

FAITH IN THE ART OF ACTING TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis argues the importance of mining the student's faith and strengthening the student's creative individuality or uniqueness in actor training. I will argue that allying the pedagogy of past master teachers Konstantin Stanislavsky and Yevgeny Vakhtangov with the development of "faith," in the secular understanding of the word set forth in this paper, will aid actors in implementing a strong technique. The first chapter of this thesis focuses on the broad concepts of faith, both religious and secular, in order to establish the necessary vocabulary for my argument. The second chapter presents the theories of Konstantin Stanislavsky and Yevgeny Vakhtangov, in particular the examination of justification, crossing the threshold, and creative individuality, to advocate for faith as a powerful tool in actor training. The third chapter demonstrates how three projects completed as part of my graduate actor training at California State University Long Beach, which facilitated actor development and created opportunity for the students, reinforced my conviction that teaching faith in action and creative individuality is both useful in the training of young actors--and urgent. These projects include fight choreography done in service of a CSULB University Players Mainstage production of *Macbeth*, a project titled *Parkour Prince* for Dr. Joanne Gordon's Directing class, as well as my "Auto Drama" for Professor Hugh O'Gorman's Advanced Actors Process class. The conclusion of this paper argues for the design of practical curriculum that deals with acting as a spiritual vocation in theatre departments throughout the United States.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Each year in the United States a proliferation of acting students graduate college expecting concrete and tangible results. These tangible results might mean employment in their field, the ability to meet material needs or, pay student loans, and most definitely the ability to meet the demands of their field with certainty. To propose, therefore, a seemingly intangible concept such as “Faith” as a pedagogical tool could elicit a dubious response from students and teachers alike. This has not always been the case. By faith, I mean the belief in something intangible; it is the belief in an idea or choice. Once the actor makes a choice, it is then by faith she is moved forward. Faith is the state of being, released from the state of doubt. By faith, I do not mean religious conviction without proof or the belief in the supernatural, though perhaps all imagination and creation share something of this wonder in that what was once impossible now suddenly is possible. What I mean in this context is something more practical but equally as important: the resource that allows an actor to have strength, understood better as an intuition rather than a possibility, the force that allows conviction, or talent, or training to manifest in a way that involves some measure of wonder, some measure of what cannot be quantified, but which suddenly is, a power so qualitatively superior to confidence it can be recognized as such dynamically and not necessarily substantially. I argue that faith can be employed as a pedagogical tool to aid the actor.

This thesis argues the importance of mining the student's faith and strengthening the student's creative individuality or uniqueness in actor training. I posit here that allying the pedagogy of past master teachers Konstantin Stanislavsky and Yevgeny Vakhtangov with the development of “faith,” in the understanding of the word set forth in this paper, will aid actors in

implementing a strong technique. Faith in this essence is stimulated by an intake of breath which focuses, and initiates courage, when feelings of doubt materialize in the actor. Therefore an actor's faith is an invaluable tool in handling adversity and doubt. My first chapter contextualizes and defines faith.

I believe faith co-exists with doubt. The existential philosopher and renowned theologian Paul Tillich writes in *The Courage To Be* about the paradox of negativity. Tillich writes, “No actual negation can be without an implicit affirmation. The negative lives from the positive it negates” (176). I find this examination of doubt and the paradox of negativity extremely useful for the actor’s purpose. Doubt instructs the actor to reflect, to reevaluate, to continue moving forward, or to quit. The end-game in actor training is ultimately not to remove doubt from the acting process, but to incorporate faith as a tool which allows the student to brave fear courageously. As a student moves through doubt, she will discover a true and tangible creative individuality. This uniqueness, which often manifests as awareness of self, will eventually become a foundation on which to build a disciplined practiced technique and a continued way of working.

Doubt can cripple an idea before it has time to come to fruition. However, doubt can also be innovation’s ally. The actor who suffers from doubt can point to some very simple problems: confusion about the text, role, direction, lack of technique, or self-doubt which has been with the actor since childhood and has its origins in something unrelated to actor training. It is necessary for the student to establish a new relationship with doubt. Doubt is associated with negative feelings. However, these feelings can act as a signal to become curious about the paradox of negativity. Self-doubt can now serve the student by providing an opportunity for positive action in an acting class. An acting teacher’s job is to lead the student from personal habits or comfort

zones that restrict ability to growth. This transition from habit to a new experience will eventually empower the student. It is often in transitions we are the most vulnerable, however, the inspired teacher will design a curriculum in order to bridge this transition with exercises that result in acute awareness to bring about the student's creative individuality, which, in turn strengthens faith.

I posit here that Faith is one of the primary essential tools to aid an actor in moments of doubt and through the complexities of the artistic process. The purpose of this pedagogical approach is to prepare the actor, or arm the actor as it were, with a tool to navigate fear of failure, or a course of action when faced with doubt. Tillich states, "It is our uncontrolled desires that create masks and put them over men and things" (14). If we accept Tillich's statement as true then the opposite must also be true; our will can strip these masks off. What would this man look like without this mask? A vulnerable man. Actor training requires the removal of complex and well-developed social masks, calling for a vulnerability that is unique to the student to be accessible to the teacher and other students. This act of unmasking oneself takes courage.

Learning the fundamentals of acting, which include developing a muscular freedom, emotional accessibility, and a flexibility which is imaginative, as well as, script analysis, requires intense discipline. Unless one is innately gifted, acting without this discipline will be shallow and generic. The practice and application of these fundamentals takes a lifetime. Stanislavsky warns about dilettantism in his seminal tome *An Actor Prepares*: "Unfortunately, our art is frequently exploited for personal ends. You do it to show your beauty, others do it to gain popularity or external success or to make a career" (31). His statement still resonates today. An acting student needs a clear purpose that transcends validation from authority figures or employers. Those who wish to capitalize on the desires of students will continue to do so, for

those students will never have learned how not to be victimized. Throw a stone in Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago, and it will hit a so called, “master teacher” who, capitalizing on an actor’s fear of scarcity of regular employment in an industry with notorious financial insecurity and limited opportunity, will promise almost immediate results. These charlatans prey upon these fears as well as the student’s lack of experience and knowledge. The precarious realities of being a professional actor can cause anxiety even in the most balanced artist. Without the committed requisite study, one that expands the capacities of the physical and vocal instrument, and one that emphasizes a flexibility which is imaginative, an actor will resort to clichés and stereotypical acting in an attempt to win approval. However, an actor who commits to a progression of skill development and dedicates enormous time in exercises, often with no immediate external performance results, will, with time, create specific and nuanced characters, characters who live moment-to-moment in relationship with their ensemble before an audience. I will argue in this thesis that this development of a tangible and repeatable technique will provide a student with faith in action; this is priceless, but takes time.

The second chapter of this thesis focuses on the broad concepts of faith, both religious and secular, in order to establish the necessary vocabulary for my argument. The third chapter presents the theories of Konstantin Stanislavsky and Yevgeny Vakhtangov, in particular the examination of justification, crossing the threshold, and creative individuality, to advocate for faith as a powerful tool in actor training. The fourth chapter demonstrates how three projects completed as part of my graduate actor training at California State University Long Beach, which facilitated actor development and created opportunity for the students, reinforced my conviction that teaching faith in action and creative individuality is both useful in the training of young actors--and urgent. These projects include fight choreography done in service of a

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CHAPTER 2

BROAD CONCEPTS OF FAITH IN THE ART OF ACTING TRAINING

This chapter broadly explores the concepts of religious and secular faith, which include spiritual, ontological, and theatrical tools to aid the student and teacher of acting. The second purpose is to examine similarities in religious and secular faith for the purpose of disassociating religious connotations for this paper. This chapter defines faith for the purpose of actor training and begins to demonstrate how the word “Faith” shows up consistently in the rhetoric of renowned master acting teachers.

Merriam-Webster defines “faith” as “a firm belief in someone or in something for which there is no tangible proof, without doubt or question; verily; complete trust; based on spiritual apprehension rather than proof.” In Latin “faith” translates to *fidem* which means, “to have full trust,” and in Greek “faith” translates to *pistis* which means, “easily persuaded.” The Latin and the Greek translations bring the words persuade and trust, regularly used by acting teachers, under the umbrella of “faith.” This thesis argues for the purposes of actor training faith as belief in a choice or idea.

Renowned master acting teacher, William Esper, a graduate of Western Reserve University and the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre in New York City, makes the link in his book *The Actor’s Art and the Craft*. He is the founder of the William Esper Studio, where he continues to teach to this day, and he also chaired the Professional Actor Training Program at Rutgers University’s Mason Gross School of the Arts for many years. He describes the link between acting and religious faith, via the actor’s “acceptance” of the script, which she must accept without question:

The closest thing to actor's faith in ordinary life is religious faith. Anyone who subscribes to a religion must invest themselves utterly in the articles that that religion sets forth as truth. He must accept these articles on blind faith and blind faith alone. Yes, religious faith and actor's faith are very similar.in actor's faith, as with religious faith, no one can prove these things to you. Having faith means that you simply accept them. Just like, if you and I are actors in the same play and the script says I'm your father, you become my son. I don't question it. That's the way it is. Period. (Esper and DiMarco 11)

This acceptance of the willing suspension of disbelief, while simultaneously experiencing doubt, will become the actor's creed.

We are all born with the capacity to learn. All of human development cultivates and calls upon faith to survive. As a religious believer calls upon God for comfort, so can an actor trigger faith when experiencing doubt. I mean faith as the artful deployment of belief in an action, or series of actions, so to persevere through doubt. As teachers, we are ourselves models of this transformation. We transformed from beginning students to experienced, knowledgeable, and credible guides. This occurs naturally through our innate faith in our ability to learn coupled with our experiences.

Simultaneously, we must acknowledge the potential of an adverse reaction to the word faith, as it carries many connotations, not all of which are positive. One ubiquitous and immediate association is with organized religion. For the agnostic or atheist, this paper wishes to argue that faith takes place in the same explorative space as creativity. The secular appreciation of faith begins with the correlation between theatre as a sacred space to its practitioners as Church is to its parishioners. They both deal in ritual and performance to reveal mystery through the presentation of story. Tillich argues that "faith is the state of being grasped by the power of

being-itself. The power of this self-affirmation is the power of being which is effective in every act of courage. Faith is the experience of this power” (172). The student will find faith resonates in the part of the soul where courage lies, what the Greeks called “thymos,” where the intellectual and the sensual elements meet. This is the manifestation of believing in the unseen. The belief of seeing things unseen in the religious sense is the faith in a higher power or god/God. This belief for the actor’s purposes is the faith in imaginary circumstances.

Learning an acting technique takes time. It would be wise for the actor to consider it takes an acorn thirty years to become a mature oak. Quality growth takes time. Growth asks for time and patience. Growth, as it unfolds, is imperceptible. Growth necessitates a faith that potential can be fulfilled for the actor, just as a seed can, with sunlight, water, and proper nurturing, fulfill its potential to be a tree. Faith is not simply a psycho-physical state like courage; it is also the strength and possibility that comes from long and extended training. Esper articulates the required extensive training to be an actor:

This work (acting training) has a creed, an article of faith, if you will. I believe that, in the best of hands, acting becomes a creative art, and that true excellence in its practice can only be attained by total mastery of technical craft. Unfortunately that takes time, and America is a hurry-up place. In America we think we’re gaining something by how fast everything around us is moving. Every day, faster and faster. But what do we miss in the process?to become a Bunraku puppeteer, you must apprentice yourself for twenty years! Twenty years to learn an art. My God, in this country a person can expect to change jobs four or five times within twenty years. Where is our focus? Clearly we’re a transient culture. But nothing worth learning comes quickly. Sandy said this, (Sanford

Meisner) and I've always upheld it: It takes twenty years to become a master of acting.

(10)

A teacher can help facilitate artistic growth by means of effective language in the acting studio or classroom. The language teachers use directly affects the student's experience.

Accordingly, I find "faith" a more useful word than "confidence" in facilitating learning. The acting techniques I subscribe to encourage the use of asking provocative questions, and the use of training exercises that stimulate uncertainty rather than those that aim to achieve "certainty" in performance. Declan Donnellan, in his book *The Actor and the Target*, addresses a series of exercises that aid the actor, and he argues that faith is preferable to certainty:

An addiction to certainty will paralyze the actor. But we can be certain of nothing.

Going over and over lines in the wings is a fairly reliable way to forget them on stage.

All the actor can do is to have faith that, when needed, the lines will be there. An obsession with certainty destroys faith. We cannot have certainty and faith, we can have either one or the other. (158)

Donnellan suggests faith means to give up the need for certainty, in order to act. This alludes to the ability to surrender. A student can never have enough faith. Certainty, on the other hand, is a peculiar notion. A student who has absolute certainty is not capable of learning anything new.

CHAPTER 3

FAITH AND PEDAGOGY: STANISLAVSKY VERSUS VAKHTANGOV

THE MAGIC “AS IF” AND JUSTIFICATION

Our human body appears and disappears moment by moment without cease and this ceaseless arising and passing away is what we experience as time and being. They are not separate. They are one thing, and in even a fraction of a second, we have the opportunity to choose and to turn the course of action either toward the attainment of truth or away from it. Each instant is utterly critical to the whole world. --Ruth Ozeki

Konstantin Stanislavsky and Yevgeny Vakhtangov lead their actors to an ownership of a craft. Both master teachers, though different in methodology, taught actors faith through action. They did so via a theory called “justification.” Konstantin Stanislavsky, founder of The Moscow Art Theatre in 1898, devoted his life to the practice of acting, teaching acting, producing theatre, and directing for the theatre. He spent the last years of his life altering and revising his theories. He believed acting could be taught as a system, that acting was not purely arrived through talent alone. Yevgeny Vakhtangov (1883-1922) was a former student of Stanislavsky. A celebrated member of the Russian Theatre as both actor and director, he died May 29, 1922 at the young age of thirty-nine. The gifts his pedagogical approach contributed to western actor training, as well as to the theatre at large, are enormous. His students could feel his life force and presence at work in the studio, and it was Vakhtangov’s desire for the students to feel their own. This chapter explores the similarities and differences between of Stanislavsky’s and Vakhtangov’s take on building faith through justification. This chapter will also reinforce a professed need for theatre schools to better cultivate an actor's creative individuality, for this goes hand-in-hand with the actor’s purpose.

Stanislavsky and Justification

Now that “Faith” has been defined for the purposes of facilitating courage in acting training, how do we use it? Stanislavsky wrote a whole chapter in *An Actor Prepares* on Faith and the Sense of Truth. In this chapter rich with practical guidance, he writes “Put life into all the imagined circumstances and actions until you have completely satisfied your sense of truth, and until you have awakened a sense of faith in the reality of your sensations. This process is what we call justification of a part” (129). Everything that happens on stage must make sense to the actor, to her scene partners, and to the audience through the pursuit of truth. An actor’s truth in life becomes the inspiration for the imagination to create a “scenic truth” for creative fiction. Stanislavsky taught the actor to cultivate the quality of courage, because it takes courage to identify truth in life. He gave actors a tool called the magic “what if” or, as it is also known, the magic “as if” as a means to activate the imagination and to justify behavior within the given circumstances of the playwright's story on stage. Using the play *Hamlet* as example: the actor playing Hamlet should act “as if” his father had just died, and “as if” his mother had married his uncle immediately after his father’s funeral, and act “as if” he was looking out into the world as Hamlet. Once the actor justifies the given circumstances (the who, where, why, and what of the play), everything on stage will contain the element of truth, as it is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances. Stanislavsky continues, “How can you prevent yourself from going in the wrong direction? At every junction you should have a well-trained attentive, disciplined signal-man. He is your sense of truth which co-operates with your sense of faith in what you are doing, to keep you on the right track” (148). The easiest path or the line of least resistance is the road to the habitual or the familiar. An actor needs to learn the difference between what is truthfully pursuing an objective on stage and falsely pursuing an objective on stage. Once an

actor discovers the benefits of the more challenging route, the choice to go down that path will increase. This is where working with honesty is connected with payment or a price. It costs the actor something on stage to be truthful. It is easier to be false. Stanislavsky taught justification as a way to stimulate the imagination. He was after the replication of truth on stage. He wrote, "...if acts as a lever to lift us out of the world of actuality into the realm of imagination" (46). He was experienced enough to know how the mind would balk at the suggestion, "I am Hamlet" for rightly so, this is not true. However, if actors use the "as if" in connection to the imagined circumstances then the mind will play along and do so happily as children do in the playground.

Vakhtangov on Justification

Under closer examination we see that the two master teachers diverge at the very definition of acting itself. Stanislavsky believed acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances while Vakhtangov believed in living passionately in a new artistic reality. Vakhtangov thought the actor needed to destroy the "fourth wall," an imaginary wall between the actors on stage and the audience. This term and practice was coined and developed by Stanislavsky as part of his system. Vakhtangov on the other hand felt there was no need for solitude in public because the actor was served far greater in accepting the fact that they were being watched. Vakhtangov taught his actors to experience the feeling of truth, and the feeling of lies, and to experience the threshold between the two. He encouraged this threshold to be pushed to the extreme. Vakhtangov believed actors were so afraid of being false in their desire to be "truthful" that they would convey nothing at all. This passivity is to be rigorously challenged in the actor. He thought actors would not reach for truth for the fear of being false. With this model of justification, every action on stage must be done for some purpose, any purpose that makes sense to the actor. His actors need not align their justification with the world

of the “given circumstances” or with the playwright or with the world of the play, as Stanislavsky believed. The actor’s choice simply needed to be justified personally, however the actor wishes to do that. When she has justified her being on stage, then and only then will she fully be free. To train this ability an actor needs to start with a series of small tasks and then work to fulfill those tasks with precision.

Where Stanislavsky aimed to find psychological truthfulness, Vakhtangov believed everything on stage was a lie and that actors must acknowledge that truth in order to be believable. Only when, paradoxically, the student satisfies that “truth” through the acceptance of the “lie” will she be successful. Vakhtangov believed life on stage should not resemble everyday life; he encouraged actors to perceive the events of the play and the stage environment as the creation of their own artistic passions, another major difference between his theories and that of Stanislavsky.

In *The Vakhtangov Sourcebook*, edited by Andrei Malaev-Babel, Vakhtangov’s lessons, letters, and methods of teaching are gathered for the benefit of actor training and acting research. He drilled his actors in believability, seeking excellence and precision: “Some logical justification is needed in order to coax the actor’s creative nature into believing the reality of the action, what comes from the actor instinctively comes from his subconscious” (94). It was his opinion that an actor need no external motivations to act, “to spontaneously feel any passions or to create any imaginary reality. While in the creative state one does not need to believe in the imaginary circumstances or events as one does not need to take props, costumes, sets, and partners for something, real” (27). The fundamental idea of justification is to give the actor faith to create a new reality, by any means which satisfies the actor. This freedom of ownership and development of imagination in actor training is still revolutionary.

According to Vakhtangov, “Justification” is an actor's friend; he wrote “justification is a path toward faith” (177). If the actor feels credible, an audience will feel the same. An audience will believe an actor if the actor believes in her own behavior and business on stage. To that end, an actor needs to justify every, “object, action, or accident,” for an actor to have faith in their work. The strength of the justification, no matter how ludicrous or unrelated to the given direction, could lead the actor into a more convincing reality. Vakhtangov believed feelings, “that seem true beget trust and the truth of passion begets faith.” (92). Vakhtangov knew that truth could be discovered through pure chance or from some kind of action. He strongly believed truth co-existed with faith on stage; where there is untruth onstage it must be that faith is absent. He wrote, “Every action must be done for some purpose, and it should be done to the appropriate degree. The feeling of truth must die” (93). Through justification an actor can create by using bold strokes to free the subconscious. This activation of bold strokes tests the actor’s logic and sense of truth by arbitrarily committing physical actions that seem over the top. Vakhtangov believed “justification” was the tool to “preclude all doubts.” A student can train to find quick justifications through improvisations and indulging fantasy. An exercise to practice quick justifications and indulging fantasy goes as follows: The Actor does,

1. A physical pose;
2. Associate the pose with a place,
3. Commit to an action like sweep, or count light bulbs.....
4. Take note of the sensations, and be aware of what is happening, then
5. Introduce several unconnected situations...

Stanislavsky and Crossing the Threshold

Stanislavsky taught actors to separate their daily routines from their artistic study to access the imagination. Our freedom before class, “is the pedestrian and limited by reason and conventions, beyond it, our freedom is bold, willful, active, and always moving forward” (282). This is why “crossing the threshold” is essential at the start of class. His preparatory work consisted of exercises in muscular freedom, concentration, faith and naiveté, the circle of attention, stage task, memory of action, memory of feeling, and tempo. Exercises were meant to develop technique, but also to develop and reinforce the student’s taste. The through-line of all of the exercises was to maintain a desire to act. His system was not static, but evolved in perpetual service to the actor. Crossing the threshold to the subconscious and justification were meant to act, as he referred, as a means to activate the imagination and free the constraints of the pedestrian life. His system was constantly evolving, challenged, perfected, deconstructed, and constructed by his teachers at the Moscow Art Theatre. He used the magic “if” as a way into activating the imagination. He wrote, “In moments of doubt, when your thoughts, feelings, and imagination are silent, remember if. The author also began his work that way. He said to himself: What if...” (48). He also believed, that “if” could provide stimulus to the subconscious. In essence, when we cross the threshold, we become the author of our own training. The magic “as if” is a tool to increase the actor’s faith.

Vakhtangov on Naiveté

Vakhtangov saw the theatre as a secular Church, as a place where the actor could concentrate on the imagination and pursue fantasy. Vakhtangov thought the essence of the student’s creative individuality would emerge through training with an open soul, by nurturing a sense of naiveté. He also believed in the practice of crossing the threshold as a means to help an actor train with vulnerability. The importance of using naiveté in training perception--the way

we see, hear, touch, taste, smell--is paramount to taking stock of sensory experiences. To perceive with naiveté or to look into the world with the newness of a child, without preconceptions, should be an actor's goal. Vakhtangov's faith has a paradoxical relationship to naiveté: "My faith does not come as a result of my naiveté, rather I become naive as a result of my faith" (178). He also believed the creative spirit or the creative individuality can be cultivated in the student. So can an actor's faith.

To become naive, the student must strip away this "social mask," to look out into the studio or classroom and work with a sense of wonder. The task Vakhtangov gave his actors: create new points of view like children do! Children are the source of tremendous inspiration to the actor. As children, we could create new points of view instinctively, at will, and instantaneously. For example a child who believes in an upside down chair as a spaceship really pilots that ship through space. Children transition from one game to the next with extreme speed and agility, without any need for "preparation." As adults that ability often becomes stunted or dormant, and therefore needs to be reawakened.

Vakhtangov on Crossing the Threshold

Vakhtangov felt an acting class should begin with the student crossing a threshold of sorts in order to access a heightened state of creative learning. For a student to cross this threshold, she needs to remove her social mask. According to Vakhtangov, an actor's faith is the faith in the ability to make something out of nothing. He wrote, "Faith is an actor's ability to live creatively onstage and to experience creative passions without literally perceiving the events of the play and the stage environments as real...to perceive the essence of every event and every object onstage" (26). His aim was to arrive at a greater sense of passion in performance by focusing on the principles of concentration, faith, and naiveté. Vakhtangov stressed the

importance of leaving the pedestrian viewpoint behind when training: “the process of life on stage does not equal everyday life process-- onstage an actor engages in a creative process-- where everything that surrounds them does not equal itself. Therefore, in order to become, ‘real’, an actor’s surroundings need to be creatively transformed through the prism of an actor's artistic fantasy” (26). This requires a loss of self-control, and demanded a joyous energy from his actors. He was seeking the theatrical essence of joy, which was awakened by crossing the threshold, aligning the joy of living with the desire to play.

Vakhtangov could model zeal so effectively because he was a dying man. He stressed the importance of passionate living, or the sensation of wanting “to live more than ever, and feeling, belonging to everything living” (11). The term “affect” or “affective” is associated in Russian psychology with the realm of heightened emotions. Affective memory is the memory of the most heightened emotional moment of our life. Vakhtangov wrote “truth of passions begets faith, the moment of passion within the theatrical creative state, when an actor almost forgets that he is onstage, is the moment of faith, the moment of truth” (92). This is a great example of dancing like nobody is watching, and playing like there is no tomorrow.

Vakhtangov on Theatre Schools

Vakhtangov had a problem with theatre schools: “The main mistake the schools make is that they take it upon themselves to teach how to act, while they should be cultivating actors” (120). His strong sentiments are refreshing in a climate where acting academies are forced to commodify departments and produce celebrity alumni. Vakhtangov, no stranger to controversy, challenged Stanislavsky’s aesthetics and made a departure from naturalism in the pursuit of greater theatricality. This gave rise to some of the most original productions of the Russian post-Revolutionary theatre. The laudable relationship between the two teachers has been

misconstrued as contentious. They had a passionate and complex but ultimately respectful relationship. They both had strong points of view regarding acting aesthetics. They challenged each other, but also supported one another.

Faith As a Tool Today

The adoption of said principles of secular faith in theatre departments would facilitate growth and help to fulfill student potential. Stanislavsky told his students, “I ask you to note especially that the dependence of the body on the soul is particularly important in our school of art” (13). His statement would legitimize the study of acting as it relates to the depths of humanity. Stanislavsky writes:

In the soul of a human being there are certain elements which are subject to consciousness and will. These accessible part are capable in turn of acting on psychic processes that are involuntary....this calls for extremely complicated creative work...carried on in part under the control of our consciousness, but a much more significant proportion is subconscious and involuntary. (13)

The work Stanislavsky and his peers undertook highlights the dimensions of the divine in tandem with the human soul as it relates to the physical and vocal apparatus. I believe “faith” not only aids but also makes a direct connection to the strength, courage, and vulnerability that are necessary for acting work. The art of teaching acting could legitimize and promote the research of the body/soul connection in theatre departments across the United States.

I attended two institutions on route to finishing my undergraduate degree, and in both schools spiritual rhetoric was non-existent. I am curious, knowing the master teachers promoted acting as a spiritual vocation, why this is so? My two undergraduate institutions, The University of Illinois at Chicago and Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, are reputable. Both use

scene study, script analysis, multiple voice and movement pedagogies to teach acting. Scene Study usually ends up with actors “acting” before they understand what to do, before they have trained enough to understand basic event analysis, bits, objectives, and the rudiments of playing action. Students typically rehearse, perform, and get notes until the teacher gives an ultimate pass or fail of the scene, and then a repeat of this process happens once more before the final exam. Teachers become directors who direct scenes. Students typically walk away from the work feeling “great” or “horrible.” This is result-oriented actor training at its worst and leaves little to increase an actor’s faith.

Scene Study is effective for a portion of learned technique. Yet without knowing how to “play action”, the student flounders, or gravitates toward performance habits. Acting teachers should target the student’s habits and identify comfort zones, and develop acting exercises to move the students out of those comfort zones. Acting exercises that accomplish this goal while increasing the actor’s faith in ability are ideal. The acting exercises from Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov which serve to move the student from the generic to something of deeper substance is also ideal. The teacher should have free reign to create exercises that accomplish this task, as inspired teachers continue to do. Faith will increase with practice.

Acting is indeed complex. In his 1985 book *Between Theater and Anthropology*, Richard Schechner explains, "In all kinds of performances a certain definite threshold is crossed. And if it isn't, the performance fails" (10). This imaginary line drawn in the sand allows us to cross into the realm of play, and then back into the reality of the day. A free spirit and appreciation of what we do in class and outside the classroom will continue to penetrate through the mundane and allow for deeper explorations with practice. As we cross the threshold, we leave the ordinary into the world of the fantasy. When class is finished, and we cross back over

the threshold toward our pedestrian and daily self, why not take some of the fantasy back into our ordinary reality.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FAITH IN ACTION VIA GRADUATE SCHOOL PRAXIS

Ever tried? Ever failed? No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. --Samuel Beckett

The CSULB University Players Fall 2015 main stage production of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, directed by Elizabeth Swain, provided multiple opportunities to explore my theory of faith and its application to acting pedagogy. Doubt is accompanied by feelings of stress and anxiety, so faith must also be accompanied by certain feelings. This chapter explores the causes of doubt and the effect of the application of faith as a tool. This chapter also examines how the greatest amount of personal doubt in the following outlined projects is also where I experienced the most personal success. Two students testify to the similar experience. Doubt is, undoubtedly, an uncomfortable, anxious feeling, yet thanks to the opportunities presented in fulfillment of this thesis by Elizabeth Swain, Dr. Joanne Gordon, and Professor Hugh O'Gorman, I remained positively curious about the outcome. This research provided the opportunity to be curious as to what was on the other side of doubt. As doubt was an ever-present element in all of these projects, it gave us participants an opportunity to put this theory into practice.

I learned very quickly that an actor already possessed a modicum of faith or they would not have decided to pursue a career synonymous with financial uncertainty. The mission, then, was to make the student become aware of faith as thoroughly as they identified an awareness to doubt. Doubt and faith manifest as a feeling in the body. This is how we know that they exist. I suggested to the students that doubt has a distinct negative feeling and faith has a very distinct positive feeling.

I was tasked with the responsibility of acting the part of Macduff as well as choreographing three specific stage combat fights for the production: Banquo's murder, the murder of Lady Macduff and son, and fight between Macduff and Macbeth at the end of the play. Ultimately, I had the necessary platform to begin to put my theory into practice on three platforms: teacher, director, and actor. In the pages that follow I will analyze the process of putting faith into action with choreography and teaching stage combat.

The featured fight between Macbeth and Macduff presented the greatest artistic challenge. I decided not to use traditional broadswords or prop swords due to budget constraints and the minimalist aesthetic of the production. I imagined quarter-staffs, large sturdy dowel sticks, to function as both swords and quarterstaffs. I intended to play with two styles of fight choreography, broadsword and quarterstaff. Immediately, this decision raised personal doubts, which accompanied feelings of dread and failure, both decidedly negative feelings. Could I mix both fight styles effectively? Would the audience see and hear these “sticks” as weapons? However, as I became aware of these negative doubt filled feelings I gave myself the prompt to incorporate faith into the process. I already had faith in my ability to choreograph stage combat, and so my desire to choreograph two styles within a single fight could and should in theory be fun. So why was doubt creeping into the exercise? I decided not to abandon this idea. When I began to experience doubt I decided to see this as an indication of a possible positive outcome, or the ability to do something I had not done before. This shift in personal perspective made the journey exciting and enjoyable.

Applying faith in the face of doubt helped me identify my comfort zones. Faith helped me access a power to continue creating regardless of my lack of confidence in my abilities. I doubted my ability to work in a new aesthetic because the majority of my experience was with

traditional Elizabethan stage combat. Without the clang and spectacle of broadswords on shields, with which I was so familiar from my days with the Atlanta Shakespeare Company, I doubted my ability to provoke excitement in the audience.¹ I felt the “sticks” would be looked at as an apology rather than as a fight director’s intention. I told myself, “What would I tell myself if I were my teacher?” I would probably say, “Go for it!” Armed with this “as if”, I moved forward with the “sword fight without swords” to create something new.

Robert Hart, a CSULB undergraduate actor cast in the title role of Macbeth, presented a challenge from the start, as he had never before done any stage combat. At our first rehearsal he expressed fear in his capabilities due to this lack of experience. My first priority was to teach a lesson in stage combat safety. I then evaluated how Robert and I moved together through a series of simple tasks: slow motion martial arts improvisations, races in slow motion complete with a desire to win, and scenarios that explored loss in connection with a competition. We played with what it felt like to win and to lose. As part of this learning process I instilled early on that our fights would always be grounded in the character’s desire to win. This was an important element to dramatize the effects of loss in any fight or scene. I used Stanislavsky’s magic “as if” throughout the choreography and rehearsal process to maintain the integrity of the character’s fictional reality. I wanted to play with sensations connected to how it might feel to win or lose with regard to something extremely important. I asked Robert if he identified as a competitive person, and he answered he did not. Outwardly Robert displayed a laidback and calm disposition. I suggested he play our games “as if” he were extremely competitive. The difference in quality and nature of his play was significant. I coached, “It’s as if you are the high

¹ I was Artistic Associate and Senior Education Artist 2001-2008. I acted in all but three titles and was a featured combatant in the *Henry Plays*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo Juliet*, *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Cymbeline*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Macbeth*.

school star quarterback for the championship game, and it is “as if” this is the last pass in order to win, and it's “as if” I fumble.” We began to strengthen our faith in each other. I would ask after each rehearsal, “What would increase your faith in your abilities, or in me?” I honored all of his suggestions. Sometimes he would ask for repetition, sometimes he would say nothing. It was apparent he gained faith in his abilities through the magic “as if” and with practice.

I played with tempo and rhythm as a means to teach balance. It was important to know the difference between our inner versus outer rhythm and the character’s inner and outer rhythm. For example, as Robert and I began a mock race, in slow motion, I borrowed Stanislavsky’s prompt to imagine that even though we were moving in slow motion, it is “as if” our bodies were racing in regular speed as a way to experience desperation. We established a vocabulary we could agree upon as helpful. Robert would repeat a mantra we came up with together, “I’m not confident in where I am at, but I have faith in my ability to learn.” I thought this a helpful articulation of the importance of this thesis. We listened to each other, not only verbally but physically as well. We gained faith in each other’s abilities, which translated into a feeling of ease and the feel of camaraderie. This took time and work. The growth developed throughout several weeks of a rehearsal process. I determined we should both work towards an image of the kind of combatant we wished to be and in rehearsal we would start by crossing the threshold, stepping into that image of master combatant. We continued to respond to each other with a desire to win and react to the pains of loss every time we rehearsed. This work, initiated by Robert’s own faith in his abilities, and how we could grow in relationship with each other, was life changing for us both. It has altered the way I teach stage combat; for Robert it has led to a declaration of a life in the theatre. I will continue to work in this way, slowly, taking my time to evaluate my ideas with faith rather than repeating skills out of habit or bowing to self-doubt.

A fight can be broken down into a series of phrases: beginning, middle, and end. Accordingly we broke down who was on the “offense” and who was on the “defense” with each fight phrase. Robert responded positively to my use of sports vernacular as a means to create theatre. I combined sports and theatre terminology to reinforce creative play-- “As we begin working on the second phrase, this part of our scrimmage, our choreography, or our dance as you will...”-- as a means to relate with and engage Robert. When Robert experienced doubt in his balance or coordination, I suggested, “Now let's do the fight, “as if” you are a Jedi Master or as if you were a Samurai warrior,” and finally, “as if you were Macbeth and you had ordered the slaughter of Macduff’s entire family.” The ‘as if’ exercise provided Robert with the much needed leverage out of doubt to faith in his ability to be athletic and coordinated. Giving exercises that cultivate belief in the “as if” are ways a teacher can lead a student into having faith in the ability to play.

I created an atmosphere in rehearsal where we would begin by crossing the threshold from the pedestrian to a higher state of creativity; an atmosphere where we could work with the permission to fail. Was I always successful? Did Robert respond positively to all of my suggestions? Of course not, but I always worked to create an atmosphere of joy. I used Vakhtangov’s three directives to frame rehearsal: everyone experiences something at any given moment, experiences change constantly, and every single experience is individual.

At the start of every rehearsal, we would rehearse our fight without weapons, using our hands or fingers as a way to drill for precision and for the purposes of safety and muscular freedom. Two actors from the cast picked up their guitars and played the Pirates of the Caribbean main theme as we fought. Robert and I began to add sound effects and “play fight” with complete abandon as children do. Spontaneously we created a new experience based on the

established choreography. When we finished this “warm up,” I heard the guitarist say, “That was magic!” Fellow ensemble members from the cast who witnessed said, “That was amazing.” I could feel the atmosphere in the room change. There was a celebratory atmosphere, one with smiles, excitement, and joy. The laughter in connection with taking an amusement ride was present. When we did the fight the night before, in a run-through of the play, the atmosphere was completely different. It was dark, labored, and full of effort. This was the problem. The expected was supposed to feel unexpected. I knew I preferred this new atmosphere. I wanted to bring this energy into the fight. I wanted the energy of a thrilling action sequence, or the energy of spectators cheering at a boxing match. What if I established the quarterstaves as weapons in the show, but then took them away during a light cue before the actual fight? What if I supported this through strobe lights and sound effects, and what if those two actors created a really dynamic original theme to play on their guitars while we fought? Could all this provide the spectacle or magic I was craving? Almost immediately, doubt began to surge, complete with the familiar negative feelings and the voices in my head: “You could never do that!” “You have to have weapons in a featured fight!” “Those Quarter-staffs were ordered and cost money.” “The audience will laugh at you.” “Robert will think I doubt his abilities with the real weapon.” “The Director will never approve it.” The onslaught of doubt in connection with this idea meant I had to make a choice between believing faith would help me or not. I could have faith to move forward in the fulfillment of this research or not. I was aware of the negative feelings of doubt, and I began to identify and become aware of the positive feelings associated with faith triggered by doubt and stimulated by focus and an intake of breath. Feelings are associated with faith and doubt, they manifest after the initial thought or image enters the brain. I proposed the idea to the director, and she supported my decision and applauded the creativity.

My idea worked. It was considered an innovative piece of storytelling by the majority of our audience and the faculty. I was not confident that the illusion would work, but because of this research, I had faith in the ability to move forward with executing a new idea. I had faith in Robert's support through our working relationship. I had an intuition about the experimental theatre I wished to create, however I doubted my ability. When I doubted my ability, I had faith in the magic "as if", or the ability to improvise, or Vakhtangov's justification in unconnected situations to move me forward. Doubt signals the need to get active and connect up to positive feelings. The sensations specific to doubt can alert a signal for faith. Faith proves effective when used as a tool to accomplish a task. Faith can execute innovative ideas if used in the face of doubt. Otherwise doubt becomes an actor's interference. This experience has illuminated the negative feelings in connection with doubt as they coexist with the positive feelings and sensations accompanied with faith. The negative feelings associated with doubt can coexist with the positive feelings associated with faith.

The following is from Robert Hart's point of view. His analysis is helpful to further the discussion of faith as an acting tool.

This new tool called Faith: by Robert Hart

I have never participated in any type of fight choreography in my life. This part, and this fight was a new experience for me, one that I was looking forward to and one that scared me. I felt I could keep up with whatever athletic demands were placed on me physically and with the memorization of the choreography, but then I began to doubt myself because I had no prior experience. David related his doubts and shared what gave him faith. He said Faith was the pull towards something new, and heeding it was necessary in working outside of my comfort zone. This made sense to me, for who needs faith in a habit? We

need faith to change our habits. He instructed me to raise my hand when we were rehearsing the moment doubt began to interfere with my abilities. When I did so, David would ask, “What can I do to help you gain faith in your abilities?” We did a lot of slow motion fighting, balance work, and observation mirror exercises, or flocking exercises. We played a lot which gave me faith in my ability to use my imagination. I had seen a few shows where the fight choreography didn’t quite sell the illusion. It felt rushed and sloppy in certain areas, which made me think that I didn’t want to do that because it would be selling ourselves and the audience short. So I had faith in not doing what I didn’t want to do. This was a start. The slow motion exercises and the theatricality of playing helped me have faith in the combat moves. Rather than throwing me into fight choreography immediately, our first rehearsal consisted of finding each other’s rhythm, and playing with offense and defensive moves, highlighting the emotions of winning and losing. David always insisted I knew the difference between being fluid, solid, fulfilled, or unfulfilled. Rehearsal felt like playing sports or even dancing, which made me feel comfortable. I felt as if I was a valid part of the process. I felt free to contribute ideas. I felt completely safe, and if anything felt a bit off we would go back and adjust so that the fight was clean, precise, fun to do, and fun to watch. We were both engaged with one another and I had a lot of fun working so by the time I had the fight moves perfected, I was excited to see how the idea of us creating the illusion of fighting without weapons would work. I didn’t doubt it for a moment because I believed it to be radical storytelling. I had no idea David even for a moment doubted the decision, but it makes sense to me that the newness of the idea would elicit doubt. I am glad David used it as an indication of something worth exploring, as something that was new and not familiar, and

I learned from watching. I am curious moving forward about how I will respond when faced with feelings that come from doubt. I imagine it is harder than it appears to use faith, but I can see it is more rewarding. I reminds me almost of delayed gratification. I need more experience, and I have faith I will continue to work this way, especially knowing that the anxiety which comes from doubt is actually a positive sign I am onto something new. I like the idea that faith is pulling me towards something unexpected, towards my dreams. This will stay with me as I am certain to be reminded of it in auditions, future productions, meeting girls, etc.

Parkour Prince

For my directing project in Dr. Joanne Gordon's CSULB Theatre Arts Department class I choose to work on William Shakespeare's, *Hamlet*. I was interested in how to incorporate faith in action in connection with doubt and the awareness of the student's own ability. I wanted the actors to identify self-doubt so I could use a variety of exercises to increase the actor's faith. I cast Alexander (Alex) Romero, gifted Parkour runner and CSULB BA Theatre Minor, as Hamlet. He had little acting experience in our department. He is popular among the students and occasionally he had performed in Theatre Threshold productions, which are the student-run production company at CSULB. I first met Alex as a shadow teacher for Professor Ezra LeBank in Advanced Movement for the Actor class. I gravitated towards Alex's kindness and his sense of adventure. His ability to do a backflip impressed me. I cast him as Hamlet because he was physically gifted but doubted his abilities as an actor. This would present the opportunity to integrate his physical ability with his need to express himself verbally.

My initial doubt: Not another Hamlet! However, I became more excited about the piece of theatre I wished to create rather than fearful due to the negative voice in my head saying "not

another Hamlet.” I wanted to see Alex play Hamlet, and more importantly I wanted Hamlet to be the *Prince of Parkour*, doubts be damned. Alex’s words illuminate his relationship to doubt and how he applied faith in action.

Surrendering to the Process: by Alexander Romero

For me, the idea of acting has always been more enticing than the actual execution of it. I become swept up by exciting visions of myself playing powerful roles to touched audiences, but once a physical script is handed to me or I am given some kind of stage direction, my first inclination is to hide. The end result of what we’re trying to achieve seems abstract and implausible. The less rehearsal time we have, the more futile the situation seems. Working on this project with Connor, Alyssa, and David forced me to do something. It required me to take charge of my work in a way that I hadn’t previously. In most of my prior acting experiences, I could’ve gotten by on the performances of others or by holding onto the handrail known as the “script.” The problem here, however, was that I had become the script. The narrative progression David visioned was based on the actions that I created, from the things he wished to see, to what I felt in the moment organically. God forbid a human have the ability to make decisions independently, the responsibility seemed far too frightening. David would ask, what do you imagine yourself doing here? What’s it look like? There were points where I wasn’t even sure this performance was going to work out. I couldn’t figure what was “supposed” to happen in my “plan” that gave me comfort. The more I wanted “to act” Hamlet the more frustrated I got. David on the other hand had complete faith in us throughout the entire rehearsal process. I think this was what kept me invested. If there was someone with this much faith, I couldn’t help but be inspired to leap into the

abyss....which he made me do, over and over and over, but always with the acknowledgement that on the other side would be something of tremendous value. When the work felt easy, he made me do it again, until I knew in my bones it cost me something. The hours of one-on-one practice, experimentation, repetition and exploration were hard. I wanted so badly to understand what I needed to do, to reach some level of clairvoyance. The thing is that the more I struggled, the further I got from my truth. If I had been in the room by myself, I'd have likely been drowned by my own preconceived notions but I had a teacher who helped me refocus and re-center. And then I started to realize that the truth was simply the experiences I was having, not the concept of what I think it should be. With this (and much more rehearsal) I went into the final performance with as little expectation as possible, simply with the goal of creating something and having fun doing it.

The more I instilled my belief in Alex's full potential, the more he would gain, as he says "clairvoyance" in his already incredible physical capabilities. I would guide Alex's object of attention from doubt triggered from his performance creating interference, to an image which triggered the state of breath. This is accomplished through mindful breath and the active search of an image which gets the student outside of his inward experience of doubt and outward to an image where the student's attention stimulates the courage necessary to move forward, and through the fear of being able to perform. If Alex raised his hand while we worked, it meant he was aware of self-doubt. This was my cue to know the actors were aware of negative feelings. During one rehearsal while working on the opening monologue, "O if this too too solid flesh would melt," Alex hopped up onto a table top and started to pace back and forth. Right as he was about to speak the text, "Fie on it, ah fie"-he raised his hand. I responded, "Say Yes to it!"

He paced back and forth faster. I coached, "Use Words!" and he erupted, "I CAN'T" to which I yelled, "YES, YES YOU CAN" to which he ran to the end of the table and did a three quarter front flip, landed perfectly, and looked up and said, "Tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature possess it merely." I had never seen something so exciting and beautiful. Alex took a deep breath and acknowledged what had happened. He experienced tremendous self-doubt, but also had tremendous faith in his abilities to execute an idea through movement. It was the combination of his own creative individuality matched with faith in physical ability, which came together at once. He expressed Shakespeare's text in a way that was unique, and thrilling.

The Auto Drama

My personal "Auto Drama", an acting exercise in the Advanced Acting Process Class taught by Professor Hugh O'Gorman, was the culmination of my work for the semester. I was not required to do the assignment, but after I watched the undergraduates universally demonstrate such fearlessness and courage in how they expressed themselves, I began to experience doubt as to if I could be as vulnerable as they were. This is when I volunteered to do the exercise. Consequently I immediately felt the pains of doubt. I wondered if I could go as deep as the undergraduates did. The assignment must be a minimum of ten minutes in length. That is a long time to alone on stage. The Auto Drama performance must also be highly theatrical and deeply personal. It must reveal something personal about the performer and they and only they can be on stage. In this exercise the student is required to make a leap of faith, or as Professor O'Gorman instructed, "Go for it." In preparing for the assignment I found a handful of personal letters at home. One called out to me. I knew in an instant who wrote it and its subject matter. It was deeply personal. I thought I might read the letter and almost immediately

I doubted if I had the courage to reveal something so personal. I felt doubt signaling me once again, this now highly tuned awareness cued my desire to work through self-doubt by committing to the practice of faith. I had found the substance of my Auto Drama.

I knew what to do. When the students sat down, I made sure to part my lips and breathe, as I had learned in class as a way to become vulnerable which allowed the class to see me and for me to see them. I opened the letter my best friend wrote to me eight years ago and read it to the class. I made sure that each sentence was communicated directly to someone specifically. I knew it was important to communicate each thought. I was able to move through tremendous emotion in a way that was not planned or self-indulgent. Then, I showed a short film about a day in the life of my daily forty-five minute commute, on two trains, to get from my apartment to my undergraduate college, all this in a harsh Chicago winter day. Then I played a song I wrote about a date who dumped me, to finish out my piece. I placed three different light cues to match the three experiences. I did exactly what I wanted to do without self-generating emotions, pushing, or the need for validation from my peers after. I felt tremendous faith in my ability to be completely vulnerable but precise in my execution of tasks. I had faith in my ability to be seen by my peers and to see them. I remained open and receptive to my surroundings, and I paid attention to what I wanted to do, or as Professor O’Gorman, head of acting at CSULB says, “Where my attention goes, my energy flows.” Every time I work this way, my faith grows in my ability to become the actor I wish to be.

End of Analysis

Today I show up with the desire to learn and then let go of any expectations of performance. The uneasiness of “not knowing” often leads to a negation of what is happening in the moment. Now, instead of running away from it, I acknowledge it as a sign to get curious

about what is going on in the present moment. I am so much more aware and present on stage now than I have ever been. I have experienced doubt countless times in my career with no tangible tool to come to my aid. Because of this new awareness of doubt's signal, combined with the ability to employ faith as a tool, I experienced growth as a fight director, director, and actor. Without this thesis I would not have participated in the Auto Drama and would have missed out on such wonderful insight into my own craft.

How to Trigger Faith

The following is a suggested guide to move the student from the state of doubt to the state of faith. The trigger for faith is slow and mindful breath. The teacher can bring the student's attention from a negative image over to a powerful image of overcoming adversity. This is the sequence. The student becomes aware of doubt and makes a deliberate choice to meditate on breath. Physically the student should be in an open stance and not closed off. Instruct the student to part their lips to facilitate ease of breath. The student should be instructed to release tension. Now the student must think of a powerful image. The teacher should reinforce the student's action and acknowledge this shift in the doing. It is important to realize an image is a thought and a thought is an action. Faith is the belief in a choice without evidence or expectation. Faith is the manifestation of being in the present. If the student is present, there can be no doubt. This sequence is repeatable and can be mastered with practice. Faith gives the student permission to continue doing, where doubt signals the actor to stop.

Doubt is interference in the process of creation. Doubt is a physical and psychic outpouring of negative energy, a squeeze, and often results in a shutdown of the actor's imagination and fear manifests as interference in taking the next steps of the acting process, whatever those steps may be. The trigger for faith requires focus from the internal discomfort

and dreadful prognostication of future failure to a positive image. The point is not to reduce doubt but to use doubt as awareness to trigger faith through breath and the power of image. Instruct the student to remember a time when a goal was completed and then give the student permission to believe in the choice which triggered doubt. The link between the awareness of doubt and the application of faith is crucial in the creative process. Creation is, by definition, the formulation of existence. Something exists now which did not exist before. Doubt is the prompt to employ faith; faith is the prompt for the student into action. The new state of faith is the transition out of the interference caused by doubt. Faith gives the student belief in ability, and permission to continue doing, building, training, and creating. The student's creation is a manifestation of the student's faith.

The teacher must underscore the link between doubt and the application of faith by the stimulation of the student's inherent understanding of faith, be it faith in their immune system, or faith in science, or a faith in experience. The teacher may offer further clarification to the student regarding faith by stimulating memories of accomplishments or the completion of goals which resulted in the boost of the student's self-esteem.

It is important for the student to realize the innovative idea which stimulates doubt will also be the same stimulus to initiate faith. Doubt exists anytime a person encounters a new stimulus because the person does not have a habituated response to the stimulus. The transition from one state, doubt, to another state, faith, happens through evaluation, active participation, and accepting the idea which provoked the idea instead of denying it. Triggering faith can be as simple as believing in the choice. Another trigger for faith can manifest itself physically by the actor looking up and making a proclamation, "I am exactly where I am supposed to be, I can see what's right in front of me, and this doubt will not get the best of me."

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper is to explore the complex feelings associated with potential failure that is wrapped in the word, doubt. A student should be able to reestablish their relationship with doubt by using it as the cue to trigger faith. The rhetoric of faith has been widely used for over a century in actor training. Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov's concentration exercises, established yet evolving movement systems, the Michael Chekhov Technique incorporate image and faith as a way to bring the attention of the actor to the present. Doubt creates tension and disrupts performance. An arguable definition of performance is potential minus interference. If doubt is attached to the dread of performance, then the student can trigger faith to eliminate that interference and free the actor to release out fully.

Prior to my pedagogy training I had been simply "directing" scenes rather than facilitating an experience that would give the student ownership of a specific technique. Perhaps most importantly, I know now as a teacher the difference between the two. My time at California State University Long Beach, in graduate actor training, has opened up the scope of both my acting and pedagogical research. This research into faith in the art of actor training is not final, nor concluded, but within this thesis I make a genuine plea for my colleagues to join in this conversation as a move towards the inclusion of faith as a useful tool in the classroom which can aid an actor.

My relationship with the craft of acting has been turned on its head time and time again from running towards it with open arms, to fleeing it in tremendous terror. Today I understand doubt as an indicator, the signal man, informing me that I am heading toward challenging and interesting territory. Doubt only comes in connection with things that matter to us personally and it will cost us something. Faith is one of the essential tools that assists us as we move

towards our hopes and dreams. Without faith, I deny an original idea before trying, or I quit while in pursuit. Paul Tillich writes, “The question then is this: Is there a courage which can conquer the anxiety of meaninglessness and doubt? Or, in other words, can faith which accepts acceptance resist the power of nonbeing in its most radical form? Can faith exist without meaninglessness? Is there a kind of faith which can exist together with doubt and meaninglessness?” (174). Faith invites the need to be self-reflective and to exist in a constant state of evaluation. Faith can coexist with doubt.

Vakhtangov, suggests we create new points of view. Professor Alexandra Billings, professional actress and faculty member at CSULB, specifically challenges the student in her Viewpoints training to “go towards the new.” As teachers, our responsibility is to shift the perception of the student from a pedestrian or quotidian viewpoint toward the exploration of sensations that are unique, towards the newness of possibility, in an attempt to provide an atmosphere where the student can “get lost.” Students will demonize, vilify, or glorify professors if training does not contain a goal or connect to personal purpose. I was uncomfortable and frustrated for the bulk of my actor training because I could not make a connection between my frustration and the learning goal. I was in perpetual angst trying to figure out a problem without realizing the need to get creative. I asked Professor O’Gorman my first week of graduate school about my resistance and frustration, and he said, “David, that was your habit. You didn’t know what you were doing, so it made you mad.” Training continues to produce those same sensations, but those feelings and sensations have tremendous value now because I know that actor training can be about categorizing sensations. The sensations that come from an acting exercise have value and contain everything that is essential about the actor’s process. I know students can have faith in the equation of success: opportunity plus

preparation. By showing up to class, the actor can have faith in fulfilling one part of their journey towards this equation. Showing up to class will also make the student a better actor or I have faith if I show up to class I will become a better actor

Actors are really explorers of imaginative, physical, and emotional conditions. These emotions are powerful and often provoke a desire to run away or quit. Yet actors should train for this adversity and gain the ability to have access to emotions through vulnerability, and imagination through naivety. Actor training is about acquiring a practice and a way of working to connect to personal and artistic purpose. An actor's purpose is also a key to the actor's creative individuality. This process more resembles the peeling of an onion than the dressing of a doll. It is scary to stand in front of an audience and be vulnerable and yet that is exactly what an actor must do. A student needs the courage to remove complex social masks acquired through habit, to become vulnerable, naive, and enter into a new kind investigation with capabilities. This process is complex. Students are bound to experience sensations uncomfortable and unfamiliar on a scale so great that the only option may be to run away or to shut down. But armed with faith, actors will dive head first into their training with tremendous courage.

Stanislavsky quotes the great Russian poet Pushkin to make a strong point about faith, "A host of lowly truths is dearer than fictions which lift us higher than ourselves... It is our faith in them that lifts us. This is strong confirmation of the point of view that on the stage everything must be real in the imaginary life of the actor" (157). The student intuitively knows how to make believe and play. It is the teacher's job to facilitate a crossing from reality to imagination. This is a spiritual activity.

I believe the student should consider everything in training as a process to categorize sensations, and navigate through the chaos of that inventory. The message here is to make the student's experience a constant process of evaluation. If feelings of frustration, resistance, fear, or doubt become present, and there is no immediate danger, chances are a learning experience is about to take place. I suggest actors learn to become aware of the sensations which alert a strong desire to quit, and name it doubt. Instead of quitting or shutting down, they can learn to do something different, and use faith as a tool to move forward rather than retreat. Students must also learn to reserve all judgment until after the project is over, and have faith that the acting exercise is leading toward growth. I am not suggesting this an easy process. To have faith is hard work but essential in learning something new.

I posit an artistic process is like a birth. It is messy, strenuous, loud terrifying, spiritual and life changing. Stanislavsky agrees: "Our type of creativeness is the conception and birth of a new being-the person in the part. It is a natural act similar to the birth of a human being" (312). It is encouraged to have faith in the rehearsal process to give birth to another human soul. An actor needs a tremendous amount of nurture and a tremendous amount of self-care. Acting, like all great puzzles, will challenge and frustrate the will of the actor. It is the responsibility of the player to adopt strategies to attempt this puzzle with joy and wonder. Acting is ultimately gratifying. This is absolutely true and provable to me. Those I continue to associate with care so deeply about this craft. It takes courage to explore the unknown, and faith met with doubt or uncertainty will prove an effective tool.

Self-exploration, whether it be taught through Stanislavsky's quest for psychological realism or Vakhtangov's creation of fantastic realism, begins with a modicum of faith. A willingness to explore is a form of faith. Actor training becomes a constant process of evaluation in this regard. Like a baby taking a step; we need to experience the falling, before we can move forward. Billings writes in her thesis *The Moment Before The Moment Before*,

Stanislavsky breaks down the mechanics of what happens to an actor as they go from one event to the next, and Dr. Schechner invites the actor's infinite imagination to live truthfully in the middle of that transition. This process consists of constant practice, and the ability to dream. By crossing a threshold from one event to the next and by examining the space in between events, the actor learns the mechanics, the equations, and then, most importantly, to "un- think" them." (16)

This transition from familiar to unfamiliar is suggested as a means to begin. This process is scary but it is also fun, like diving off a high board, or cliff, or riding a roller coaster. It is visceral, and it is magical if we dare to go towards the unfamiliar, not as a victim, but as the victor. Every step is a step forward and when we decide to take that next step, we must first release into that choice and have faith in the body's ability to lean backward, fall a bit, and then move forward.

As teachers, it is our responsibility to foster language in the classroom which can aid in this profound and noble endeavor the student has decided to make. Much more than a semantic argument, faith requires the student to believe, and confidence requires the student to think. An abundance of faith can never harm an actor, but an abundance of confidence may not only come across as arrogance but actually manifest as interference. Confidence lacks the consistency needed for the pursuit of stage and film work. Faith, however, is timeless and can inspire an army to great victory. More research clearly needs to be done, but it is my intent to have a dialogue on the effectiveness of the terminology, "faith in action" versus "gain more confidence" in actor training. I think it right to say that doubt and faith are essential values in actor training, and perhaps hold more interest than the educational standards of trust and confidence.

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