria symptoms were examined from a physiological makeup, not a situational one. In other words, the symptoms were recognized but the underlying cause of trauma, abuse, and societal oppression were not only not investigated, their very existence was rejected. Women suffering any mental illness or emotional symptom were seen as “maligners” with treatment falling to popular healers and hypnotists (Herman 26). With the push for some independency for women, Scientists began to study women with Hysteria with a wider scope. One pioneer of this study, was none other than Sigmund Freud. Freud conducted years of interviews with women suffering Hysteria. His work uncovered that almost all of the women he studied had suffered abuse from a very early age, mostly at the hands of family members. Freud published his work but quickly rebuked it all after the patriarchal outcry over his findings that domestic violence not only caused trauma in

women, but was common in the family home. Freud dropped this line of research and changed his methodology. Instead of investigating how abuse affected women, he turned his questions to if the abuse caused sexual arousal in the victims themselves. According to Dr. Herman, “Out of the ruins of the traumatic theory of hysteria Freud created psychoanalysis. The dominant psychological theory of the next century was founded in the denial of women’s reality” (Herman 25). Basically Freud’s work was a precursor to “she asked for it,” the degrading phrase often hurled at rape victims.

APPENDIX E REDUCTION METHOD TABLES

A Christmas Carol Orlando Shakespeare Theatre, Jim Helsing Director

Table 2 Reduction Method Rehearsal 11/17/2022

Negative	Positive
A little unfocused	Found fun cackling moment to root Char Woman.
Self-conscious in a few moments.	Was able to play with movement in Char Woman scene.
Stereotyped Charity worker. Director said she was one-sided.	Had fun with scene partner in Char Woman scene.
Not feeling connected with scene partner.	Lines are coming along.
Didn't feel like we were listening to each other in charity scene.	

Table 3 Reduction Method Rehearsal 11/18/2022

Negative	Positive
Got in my head about accent.	Found some moments to have fun
Lots of pauses – not thinking on the line. (Director said pace is too slow)	Harmonies were great!
My accent was in and out. Lots of notes from Director on this.	Remembered most of my lines.
Un focused!	Had fun singing together.
Sang wrong harmony for Lookout	Felt supported by cast members.

Table 4 Reduction Method Rehearsal 11/19/2022

Negative	Positive
Un-focused	Vivian helped with accent
Accent mistakes-Director notes on this.	Found a moment of connection in Fezziwig scene.
Forgot some lines	Nailed the choreography.
Negative self-talk	Found a few specific
Out of breath during dance	Director likes new direction of Charity Worker (my actions are clear and she is genuine)

Table 5 Reduction Method Rehearsal 11/20/2022

Negative	Positive
In my head about accent work.	Accent work helped me understand what I am saying more. (images are clearer)
I didn't listen to my scene partner.	Having fun elongating consonants!
I dropped some lines.	My harmonies are solid
My actions did not affect scene partner.	Fun Fun dancing
Pushed my voice too hard	Lots of connections with Laundress

Table 6 Reduction Method Rehearsal 11/23/2022

Negative	Positive
Still not getting accent 100%	Found a new connection with scene partner.
Did not listen to my scene partner in Charity .	Ran the entire show!
Lost focus	Fully engaged in Char Woman scene
Timing off on money box bit	Tried a new action – Mark felt it and responded.
Anxious here and there	New moment in Fezziwig scene with Tim

Table 7 Reduction Method 11/29/2022 Dress Rehearsal

Negative	Positive
No connection with scene partners in Charity 2 scene.	Found a new moment of fun in Char Woman
Anxious	Audience responded with laughter to my new action – to “one up” for Char Woman
Pushed in some moments because I didn't know my action.	Redirected anxiety with Pillar focus
Late on entrance/costume quick change	Black teeth worked well

APPENDIX F KIMBER KING CREDENTIALS

KIMBER KING

KIMBERKINGACTOR.COM

ARTIST STATEMENT

I am an experienced, highly motivated, team oriented and passionate artist scholar. My More than 10 years of experience teaching and directing, nearly 20 years of experience as an actor, ample years as a sound engineer, stage manager and production manager as well as executive director of a nonprofit arts council, have given me a unique skill set and a vast understanding of the world of theatre.

As a theatre maker, practitioner, and director, I am most interested in telling stories that challenge the minds and innate biases of audiences. My goal is to expose communities to the universality of the human condition across diverse cultures and backgrounds. Truth is central to all that I do, however so is a bit of mystique and spectacle. I invite discourse into the artistic dialogue and approach everything I do as a collaboration. I expect actors to bring themselves to the room and I meet them where they are. Afterall, an actor's individuality is what creates wildly fascinating characters. Not subscribing to traditional theatre hierarchy, Anne Bogart is one of my biggest inspirations for directing. Her collaborative deconstruction of classic plays and modern adaptations are core to my methodology. As we leave post-post modernism behind, I have had the honor of working with many new playwrights to develop *what comes next* in modern theatre. Central to these works, all authored by BIPOC artists, is a reclaiming of identity and a demand for understanding. These plays are able to deliver high stakes in inventive, humorous and entertaining ways. This is the movement I choose to be a part of.

As a theatre educator, the student is the driving force in my pedagogy. My goal is to inspire actors to find and use their voices and to always stay true to themselves. Having focused on positive psychology for the actor's process in graduate school, Joy is the pursuit of my daily practice. Developing actors who are confident in their own practice and feedback system is central to my lesson planning. My classroom and rehearsal space are safe places that allow actors to explore their own personal connections to the works of practitioners and playwrights, past and present. Believing each actor needs to create their own individualized practice, I draw from a multitude of pedagogies including, but not limited to, those of Meisner, Uta Hagen, Stanislavski, Chekhov, Bogart and Alexander.



KIMBER KING

EMC, SAG/AFTRAe

Height: 5'7"
Hair: Red Eyes: Blue
Vocal Range: G2-G5
kimberkingactor.com



Orlando: 407 894-1910
flbmg@bmgtalement.com

Professional Theatre (partial list) *EMC Credit **Musical

<i>Charlotte's Web</i>	Charlotte	Orlando Shakes!
<i>Henry V</i> *	Alice/Macmorris	Orlando Shakes!
<i>Noises Off</i> *	Dotty Otley/us	Orlando Shakes!
<i>A Christmas Carol</i> ***	Charwoman/Charity	Orlando Shakes!
<i>Various</i>	Company Member	American Immersive Theatre
<i>The Haunted Road</i>	Evil Queen	Markido Made it
<i>Outside Mullingar</i>	Rosemary	The Playhouse at White Lake
<i>Educating Rita</i>	Rita	The Playhouse at White Lake
<i>Always...Patsy Cline</i> **	Louise	The Playhouse at White Lake
<i>Dearly Departed</i>	Suzanne	The Playhouse at White Lake
<i>Blithe Spirit</i>	Elvira	The Playhouse at White Lake
<i>Old Love</i>	Molly	The Playhouse at White Lake

Educational Theatre University of Central Florida (partial list)

<i>Indecent</i> **	Elder Vera	Dr. Julia Listengarten
<i>The Wolves</i>	Soccer Mom	David Reed
<i>Dear Helena</i>	Tessa	Cynthia White
<i>Affinity Lunch Minutes</i>	Jill	Roberta Emerson

Community Theatre (partial list)

<i>The Spitfire Grill</i> **	Shelby	Central Park Players
<i>The Rabbit Hole</i>	Izzy	Muskegon Civic Theatre
<i>25th Annual Putnam Co. Spelling Bee</i> **	Olive	Muskegon Civic Theatre

Film/Television (full list on [IMDB](#))

<i>Hider in my House</i>	Heather (supporting)	TLC Network
<i>All Things Fall Apart</i>	Mom	Mario Van Peebles
<i>The Color of Time</i>	Woman Next Door	James Franco
<i>Whip It</i>	Spectator/Stand In	Drew Barrymore
<i>The Christmas Bunny</i>	Diane (principle)	Hallmark Channel

Training/Certifications

MFA Acting 2023	University of Central Florida
BS. Broadcast Communications	Grand Valley State University
AA Music	Muskegon Community College
Acting	Michael Wainstein, Kurt Dryer, Tom Harryman
Improvisation	The Second City Chicago
Certified Broad Sword, Knife, Unarmed	The Society of American Fight Directors
Dialects (IPA)	Vivian Majkowski
Voice	Richard Crawly, Dr. Carlos Seise, Vivian Majkowski
Shakespeare	Jim Helsinger, Orlando Shakes!
Flute	Linda Apple
Movement	Christopher Niess
Acting for Camera	Belinda Boyd

Awards and Special Skills

Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor – Bess Z Awards, Best Cast - I see You Awards
Beginning guitar and piano. Beginning English and western horseback

KIMBER KING

KIMBERKINGACTOR.COM

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Theatre connects people to people, people to community, and community to the world. For the individual, theatre develops critical thinking skills, leadership, collaboration, empathy, and a deeper understanding of oneself. The student is the driving force in my pedagogy. My goal is to inspire students to use their voices in a way that is true to themselves and contributive to the greater good. Having focused on positive psychology for the actor's process in graduate school, Joy is at the center of my daily practice. My classroom is a safe place that allows students to explore their own personal connections to the works of practitioners and playwrights, past and present. I am an experienced, highly motivated, team oriented and passionate artist scholar. My More than 10 years of experience teaching and directing, nearly 20 years of experience as an actor, ample years as a sound engineer, stage manager and production manager as well as executive director of a nonprofit arts council, have given me a unique skill set and a vast understanding of the world of theatre. I seek to join an institution of higher education that can use these skills to inspire the leaders of tomorrow.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor; Orlando Shakespeare Theatre 2022-2023

- *Shakespeare Alive* in area public and private schools
- Saturday Classes for grades 5-8

Instructor of Record; University of Central Florida 2021-2022

- Acting 1 for Non Majors
- Acting 1 for Majors

Graduate Teaching Assistant; University of Central Florida 2020-2022

- Advanced Directing
- Script Analysis
- Theatre Survey
- Stage Voice
- Sex, Drugs, and Rock n' Roll Musicals

Youth Theatre Director; Whitehall Public Schools 2009-2019

- Directed 1-3 productions per year involving up to 95 students
- Fundraised over \$10,000 per year
- Created a training and mentor program ending in high school team producing a middle school play each year.
- Delegated parent and community volunteers.
- Coached high school students for college scholarship and entry auditions resulting in numerous full ride scholarships.

Director of Penguin Project; Muskegon Civic Theatre 2018

- Directed production for youth with cognitive & physical disabilities.
- Directed mentorship program matching high school youth with youth with disabilities.

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Executive Director; Arts Council of White Lake 2011-2017

- Developed and managed new strategic plan for organization.
- Oversaw youth theatre program.
- Managed organization budget.
- Organized 3 fundraisers per year resulting in 30% of budgeted income.
- Managed donor relationships resulting in a \$1 Million match endowment campaign (goal since met).
- Created the organization's first ever annual report.
- Wrote annual grants winning 20% of budgeted income.
- Facilitated renovation of and relocation to a new more central location.
- Managed at least 50 volunteers annually.

TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE

FOH Sound Engineer/Sound Designer; Playhouse at White Lake 2012-2020
Stage Manager; Playhouse at White Lake 2007-2009
Monitor & FOH Sound Engineer; ProAudio (National Touring) 1996-2001

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Chair/Treasurer, Friends of the Playhouse 2012-2019
Production Manager; Playhouse at White Lake 2020

EDUCATION

M.F.A. Acting; University of Central Florida *Expected* 2023
B.S. Broadcast Communications; Grand Valley State University 1997
A.A. Music; Muskegon Community College 1992

WORKSHOPS

Comedy Sketch Writing; The Second City Chicago
Comedy Improvisation; The Second City Chicago
Liz Lehrman’s Critical Response Process; UCF
Zero Zone Praxis as Conscious Creative Cultivation; Tamur Tohver
Meisner Technique; Backdoor Studio, London

DIRECTING CREDITS

LORT Orlando Shakes

Magic Tree House: A Big Day for Baseball – Assistant Director

Regional Theatre The Playhouse at White Lake

Motherhood Out Loud
Playhouse

Youth Theatre Whitehall Public Schools

Shrek the Musical
Into the Woods
Mary Poppins
Seussical Jr.
Once Upon a Mattress
The Lion King Jr.
The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe
Aladdin a British Panto
High School Musical
Little Shop of Horrors
Willy Wonka Jr.
The Absolutely Insidious and Utterly Terrifying Truth About Cat Hair
Devised pieces each year for College Theatre Festival

ACTING EXPERIENCE SEE ATTACHED ACTING RESUME

PLAYWRIGHT

<i>Mind the Gap</i> Premier The Playhouse at White Lake July 22, 2020	2020
<i>42 in 1 Act</i> Commissioned for the Bennett Prize, Muskegon Museum of Art Premiered– Muskegon Museum of Art August 23, 2019 Official Selection- Voices of She	2019
<i>Playhouse</i> Premiered at The Playhouse at White Lake September 22, 2016	2016

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