

SEARCHING FOR A PATH TO AUTHENTICITY
THROUGH PHYSICAL THEATRE PRACTICES
AS THE BARON DOCTEUR IN PARKS' *VENUS*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores my attempt to develop a system to help achieve authenticity in performance. My primary research involved reading the works of such authors as Kristen Linklater, Anne Bogart, Michael Chekhov, Keith Johnstone, and several others. This theoretical understanding was supplemented by personal explorations in the studio, as well as in the rehearsal hall. I then attempt to synthesize the discoveries made therein into a set of practices that I apply to the rehearsal and performance of Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*. Ultimately I make the first steps toward discovering emotional access through interoceptive examination, embodied listening by deprioritizing vision and hearing, and spontaneity of action achieved through acknowledgement and acceptance of tension. Finally, I look at how I will continue this work in the future.

DEDICATION

For my mom and dad, Cathy and Kit Silcox,
who have been ceaselessly supportive of me in everything I do.

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INTRODUCTION

I was compelled to pursue a Master's of Fine Arts in Acting because I felt that my acting was technically proficient, but lacked heart. Although I had reasonably good diction, physicality and understanding of text work and stagecraft, I didn't feel that I was really communicating with my scene partners, connecting emotionally within myself, or really presenting my authentic self on stage. Although I have made many discoveries and had numerous meaningful explorations in this direction this year, I still feel that it is in these three areas that I struggle the most.

For the sake of clarity, allow me to define these three challenges and what they mean to me. Authentic communication means being open and receptive to all of my scene partners. Not only listening to the words and allowing them to affect me in the moment without racing ahead to the moments that are coming up, but also connecting to my scene partner's emotional state and allowing that state to inform my own. Furthermore, authentic communication means that the text not be calculated and then presented, but that it be an expression of my authentic self in that moment. I find I often perform my homework, knowing which words are most important and what the driving argument is; I don't allow that information to sink deeper and allow it to affect (or reveal) *me*.

The issue of sinking in and finding emotional connection is, to me, fairly straightforward. A waspy catholic upbringing had me, for many years, repressing a great deal of my emotional life, particularly those darker emotions that I didn't want to claim as my own. A great deal of life experience, coupled with plenty of soul-searching and therapy, have given me much more access to my emotional life in my day-to-day

existence, but somehow I find it very difficult to access real emotions when I am on stage. Ironically, perhaps, I find my emotions closest to the surface when I am in the audience of a great play, movie, or television program; I long to find this ease of access when I myself am performing.

Revealing my authentic self on stage means resisting the urge to *perform* and allowing myself to simply *be*. I am so enthralled by actors who make me feel that I am seeing some truth that they have within themselves. I believe that this may be the core struggle for me as an actor, and that finding a route to greater authenticity of self could help me along the path to finding emotional connection and authentic communication. Or, it could be the other way around, perhaps learning how to connect emotionally and communicate authentically will lead to finding my authentic self more clearly on stage. I find this the most daunting challenge to take up, as I often feel that I have trouble being authentic in my private life, that I wear different masks depending on the situation and that I perform my own life in a way. Taken together, these three can be called simply *authenticity*, as at times I think that it will be useful to take them as a unit, and at other times I will focus on each aspect individually.

I am very fortunate to be able to explore these areas through the character of The Baron Docteur in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*. This role is ideally suited to my needs: not only is Parks' writing densely emotional, offering me a wide range of emotions to explore, but through her unique writing style she emphasizes connection and communication between her characters as well as offering her actors the opportunity to connect within themselves.

My research in preparation for this role took several forms. Firstly, I decided to broaden my understanding of a range of approaches to the art of acting. I studied the written works of Anne Bogart, Michael Chekhov, Robert Lewis, Kristin Linklater, Sanford Meisner, Yoshi Oida, Konstantin Stanislavski, and Stephen Wangh. I also read books by Moshe Feldenkrais and Kelly McEvenue who wrote about the physical use of the body.

To complement the theoretical understanding I was gleaning from the authors above I also participated in workshops where I could begin to put these theories into practical application. To this end I took several week-long workshops. With Peggy Baker, a dancer, choreographer, movement coach, and member of the Order of Canada, I learned a physical theatre practice which focused on whole-body integration and using the language of sculptors to help us understand ways in which we as performers can use the body. From Sonia Norris, a physical theatre director and movement coach at The Stratford Festival of Canada, I took a mask workshop that focused on full and half character masks. With Stephen O'Connell, from the renowned physical theatre collective bluemouth inc., I spent a week studying how to work on collective creation. Finally the experience that I found the most useful was a very intense week at the University of Toronto spent with a team from Jerzy Grotowski's Workcentre that focused on integrating voice and movement and on freeing spontaneity in the body.

I also undertook regular sessions with an Alexander Technique practitioner and massages with a Registered Massage Therapist. Both of these practitioners were able to stay in dialogue with me about the patterns of tension that they noticed and were able to offer me techniques and practices to help relieve these tensions.

My research into *Venus*, the play itself, consisted of research into the author as well as into Baron Georges Cuvier. To better understand the nuance of Parks' writing, and how it plays out in *Venus*, I read interviews with Parks as well as accounts of the way that she works with actors in rehearsals. I also read some of Parks' own writing about her works and several essays written about her. I focused particularly on the rhythmic qualities in her writing and her use of rests and spells, hoping to use these as clues to lead me toward authenticity.

Baron Georges Cuvier is a Napoleonic-era zoologist who was associated with Saartjie Baartman, the woman whose life inspired Parks to write *Venus*. I used him as a real-life model for The Baron Docteur. I read several sections from Cuvier's book *The Animal Kingdom*, with particular focus on the sections about humanity and Georges' views about the differences between the races. I also read some biographical information about Georges from two encyclopaedias, as well as two books about the history of anatomy. I was hopeful that the information I discovered could help me understand the ways in which I could bring myself to the role authentically.

ARTISTIC CHALLENGE RESEARCH

Finding Milestones in the Words of the Masters

I have always been a performer. I was the class clown for many years. I would do impressions for friends and family (whether they asked me to or not). Early on I even learned to juggle and do magic tricks. Eventually I found my way onto the stage, where I could be a performer for people who actually *wanted* to watch me. As my skills developed I became a better and better performer, but I was dissatisfied. Over time I became aware that there was more to acting than performing. George Burns famously quipped, “The most important thing in acting is honesty. If you can fake that, you’ve got it made” (River Chapter 4). But I didn’t want to fake it any more. I had begun to search for a way to bring my self authentically to the stage. It was this challenge, to find authenticity in my performances, that brought me to begin my graduate studies in acting, and it has been the subject of my research over the past months. To clarify the path for myself I have identified three directions that I can explore in order to develop authenticity.

In this chapter I explore some of the ideas that I’ve discovered about how to find increased authenticity on stage. I discuss the importance of listening well and connecting to my scene partners. I explore ways in which I can give myself greater and more nuanced access to my emotional life. I look into tactics that I can use to reveal my inner self. I also outline some of the work that I’ve done in order to develop better body alignment and to release excess tension. I will discuss my longstanding battle with my third eye (that part of me which judges my own performances while I am performing), and some insights I have had into how to deal with it.

In my conclusion, I will draw a roadmap of the types of training that I would like to explore as I finish my graduate studies so that I can continue down the road towards true, simple, and expressive authenticity in my acting.

Listening with More than my Ears

Many years ago I read a book of quotations by and about Jim Henson, who is perhaps my biggest hero. I was struck by one quotation in particular: “Listening is the first step and the last step” (Henson 17). This simple sentence became one of the core philosophies of my theatre work. It is the axiom that I hold to whenever teaching or directing theatre. And while I always teach its importance in acting, somehow I feel that I myself have fallen short of real listening on stage. Too often I do not really hear what is happening around me. When others speak, it simply interrupts that all-important theatrical event: *my* lines. This attitude is in conflict with the true nature of theatre, as American physical theatre teacher Stephen Wangh states in his introduction to *An Acrobat of the Heart*, “Everything an actor does is not so much an act of *doing* as it is a *response* to a real or imaginary partner” (xx).

Over the course of my study I’ve come to two deeper realizations, both of which point to the fact that conceiving of the process as “listening” is doing me a disservice. Firstly, theatrical listening is not merely an aural experience, but a whole-body one, a whole-being experience. As renowned acting teacher Sanford Meisner puts it, “Listen with your gut, not your head” (Chapter 4). Famous actor and teacher Uta Hagen also touches on this in *A Challenge for the Actor*, “We listen with our entire being when we

are engaged in a truthful dialogue” (115). Clearly I ought to listen with all my senses, with my entire self. There is another side to consider, though. World-class voice teacher Kristin Linklater suggests, “One could say that the eye objectifies while the ear ‘subjectifies’” (327). I think that perhaps the final solution for me is to remember that I need to listen with my whole self, perhaps giving a slight precedence to the ear, and downplaying the importance of sight.

The second way in which my conception of listening has failed me is that I imagined it as a sort of one-way street. Even taking into account the idea of whole-self listening, it is still a static transaction: you speak, and I listen. Better still to conceive of it as dialogue, a constant two-way street.

This is an even more difficult concept to wrap my head around. Whenever I talk with anyone, on stage or off, it is like a sort of ping-pong match: I make my volley, they respond, I respond to the response, and so on. A better image may lie in Robert Lewis’ discussion of the importance of studying fencing, “The whole business of bodily coordination, the give-and-take, having to watch the other fellow’s eye, the lightness and so on, are great aids for the actor” (44). Recently, though, I have been trying to explore an image of my own to inform my listening: an arm-wrestle. Whereas in ping-pong (and even in fencing, though to a lesser extent) there is a you-then-me-then-you-then-me quality, arm-wrestling is about creating a unit, an “us,” and then negotiating within that relationship. I have tried to approach this in the shows and workshops that I have attended as well as in my classwork, but although I deliberately tell myself to try to communicate in a different manner, I find that I am completely unable to do so.

Even as I write this, reflecting on attempting this new kind of communication, I begin to wonder if perhaps this conception is faulty. Perhaps the goal could be to increase the speed of the ping-pong match. Exploring this will be a part of my process going forward, though I am perhaps least clear about what the road to discovery in this area will be.

Finding Simplicity in Emotional Access

The waspy upbringing I mentioned in the introduction led me to a place where I have many emotional blocks. Although I don't feel that I suffer in my day-to-day life because of emotional blocks, I often doubt that I am as emotionally "connected" as I ought to be to pursue a career as an actor. Kristin Linklater writes:

Actors who have "good voices" and have been complimented on them are sometimes surprised, if not offended, when I commiserate with them on their gift. It is nearly always those actors who have the greatest trouble finding their emotional resources. Those who start with weak vocal instruments tend to be better off in the long run, as dependence on the inner life pays off and the voice gradually learns to serve it freely (228).

This rings very true to me. My voice is one of the ways I protect myself from the world around me. It keeps me from having to be vulnerable, or at the very least, from having to reveal my vulnerability.

In many ways my emotions are “subjected to stringent internal criticism lest [I] reveal [my] organic nature” (Feldenkrais 6). By keeping my emotions constantly in check I remain in control of how I am perceived by those around me. Noted British actor Simon Callow writes in his foreword to Michael Chekhov’s *To the Actor* that Chekhov struggled with “...what he perceived to be his own shortcomings as an actor, notably self-consciousness and narcissism.” I feel that I function in the same way, both on stage and off: I curate my emotional life, carefully regulating my emotions to avoid revealing the sides of me that I find undesirable. Anger, hate, violent urges, even excessive sadness are edited out of my presentation of myself. My need to be well thought of, to be liked, keeps these emotions always at arm’s length.

I was most interested to see what the great thinkers in the world of the theatre had to say on this subject. And although there were a few slightly conflicting theories, the more-or-less unanimous opinion seems to be (frustratingly enough) that I should stop worrying about it so much and simply get out of my own way. Chekhov tells us, “... you need not ‘squeeze’ your feelings out of yourself...they will rise from within you by themselves” (Chapter 2). “Actors,” says Hagen, “please note: the emotion takes us, we do not take it!” (88). In *Method...or Madness*, Robert Lewis, founder of The Actor’s Studio in New York, advises, “It is a mistake to wait to act until you feel. I think that you must act and feeling will come; but in the meantime you must act” (90). In a slightly different vein, Keith Johnstone, British-Canadian improvisation pioneer, advises one of his students, “Just be sad. See what happens” (81).

It is clear that fretting about emotion serves only to drive it away. There seems to be an almost universal consensus that the clearest path to emotion lies through the physical body. “The emotion comes with how you’re doing what you’re doing,” advises Meisner (170). Wangh describes Polish movement theatre pioneer Jerzy Grotowski telling his class, “The requisite emotions...would arrive on their own if [the actor] would just pay attention to the physical details” (xxi). In *The Actor and the Alexander Technique*, movement coach and Alexander Technique practitioner Kelly McEvenue teaches, “It is through the body that the actor is able to access an emotional state time and time again in a scene” (17).

Although it is certainly not the only necessary step, it’s clear that a great deal of progress can be accomplished in developing my emotional access through my physical self. This physical process must be two-pronged. First, I must develop my body’s sensitivity, attuning it to the requirements of an actor’s psychology. I will accomplish this through experimenting with physical techniques such as Michael Chekhov’s Psychological Gesture, and Grotowski’s plastiques and rivers, which are a “*via negativa*...not so much a process of learning new skills as it is a process of uncovering old abilities we still carry deep within” (Wangh xl). The biggest step necessary for developing my emotional physicality is developing better use of my body and ridding myself as much as possible of extraneous physical tension. This is a big problem for me of which I was only able to scratch the surface during my research time.

Developing Better Use of my Body

The vast majority of the practical work that I have been doing this summer has been focused on better use of my body, with particular focus on addressing the problem of excess tension. For, as Linklater tells us, “Actors must develop bodies that are sensitive and integrated, rather than super-controlled and muscular” (8).

To find this improved use I took weekly sessions with Alexander Technique teacher Alison Taylor, had bi-weekly massage therapy sessions with Val Muzik, and took a week-long movement course with Peggy Baker at the Volcano Conservatory. Each of these three avenues helped me discover a sort of dictionary of images to help me connect with my body. Wangh points out that “Surrounding your body with imagery seems to have an effect on the body itself” (22), and I felt this effect in spades over the summer.

Through Peggy Baker’s work I developed images that helped me to feel my body working as a single unit, or “incorporated” as she put it. Together we also worked on developing the proprioceptive system. Feldenkrais writes that “A complete self image would involve full awareness of all the joints in the skeletal structure as well as of the entire surface of the body— at the back, the sides, between the legs, and so on” (21), and with Ms. Baker we worked especially on waking up awareness in places that I tend to ignore. We also worked with the language of sculpture, which reminded me to envision my body as pliable and plastic.

My massage work helped me to develop a clearer image of the physical systems of muscle, tendon and fascia that hold my body together. Not only does this give me a

clearer understanding of the mechanics of how my body works, but it also gives me an awareness that helps me deal with tense areas as they arise. For, “The first step in the process of change is the recognition of what it is you're doing” (McEvenue 12).

The images developed through my Alexander work, both in my practitioner’s office and on my own, helped me to find better alignment and release as well as assisted me in keeping from performing habitual gestures and actions in ways that end up causing tension or blockages in my body. This work informs the discoveries made in massage therapy, for although the anatomical understanding that I’ve started to develop is useful, “Systematic correction of the image is more useful than correction of single actions” (Feldenkrais 23).

Release of tension is difficult for me. I tend to want to fix myself in place by using my musculature. Mentally, I also tend to have a “strained attention” which “shackles [me] every bit as much as muscular spasms” (Stanislavski 310). I feel a direct link between my mental strain and my physical tension: each can feed into the other, but also, each offers a pathway to relieving the other.

Although I find physical work focused on relaxation very beneficial and often the most satisfying work, it can also be very frustrating at times. It is, however, a practice that I am eager to continue exploring for, as Stanislavski also said, “No matter how much you reduce tension, it will never be enough” (309). Moving forward I will continue the Alexander work that I have undertaken over the past year. I will also try to maintain my overall physical health through those boring old standbys: diet and exercise. On the subject of exercise, I would like to begin seriously pursuing Yoga as a means of

increasing strength and flexibility, and also for the ways that its meditative qualities can help me to find a clearer understanding of my self, so that I can bring that self to the stage in the best possible way.

Revealing my Self

“The need for constant support by one's fellows is so great that most people spend the larger part of their lives fortifying their masks,” writes Moshe Feldenkrais, creator of the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education (6). We all wear masks in our everyday lives, and these masks change depending on whom we are with. Once in a great while we experience a time when those masks fall away and we feel we are revealing our true selves for a short time. Though these moments are rare in real life, they occur frequently in plays. The job of the actor is not only to build a character, but also, through that character, to reveal something about the actor's self when the character's mask falls away.

As discussed above, I have blocks, physical and mental, that keep me from easily expressing my more negative emotions. These blocks also keep me from easily revealing my authentic self. However, if I wish to develop as an actor, I undoubtedly must develop the ability to reveal myself, warts and all. After all, as Stanislavski wrote, “I can't expel my soul from my body and hire another to replace it” (217).

In the past I got around the need for revealing my self through the use of “all sorts of theatrical tricks and clichés”; this served me well for a while and at a certain level of performance, but in the end they are “only a replacement for [my] real artistic feelings and emotions, for real creative excitement on stage” (Chekhov Chapter 1). I am

now looking to move past my bag-of-tricks and work on bringing my *self*, simply, to the stage.

Here again, the development will at least partly have to come from exploring my physical body. However, as this is a somewhat deep-seated problem for me that I struggle with also in my off-stage life, some work will also be done through journaling, and through visits with my therapist. The physical work that I hope to do is the type that Linklater describes as “ask[ing] that you drop away external distraction and dwell – perhaps for a few moments only – in intimate proximity with a simple, true you” (224). The goal, as Chekhov puts it, is to “feel my body and my speech as a direct continuation of my psychology...feel them as visible and audible parts of my soul” (Chapter 5).

Freeing Spontaneity

In my original conception of my thesis and the acting challenges I would address in it, I thought that the primary focus would be spontaneity. In the end, I decided that it was more important to focus on authenticity in my work. Interestingly, I’ve come to the point where I’m now interested in developing my spontaneity as a means to better my ability to be authentic on stage.

In the past I have tended to be very cerebral in my approach to a part. Like Keith Johnstone, “I accepted the idea that my intelligence was the most important part of me. I tried to be *clever* at everything I did” (17). I have worried that perhaps this has hindered me, and that I ought to be working without my intellect. My reading this year has shown me that there is room for my mind in my acting, but that there must also be

room for other parts of me. As Linklater puts it, “It is not that spontaneity is right and calculation is wrong, but that spontaneity should be possible and seldom is” (22).

Spontaneity is rooted in the subconscious. “Switch off the intellect,” says Johnstone, “and welcome the unconscious as a friend: it will lead you to places you never dreamed of, and produce results more ‘original’ than anything you could achieve by aiming at originality” (10), for “Our subconscious has its own logic” (Stanislavski 252). Johnstone advocates strongly for developing spontaneity by working to strip away any editing instincts and allowing impulse to flow freely. He invites creators to enter a “trance state” (154), in which the subconscious is able to directly express itself.

Stephen Wangh touches on something like this “trance state.” He teaches the importance of identifying the “flash” of inspiration from the subconscious, that keeps the mind from inserting itself between this “flash” and its expression. The “trick is to engage yourself in the physical action, because once you dare to follow your impulse, the very fact that you are doing so will imbue your image with reality” (95).

I didn’t have as many opportunities as I might have liked to explore these ideas in the studio or rehearsal room this summer. But the opportunity I did have I found very exciting. I took a collective creation workshop for three days with Stephen O’Connell from acclaimed Canadian performance collective bluemouth inc. In this workshop we created site-specific collective performances in small groups based on Picasso’s *Guernica*. We explored Grotowskian river work done with the eyes open and with the eyes closed (which I found very liberating), as well as rhapsodic writing sessions where there wasn’t time for second-guessing. I was surprised by the nature of the material I

created, and also how working directly from my subconscious allowed me to circumvent my ego when creating in a collective environment.

Working With, and not Against, my Third Eye

As an actor I have always struggled against my critical third eye: that part of me that judges my actions as I do them (or sometimes before I even take them). This often gets in the way of my ability to be in the moment and create spontaneously on stage. Johnstone quotes German philosopher Friedrich Schiller, calling this “a ‘watcher at the gates of the mind’, who examines ideas too closely” (79). As I have worked over the summer I’ve noticed my judging third eye coming in and disrupting me in rehearsals and performances, and during Alexander work and massages. I even caught my third eye getting in the way of my job waiting tables.

As with my search for better emotional connection, I think that perhaps much can be gained by reframing my conception of the problem. After all, “The actor who has nothing but reason and calculation is frigid. The one who has nothing but excitement and emotion is silly. What makes the human being of supreme excellence is a kind of balance between calculation and warmth” (Wangh xxxii). Or as nineteenth century Italian actor Tomasso Salvini said, “An actor lives, weeps and laughs on the stage, and all the while he's watching his own tears and smiles. It is this double function, this balance between life and acting that makes his art” (Stanislavski 288).

The key is not to conceive of my intellect as being an obstacle, but rather as a tool that opens up doors of possibility for me. After all, my third eye can be a useful tool to help me “become aware of [my] idiosyncratic manner in order to change it and make

it easier to adopt a character” (McEvenue 15). I must also remember that that intellectual part of me will not suffice; I have to include my emotions, my instincts, and my ability to connect with my scene partners and with the audience. As Hagen states, “We must use our total intelligence rather than our *intellectuality* to come to an understanding of the play and its conflicts” (106).

I don't feel however, that simply changing my attitude towards my third eye is enough to rid me of the blockages that it causes. The problem at its core is that the feedback I get from my third eye frequently drives me into old, habitual ways of acting. But by applying the concept of 'inhibition' that I've been developing through my Alexander work, I hopefully can turn that moment of over-analysis into an opportunity to discover a new path. As McEvenue puts it:

In the Alexander work, the conception of "inhibition" is one of actively and consciously being aware of our response to a stimulus. . . The actor applying inhibition allows a moment of stillness, where the unknown will be experienced, which invites something else to happen other than the habit. . .It is there, in the moment of our choosing the unknown and not responding with our habitual preconceived notions, that we allow ourselves to discover the many options of "yes" (14).

This concept of 'inhibition' will be particularly useful for me in exploring Parks' use of rests and spells in her work.

My original conception of my third eye is well summed up by Chekhov in *To The Actor*: “You may have noticed that the more your mind "knows" about the character, the less you are able to perform it” (Chapter 5). I will try to work from now on using my ‘total intelligence’ to open up possibilities, and see that “The more you know, the better you can imagine” (Bogart 48).

Solo Show

The final step in my artistic challenge research involved writing and performing a fifteen-minute, one-person show as a vessel through which to explore some of the concepts that I have been researching. I created a show that talked about my younger sister Laura, who is a Catholic nun, and how her life choices and mine are similar, and different. This experience served as a great litmus test for how well the concepts I had been thinking about quite academically had managed to sink into my performative self. There were a few successes and a few notable failures, both of which were very useful to note.

The ways in which I failed were in listening and in accessing emotion. The manner in which both of these failures came about was surprising to me. I had anticipated having a tough time with listening in a one-person show, as it meant I was essentially in a monologue with the audience the whole time. In anticipation of this problem I built a moment into the show where I brought an audience member up onto the stage with me. When performing the piece, however, I found that I was able to be in two-way communication with the audience, though somewhat imperfectly. Yet when I brought the audience member up on stage with me my listening one-on-one almost

completely broke down. Similarly, the failure in emotional access came at a counterintuitive time: although the show didn't delve very deeply emotionally (I had, in fact, deliberately decided not to try to deal with emotional access in my piece), on performance day one of the very last lines, which I had added only the night before, brought me to tears. I reacted to this unexpected vulnerability by quickly shutting it down—tensing my whole body to hold everything in check until I could get off the stage. In the end, because it was an *unplanned* emotional reaction, I kept myself from simply sitting in it. As a result I missed out on what could have been a very good moment in the show.

There were also several successes in the performance of the show. I think that I really managed to reveal my authentic self (though it certainly helped to make the show about a subject so close to home). I also used my body very well throughout the piece, keeping free of excess tension except for the emotional suppression mentioned above. This helped me to feel that I could act spontaneously from impulse through the piece.

I left this performance feeling that I had, in fact, managed to embody the principles of authenticity that I had been researching. Granted, the piece was hand-tailored to fit the challenges that I was working with—to push me in each aspect but not too far. Overall I think it was a great success, and I am seriously considering re-examining the show when I am finished my graduate studies.

Finding a Sense of Direction

My research this summer, both in the library and in the studio, has left me feeling somewhat overwhelmed. As I look forward to a final semester of studio work I am eager

to use the time to explore the ideas that I have been reading about for these past months. My voice and movement classes will offer me the freedom to explore these concepts internally and abstractly, while acting and text classes will help me find ways to turn abstractions into real-world performances. I am eager to discover which theories are useful to me, and which ones fail to resonate as strongly.

This summer of research has also made me even more aware of how much there is that I have left to learn, both theoretically and practically, though it has inspired in me the desire to pick one or two theatrical practices and focus on mastering those (as opposed to dabbling in a bit of everything). I am most strongly drawn to the writings of Chekhov, Grotowski, and Wangh, but I will try to approach my studio time with an open mind and allow myself to discover where my proclivities lie, working both with and against them.

As I enter my final year of study I try to remember the words of Stephen Wangh, somewhat frightening, and yet reassuring: “The paradox remains: you must discover your own path, but you can't perceive it while you are on it, only after you have traveled it” (xxix).

CHARACTER AND PLAY RESEARCH

Dissecting the World of *Venus*

In seeking to understand the world of the play and the nuances of The Baron Docteur I have undertaken an exploration of both Suzan-Lori Parks and Baron Georges Cuvier. For both of these noted figures I have looked at what has been written about them, as well as what they themselves have written. These explorations have given me much to think about and digest as I begin the rehearsal process for *Venus*, and offer me several clues about how I can help myself find authenticity in rehearsal and performance.

The Language of Suzan-Lori Parks

One of the most striking features of Parks' writing is her use of language. As Parks herself writes in *New Black Math*, "A black play...talks in code" (576). In *Venus* this code is revealed in many ways: in the playwright's eschewing of standard spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure; in the geographical structure that Parks gives to the setting of the words on the page; and in the importance that Parks puts on the non-verbal use of her "(rests)" and, more importantly, her "spells." As Parks herself puts it in Susan Letzler Cole's *Playwrights in Rehearsal*, "The rehearsal process has to do with understanding the rules of the rhythms of the language" (85).

I understand that it may seem somewhat counterintuitive to spend time focusing on language when trying to discover a physical path to authenticity, but, as Parks explains, "Language is a physical act. It's something which involves your entire body—

not just your head” (Cole 85). It is my hope that the extreme rhythmical nature of the text will help and not hinder my process. As Harold Clurman writes: “Finding the suitable tempo rhythm of the character will *lead* you to feel correctly in the part” (41).

The text for *Venus* has a sense of driving rhythm. Much of the dialogue scenes are composed of very short lines which seem to come right on top of one another, as:

THE MOTHER SHOWMAN
We seem to have an understanding.

THE BARON DOCTEUR
How much.

THE MOTHER SHOWMAN
A lot.

THE BARON DOCTEUR
Ok.

THE MOTHER SHOWMAN
A ton.

THE BARON DOCTEUR
All right.

THE MOTHER SHOWMAN
A mint!
A fortune!
Fort Knox!

Also, within individual characters’ lines there is often a repetition which reinforces this sense of driving rhythm, as in The Baron Docteur’s line which follows from above, “Here here take it take it” (88).

The physical layout of the words on the page also suggest this driving pace: the staggered right edge of Park's poetic writing gives a strong impression that the characters' ideas are struggling to be expressed, are forcing themselves out. Even The Baron Docteur's seven-page-long intermission monologue, which is ostensibly a simple reading of his paper on the dissection of The Venus, maintains this driving poetic form. In fact the only places in the play where this standard staggered right border is deviated from are the Negro Resurrectionist's "historical footnotes." These sections stand out distinctly when reading the text, and seem to have a much easier pace. Parks herself emphasizes the importance saying, "There's no rest where it's not written as a rest or spell" (Cole 100).

The danger in this of course is in turning this sense of pace up too high, driving the pace so hard that the rhythm is lost, or worse, focusing so much on playing with the rhythm that I forget to listen to the scene I am in. Parks herself warns of the dangers of succumbing too much to the tempo of her writing: "It's rhythmic but it's klunky [sic]," she writes, adding, however, that "It's not arhythmic" (Cole 100). In Cole's documentary article in which she follows Parks in rehearsal, she quotes Parks as congratulating her cast, saying, "You all weren't resisting the rhythm. You were playing *with* the rhythm rather than against it" (98).

The key, I believe, is to see that the driving rhythmic structure in Parks' writing reveals the density of thought and emotion within each character. These are all struggling to be expressed, but are contained to a greater or lesser degree by the characters at any given point. At times they do spill out ungraciously, but at other times

they are meticulously controlled. There are no gaps in thought or emotion; all of these run constantly, and powerfully, under the surface.

There are of course traps in this conception of the play that I will need to be careful of: the idea that The Baron Docteur is always brimming with thoughts could lead to a performance where I am always in my own head and not connecting at all with my emotional life or with my castmates. A slightly different conception of The Baron Docteur may help with this: not that he is constantly thinking, but that he is extremely sensitive and constantly reacting to his environment and to whatever emotions are bubbling up inside of him. The thoughts aren't formed in a void, but are a consequence of an *emotional* response to whatever is actually happening in front of him.

In contrast to this driving pace, Parks intersperses her text with what she calls 'spells.' The author is somewhat frustratingly unclear about the nature of these spells. She describes them in her author's notes to the play as "a heightened and elongated (*Rest*)" (7), but in Cole's text she is quoted as telling her cast "It's not a rest" (86). She describes it as "a moment of deep, intense connection with another character", and also as an actor "connecting very deep within himself, within his core" (Larson 219). She does give hints, however, on how to explore these spells, telling us, "It's like a major chord with left hand and right hand, like a chord played on an organ" (Cole 101). She also says that, "It's a moment when the characters will take a breath together" (96). In her essay *Resonant Silence: Love, Desire, and Intimacy in Suzan-Lori Parks's Venus*, Lisa Mendelman quotes Parks as saying that a spell "is a place where the figures experience their pure true simple state" (135).

It is these spells that are perhaps the greatest help for me as I confront my challenges. They offer me the chance, within the hectic demands of performing a play, to take time to touch base with myself and hopefully bring more of my authentic presence to the stage. What's more, it gives me the chance to connect directly with my scene partners, offering me the opportunity to engage (without text) in the constant two-way listening that I discuss in the chapter on my artistic challenge research. Finally, it is also a chance to try to engage in the concept of 'inhibition' that comes from Alexander Technique; it's a moment to pause and make sure that I'm not acting from habit but from instinct.

Parks' final gift to the actor with regard to the spells comes in her interview with Jennifer Larson, where she says that when actors "are like, 'I'm not feeling it here.' It's okay. Just know if you do feel it great, if not, that's okay. No worries... There it stands, but you can walk by it" (219). This is a blessed permission from Parks to perhaps fail at any or all of the spells. The spells aren't a push toward emotion, but an active release into...possibility, or into whatever I discover in myself or in my partner in the moment. Hopefully without seeing the spells as a high-pressure moment where I am required to perform, my third eye will rear up less often, or at least less intrusively.

Parks also says of the spells that they happen "most often before a deep, emotional turn" (Larson 219). Thus the spells also serve as a series of milestones, helping the actor navigate the dense text and find the emotional journey. In her essay about Parks' use of spells in *Venus*, Mendelman explains that they are divided into "four different types of spells" (135): "traveling spells" (135), "gazing spells" (136), "thinking

and negotiating spells” (137), and “loving spells” (140). The latter three of these map out the development of the relationship between The Baron Docteur and The Venus. The relationship begins with gazing spells, which represent lust: a look in which one person gazes wantonly at another. It then progresses to thinking and negotiating spells, which move beyond the “one way nature of the subject-object gaze” of the gazing spell (137). In the case of The Baron Docteur, the thinking and negotiating spells bring the interior life of The Venus into the equation and mark a closer connection developing between the two. Finally, there are the loving spells, which are defined by “the greater physical intimacy of touch” as well as “emotional intimacy between subjects” (140). Although in many ways The Baron Docteur may be seen as the villain of the play, the hints in the spells indicate that he really does grow to love The Venus. In fact, the final spell between them occurs just before The Baron Docteur confesses his love to The Grade-School Chum, the only time we hear him freely volunteer that he loves her.

The danger here is in thinking that each spell has a prescribed meaning, thus closing off the possibility of discovery. The key, I think, is to remember that these guidelines offer me a *question* to ask in the moment that I find myself in the spell; if I don’t “feel it” as Parks says, then I can ask myself what kind of listening I am actually doing in that moment. Am I gazing in a disassociated “subject-object” way (Mendelman 136), where I am experiencing a personal emotion? Am I negotiating with a scene partner in an almost transactional way? Or am I sharing an intensely personal moment with The Venus?

There is a final lesson that I hope to take away from my study of Parks, and it is a simple one: the importance of breath. As Susan Letzler Cole remarks, “Breath is, for Parks, an essential note” (90). Parks remarks time and time again on the importance of breath both in exploring the spells, as well as in how an actor works their way through the text. Hopefully I will be able to heed this advice and use breath as the touchstone to authenticity, emotional connection, and listening in rehearsal and in performance.

Baron Georges Cuvier as Inspiration for The Baron Docteur

In conjunction with exploring the clues that I can glean from the text of the play itself and Parks’ discussions of her own work, I decided to also look into the life and work of Baron Georges Cuvier. Many indications in the script hint that Cuvier is the inspiration for *The Baron Docteur*. Not only did he view the historical Saartjie Baartman while she was being displayed in Paris, but after her death in 1815 “Cuvier made a plaster cast of her body, then removed her skeleton” (Davie); echoing *The Baron Docteur*’s interest in the “maceration” of the Venus’ body. Also, the way in which *The Baron Docteur* seems to tantalize his audience with the promise that a description of the Venus’ genitals “will be revealed toward the end of my presentation” (99), echoes the fact that Baron Cuvier had Baartman’s “genitals...pickled” and displayed “in bottles at the *Musee de l’Homme* in Paris” (Davie).

My research into Cuvier involved reading his entry in two encyclopedias, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, as well as in Isaac Asimov’s *Biographical Encyclopedia of Science and Technology*. The former is somewhat more detailed, whereas the latter (in

Asimov's unique way) humanizes the scientific figure. I also looked into Cuvier's most famous piece of writing: the book *The Animal Kingdom*, originally published in 1817. I was fortunate to be able to read an early second edition of the book, which was printed in 1851.

In their book *The Playwright at Work*, authors Rosemary Tichler and Barry Jay Kaplan describe Parks' characters "supply(ing) a performative rendition of their splintered selves occupying a liminal space" (33), and much of what I discovered about Cuvier reveals a "splintered" self. He also occupied a liminal space himself, as the *Britannica* points out: "Cuvier's lifework may be considered as marking a transition between the 18th-century view of nature and the view that emerged in the last half of the 19th century as a result of the doctrine of evolution."

Cuvier's splintered self came through in his struggle between remaining an "active protestant" (Asimov 264), who was "devot(ed to) the literal words of Genesis" (265), and his scientific and intellectual rigour which Asimov described, calling him both a "monster of erudition" (266) and an "intellectual dictator" (264). Cuvier is, after all, considered "the founder of paleontology" (265) and also "established the science of comparative anatomy," not to mention the discoverer of the pterodactyl (*Britannica*).

Cuvier divided humans into four races: the "Caucasian", the "Mongol", the "American", and the "Negro". One thing that becomes clear in Cuvier's own writing is his firm belief in the supremacy of "European Caucasians", as well as his assertions that "Negroes" sit at the very bottom of the human ranks. He begins his pages-long

discussion of the human race by stating that all races must be considered a single species because of their ability to reproduce across racial lines, but follows this with an extended footnote explaining that this isn't necessarily true, as nature shows multiple examples of inter-species reproduction (49).

Further reading makes it clear where Cuvier perceives the species line to be drawn: whereas Caucasians are described as being "distinguished by the beauty of the oval which forms the head" (49), black Africans are the only group to be compared to an animal, described as having a "projecting muzzle and thick lips (which) evidently approximate it to the apes" (50). He goes on to comment that the "hordes of which it (i.e. the "Negro" race) is composed have always continued barbarous" (50).

Compare this to his description of European Caucasians (which, it should be noted, he takes great pains to differentiate from Caucasians found in Asia or in Northern Africa): "It is by this great and venerable branch of the Caucasian stock, that philosophy, the arts and sciences, have been carried to their present state of advancement; and it has continued to be the depository of them for thirty centuries" (50).

Cuvier gives so little credit to the black Africans that, in a section comprised of five large pages of very small font delineating the specifics of each of the "four" races, he completely omits any mention of black Africans. The editors of the second edition (edited and published after Cuvier's death) graciously rectify this mistake with the addition "the fourth class comprises only the Hottentot and Bushman race. A fifth class (here the editors are pushing forward their own, updated, taxonomy) are the Negroes" (53).

Cuvier also shows a strong misogynist bent, describing the creation and use of fiat currency as bringing forth “the vices of effeminacy” (49). In fact, all of his descriptions are based on male anatomy except with regard to specifically female organs. This, however, is somewhat understandable. As Hugh Aldersley-Williams explains in his book *Anatomies: A Cultural History of the Human Body*, “Anatomy texts place unfair emphasis on the male body, not only because anatomists and surgeons were men, but also because male cadavers were what tended to issue from the gallows” (8).

Certainly The Baron Docteur is not a one-to-one substitute for Cuvier. The Baron Docteur is an anatomist, whereas Cuvier was a zoologist and a proto-palaeontologist. Also, there does not seem to be any evidence that Cuvier and Baartman had any relationship whatsoever. Certainly during Baartman’s time in Paris she was kept (‘owned’ might be a better term) by a person much more like The Mother-Showman. And though Baartman may indeed have died of syphilis (and this is debated), her official cause of death is given as “inflammatory and eruptive sickness”, most probably contracted during a period where she was forced into prostitution (Davies).

However, there are many insights that I have gleaned from looking into Cuvier. The most useful, I believe, is the vast difference that The Baron Docteur would have seen between himself and The Venus. In his eyes, The Baron Docteur, like Cuvier, is a member of the most developed race, in the most developed part of the world. He is “very” rich, received the best education, and is in the inner circle of the leader of the country. Similarly, Cuvier was invited to join Napoleon on his expedition into Egypt

(though he ultimately declined) and served as Napoleon's Imperial Inspector of Public Instruction (Britannica). The Venus, on the other hand, is impoverished, uneducated, and a member of a race which, if human, is only barely over the threshold. What's more she's a woman!

Thus, The Baron Docteur's sexual desire for The Venus may stem from a digressive sexual appetite, and the desire to be with something that is less than himself. The limitations of her faculties and the low nature of her racial stock make the relationship equitable with pedophilia or perhaps bestiality in his eyes. Not only does this transgressive desire help me to keep the stakes high, they drive the weight of the obstacles put in place by The Grade-School Chum to the highest limits.

Also, this difference in status between The Baron Docteur and The Venus may offer me the opportunity to allow myself to be more vulnerable. In the same way that one can easily let one's defences down with a child or a dog because they aren't the same kind of threat as an adult, The Baron Docteur may be able to let his defences down with The Venus because he doesn't see her as threatening as he would one of his peers.

Added to this transgression is The Baron Docteur's marital infidelity, which is in itself a breaking of natural laws. Cuvier writes two extensive paragraphs on scientific proofs that life-long monogamy is the natural state of man (48).

Finally, looking into the writings by, and about, Baron Cuvier has helped me to understand that he was also human. The Baron Docteur could easily be considered the principal villain of *Venus*. Unlike The Brother or The Mother-Showman, his manipulation of The Venus doesn't come from a need to escape poverty, but merely the desire for

even more wealth, fame and notoriety. However, there is a trap in not seeing the whole person behind this character. As Parks tells one of her actors in *The Playwright in Rehearsal*, “You don't have to *play* evil. You are evil” (87).

Cuvier is described in the preface to *The Animal Kingdom* as “much beloved for the kindness and urbanity of his manner” (1). In his writing he sometimes delivers a deliberately poetic turn of phrase, as in his description of the end of human life: “The different vessels become gradually obstructed; the solids become rigid; and after a life more or less prolonged, more or less agitated, more or less painful, old age arrives, with decrepitude, decay and death” (47-48).

He is even described as having a wry sense of humour in an anecdote reported by Asimov: “One of his students dressed up in a devil’s costume and, with others, invaded Cuvier’s room in the dead of night and woke him with a grisly ‘Cuvier, Cuvier, I have come to eat you.’ Cuvier opened one eye and said, ‘All creatures with horns and hooves are herbivores. You can’t eat me.’ Then he went back to sleep” (264-265).

Whether or not this story is apocryphal, clearly Cuvier was understood to have a sense of humour.

What these insights into Baron Cuvier’s personality offer me is the freedom to bring every part of myself to the rehearsal process. I don’t have to be constricted by a two-dimensional conception of The Baron Docteur. Every situation can be approached with every facet of my authentic self, including my humour, my own eruditeness, or my aesthetic sensibility.

Historical Era and Original Production

Finally, I conducted research into the historical era in which *Venus* is set, as well as the original production, directed by Richard Foreman and performed at the Joseph Papp Public Theater in New York.

When delving into France at the turn of the nineteenth century, the dominant theme was best summed up by German art historian Jakob Rosenberg, who is quoted in the introduction of Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War* as calling the period a "...deep revolution in philosophic, social, and political concepts that shook the western European world" (1). For *The Baron Docteur*, the period of the play (which roughly spans the years 1810-1815) would have been very tumultuous indeed, beginning in a year that was "Napoleon's zenith," and seeing within that time that same leader twice abdicating the French throne (Grun and Stein 381). As someone who worked closely with the Emperor, *The Baron Docteur* would have been aware both of the successes of Napoleon's career, such as "The *Code Napoléon...*" which brought "...the standardization of law, open courts and trial by jury" to much of Europe, as well as the great failures, such as the failed invasion of Russia in 1812 (Wright 65).

However, the more I looked into the play itself, the clearer it became that the historical context wasn't important. Parks' play is rife with anachronisms: The Chorus of the Wonders talk about jet-lag, and *The Baron Docteur* in his long intermission speech (ostensibly given at the Royal College of Surgeons) mentions a lecture by Tomas Henry Huxley (which occurred some thirty years after Cuvier's death) and also Dr. Todd Wood

(who conducted DNA research into the relationship between human and chimpanzee more than a century after that).

In addition, Peter Francis James, an African-American actor, originally played the role of The Baron Docteur. Clearly Parks and Foreman were not concerned with the political machinations of Napoleonic France, for this piece of casting removes even the very basic and contemporary political commentary about a white man taking a black lover. The focus in *Venus* is steadfastly kept on the simplicity of the human relationships that The Venus lives and dies by.

This eschewing of the historical period is further confirmed in reviews of the original production that describe the world created as a “singular limbo land” (Brantley). In his New York Times review of the play, Don Shewey describes it as having an “aggressive surrealism,” being “fiercely eccentric,” and including “enigmatic vaudeville turns” (Shewey).

In fact, Parks’ utter disregard of the historical era prompted me also to disregard the original production and the trap that would come from basing my work on it. Parks herself seemed almost blasé about the production, saying about a flashing red light that the director added three days before opening (and which was on throughout the whole show), “I love that flashing red light! I haven’t asked [director Richard Foreman] why it’s there.” What Parks seems most interested in is the humanity of the characters on stage, and so that is where I will focus, only looking into my historical research when it helps me find something more human in the character that I am playing.

APPLYING MY RESEARCH

Bringing it All Together

As I contemplate entering into rehearsal, the biggest challenge that I face is in curating all the techniques, theories, and ideas that I've accumulated over the last year into a manageable system. I think that the key word here is 'system.' As Robert Lewis tells us, "It is meritorious to insist on forms" (108), and so my goal is to create for myself a clearly defined pathway into rehearsal and performance, as well as giving myself guidelines on where to focus my energies once I am performing.

Prep Work

The first step that will be taken in my preparation will be to make sure that I am off-book for the play before the rehearsal process starts. "The actor's work is to a significant extent a matter of waiting and being silent 'without working'" (207), says Michael Chekhov, and I don't want to be spending the time during rehearsal working to memorize my lines when I could be exploring the character and listening closely to my scene partners. In the past I have always avoided spending too much time learning lines before entering the rehearsal room. I didn't want to end up locked-in to a particular reading or understanding of what I am doing at any given point. This practice came from a few experiences when I was a young actor when I did end up making decisions too early on and then being unable to find my way to newer, better decisions when it was needed by the play. However, to quote Harold Clurman again, "There are nothing but obstacles in the creation of a part. Each new stage of her rehearsal creates obstacles" (147), and although being firmly off-book before rehearsal starts may present

certain obstacles, I think that in the many years that I have been growing as a performer I have learned to overcome those traps. I am, after all, much older and perhaps even a little wiser than I was then.

The Warm-Up

The next step in preparing for the role of The Baron Docteur will come from a strong warm-up routine that will follow a fairly prescribed path, although with a certain amount of latitude along the way. The ultimate goal of the warm-up is to find what Peggy Baker called “integration.” That is, attuning the body so that it works cohesively as a single unit. Or, as Linklater put it, “Voice and speech, the soul and the mind, are not separate from the body but originate from it” (101). For, “we act as a whole entity even when this wholeness is not quite perfect” (Feldenkrais 51).

However, within this broader goal for my warm-ups, I’ve articulated four more precise goals that I will explore for a portion of each warm-up session:

- 1) To help distance me from my physical habits and otherwise limber myself physically and mentally. For this section of the warm-up, I have several ideas about exercises I might use. Some of these exercises are really very simple: for example, stretching and yawning exercises that I explored in the studio in my fourth term under the guidance of movement teacher Erika Batdorf. I’m also interested in investigating some very simple, physical warm-up exercises I did with Peggy Baker over the summer that focus on “integrating” the upper and lower body into a single unit with a single purpose, and on heightening awareness throughout the body. I would also like to

employ some exercises that I learned when working last winter with a group from Grotowski's Workcentre. These exercises are very similar to the *exercises corporels* described by Stephen Wangh in *An Acrobat of the Heart*. Although they have clearly changed a little since Wangh worked with them, they still have the same aim: "...relieve us of our...habits of sitting and standing, and in so doing they grant the lower halves of our bodies the freedom to move, to sense, to feel, and to express the much greater range of emotional life" (61).

2) Start attuning my listening to the room in which I am working, as well as to the people in the room with me. I might approach this in several ways: by working my way through my five senses and noting what I can hear, see, smell, taste, and feel in the room; by speaking some of my key lines and seeing how I feel they interact with the room and whomever happens to be in it at the time; just spending a few minutes listening to myself and my inner processes, feeling my breathing, my circulatory system, my digestion, and my proprioceptive system; and even taking note of my thought processes, something along the lines of mindfulness meditation. If I can get the blessing of the director and the agreement of my scene partner, I may also try to do some warm-ups in this section with the actress playing The Venus: a game of catch, or maybe an arm-wrestle, or even just a walk through the halls could really help me to understand the real person that I will be playing with on stage and not just the conception that I have of the character of The Venus.

3) Begin connecting with the emotional touchstones that The Baron Docteur arrives at throughout the play, exploring the full emotional range of each one. This section is, I think, the most important and should easily take half of the warm-up time.

Early in the rehearsal process, through physical action, this will involve looking for pathways into certain emotional states that I have discovered either through textual exploration or in rehearsal of a scene. This could come from a series of Yoga poses, simple calisthenic exercises, work on Michael Chekov's Psychological Gestures, or even moving to music which helps bring me to the appropriate emotional place. Later on in the rehearsal process, when I have had experience with all of the touchstone emotions that I think I will need for the play, I will hone in on the precise *physiological* changes that either accompany each emotional state or that act as a catalyst into each state. I will then work on shortening the route into each one, ideally learning to quickly go in and touch each emotional state, quickly get out of that state, and then quickly move on to the next one. This I hope will help me access real emotions on stage come performance time and not simply playact some emotion that I have intellectually decided on in advance.

4) The final section will work on developing the physical container in which The Baron Docteur contains his emotions. One of the ideas about The Baron Docteur that I have been exploring with the director is that he is, for the most part, very, very still. As a man of much breeding (not to mention a surgeon), he would have learned to always be in control of himself. This of course does not mean that he lacks a vigorous emotional inner life. In fact, I want to explore the idea that he experiences great swings of emotion throughout his scenes, and that the boiling pot of his emotions is matched with an incredibly tight lid that keeps it all contained. Thus the final part of my warm-up will be figuring out the ways that I can put these control mechanisms on the inner emotional life that I will have just developed. I will have to avoid the trap of using excess tension to

accomplish this containment. This doesn't mean that I won't be using tension to contain the emotional life (sometimes it may require quite a lot), but that I work to make sure that I'm not using any more tension than I absolutely need, and that I don't use tension patterns which would constrict my voice or limit the fluidity of my spine.

Throughout the warm-up process I will be varying the particular exercises that I work with in order to discover over the weeks which exercises really work for me and which ones do not. The goal is to have a small toolbox of exercises that I know help me get into the particular place I need to go for this role, so that come opening night I will have an even more focused warm-up routine to get me ready for performances. I will try to consider my warm-ups "a series of questions [I] ask [my] body" (Linklater 23) to help me see on a day-to-day basis exactly what is most useful for me.

In the Rehearsal Room

After my warm-up is done and it comes time for rehearsal itself, I want to use this time to really attune my listening. I want to work on listening to the actress playing The Venus, being, as much as possible, aware of where she is and what she is doing and experiencing. Stanislavski notes that, "It is much harder to truly commune with your partner than to *represent* yourself as being in that relationship to him" (222). My goal, then, will be merely to bring my awareness to her, and not work to show in any way that I am doing so.

However, while listening intently to her I don't want to sacrifice my awareness of whatever else is happening in the room around me. In some ways I think that this mirrors the experience of The Baron Docteur, whose primary focus in almost every

scene is The Venus, but who is nevertheless always aware, to one degree or another, of the society around him and what they may think about his relationship with her.

I want to strive, while I maintain these pathways of communication, to never let them become an end in themselves, but a catalyst for my own actions. I will seek to use whatever I am offered in the rehearsal room, no matter what. As Keith Johnstone says, “The actor who will accept anything that happens seems supernatural” (100), and it is this supernatural ability to listen and accept for which I will strive. The danger here is in trying to be clever with my responses to the stimuli in the rehearsal room. Again, Johnstone has sage advice: a reminder to the performer that “the more obvious he is, the more original he appears” (87).

The final thing I will attempt in rehearsal is to give myself permission to fail. This is a mantra I hear a lot, but I think that it is much harder to accomplish than it sounds. To not just make a less-than-perfect choice, but to really fall on my face, to embarrass myself, perhaps even to make my director or my fellow actors upset with me, is something that I have rarely accomplished in rehearsal. I hope to really allow myself to follow my instincts, to not edit, to take the time to explore within myself even if it is far, far too much time. This would be a big change from my usual way of rehearsing where I am very aware of pleasing the team that I’m working with, at times to the detriment of my personal process.

On Stage

As I move into performance my plan is to continue my warm-up. Rather than exploring new warm-up possibilities, I will go back to the techniques that served me well

in rehearsal. The broad shape will remain the same, but for each section I will have a shortlist of exercises to go to, as well as text, music, and images that will help me to get into the show as much as possible.

Similarly, while on stage I hope not to feel locked in to particular line deliveries or gestures, but to work from what I am receiving within each moment from my scene partners. This is not to say that I won't have any structure whatsoever, but that I will allow my performance to be "sensitive and integrated, rather than super-controlled and muscular" (Linklater 8). So, if there is a line that the director needs delivered in a particular way, or if there are pieces of blocking that need to be executed just so, I will find an organic route to all of these places from my inner life, and from what I receive from my castmates and the audience.

In order to keep myself focused and in the correct headspace, I will spend the entire show in the theatre space from when "places" is called until after the curtain call (barring, of course, technical requirements that may take me out to another room for makeup or costume change, though I don't foresee much of this). I want to be able to hear the real voices of the actors and the real breath of the audience, and not simply what is picked up by the Tannoy speakers off-stage. As much as is possible without being in the way (or being seen myself), I want to be able to see the action as it is actually unfolding on stage, and not through a digital monitor.

The Great Trap: Shortcuts

In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski warns his students that, "The actor, no less than the soldier, must be subject to iron discipline" (3). This discipline is the key to the

success of this research plan: resisting the urge to sleep in an extra hour and not do my warm-up, resisting the call of friends as I am working in the room, or resisting the easy choices which allow me to fall back into my old habits. This difficult process of learning to “work at something that is, basically, pure fun” is a big part of what I hope to accomplish with this show (Wangh 5).

I also need to make time shortly after each rehearsal to assess whether or not I am achieving my goals. Am I really listening? Am I finding stillness? Am I doing what I feel is expected of me, and not what I really need for *my* process? In order to keep myself on task I will try to use my journaling to pinpoint a small number of concrete goals for the following rehearsal, and to judge whether or not I achieved the goals that I had set the day before.

In this way, I hope to keep myself from falling into physical or vocal habits, habitual ways of listening, habits which block me from expressing my true self, or habits of how to ‘behave’ in rehearsal. I will certainly fail many times at this, and I hope that I can find forgiveness of myself in these moments too. The ultimate goal, however, is to keep myself aware and to try to see the trees as well as the forest.

Conclusion

As I sit here after the closing of *Venus*, I have much that I can say about the process. In the name of succinctness, I will focus in this conclusion on what I feel were my successes and failures, a discussion of my experience in developing my warm-up (as this was such a central aspect of how I hoped to work on the play), and a small section on what direction I feel I should be taking as I move forward. As a small aside, and for the sake of clarity, I'd like to talk a little about the ways in which outside circumstances altered the course of the show.

After our fourth week of rehearsal, and just before beginning to work on-deck for a week before launching into tech week, a strike was called at York University that shut down all academic activities. For two weeks we met once a week to rehearse in a space downtown. There were significant absences in the cast in these rehearsals, however, and they were done not with the idea that we were making progress with the show, but simply that we were keeping our work from sliding backwards. Ultimately this labour disruption resulted in the show being cancelled. With five days notice we completely re-worked the show for an unmounted showing in our rehearsal hall. Although I touch on this only briefly in this conclusion, it will inform the reader's understanding of some of the journal entries in Appendix A.

Warm-Ups

Before discussing what I perceive as my broader successes and failures, I'd like to talk about my experiences with my warm-ups. I entered this process with the idea that my warm-ups would be the centrepiece of my exploration in *Venus*, and I believe

that that was indeed the case. The rehearsals and performances where I felt I had the most success were strongly correlated with a successful warm-up. Furthermore, some of the most useful discoveries I made about *The Baron Docteur*, and about specific moments in the play, arose directly from my warm-ups and then were applied to my work in my scenes. For example, midway through the rehearsal process I was doing a river work exercise based on my lines in the first scene with *The Venus*. The physicality I found in this improvisation was centred around a large cat stalking its prey on the savannah. This image then translated itself into the scene the next time I rehearsed it: whereas my physicality was very pedestrian, my quality of the relationship, the ways in which I was listening, and even my breathing patterns all mirrored this predator/prey relationship.

In terms of the nuts-and-bolts construction of my warm-ups I managed to stick roughly to the pattern I outlined in the chapter on applying my research. I began with stretching, mixing both the stretches one might do as an athlete (merely to loosen tight muscles) with the stretch-and-yawn work I have been exploring this year. In these sessions I would try to mix moments of extreme release (where I would drop out of a stretch and try, sometimes for minutes at a time, to just let myself sink into the floor) with moments of extreme tension (engaging as much of my musculature as I could). I did not end up using much of the Grotowskian *plastiques* I had learned, but this was not willfully done; rather it failed to happen very often because I failed to have an impulse to try it very often. Here I think I ought to have noticed this gap earlier and made a concrete effort to include them once or twice.

Perhaps the most difficult part of my warm-ups was attuning my listening. I ended up doing my warm-ups completely alone as often as I could as I found that having other people in the room constrained me, both because they made me shy about being completely spontaneous, and also because I found the possibility of socializing distracting. Being completely alone in a room which had been deliberately soundproofed left me little to work with in terms of listening. In the end, this time alone turned into an opportunity to practice balancing my focus on external and internal stimuli simultaneously. Oftentimes the external stimuli, and hence the internal reactions, were quite subtle. In the future I might like to deliberately invite someone else (with whom I feel comfortable) to warm up with me so that I have someone with whom to react.

In terms of exploring emotions during the warm-up, I did so by turning my attention inward to the particular physical processes that accompanied each emotion. For example, shame manifested itself with a slow sliding sensation in my skin and muscles, like gelatine melting, accompanied by constriction around my heart and lungs. As my process continued, I found myself moving from exploring emotions in these moments to exploring primary relationships (such as father/daughter, teacher/student, or lover/lover) and states-of-being. Ultimately it was the states-of-being that resonated with me the most, and I developed a progression of states-of-being which mirrored the arc of *The Baron Docteur* and which I would explore physically in warm-ups before performances. The progression was as follows: “I Am Approaching the Goddess” -> “God is In Heaven and All is Well” -> “I Am Betrayed” -> “I Am Falling” -> “I Am the Betrayer.” The step that I did not explore in this process was using music to explore the emotional landscape of *The Baron Docteur*. Although I tried to find music that seemed

suitable, ultimately I was always unhappy with the pieces I found and decided to abandon the tactic. In the future I would like to try using music in my warm-ups, perhaps being less picky if I don't find the perfect piece.

Finally, the idea of developing a physical container in which to contain the emotional life of The Baron Docteur was one I abandoned very early on. It became clear to me that this was in fact merely serving to lock down my physicality and close off possibilities. Ultimately it was distancing myself from my main goal, authenticity. In the moments where I felt The Baron Docteur needed a certain amount of poise or control, I instead focused on the parallel circumstances I could find between The Baron Docteur and me and how I would change the use of my body in those circumstances. For example, when I teach I tend to carry a bit more stillness and height in my body, and so I would consider that in the scene where The Baron Docteur is teaching a group of anatomists.

My biggest failing in regards to my warm-up was in a lack of discipline. I rarely felt that I had given myself enough time, and on several days completely missed warming up at all. Occasionally there were legitimate reasons that I couldn't find time to warm-up, but mostly I allowed myself to eke the time away. I did find that any amount of warm-up, even five minutes, resulted in a noticeably better day of work than none at all. As I move forward I'll be working to create structures when I am in rehearsal and performance that allow me to do a good warm-up, and learning how to work as efficiently as possible when I have very little time so that I can make the most of whatever warm-up I can manage on days when it can't happen in an ideal way.

Failures

My failings in terms of my warm-up were of course not the only ways in which I feel I fell short of my ideal. Perhaps my biggest failing was in curtailing my third eye. Throughout the rehearsal process, and even in performance, I found myself judging my actions as I took them, or even before. My opening performance, for instance, saw me completely blanking on a line early in the second act. The scene ground to a halt in a way that was quite obviously my fault. Here I immediately fell out of the scene and became so aware of the audience's judgment of me that I almost completely forgot about the show. It made it very difficult to get myself back into communication with The Venus. Even when, on the second night, another actor dropped a major line, I was immediately worried that it would seem like I was the one at fault as I had the next line. The way that I ended up working through my ego-driven worries about being judged was to connect those feelings with where The Baron Docteur would have been at that moment: also worried about the judgment of the outside world, but in his case because of his relationship to The Venus. By trying to not judge my self-judgment but rather to accept it as a reality of the situation, I at least managed to mitigate the damage that my third eye was able to do in these scenes.

I also feel that I could have done a better job of listening. I had many small successes in this department, and certainly made improvements over my past performances, but there were many times when I wasn't listening nearly as well as I could have. I noticed particularly that my ability to listen diminished in scenes where I was deep in negative emotions. Instead, I would turn inward in these scenes, perhaps relishing too much the emotional journey I was on and not connecting with my scene

partners. I also noticed that I listened much better to Gabby, the actor playing The Venus, than to Corey, who played The Grade-School Chum (my other major scene partner). I'm not sure if this is because of the amount of time I spent in rehearsal building my connection to Gabby, or if it has something to do with a male-female relationship versus a male-male relationship. Given the nature of my scenes with each of them it is certainly tangled with my tendency to turn inward when in a negative emotional space. Although I feel that I have developed better listening skills, my goal now will be to learn to apply those skills to messier and messier situations.

Finally, and perhaps somewhat related to the last point, I wish that I had had the presence of mind to employ the Alexander Technique idea of inhibition more throughout the process. This does in some ways seem to conflict with the attempt I was making to allow myself to act from impulse, but I think that often when I failed to act from impulse it was because I was acting from habit. In the future, by working to Inhibit myself just for a moment, I hope that I can catch myself before acting from habit, identify the impulse that hides behind the habit, and act from that instead.

Successes

All that being said, I still feel that I managed to make progress on a number of fronts throughout this process. Firstly, the goal that I had to be solidly off-book on the first day was a great success. It really helped me to feel like I had the ability to play and explore more fully early on in the process. It's a practice I want to continue doing in future shows.

Also, more than I have ever done before, I found a rich emotional life within The Baron Docteur and managed to find that emotional journey manifesting itself in me in sometimes powerful ways. The positive and negative emotions throughout felt like *my* emotions in a way that I've rarely managed to find on stage. Instead of shying away from negative emotions, as has been my habit, I managed to find a kind of joy in them. I identified in my own life the times when I felt rage, sadness, or frustration, and relished those feelings, letting myself stew in them. This was what really helped me find my way through The Baron Docteur's dark side, the idea that I could enjoy it and then still come out the other side.

One of the biggest helps in exploring these emotions were the “(Rests)” and “Spells” in Parks' script. Taking the time to sink into these in rehearsal really gave me a lot of room to play emotionally. However, in our two shows I feel like I may have completely blown by these moments in the heat of performance. Two thoughts console me when I consider this: first, that Parks herself gives her actors permission to make something of these moments or not, they are simply a suggestion, a signpost of sorts; the second is my hope that the number of times that I fell deep into these moments in rehearsal will have manifested themselves in my performance despite my not consciously acknowledging them. As the old axiom goes, “In times of stress we fall to the level of our training.” I hope that my training helped me fill the “(Rests)” and “Spells” in performance.

I also feel that at many points throughout rehearsal and performance I found success in listening. Although I theorized before work on *Venus* began that I would “perhaps giv[e] a slight precedence to the ear, and downplay...the importance of sight,”

I found that in practice I tried to completely level the importance of all my senses (taste notwithstanding). Sight and sound were certainly there very strongly, but equally strongly was my awareness of touch and smell, particularly in regard to Gabby.

I also found a similarity to the performance of my solo show in September when performing the intermission monologue. In both cases I managed to find a one-sided dialogue with the audience, listening to them even in their silence.

In the section titled “Listening with More than my Ears” above, I wrote about envisioning dialogue as a ping-pong match between actors. While I did feel like I was able to lessen the your-turn-my-turn quality of my listening, I found a different type of ping-ponging to my listening. For the first time I was very aware of switching back and forth between registering the external stimuli from my four senses, then turning inward and feeling how those stimuli were affecting me on an emotional, physical and even intellectual level, and then switching back to external awareness. It was a really intriguing process to observe within myself and I hope to find a way to be able, perhaps, to do both simultaneously.

Another success I found was in finding a freer physicality in my performance. My warm-up was the greatest help for this and I saw my ability to be physically free ebb and flow in relation to the quality of my warm-up. But while I did spend much of my warm-up trying to release tension, I think that what helped me the most was the way that my warm-up made me aware of the tensions that I was holding on to that day. By simply acknowledging the tension that was there, I found myself able to focus on acting from impulse. I didn't have to spend any time or effort muscling through a physical limitation, or trying to will my tension to release. I learned about the body I had that day and

worked with it. I think it was this that helped me feel I was finding impulse better than I have before.

Finally, small though it may be, I am happy I managed to fail in rehearsal as I have never done before. Certain choices were so wrong as to get other actors, and even our director Jamie, to ask me “What was that?” Realizing that I could make such failures and still continue working well with my peers was very liberating. It allowed me to feel free to try things that I was certain were wrong, but were educational to me. For example, driving The Baron Docteur’s rage at The Venus way over the top was absolutely the wrong choice for a performance, and somewhat startled my scene partner in rehearsal, but by expanding the emotional range to a ridiculous extreme a couple of times it gave me a sense of just how far I could push it and still land in the world of believability.

Moving Forward

Of course there is much overlap between my successes and my failures. No failure was absolute, and no success was unmitigated. Despite the work of the last eighteen months, undoubtedly my biggest challenge as an actor is still finding and maintaining authenticity. Without continuing to work on it I feel certain that I will fall back into old habits. As I move from a structured learning environment back into the shapeless miasma of carving out a theatre career I will have to find ways to continue this work. Most importantly, I will have to find ways to continue the work that does not depend on me having a great role in a great show to work on, or any show at all for that matter.

My research has left me most interested in the work of Chekhov and Grotowski, though it has also given me a better appreciation of the disciplines laid out by Linklater and Alexander. These are the paths on which I will look to continue my exploration in the near future. The former two because I feel the most affinity with them and the latter because they still scare me the most. Rather than taking a general interest in these practices, I hope to look for particular mentors to get the most out of my future studies. For as famous actor Yoshi Oida writes in *The Invisible Actor*: “In Japan there is a saying that it is better to spend three years looking for a good teacher than to occupy the same period of time doing exercises with someone inferior” (Chapter 5).

As I reflect on my work on authenticity over the last months, I am certain that it will be my lifelong target as an actor. But perhaps this is not because I have some deficit in authenticity that other actors do not, but because the concept of authenticity is the lens through which I can see my many weaknesses and strengths as an actor more clearly. Perhaps it is the keyhole through which I’ll see an acting methodology which is uniquely my own.

APPENDIX A: REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE JOURNALS

Tuesday January 27th

Today's Goal: To listen during the read-through, and not read the parts that aren't mine. With particular focus on Gabby.

My third eye came in strong during the read-through today. Only when I was saying my lines, though. I was able more-or-less to achieve my goal of listening to Gabby. I tried to pay particular attention to her throughout the process, which was easy as Jamie put us beside one another for the company meeting and I chose to sit across from her in the rehearsal room where we read the second act. I found myself remarking on details about her voice and her body. She has a slight creakiness to her voice that suits her well. I also remember clearly looking at the way in which she draws on her eyebrows, the slope of her shoulders, and, during a long section where I was not needed, the way in which the light plays off of the skin of her arm. It is very different from the way that white skin carries light, deeper shadows and more pronounced highlights. I did not manage to get completely off-book for the first read, but I was very familiar with the script and more-or-less off-book for my scenes with Gabby, which I had prioritized. I think that I will be able to get myself completely off-book for each scene as we come to them. Tomorrow's goal: to manufacture some interactions with Gabby during the down times in rehearsal. There are two reasons for this: firstly I want to get to know her a little better before we start working closely together, and secondly I want to talk to her briefly about how to approach the intimacy needed in our scenes. The challenge here is to not come across as creepy...tune in next time to see how it turns out.

P.S. I think I'd like to do this on every show—listening to the read instead of reading it.

Thursday February 5th

Today was my first rehearsal of my scenes with The Venus. My goal for this rehearsal was to keep a bead on Gabby throughout the evening. I think that I managed this more-or-less successfully. Life, as it is wont to do, got in the way of my warm-up. I did a little bit of work on heightening my listening in the hallway by simply sitting still and focusing in on my senses, but I didn't do any work on waking up spontaneous movement and as a result I felt somewhat stilted in rehearsal.

However, I think that I did do a pretty good job of being responsive to Gabby throughout the evening. The Baron Docteur talks much of the "grace" of The Venus, and I saw that in Gabby in many ways: she has very long arms, which could be gangly in others, but she carries them with a certain delicateness; her standing posture is very elegant and refined-seeming; she moves with an energy carried in her upper sternum which gives a somewhat flowing quality to her movements.

Although my failure to do a proper warm-up may have been a part of my inability to move from impulse, another culprit was the intimacy required by the scenes. This being the first time that we've worked these scenes, the first time as far as I can remember that we've really touched at all, my shyness and desire to maintain my scene partner's comfort and ease sometimes kept me from doing what the scene required of me.

I did however find that I had a couple moments of real impulse-driven physicality that came from smelling Gabby. The first couple of times that I got close enough to smell her it registered with me in my spine and led to a subtle shift in my physicality (or at least my perception of it) that felt to me natural and unfiltered. These moments were pretty fleeting, but they perhaps showed me a path that I can explore further.

My goal for next rehearsal is to explore how to keep my listening broad and receptive to a large chorus of people with whom I'm working, as well as to The Venus, who is the centrepiece of the scene, but who does and says little in it.

Wednesday February 11th & Thursday February 12th

Over the past two rehearsals we've been doing runs of Act 1 and 2 respectively. My goal in these rehearsals was to simply watch the show, with particular focus on The Venus. I didn't look ahead in my script, even though I was trying to do the rehearsal off-book. I wanted to try to let myself fail, maybe miss an entrance or forget my lines or otherwise screw up.

My warm-ups for these rehearsals began the process of trying to touch on each of the emotional states that I have to hit in the show. It was really useful because, only having to focus on one act at a time, I didn't have to travel as long and complicated an emotional route in the warm-ups. Most of this emotional journey was accomplished by just sitting or lying still and paying attention to what was physically happening to my body as I sort of meditated my way into each emotion. I would find a bodily trigger like tightening my larynx when looking for anger or rage, and then see how that first step towards the emotion (which came about naturally as I touched on the emotion) triggered other reactions in my body. I tried to simply note these changes. But as I waited until the

end of two full days of rehearsal to sit down and write about them, I've lost much of the details.

During the runs themselves I fell into something of a trap where the focus I gave to watching the performers (Gabby in particular) let me completely shut down in terms of my own self-awareness. The observations became a litany of things: Gabby's arms seem very long, Bob is playing for the cast and not the audience, Soo's accent is sounding pretty consistent. But what I missed out on was having a response to what I was observing, letting myself not just observe, but listen, and respond. I was shaken out of this when, during a moment where I was blocked to be watching *The Venus* with *The Mother-Showman*, I suddenly realized that both actors were making fun of me for staring. This shook me out of my reverie and made me realize the trap that I had fallen into. Once I noticed this it became something of a battle to avoid that trap, and not go too far the other way and become completely introspective. I did find a few moments where I did feel like I was managing to find a middle ground.

The goal for tomorrow's rehearsal, where we are working bits and then running the first act again, is to find more of a sense of play in my second stab at the first act. To try things because I think they might be fun

Tuesday, February 17th

Realized I'm being too nice.

Today, we worked back through all the scenes in the second act that we had looked at on Saturday, but worked in the various choruses. It gave still more time to get comfortable with Gabby, and to get more comfortable with the intimacy we have to perform and how to keep that intimacy with a room full of people watching. The biggest

thing that I realized that I had been doing with The Baron Docteur was making him too nice. In the same way that I resist acknowledging the harsher side of myself, I was pretending that The Baron Docteur didn't have a dark streak. Several times I made choices that kept all the conflict out of the scene, or when conflict was unavoidable, I would dissipate it as soon as I could. I started to look in the other direction in this rehearsal, making my cuts deeper, drawing the moments of conflict out as long as I could. It didn't always make the best choice, but it was certainly more compelling than what I had been doing before.

Wednesday, February 18th

Did a run of Act 2. In bare feet and comfy clothes.

I was the most warmed up because of a class that I had done in the morning. I had made a great discovery in that class that I wanted to try to bring into rehearsal. The discovery was about the sense of touch. By simply feeling something against my skin, I am inherently externalizing that object (or person). *I am touching it.* As the teacher said today, by feeling with the inside of the skin, I am not feeling the object, but rather feeling what it is doing to my skin, my muscle and bones, my nerves, my self. So much of the play has become about touching The Venus that I was really excited to see how that touch would affect me. Luckily for me we were doing a run of the second act, where I have the most contact with Gabby. I decided not to wear my rehearsal jacket or boots for this run. I gave up all semblance of a character body and tried as much as I could to simply be me in my body and see how it was affected by Gabby and her body. The results were great. I felt like it really turned up all my senses. I felt like I was sparkling, or radiating. For the first time I felt like we found moments where we were just two

people. I wish I could find a way to make the same experience work with sight and hearing but it's so abstracted to me that I don't know if I'll be able to do it. I will keep exploring though.

Saturday February 28th

My goal for today was to hunt around inside of myself for ways in which to personalize my work. To find the parallels in my life that will help me touch base with all of the emotional milestones that The Baron goes through.

In my armchair work on The Baron I decided that the superobjective for the Baron is to leave a legacy. I tied this in with my desire to leave some legacy of my own. But now, as my MFA training is coming to a close, I'm feeling more and more worried about my own future. I realize The Baron isn't worried about leaving a legacy, he's afraid, so afraid, of being forgotten. Just as I find that I am. I entered this program for many reasons, but mostly because I was very unhappy with the shape that my career had taken up to this point. I wanted a chance to revive it. Now that it's almost over I'm afraid of what lies on the other side and if it's the same mediocrity that I found in my first decade out of my undergraduate. This is a real, deep, gnawing fear that eats at me. The Baron must feel this too. He's "One in a crowd of millions" as he says. He needs to leave his mark, to not disappear into the crowd. The Venus to him would be like me being offered a movie role next to Tom Hanks, or an entry level teaching position at NYU: an opportunity that I can't let myself screw up.

I've been finding that work on primary relationships resonate the most with me physically. I can feel a change in my body when I switch from lover/lover to parent/child

with Gabby. Or when I switch between teacher/student and lover/lover in the scene with the anatomists. I'm going to see next week (if there is a next week, what with the strike and all) if I can explore these primary relationships in broad physical ways in my warm-up.

I think that things are getting a little too controlled in *The Baron*. I want now to turn up the heat on the pot. Get things really boiling, and then see how I can clamp on the lid tight enough to contain it. Right now I'm just getting a gentle simmer and I feel like I'm leaving something on the table. Let's hope that I've still got a week to explore.

(Note: It is at this point that the labour disruption occurred at York which ultimately led to the cancellation of the show. The following journal falls at a time after the beginning of the strike but before the show was cancelled. All the entries from March 17th on were after we were told the show was cancelled.)

Thursday March 12th

We're back in the space, sort of. I'm feeling about a thousand fucking things all at once. It makes it hard to do the work. It's hard because the things I feel aren't the things I like to show that I feel. I don't want to show them in rehearsal, so I end up bottling it up in a way and then it all gets bottled up. I feel like I'm being torn in a bunch of different directions when all I want to do is focus on this goddamned show.

I don't want to be on strike, I just want to get the work done, but I also know that we're striking for good reason. I feel badly because I do feel like I'm crossing the picket line merely because it's a good choice for me, not because I think it's right. I'm also really angry at the people who are refusing to cross the picket lines after I bent over

backwards and spent hours and hours at the university when they all went home to sleep in order to get their thesis show to run smoothly. Now I feel like I'm being abandoned. Barring an unforeseen end to this strike I think the show is going to go on without everyone, with giant gaps in it, under rehearsed, and already the disruption has put me in too many places at once to keep going with my progress. I wasn't doing the best job of it when we were going, I wasn't getting the greatest warm-ups in, my journaling was spotty at best, but now it's been two weeks since I've really done anything and I feel like it's slipping away. And I just want to get out of this fucking program and all the fucking drama that this godforsaken MFA class can't seem to do without. I don't want to be the one in the middle being stable and level-headed and helping everyone else through it.

And that space is fucked! It's so big, and empty. I don't want to fill up big and empty, I want to be a real person, with another real person. I can fill things fine, but I still haven't figured out how to just *be*. I need to figure that out before I can start inflating it to fill that enormous space—CANT WE BLOCK OFF THAT STORAGE ROOM OR SOMETHING!!!!@@12211221

Sorry about that, I'm just sick and tired and I want a rest without feeling like something is looming over me, like there are a thousand things that I should be doing instead of resting. But that's not the life I chose, I guess. I chose hard work, and no pay. I've almost forgotten why.

Tuesday, March 17th

I managed to fail today, and fail big. At the beginning of the stressful, not-enough-time-to-do-what-we-need-to week I arrived thirty minutes late to rehearsal for no other

reason than I thought it started at 4:30 instead of 4. Needless to say I didn't warm up. And I didn't do a very good job of finding much joy (which was my goal for today), not in the work at least. I had a good enough time seeing everyone, but the work stressed me out. We really don't have enough time, we barely re-blocked 2/3 of the first act today and we're supposed to block the whole thing by the end of tomorrow.

It's strange, because just about everyone else seems to be having a pretty good time, with the exception of Gabby, Soo and I. And Jamie. I feel like I'm bringing the room down when I ought to be buoying it up. I know, of course, that that's not my job, but I can't help feeling the pressure to do so.

Now that there isn't any appreciable backstage area it means that in order to watch Gabby throughout my time offstage I need to be in performance mode. It's much more draining and physically tiring than it was when I could relax and watch. I worry that it'll bind me up in tension by the time I get into my scenes.

I don't really know how to get out of this funk. Perhaps it's a usable funk, but I don't know. I'm going to try tomorrow to connect with Gabby, talk about my disappointment, and maybe between us we can stir up some joy.

Friday March 20th - Opening night.

I screwed up my lines. I can't remember the last time I screwed up my lines, certainly it was before the strike started. I screwed them up and then completely lost my way out. Gabby tried to save me, but I couldn't find it. Eventually we skipped ahead and that was that, but I felt that failure for a long time afterward. Shame. But I fell back to the level of my training, I fell back to what was regular to me, because of my work on it in rehearsal: seeing Gabby.

I tried something completely new in my warm-up today. It was suggested to me by Natalie on our drive home last night. She called it “a personal inventory”, I think. It involves taking some relaxed, neutral position and then listing all the things you’re feeling, physically and emotionally. Then you find ways to tie the feelings to your character. I was worried about making a fool of myself before going into the show, and I tied that to The Baron Docteur’s worry that he will be made a fool of if his relationship with The Venus is discovered. I am still physically strained from walking the picket lines and carry a lot of tensions which are unusual for me. I tied this to an imagined circumstance where The Baron Docteur has been spending long hours dissecting. I imagined it would be done hunched over and that he’d have a lot of the same tensions in the thoracic spine as I have.

Today’s warm-up was long and luxurious. A gift. Considering all the days when I dreaded having to find studio time to warm up, I was amazed at how much I loved it. I showed up four and a half hours before the show. The performance space needed to be set up, chairs stolen from a nearby room and mats laid down. I started with this. It felt like a ceremonial creating of my own performance space, and I structured it sort of formally: lining the stacks of chairs up carefully, being deliberate with my placing of them. I had started this process as a way of delaying the beginning of my warm-up, frankly, but by the end I realized that it was the beginning of my warm-up. It was physical, it got me sweating and my heart pumping, but it also got me into the world of the show a bit.

When I felt I’d gotten all I could out of setting up the space, I went to the rehearsal hall next door. I started with a thirty-minute Linklater progression, which I

haven't done in a long time. Then I warmed into my physicality a little with some stretching and yawning, as well as trying to feel my internal systems: breath, blood, digestion, touch, gravity. Once I felt awakened to my environment I tried to sink into the states-of-being that I have tracked through the show. These are: I am Approaching the Goddess, God is in Heaven and All is Well, I am Betrayed, I am Falling, and I am the Betrayer. In each one I tried to sink into it and then played physically for a while, exploring how I wanted to express it. Finally, I talked through all of my lines, exploring a physical river while doing so, allowing myself to move from impulse as directed by my lines. I found a lot of great physical metaphors in this.

I saw these warm-ups manifested in the performance. When I screwed up my lines and felt ashamed and guilty, I looked into how The Baron Docteur felt ashamed and guilty at that moment. The next scene was when I get the letter from the Grade-School Chum, outing my relationship to The Venus. There was a lot of shame and guilt in there and I tried to pour what I felt into it. Thanks Natalie!!! I also felt in my body the muscle memory of the state-of-being and river work in a couple of moments, particularly when I found myself drifting into my own head. I would want to get myself back in the show and those exercises would sort of be my pathway back in.

I'm going to give myself another big lead-in tomorrow. My goal is to find myself as much as I can. Look inside and see what is there and then let it live in whatever moment.

Saturday, March 21st - Closing Night

I was overall more distracted and distractible today. I bet I could chalk this up to any number of reasons: my parents being there, my girlfriend being there, the disjointed way I spent my day. I don't really know.

I got to the theatre at four and took my time again with my warm-up, but the distraction had already started. It was just harder to get in the zone for it. I followed roughly the same pattern as yesterday, but with a slightly shorter Linklater progression so that I could feel like I had a little more time with my states-of-being and my river work.

Writing cards for the cast, and then taking a moment with each person was a nice ritual, something like the ritual of setting up the space that I got to do the night before.

The distraction caused my mind to wander periodically throughout the show. Funnily, this very journal was the subject of the distraction. I caught myself, on a couple of occasions, completely out of the play because I was thinking "I should journal about this later." Now that I'm writing though, I can't remember what any of those moments were.

I do remember the biggest distraction in the show, however, one that took me out for quite a while. Before the show I tried to reserve my parents some chairs, as I knew they'd be running late and that they couldn't possibly have sat on the mats. I got Aaron, our assistant director, to hold the seats beside him for them. Unfortunately, this put them directly in my line of sight when I'm supposed to be watching The Venus and masturbating. I couldn't do it. I was barely able to look at her at all because I couldn't

help but see them beside her. It was bad enough performing the sexuality and knowing they were in the room. We are a pretty conservative family when it comes to sex—we never, ever talk about it for any reason. I wasn't even aware enough of the show to be trying to overcome my self-awareness in that moment. I was entirely made of self-consciousness.

At one point Corey completely forgot one of his lines. His last line in the anatomist scene. He completely left the stage and was nowhere to be found. I think that I visibly panicked, though I caught myself quickly and tried to find a way to fill the empty space while hoping that someone, anyone, would come in with the line about maceration. It's a big moment for me later on, and without this setup moment it wouldn't mean as much to the audience. I felt sort of betrayed in that moment, because there were a dozen people on stage who could have come in and said something close enough, which would have triggered the moment between Gabby, Chris and I that needed to happen. A couple of moments of breathing and then a slow walk across the space wasn't enough time to get someone to the place of saving the day though, so I jumped ahead and we moved on.

I was a little worried beforehand that I would have another line screw-up. I ran my lines with Gabby again (although this hadn't prevented it the day before). Partly I think I was extra worried about this because in most shows I run my lines in the wings before stepping on to the stage. Here, however, I wasn't able to do that because of the nature of the piece. It meant that I had to trust myself, and listen hard. Now that I think about it in fact, I think that the breakdown yesterday came from not really listening to Gabby, and not really having a clear enough image about what I was saying to her.

I really wish I had a few more kicks at the can on this show. I feel like I've been stunted, like I had just hit a growth spurt and then had to cut it short. And I was interested to see how I could maintain a performance that demanded that much focus from me for a dozen performances.

I am going to miss this show a lot. It's a part like none that I've ever had the chance to play before, and I don't know when I'll get the chance to play such a great part again. And I'll miss working with Gabby; it was really unique. Her quiet shyness belies an incredible poise and strength inside of her and it was terrific to play off of. I wish so badly that this process could have come to its natural end. I think there might have been more there for me. More challenges, and more gifts. I'm proud, though, of the work I did on this. And I'm sorry to have to let it go.

APENDIX B: SCRIPT SAMPLE

Script Text	Obj.	Obs.	Action
Come here quick, slave and attend me! Fetch my sweets! Fix my hair! Do this do that do this do that! Hahahahahaha! Mmmmmmm.			
<p>B THE BARON DOCTEUR. What are you doing?</p> <p>THE VENUS. Oh. Im sunning myself.</p>	To give her the best night	I have to leave her. I don't want to let her go.	<p>1- Soothe her</p> <p>2- Reprimand.</p> <p>3- Tease</p> <p>4- Tweak</p> <p>Time: May 1815 of another actor sc. 9</p> <p>F Know this is my last night with her.</p> <p>PR Student/Teacher</p>
<p>THE BARON DOCTEUR. Then you should have a parasol.</p> <p>THE VENUS. No thanks. Kiss me.</p>			PR Love/Love
<p>THE BARON DOCTEUR. Little Hotsey-Totsey.</p> <p>THE VENUS. Come to bed.</p>			PR Love/Love
<p>THE BARON DOCTEUR. Is the middle of the day.</p> <p>THE VENUS. So?</p>			
<p>THE BARON DOCTEUR. Mmmmm.</p> <p>THE VENUS. THE BARON DOCTEUR.</p>			
<p>158</p>			<p>S.O.B.:</p> <p>I am the betrayer.</p> <p>I am the betrayer?</p>

Obj.	Abst.	Actions	
To get her back on track	She won't listen to me anymore	1 - Squash 2 - Stroke 3 - Bug 4. Dismess 5 - Belittle 6 - Deflect 7 - Swart	* Father / Daughter Why this section if I know what's coming? ↳ Still flip-flopping

THE VENUS.
I dont think I wanna go to yr Academy innny more.

THE BARON DOCTEUR. → Obj. pr. 7
Dont be silly.
They all love you there.
2 And yr French is brilliant.
Its only been 2 years and yr sounding like a native.
3 Yr a linguistic genius!
Everybody agrees.

THE VENUS.
They touch me sometimes.
When yr not looking.

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
How could they not?
8 Touching you if well, its their job.

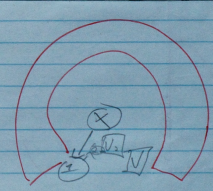
THE VENUS. → Jealousy, I'll get them.
Theyre lascivious.

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
Jesus.
Dont be hyperbolic. → Impress her w my use of language

THE VENUS.
You seem half there.
Love me?
(Rest.)

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
THE VENUS.
(Rest.)

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
Im here arent I?



THE VENUS.
I'll wake up one day you'll be gone.

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
Wrong. *What* -> PR
I'm here to stay. *PR*
Things are just a little off at work this all.

THE VENUS.
Touch me down here.

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
What is it?

THE VENUS.
THE BARON DOCTEUR.
(Rest)
(She's pregnant again.)

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
Can we do anything? Oh God. *PR*
not: Is there anything

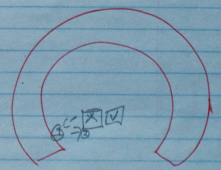
THE VENUS.
Oh God.

THE BARON DOCTEUR. *6's*
A simple yes or no will do.

THE VENUS.
I'm not feeling very well. *I can't believe her good*
It's hot in here.
Love me?

THE BARON DOCTEUR. *2*
A simple yes or no will do, Girl. *Keep throat*

Obj.	Obj.	Actions	Swing: I'll give her up. I'll give up my career.
To show her I love her.	-> She's pissing me off	1- Pull her up short	-> She knows! Youst it to be true. Search for a way out.
	She's making anything harder	2- Misdirect.	PR - Father / Daughter
		3- Cobble	
		4- Press	PR - Over Lamer
		5- Overwhelm	
		6- Threaten	
To make her agree to end it.	-> I want a child. - I don't want to hurt her.		
	I have to leave my mark		



THE VENUS.
Yes.
Yes.

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
Good. Not get some sleep.

THE VENUS.
THE BARON DOCTEUR. } x 2
(Rest.)

THE VENUS.
Whats "maceration." →

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
Huhi? PR.

THE VENUS.
"Maceration."

THE BARON DOCTEUR.
Whyd you ask?

THE VENUS.
They always say:
"the measurementll be corrected after
'maceration.'" Whats it mean?

THE BARON DOCTEUR. →
"Macerations" French for "lunch."
"After Lunch" we also say.
(Rest.)

W my true Love. → PR
Now get some sleep.

(They sleep. Enter The Grade-School Chum. As if in a dream. The Baron Docteur wakes up with a start.)

Obj. Obst Actions

- 1 - Dismess
- 2 - Deflect
- 3 - Deflect

Get her off the scent
She's smart.

- 4 - Dazele
- 5 - Exhibit:ice
- 6 - Confess
- 7 - Push away
Tea

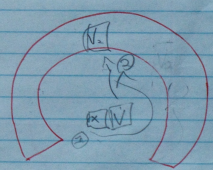
I feel like she's getting suspicious.

See her dissecting the disolving of flesh from bone. She smelt. sight Reddy of scraping the bones

PR - Sam/ mother

This lie for a nut of me.
PR - Lower/Lower
→ Last time I say it + I know

SOB
I am lost



Hilary

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