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**MOVING TO THE NATURAL: AN EMBODIED ACTOR EXPLORING A
STANISLAVSKI TECHNIQUE THROUGH *THE CHILDREN'S HOUR***

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THEATER ARTS

by

Melissa Victoria Cunha

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ABSTRACT

MOVING TO THE NATURAL: AN EMBODIED ACTOR EXPLORING A STANISLAVSKI TECHNIQUE THROUGH *THE CHILDREN'S HOUR*

by

Melissa Victoria Cunha

My process of approaching the role of Karen Wright in *The Children's Hour*, directed by Danny Scheie, serves as my practice as research; this document is a further component of this process. In this document, I will explain the process of this production, which will include, but not be limited to, the table work done with the script, the process of creating a backstory for my character, the staging of the play, conversations with the director and actors, and the performances. These examples will provide context for my work on this play as I explored what it meant to be an embodied actor in a play with a director influenced by Stanislavski, surrounded by other actors with a variety of training.

I will specifically touch on my acting technique and explain how my training and involvement in experimental theater aided me in this production to develop Karen Wright. The direction from Scheie on the acting itself was within the naturalistic approach of psychological realism. I observed others and trained myself how to work within the Stanislavski acting technique and naturalism, while also using my prior training as an embodied actor to produce the best work I could, combining these

techniques. I believe it is beneficial to expand your toolkit to gain new insights and methods of approaching a play or production.

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I want to thank my entire *Elements* family for the inspiration for this graduate program. You have been tremendous mentors in shaping my practice and who I am as an artist. Thank you to my company, Bike City Theatre, for letting me take time to get this degree. Our work as a democracy showcases the importance of art being the vessel to creating community.

Thank you Danny Scheie, for the most hilarious moments I have ever had in a rehearsal or classroom. I can never hear anyone say, “Get out of here!” again without losing it, remembering you, and Joan Crawford. And thank you to the cast of *The Children’s Hour*, for their energy, commitment, knowledge, and hearts. Allie Pratt, for being my Martha.

Thank you to Patty Gallagher, Marianne Weems, Kimberly Jannarone, and Michael Chemers, for your enormous hearts and reassuring me that my practice and experience is worth noting. A warm thank you to my cohort, for all the memories, resources, wisdom and beautiful sass.

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SECTION 1: Introduction

When one talks about being an actor, one must think about who they are, where they come from, and the body they inhabit. In *The Body Speaks*, Australian born contemporary theater practitioner Lorna Marshall¹ states: “Part of our individuality is the specific nature of our social persona. A complex structure which reflects all the diversity of our culture, class, family, as well as our idiosyncratic choices and resistances” (5). We perform these social personas through our physical habits. As an actor, one puts one’s entire being onstage for people to watch. Even if someone can completely transform into a character, the audience is still seeing who they are, as a person. One can disguise their face and body to look like something other than what they are, but one cannot change one’s energy or being onstage as our bodies are “and [have] always been, the mediator between who we are and the world” (Marshall 8).

I say this because as an actor, I use my body onstage to aid in the telling of a story. And the body that I use takes form from many different factors. I find that I have a hard time explaining what kind of actor I am because, like many actors, I incorporate many styles into my practice. If I were to label myself, I would do so as an “embodied actor” with a focus or interest in experimental and devised

¹ Lorna Marshall studied under Lecoq and Decroux in Paris, France. She teaches physical acting and movement inspired by Eastern philosophies. She has worked closely with Japanese theater practitioner, Yoshi Oida. She and Oida co-wrote *The Invisible Actor* and she translated his book, *An Actor Adrift*.

performance. When I approach my work, I do so externally, from my body first, and then internally to my mind to develop the character's psychology to play a role.

My work as an embodied actor has included Experimental Shakespeare, Tightrope Walking, Corporeal Mime, Lishi Tai Chi, Viewpoints, Devising, Fitzmaurice, Commedia Dell'arte, Media Theatre, some Noh and Suzuki Theatre, and finally Vinyasa Yoga for which I am a certified instructor. I do not claim to be an expert in any one of these areas, as I did not receive conservatory-style training for them, but I have been fortunate enough to be influenced by an eclectic group of mentors. I have learned and practiced the basic principles of each of these, in addition to having performed utilizing some of these techniques, and adding them to my store of actor practices: my toolkit. Each has taught me a great deal of how to carry my body onstage and how to let my actions speak as a result. This work has mostly consisted of performances in unconventional or intimate spaces with few costumes or sets. In turn, the story relies heavily on our bodies and our interactions with each other to tell the story.

My training includes a wide array of different techniques, as opposed to one singular school of acting style. In this way, the lack of conservatory training has been beneficial to my craft, as new information, experiences, and techniques have made me a more educated, well-rounded human being, and by extension a more versatile practitioner.

Previous to my move to the graduate program to complete a Masters in Theater Arts at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), I worked on a

production called *Elements*. It was a collaborative, experimental theater piece by the Japanese playwright and director, Ōta Shōgo, directed by Peter Lichtenfels in Bogotá, Colombia. This show consisted of seven professional, multidisciplinary actors who also had diverse backgrounds and training. In this show, we came together as theater practitioners from around the world, to creatively think and practice a piece of art. That show, which we worked on for more than a year, fascinated me because we were all distinct theater artists coming together to create a piece, which then fueled me to continue my studies in higher education as a theater practitioner. I was inspired to explore further how such individuals, with multiple techniques, can come together to create a piece of art.

Before entering the program, I discussed my interests with the former director of graduate studies, Brandin Barón, about my practices and prior work in the theater. Understanding my experience in experimental and devised theater, he encouraged me to send in an audition tape to Professor Danny Scheie, the director of the upcoming production of *The Children's Hour* by Lillian Hellman. Barón posed an important question: did I want to continue my work solely as an experimental and devised theater practitioner, or did I want to try my hand at a more conventional, naturalistic piece, the kind of work done at most regional and repertory theater companies? "See if you like it," he said. I sent in my audition tape the next day. I spoke to Scheie and had a warm conversation about the show, and he asked if I would be interested in playing a principal role. I was intrigued and accepted the work, not only because of the kindness these two showed me, but because I remained curious and had the desire

to examine how practitioners enter this type of Western, traditionalist performance space together, equipped with our distinctive techniques, to produce a significant piece of work, telling a compelling story. This show presented the unique opportunity to examine my work as an embodied actor in a classic American drama.

SECTION 2: Acting Techniques and Theorists

Coming to a naturalist process, I felt it necessary to research discourses on the more widely recognized theater practitioners and theorists of the twentieth century. I started with Constantin Stanislavski, commonly regarded as the father of realism in theater. *An Actor Prepares*, by the Russian theater practitioner, was essential to my research as it is in most actors' toolkits, and more importantly aided in my understanding of Scheie's approach as director to *The Children's Hour*. Stanislavski famously founded the Moscow Art Theatre where he developed his acting technique in the early 1900s and published *An Actor Prepares* in 1936. He developed his innovative method and shared it in this three-part text, which was the basis of my research. The Stanislavski technique was enormously influential as it paved the way for naturalistic theater at a time where over the top melodramas and vaudeville acts were popular. His method centered on actors creating real and genuine characters by studying the different exercises laid out in *An Actor Prepares: Given Circumstances, Magic If, Units and Objectives*, and *Super-Objective*.

The *Given Circumstances* provide a solid foundation for one's character in a play. This exercise informs the development of a role and in Stanislavski's book; he

defines it as the “story of the play, its facts, events, epoch, time and place of action, conditions of life” and helps “create an inner stimulus.... of a character you are to enact” (54). The *Given Circumstances* compares to the backstory for one’s role, and in turn, help cultivate the life for one’s character and conditions in which they live (55). One can build these *Given Circumstances* provided in a play, and then move beyond it by use of imagination. If I had a character in a play, my *Given Circumstances* would inform, for example, my age, sexual orientation, how I met my best friend, and if I drink coffee throughout the day, and much more.

The chapter, “Imagination” illustrated in *An Actor Prepares*, contains the technique of the *Magic If*. The *Magic If* is “a lever to lift us out of everyday life on to the plane of imagination” (58). An actor can begin in their process with this to assist with the other exercises I have described. Imagination is imperative on the stage, and it is what makes characters or situations come to life. When practicing the *Magic If*, one would invent questions to ask themselves about their part and an imagined circumstance at hand. Some of the questions one could ask would be: *If this person died, what would I do? If I wanted to hurt this person, what would I do?* The *Magic If* relies on the combination of an actor’s impulse and imagination.

Units and Objectives are a significant section in preparation for one’s role. Stanislavski describes *Units and Objectives* as the characters want or need and how one would get them. These underlying desires are always present in the play and for the characters. An actor creates the *Units* as they divide their role in the script into separate sections. In explanation of units, Stanislavski terms these sections as

“episodes” or “elements” (121, 126). Consequently, *Units* are the steps one takes to get what they want. An *Objective* is part of the *Unit* as it is those wants or needs. Once the character has this, the *Objective* “calls for some degree of action” and “it is necessary to use a verb” to carry that action out (137). He specified that the *Objective* must drive the play forward; therefore, it must be active (129). Some practitioners in the field name these actions as *Transitive Verbs*. A *Transitive Verb* is an action word that the character can do to another person or thing. Others, myself included, refer to *Units* and *Objectives* as *Beats* and *Intentions*, and the verbs as *Tactics*.² Here is a simple example of an *Objective* and *Transitive Verb*, if I had a line in a play that was “listen to me,” then my *Objective* could be “I want them to hear me.” Next, my *Transitive Verb* could be “to attack.” This choice allows my line to be more dynamic, rather than simply yelling at another person to get what I want.

The last exercise is the *Super-Objective*. The *Super-Objective*, similar to the *Objective*, is what the character wants throughout the entire play, opposed to solely in a particular *Beat*. It is “directed towards the accomplishment of the basic purpose of the play... providing nourishment and life to both it [the play] and the actors” (293). Professor Danny Scheie, a diehard baseball fan, presented this example to students:

Imagine that you are in a baseball game and that your *Beats* are each of the nine innings. The *Transitive Verbs* or *Tactics* used would be to swing, to hit, to catch, to tag, to bunt, etc. It is your *Objective* within a *Beat* to score using these tactics because the *Super-Objective* is to win the game.

Similar to the theater, Stanislavski mentions that actors must have an overall purpose that one must not deviate. If one strays from the *Super-Objective*, then that

²I will be using these terms for the duration of the paper.

choice will “stand out as superfluous or wrong” (293). This blunder would be akin to a baseball player throwing the game in the other team’s favor.

While I was new to this technique, the majority of my castmates were versed in Stanislavski’s method. Scheie utilized all of these techniques in his direction of *The Children’s Hour*. In the following section, I will discuss how we applied Stanislavski’s techniques to our rehearsal process.

Another method my fellow cast members were familiar with derived from Uta Hagen. I was motivated to investigate *Respect for Acting*, published in 1973 by Uta Hagen, a German-American Tony award-winning actor who was a student of Stanislavski’s acting technique and later adapted it into her own acting technique. This technique is not instilled in my acting, but I wanted to learn more because during the rehearsal process of *The Children’s Hour*, Magdalena Travis, one of my fellow principal actors, mentioned that she was using this acting technique in her table work and onstage. Travis said that many UCSC students focus primarily on Stanislavski, and some, not exposed to other acting techniques. This text includes a section on *Object Exercises*, much like Stanislavski’s *Given Circumstances*, which Scheie would focus on during rehearsal.

Hagen’s *Object Exercises* are a list of questions that an actor can answer for their character and interrogate on their own without the need of a partner or rehearsal. These questions establish the role and help decipher what they want in the given moment. For example, Hagen compels the actor to ask, “Who am I?” “What

surrounds me?”³ “What is my relationship?” and “What’s in my way?” (82). Travis explained that she preferred Hagen’s exercises while doing her homework for her role as it assisted her in finding a connection with her character, her relationships with the other characters, and generally empathizing with her role as the antagonist in the play. Travis thought Hagen’s method worked because she was able to pull things from her own life experience to assist in developing and justifying some of the decisions her character was making. Hagen’s *Respect for Acting* refers to this technique as *Substitution*.⁴ A Stanislavskian approach would employ the *Magic If*, which utilizes the imagination over personal experience. Using the Stanislavskian example from earlier in the chapter, *If this person died, what would I do?* Hagen instead would say, *I know a person that has died and this is how I felt then*, and would continue to work from that personal connection.

Another pupil of the Stanislavskian school of thought was twentieth-century Polish director, Jerzy Grotowski, author of *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Multiple professors recommended this text to me as it aligned with my previous experience on devised and experimental theater, and I was surprised to find a theater-maker in the Western canon to share a similar philosophy. Grotowski’s work explored the relationship between actors and audience, and posed broader questions of: “What is the theater? What is unique about it?” (18-19.) He had this view that theater needed to

³ I will return to this particular question in chapter seven, as my fellow castmate, Allie Pratt, mentioned a related exercise from *Respect for Acting* that assists her in her process.

⁴ She later renamed this technique “transference” in *A Challenge for the Actor*. For more information on Hagen’s acting techniques, please refer to *Respect for Acting* and *A Challenge for the Actor*.

have a distinct offer for audiences that differed from films. Performances could happen without lavish sets and costumes that are familiar to some productions. He and I share this belief, along with the notion that the performance space can be more inclusive by having a smaller, more intimate setting for a play where the audience and actors are in a place together rather than apart. Moving away from the traditional style of theater performance is how Grotowski describes a *Poor Theatre*. Grotowski discusses the rehearsal space as a “laboratory” in which actors can use this space as an experiment, conducting trial and error to engender a result. While training intensely with actors, he focused heavily on the physical body and technique. James Roose-Evans, author of *Experimental Theatre: from Stanislavsky to Today*, describes Grotowski’s work: “he brings the actor to such a point of heightened awareness that, as in a trance, he is wide open in performance” (129). One must commit to the work, physically, mentally, and emotionally, bringing vulnerability and willing to be exposed in the space.

I also found connections with contemporary American theater director Anne Bogart’s work. While reading Bogart’s *The Viewpoints Book*,⁵ I was able to find a source to assist me in articulating my own experiences and techniques as an actor, primarily in ensemble work. Not all of my acting techniques derive from this text and it does not correlate with how I approached *The Children’s Hour* as an actor. However, I resonate with the work and find it a fantastic resource as it explains impulses and how to use or listen to one’s body onstage. *The Viewpoints Book*

⁵*The Viewpoints Book* was co-authored by Tina Landau.

contains ensemble exercises that require the cast to work together by listening to each other with their bodies to move in relation to the other actors. For example, a typical *Viewpoints* exercise would look like the ensemble members walking around the rehearsal space, always aware of the position in relation to the other bodies to create equilibrium. If all members were to stop, they would be equally distributed in the space. My part in *The Children's Hour* was not part of the ensemble, and Scheie did not include *Viewpoints* in his rehearsals.

As part of my research, I observed the Meisner acting class offered in the Department of Theater Arts at UCSC by Greg Fritsch. The Meisner acting technique, inspired and derived from Stanislavski, is from the twentieth-century American actor and director, Sanford Meisner and his text, *Sanford Meisner On Acting*.⁶ When I began my work on *The Children's Hour*, I was brand new to the department and, as I mentioned before, was told that the Stanislavski acting technique was what was taught at UCSC. The next quarter, I heard about the popular Meisner class that was offered and was curious to learn more. In this class, the students participated in a series of exercises based on repetition throughout the quarter, usually working in pairs. One person, whom I will refer to as *Person A*, would begin with an observational statement, and *Person B* would respond with a question of the same line but would change the pronouns as follows:

Person A: "You seem nervous."
Person B: "I seem nervous?"
Person A: "You seem nervous."

⁶ This work is in collaboration with Dennis Longwell and Sydney Pollack published in 1987.

After three iterations, either person had the freedom of changing the statement, for example:

Person B: "I'm tired."
Person A: "You're tired?"
Person B: "I'm tired."
Person A: "I'm tired too."
Person B: "You're tired too?"
Person A: "I'm tired too."

The students practiced this exercise for the entire quarter. They began with simple lines that they made up, and, after time, progressed to using lines from a monologue of their choosing. He went over how this exercise lent itself to living and reacting in the moment as actors. Fritsch continually reminded the class that they were to "live truthfully under imaginary circumstances."⁷ This phrase, although taken directly from Meisner, echoes the great Stanislavski.

I have found great value in examining these various pioneers in the field for my own performance, in addition to my teaching techniques. I am taking from this that I have come to a greater understanding of how we all make successful art. As I explained before, my practice is based in my experiences, which has made me a successful actor and theater practitioner. My work is rooted in practice, rather than academic disciplines, but I am now aware that it was grounded in theory. Other actors that I have worked with have a story dissimilar to mine but engender the same results. Moving forward, I am taking this new knowledge because of my appreciation for diversity in practice and my own diverse identity, which is multi-cultural, multi-

⁷This point is taken directly from *Sanford Meisner On Acting*.

ethnic, and queer which cannot be defined by one singular category. Recognizing that each person's individuality is valuable, and having that diversity within our practice, such as a range of techniques or multiple influences, ties into our diversity in life such as our genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations, religions, and socio-economic statuses. I strive to be a more diverse artist and continue to expand and add to my toolkit. In the following chapter, I will detail exactly where my castmate's approaches differed from mine in *The Children's Hour*, and where I was able to implement these newfound naturalistic techniques.

SECTION 3: *The Children's Hour*

The Children's Hour, written by Lillian Hellman in 1934, tells the dramatic story of Karen Wright and Martha Dobie (played by Allie Pratt in this production), two friends who own and operate an all girls' boarding school. The story quickly turns for the worse as Mary Tilford, played by Magdalena Travis, a young troublemaker, tells a web of lies to avoid punishment for her evil deeds. Her disdain for her teachers and the lies told to her grandmother, Ben Chau-Chiu as Mrs. Tilford, become a complicated tale of a lesbian love affair between the two women. The result? Their school gets shut down, the schoolgirls are sent home, and Karen and Martha are left with nothing. The final act of the play displays the aftermath of this tragic event, Karen's ending of her relationship with fiancé Joe Cardin (performed by Rey Cordova), and Martha's confession of her love for Karen. Unable to cope with her guilt, Martha takes her own life.

In the first chapter, I mentioned director Danny Scheie offered me a principal role. He gave me the option of playing Mary or Karen, and I chose Karen. I chose to play Karen because I felt it was a good opportunity to play someone closer to me in age, in gender, profession. Seeing as I was experimenting with naturalism, Karen presented an optimal occasion to test my embodied work on this classic American drama.

Scheie's direction on the acting itself was within the approach of psychological realism. I had to observe others and train myself how to work with the Stanislavski acting technique, while also using what I have learned as an embodied actor to produce the best work I could.

It was thrilling to be part of this production with a renowned director, and I was once again part of a production with a diverse group of theater artists. Scheie, a known Stanislavskian director, conducted our rehearsals with this influence. He used parts of the Stanislavski acting technique such as *Super-Objective*, *Transitive Verbs*, and *Given Circumstances*. This requirement proved difficult for me as an embodied actor with practice in experimental and devised work. I had to learn an entirely new acting technique and felt isolated from my cast, as the principal characters weren't ensemble-based. Ordinarily, my practice involves using my body and impulses, and the collaboration with others first, and then grounding that work in the text or play. My approach is working from the external to the internal, from the physical body to the psychology of the mind. In *The Children's Hour*, we were asked to build from the text up, moving from the internal to the external.

SECTION 4: Before We Enter the Space

Actors in *The Children's Hour* – Most actors in *The Children's Hour* committed to their work on the show by developing a character by the use of the Stanislavski acting method. These actors were by no means solely devout Stanislavskian actors. Their practice, similar to mine, has been cultivated by various artistic influences. However, they were prepared to primarily utilize Stanislavski's method as it pertained to the piece directed by Scheie, who spoke on this technique and practiced it in the rehearsal room.

The preparation for a piece with this acting technique involves a great deal of work one on one with a character by creating these *Given Circumstances*⁸ to develop a character's life and inner self to inhabit the role. The actors in this production practiced this as they came to critical decisions about their character in preparation for the rehearsal process. These decisions were somewhat flexible, and that actor would be responsible for defending that choice to other actors and the director during table work later.⁹

There is a considerable amount of homework that is required of a naturalistic piece of theater to use this psychological approach. In realism, the actors dedicate time to creating a backstory for a character in a play because it assists in developing the psychological depth of their role. Research is done on a variety of aspects of a character's life to get a psychologically complex and realistic interpretation of this

⁸ Please refer to chapter two (Section Two): Acting Techniques and Theorists for more information.

⁹ This will be discussed in chapter five (Section Five: Table Work.)

person they are portraying. One can begin to look into the period in which the play takes place and can expand further into the political climate, clothing, music, activities, and more, that a person during this time would experience. A great deal of work can be done with this type of practice while researching a character's life from what they wear to how many cigarettes they smoke in a day, and information can be added or taken away as one undergoes this process.

Allie Pratt, the actor that played Martha Dobie, stated that she made choices about her character influenced by the Stanislavski method. This resulted in decisions on her family relationships, for example, which included Martha's parents' death, the absence of siblings, and the subsequent relationship with her aunt, Lily Mortar, another character in the play. These were all choices that she had to make in regards to developing the character of Martha. Additionally, before Pratt entered the rehearsal space, she began with printing out the script and highlighting her lines. Then, she wrote many notes in the margins on her lines or her character detailing that crucial information, using the *Given Circumstances* and *Magic If* to understand the psychology of Martha.

Pratt, like the other actors in the production, spent energy and time dedicated to creating a foundation for their character and understanding the psychology behind them to create the person that they were portraying onstage before even entering the rehearsal space. By understanding their character's personality, they were able to jump into the rehearsal process geared with a realistic approach influenced by the Stanislavski method of acting.

My Preparation on *The Children's Hour* – After I was offered the part of Karen in *The Children's Hour*, the first thing I did to begin my process was a detailed read-through of the play. I read the play while going through the audition process, but once offered a specific role, I reread the play to get a sense of my character's position in the story. I focused on the plot and how Karen contributed to it by the language she used. As I began to track Karen's place in the play, I paid close attention to the other characters that were present. I noticed that Karen played many different roles in her life. For example, she was a fiancée, a schoolteacher, a mentor, a best friend, a boss, and a business partner. It was vital for me to make a note of this and explore how she interacted with the others when in these roles, and how she changed. These beginning steps were similar to what Pratt did for her character of Martha, by printing out the script and highlighting lines. However, through this process, I was able to look at the text in the play, or the provided *Given Circumstances*, to develop an understanding of who Karen was. This was done as an alternative to what Pratt did, as she invented new information using the *Magic If* followed by creating a set *Given Circumstances* to create a life of her character and her feelings. I began memorizing my lines, similar to the Stanislavskian approach of beginning with text, which is the natural next step for most actors. It is crucial for me to be able to interact with the others onstage, and it is conducive if I do not have the script in my hands to do so. I wanted to be able to look into other's eyes and feel their energy or presence in a scene. The sooner I can work to get my lines into my head and body, the better. It also helps me as a performer to work on this before I enter the space because I spend time finding my

voice to ensure that I am not putting on a specific tone for the character, but rather, working with the sounds generated within my own body.

In this way, my process of preparation was vastly different from others in the company. I did not come up with a backstory for Karen, nor did I know what type of person she was. I did not decide her religion, her parent's occupation, where she was born, her previous relationships, or how many cigarettes she smoked a day. I did not think about Karen's family and her relationship with them. It is not in my practice to create a life for my character; I wait for the space. It is important for me to be ready to make decisions as I work in the space with the others around me, with complete openness.

SECTION 5: Working with the Text

A Stanislavskian Approach to *The Children's Hour* – During the first week of rehearsals, Scheie had opted out of the idea of doing a group read-through of the entire script. He had scheduled readings of each scene, out of order, with the cast. This first step in the rehearsal process is known as *Table Work*. This is defined as the cast read-through of each scene in the entire play. The company sits around a table, including the director and stage manager, to study the text, and answer any questions about the script. Scheie conducted the *Table Work* before the read-through with designers to ensure that we actors had ideas about our characters and were able to make choices beforehand. As we read through the scenes, Scheie would stop us if a line's intention was unclear to him, and ask us questions about our character or the

choices we were making. He wanted us to have clear actions to carry out in the scene. He specifically wanted to hear the development our relationships or characters through the delivery of our lines.

As we began the rehearsal process with the *table work*, Scheie asked if we were all familiar with Stanislavski and his acting method. When I initially agreed, I did not understand that he specifically meant: are we used to working and practicing this particular technique. I was embarrassingly unaware at the time on the specifics and terminology of the Stanislavski acting technique, such as the *Given Circumstances*¹⁰ or *Transitive Verbs*. I understood what a background story was and realism, but not the terminology of “*Given Circumstances*.” I was too shy and frankly ashamed to ask Scheie questions. His reputation is tremendous and I was thrilled to be cast in this show that I did not want to disappoint him, or more, make him dramatically shocked by my ignorance. Those who know Scheie know he is one to make everyone in the room laugh by his outlandish, loud, and sometimes lewd comments. I raced home that night researching basic knowledge¹¹ to keep up with the rest of the cast.

While working on the text, Scheie also introduced the technique of an *Inner Monologue* to include as part of our process. The *inner monologue* details the character’s inner thoughts during a scene, or the subtext. This is important, especially when they do not have any lines, but a dialogue remains in their head as another character is speaking. In Act II, for example, Karen and Martha go to see Mrs. Tilford

¹⁰Please refer to Section 2: Acting Techniques and Theorists.

¹¹ This is detailed in chapter two.

about why the parents took away the girls from their school. Mrs. Tilford explains that Mary has told her of the affair between the two women. Later, Mary enters the scene and confirms this story. Karen and Martha are enraged with this lie as they are forced to hear Mary go in detail about the affair. In the scene, I sit on the couch, listening to the adults question Mary and have this *inner monologue* of thoughts such as, *this is not true, you are a liar, what is wrong with you, or how can you make up such things, and this child is seriously disturbed*(see image 1). This ensured that I remained in the moment and engaged with the psychological process of the character. Throughout the process, Scheie questioned what our *inner monologue* was for us in any given moment.

In the course of the table work, Scheie focused more heavily on grilling our *Transitive Verbs*. A moment of this was in Act I, as Martha and Karen's first scene together is a long conversation which ends with Karen discussing the new house she and her fiancé Joe Cardin, are buying (see image 2). Martha, anxious and overwhelmed, reacts poorly to the news as she assumes Karen will leave her and the school. "My marriage is not going to interfere with my work here. You're making something out of nothing," I say to Martha, as Karen (18.) Scheie stops me and asks what am I doing with that line or what is my verb here. I scrambled, replying as quickly as I could, with *to reduce* or *to defend*, not exactly solidifying my decision and unable to support it. I did this a lot, as I did not yearn for conversations about the *Transitive Verbs*. I merely wanted to read through and make the decisions once I was on my feet. Pratt, on the opposite spectrum, was never asked what her *Transitive*

Verbs were because they were precise and effective. Pratt demonstrated that she was fluent in the Stanislavski technique and was used to the language. He did question her in this scene, and on other occasions, what was going on with her character and she replied immediately, and confidently. He asked her, not because it was unclear to him, but because he maybe disagreed with her decision. This remains vivid in my memory, as the two had long conversations steeped in the *Given Circumstances* of Martha's entire life and *Transitive Verbs*. The two were able to converse about Martha's character and dive deeply into her psychology.

Another example during *Table Work* was my first scene. I attempted to have a discussion with Mary about her bad behavior. This was an instance where Scheie provided me with my *Transitive Verbs* himself. He asked me questions and then told me that my first line should be *to soothe* or *to soften* Mary, the next *to succor*, and then *to grill*, *to scold*, *to chastise*, *to caution*, and finally as the conversation ceases because Mary's lack of cooperation, the verb is *to punish*. I am inferring that Scheie assisted with my *Transitive Verbs* because clear actions and changes in tactics were necessary for Karen as this lengthy interrogation led nowhere and variation was needed to carry it through.

A necessary and unique note about this process was that we were given two scripts of *The Children's Hour* to read from, one was the original from the 1930s and the second was an edited version by Lillian Hellman in the 1950s. Scheie was also reading another from the 1970s that seemed to be a compilation of the other two scripts, but we actors did not have access to that version, nor did we want another

version to compare to. We began by reading through the 1950s version first, and then we read through the 1930s version. In reading one after the other, Scheie could hear how the writing affected the *Objectives* in the scene or choices made for our characters. We also could get a sense of which version we liked more as actors. The fact that we had these two scripts meant that we spent an enormous amount of time on the text, and in making those decisions about it; we were taking a psychological approach to our characters and were not on our feet. This was an enjoyable moment of collaboration that I observed, as the others were attuned with this technique and could work together on their character with Scheie. It serves as an example when ideas were being shared and discussed together as a group, rather than one person taking charge. It is important, as the end result of the text in the show reflected this work and collaboration done with a variety of theater artists.

An Embodied Acting Approach– In other shows, I would read the script with the cast for the words and the story, without making decisions or assumptions. Almost as if to uncover or understand what things meant and why they were being said. During *table work*, I would not read the script with impressions already made about my character. I would read the text for what it is, using my voice without adding color or emphasis. It was so hard because I felt I was being asked to play a part and make decisions about my character without using my body in the first week of rehearsals and my body is central to the beginning of my process.

For some pieces, there is no table read at all, nor table work. Ensembles spend time working together and getting comfortable as a cast by playing games or practicing acting exercises that foster this individual growth and group dynamic. For example, in an experimental take on Shakespeare's *Richard III* at University of California, Davis, where I earned my Bachelor of Arts, our ensemble spent two or three weeks doing exercises before working with the text. We practiced Bogart's *Viewpoints* exercises, as well as contact improvisation, or improvisational dance, to initiate the development of the piece. Other pieces included work such as dance, yoga, Lishi Tai Chi, or slow walks.

SECTION 6: Moving in the Space

The Children's Hour – When it came time for staging, the actors had to know how to apply the techniques, done during *Table Work*, as motivations to play one's character. There were particular scenes that Scheie had strong visions of where he wanted the actors onstage, but it was still the actor's duty to know how to bring the director's vision to life as one's character. If there was confusion or uncertainty, then one would go to the director for clarification. These scenes were taken very slowly as Scheie would stop us and direct where he wanted us positioned, then we all would experiment to see if it had the desired outcome.

This hierarchy in the rehearsal process was peculiar to me. This order remained as Scheie, the director, at the top and in charge, then came the principal roles in the play, and at the bottom stood the ensemble. The previous work that I have done was

very much egalitarian where the director and the ensemble, principals as part of this, ultimately collaborated on the entire show. This stunted me in the staging process. I had to adjust my expectations and realize that this was a challenging learning process for me, full of new insights. In order to do my job, I had to perform and find a balance or compromise with my body and instinct. I had to find new ways of working in the space, such as discovering the motivations behind the movement to propel me forward.

In Act III, Joe Cardin and Karen had a lengthy breakup scene. During *Table Work*, Scheie went over it to divide it into *Beats* for the action to move forward and allow the audience to follow the events with ease as they unfolded. Here, Scheie directed and staged the entire scene. Cordova and I had exact directions of places on the stage that we had to land on to recite our lines and carry out our actions. For instance, we were placed center stage as the conversation became heated, then I moved downstage to break away from Cardin when I realized, “It won’t work.” Next, Cardin and I stood on opposite sides of the stage, as I interrogated him, making him confess that he was not wholly sure if Martha and I had been lovers in the past. As he realized his words were a mistake, he ran over to me on his knees, apologizing (see images 3 and 4). I helped pick him up and brought him upstage to sit in a chair as I explained how we would never work out. Cardin again fell to his knees and begged. I told him to “go away for a little while,” and he left the stage. This was entirely mapped out by Scheie and led me to feel very disconnected in the scene. The precise staging was somewhat oppressive, as I was unsure how to collaborate with Scheie to

connect more with the staging. I turned to Cordova and the work we conducted together on our relationship in the show to meet this desired outcome. Again, I had to adjust my practice and find my impulses in the scene that connected with carrying out Scheie's vision. Although the staging was singularly and meticulously devised by the director, Cordova and I came together, with diverse backgrounds and styles, and were still able to successfully bring the scene to life.

Another moment during rehearsals, Pratt experienced a similar feeling of being stuck but was able to justify it with her development and decisions about her character, Martha. Pratt, as Martha, had a strong impulse in a scene to clean up the classroom. Scheie directed Pratt to stay still and in the conversation with me, but her urge was to fix the disorganized chairs left by the schoolgirls. Pratt felt it necessary to tidy up because the text explicitly describes Martha as "high strung." Pratt explained that this was one thing Martha could control. Her anger and Karen's decisions were out of her hands, which informed her that Martha needed order and cleanliness in her life; hence, she would not leave a mess in her school. Pratt defended the choice by the development she made through *Table Work*. Pratt won the argument; it was a type of collaboration that I had not yet experienced. She was successful because of her education on the Stanislavski technique as she had a clear understanding of the psychological motivations of her character and the rationality behind her conscious decisions.

Finally, a scene at the end of the play serves as an example of the found middle ground within the hierarchy. The scene was Martha's confession of love for

Karen after the break up scene with Cardin. Scheie directed both of us to stand at the center of the stage, facing each other in a profile view for the audience. Pratt did not initially agree or like this staging, but had no choice but to follow his directions. Pratt and I were then brought down to the same status. We were both then able to experiment and collaborate with each other because we were in the same playing field in something that felt foreign and unnatural. This became a process that felt familiar. It was another opportunity in which two actors, with separate practices and identities, came together magnanimously to share our ideas. In the end, we both favored the image and grew to really enjoy the scene together.

The end of Act II contained an example of a more collaborative scene, but still a moment where I was restricted. This was a confrontation scene with Karen, Martha, Joe, and Mary's grandmother, Mrs. Tilford, that Scheie did not have mapped out. This scene was an investigation of the alleged love affair between Martha and Karen. Scheie permitted us to follow our impulses, as the stakes were extremely high. Mary told her grandmother this lie, which led to Mrs. Tilford calling the parents to remove their children from the school. Karen, Joe, and Martha desperately fought for the truth to come out during the confrontation (see image 5). Our bodies, and relationships with each other were critical to assist in the telling of the story and conflict aroused. I was eager to move around the space and interact with the other bodies, and the task was also another learning process as Scheie wished to solidify our staging rather quickly. Nonetheless, we were still able to work together, with our bodies, minds, and impulses to create this dynamic scene.

Embodied Acting and Previous Work – In my devised and experimental work, I move in the space with openness, ready to collaborate and make choices on the staging in rehearsals. A standard day began with a full body warm up and perhaps an ensemble exercise or game. In the space, I moved in relation to, and investigated, the impulses of the other bodies, the vibrations of our voice, and our energy. This movement included trial and error to discover what worked best for the space, piece, and audience, to tell the story. There was a certain freedom of movement to create new ideas and experiment together as an ensemble. This trained me to focus heavily on my body as my primary tool, the external, and then internally to my mind. I would come back to this if I felt stuck or unsure of what to do. The focus was not on the *Given Circumstances* or the *Magic If*.

The work conducted during *Table Work* and preparation assisted Scheie with understanding our character's motivations. Scheie worked on our staging, in addition to continuing to work our lines as we moved in the space. I remember a day that I had a line reading with Scheie, and struggled because he wanted me to say a line in a precise way. This happened a few times, but I will relay one example, which was my first line being to Martha during Act III. At this point in the play, Martha and Karen have hit rock bottom; nothing was left for us (see image 6, 7, 8). As Karen, I said, "what happened and why did it happen?" Scheie insisted that I emphasized the "what" and "why" in this line. And in particular, he wanted emphasis on the latter as Karen was struggling with some inner turmoil and needed an explanation for "why" her life spiraled out of control and led to this utter emptiness. I thought that I was

following Scheie's direction, but I was not. I continued to emphasize the verb in the sentence "happen." The more Scheie repeated the line note to me, the more confused I got. I point to this situation because one, it stood out as an embarrassing moment, and two, it exemplified how much time centered on the text. I was ready in the staging process to explore Karen's physicality and impulses, but was brought back to the psychological approach to my character.

SECTION 7: Playing Karen

Actors in *The Children's Hour* – From what I understood with this show, my fellow actors were portraying their characters by demonstrating the work done on their text and character that occurred during the rehearsal process. In this process, the actors grew more in touch with their part and had the time to develop the world around them to navigate how they interacted with it. This type of acting depends on the psychological depth that an actor puts towards their role.

When Pratt was preparing for our performance, which is referred to as a pre-show routine, she mentioned that Hagen was a great influence in her approach; it did not include physical or vocal warm-ups for this particular show. She said that Hagen had a chapter in one of her books about putting on perfume. In this, Pratt remembered Hagen explaining that she put on perfume as a way to step into her role. Therefore Pratt, when she works on a piece, attempts to do a similar thing. During the rehearsal process, she began to dress like Martha to find a connection with her, and before a performance, she would begin to prepare herself mentally as though she was Martha

as she got set to go on stage. After this conversation with Pratt, I searched for this “perfume” example and found it in *Respect for Acting* by Uta Hagen, mentioned in chapter two of this paper. Hagen explains that if she were to prepare for a role as her regular self, she would not be very good at it. She explains that she uses her exercise of *Substitution* and says, “I remember myself preparing for an evening at the opera...oiling and perfuming my body, soothing my skin, brushing my hair” and doing this creates “a sense of reality and faith in my character” (37, 38). Pratt later confirmed that I found the correct example and that this aids her in developing her character.

Embodied Acting and *The Children’s Hour* – It was not until the performances that I was able to combine my previous training with what Scheie was asking. Most of the rehearsal process was to focus on the text and the story that I was telling through this psychological approach for the character of Karen. Since we did not work as an ensemble during the rehearsal process, I was able to build relationships with the other characters or actors onstage during the run-throughs and performances. In this, I was able to understand better how we were all coming together to create this piece of work, equipped with our own set of practices and techniques. I spent a lot of energy during the process figuring out how to employ some of Stanislavski’s technique, along with Scheie’s direction and work on the text, that it was intimidating working more independently without the ensemble, but also exciting that we were able to be in the space together and playing.

During the performances, or in preparation for them, I focused on warm-ups, alignment of my body, and breathing exercises to prepare myself for performances. Later, I will explain moments in the show where I attempted to combine what Scheie taught me about the Stanislavski technique, along with my own physicality training. When I came to the stage, I utilized what I had in my toolkit from my practice as an embodied actor. Being an embodied actor, for me, means that I have to have control of my body by ways of relaxing and grounding myself, and that begins with me finding a neutrality in myself that I can always come to and jump off.¹²Influenced by my work with my director Peter Lichtenfels, as well as my alignment based, Vinyasa yoga practice by my guru Kia Meaux, I am able to find this neutral body. Yoga teaches one balance, strength, flexibility, and concentration. Additionally, it is important to work on building stamina and strength by being physically fit and ready to move.

I find this balance when I begin my warm-ups, rehearsal, and performances. I start with my feet, or my foundation, and I work my way up my body. I align my feet by putting them hip distance apart and parallel to each other, coming to anatomical neutral. I spread my toes, pointed them forward, ground myself through my feet, feel all nine points of contact with each of them on the floor and distribute the weight evenly on each foot. I move up by bringing my attention to my knees and engage my quadriceps in keeping them active. I soften the backs of my knees and so that they are not locked. Locking one's joints is not only harmful to one's bones and cartilage and

¹²This might resemble what some may call "actor neutral" or even the yoga pose, Tadasana.

can lead to arthritis, but it also prohibits any energy from flowing through one's body.¹³ Next are the hips, where I tilt my pelvis backward, not too far forward to have a straight back. I want to make sure that I am not tucking my tail too far in, which is harmful to my pelvic floor and strains areas such as my knees and glutes. After, I will relax my shoulders and make sure my arms have a slight external rotation, and my elbows have a micro-bend to allow a flow of energy, which will help relax my neck and shoulders, and keep my chest up and open. From my work with Lichtenfels, I acquired knowledge of audience understanding as well for this. By relaxing in this way, I am not crossing my arms or clenching my fists, and I am allowing energy to flow and have an open body that is more receptive. Following that, I will create space between my ear lobes and the tops of my shoulders, and shoot the crown of my head straight up towards the sky so I have a nice, long back. Finally, I will relax my face, like my eyebrows, cheeks, and even my tongue. This might all seem super excessive, but I do this for me to allow a good flow of energy and as I mentioned before, relaxed and grounded body. I cannot focus on this through the duration of a performance, but with enough practice, it becomes more inherent, and one can call on certain parts of one's body to serve one at the moment. In my training with Lynette Hunter and Lishi Tai Chi, I gained an understanding of how to especially relax my facial muscles. I tend to frown with my eyebrows to show emotion, but I grasped that when one rests one's face, the audience can have a better understanding of one's presence onstage.

¹³I am a certified yoga instructor and have received training to learn about this.

Once I align my body accurately, then I use my breath to support in grounding myself onstage. From my yoga and pranayama practice, I focus heavily on my diaphragm to expand and contract while breathing¹⁴, and that translates to pushing out my belly and sucking it back in. This can sometimes become difficult when acting onstage, as my natural tendency is to hold my stomach in to look more flattering for audiences. Thus, making it a conscious effort is essential to have control of my breath. My pranayama practice has become crucial as it reminds me to be aware constantly and to have control over my breath, and this can only happen through exercising my breath beforehand. I have learned, through my work with Regina Gutierrez and Dr. Lynette Hunter, influenced by Lishi Tai Chi, three sectional breathing and four directional breathing, that ensures that I am taking long, controlled breaths. Three sectional breathing starts by first inhaling through the sections go upwards and then exhaling going downwards through the same segments. On the inhale, I expanding the diaphragm, then move up to the solar plexus and expand the ribs, to finally expanding the chest and lungs. Then as I exhale, I let the breath leave first the lungs and chest, then the ribs, and then the diaphragm by contracting it. I practiced this breathing before performances, and also sometimes during the performances while onstage and not speaking. Four directional breathing differs as one cannot do it onstage, as it involves the entire body and energy. I do this practice before rehearsals or in preparation for a performance to settle in, slow my heart rate

¹⁴Everyone uses their diaphragm unconsciously while breathing. It is simply, how we breathe. In my practice, I make it a conscious movement to take longer, deeper breaths.

or relax, and focus my energy. My yoga practice involves other pranayama breathing exercises to expel old energy and make room for the new, in addition to a greater awareness of the entire body.

I controlled my breath onstage to support Karen's actions and to communicate to the audience. From working with my director Peter Lichtenfels, I have learned that if one holds one's breath onstage, then the audience will hold their breath as well. It is important to be careful when one utilizes this technique because if one is not breathing as a result of nervousness or not in control of one's body, then that can have a negative consequence for the audience not breathing as well or falling asleep. How I controlled my breath onstage was by breathing faster, slower, or even holding my breath.

An example of this is at the beginning of Act III. At this moment, the curtain opens to Karen and Martha, who are both wrecked by their current circumstances. Their school was shut down, their reputations ruined by their loss of a court case accusing them of having sexual relations with each other.¹⁵ To play on the depression that Karen was feeling and settle into this moment, I took long inhalations and exhalations to slow down my breath. This was to showcase how heavy she felt and demonstrated her life, stuck in this nightmare. Later in Act III, as their lives unravel even more with new information, the climactic moment happens when Martha confesses her absolute love for Karen. At this moment, Pratt is pacing around the stage, processing this news for her character of Martha, and rambling on to Karen

¹⁵Being homosexual was unacceptable during this period.

attempting to justify for herself and understand the words that are spilling out of her mouth. I, on the other hand, stand there and process all of the information. I practiced breathing faster, by shortening my inhalations and exhalations, in order to bring attention to how high the stakes were in that moment. My final example of how I controlled my breath onstage was when Martha goes upstage, grabs a gun to shoot herself in the head, committing suicide. As this happens upstage, I am downstage, sitting in a chair looking straight out to the audience. At this moment, I did a quick inhale through my chest and then held my breath for about 5-10 seconds until Lily Mortar runs to the stage screaming.

As it came time to the performances, I had the opportunity to incorporate my embodied practice to my role, while at the same time, having to incorporate the tasks that Scheie set for my character and me to play out during rehearsals. To go over, Scheie, influenced by Stanislavski, asked us to come up with the *Given Circumstances* for our character, develop an *Inner Monologue*, obtain a *Super-Objective*, and assign *Transitive Verbs* or *Objectives* during every moment in our scenes to display to the audience.

I worked on exploring how I could incorporate my work on my physical body as Karen, and the psychological at the same time. I attempted to continue to use the Stanislavskian *inner monologue* along with my body and breath. I have chosen three examples from Act III, in which I attempted to combine these practices.

The first was the scene in Act III where Karen and her fiancé, Joe Cardin, played by Rey Cordova break up. Here, I followed Scheie's explicit staging of where

to move in the space. Also, I practiced Scheie's direction of *Beat* changes to facilitate the narrative. This was a lengthy breakup scene with many different events that happened within it. Having these *Beatchanges* did help break up it up and carry it through. Along with this, I used moved around the space with my body, listened and reacted to Cordova's actions as well.

Next, being climactic section in the act where Martha professes her love for Karen (see image 9). I utilized Scheie's direction of *inner monologue* mixed with my training of energy and breath. I did not have many lines as Martha was frantically struggling to tell her best friend how she is indeed in love with her and has ruined both of our lives. Here, I had this inner dialogue with myself doing my best to wrap my head around this colossal discovery. I was asking myself all these questions of *how can this be true or no, no, no, you do not feel this way, it is just not possible*. Meanwhile, with my body, I was practicing my breath, as I mentioned earlier in this section, as well as having an open body and energy to receive all of Martha's thoughts and feelings. This resulted in me listening with my body.

My final example is Martha's death that I spoke about before. I articulated using my breath in the scene to carry it through to the audience how Karen felt, but I also gathered and focused my energy to remain present with the feelings and reactions that Karen had. It was also essential that I practiced Scheie's *Objectives*, and *Transitive Verbs*, influenced by Stanislavski to carry out the actions happening (see image 10).

SECTION 8: My Take Away

Preparation – I have gained an understanding from the work that the others did in preparation for this play, and find that it will be useful to take on some of their insights to the process if I were to do a naturalistic play in the future. In the independent reading of the play, they gained a great sense of their character's life story, which informed their position and rationalized some of the decisions made through the use of the Stanislavskian technique. I have learned that I need more preparation for a naturalistic play, as I might not have time during the rehearsal process to develop my character and their body before we do work on the script. Thus, I will do more preparation in terms of physical exercises to experiment in finding my character's body, which will then inform or justify the *Given Circumstances*.

I would also work closely with the script to work on memorization. Although I worked tediously on memorization in preparation for *The Children's Hour*, I did not come fully memorized come time for rehearsals. I would make sure to do this so I can place the attention onto my physicality. I understand that this might not be doable, and in that case, I would memorize each scene that I am in, and the events that take place in order to practice how my character's body would move. After time working on my physicality, I would then do my homework of the *Given Circumstances*. I would still begin my process from the external form of my body, but now I will plan to incorporate more decisions on the psychology of my character as it is pertinent to the story in the hopes that this will better prepare me for the next step: the table work.

Table Work – As I reflect on the *table work*, I find that the *Given Circumstances*, *Transitive Verbs*, *Objectives*, and *Beats* will be useful for my practice when working on a naturalistic piece. I can now confidently enter the rehearsal space aware of what might be asked of me, what these terms are, and how to use them, as I am more familiar with the terminology. However, as I am an embodied actor, I will continue to prepare first and foremost physically to guide me through the actions, and then later referred to the verbs as a tool as needed to support this. Similarly, I will explore the external when discovering my relationships with others, whether it is during the staging or the table readings of the script before I move to the internal. While working on the relationship between Karen and her fiancé, Joe Cardin, Cordova and I explored this through our physicality. After, when it seemed like the specifics our connection were lost, we had a conversation establishing how long we had been together and what kind of couple we were. This discussion revolved around us deciphering what the *Given Circumstances* were for our relationship, as it remained relevant in our scenes.

In the end, I did not find it helpful to come up with a complete story or set of *Given Circumstances* about her, as it did not further my practical development for the role of Karen. Knowing Karen's parent's occupations or her childhood pet did not change my tactics or intentions and did not change my physical life onstage. Therefore, I will work from my physicality, similar to how Cordova and I established our relationship, and then utilize the *Given Circumstances* to further the development of these roles.

Staging – Since we spent a great deal of time working on the script, I was thrilled to get onto our feet for the staging part of rehearsals. This proved to be challenging because we were not afforded with much time to do so and I struggled to find a middle ground between my work as an embodied actor and this show. Moving forward, I will adjust my expectations to make myself aware that some naturalistic shows might not be provided with the time to work as an ensemble. I will have to be equipped with my work on my character and lines, and take full advantage of the space and time to collaborate with the other actors and director.

Performance – If I perform in a naturalistic play in the future, I will attempt again, to combine the techniques that I have absorbed from this process, along with my own embodied practice.

Since this was a production and not a course on training, we actors did not fully develop Stanislavski's method of acting. Instead, we developed some of his techniques as we were directed by Scheie to cultivate the story and our characters. Because of this progression of the psychology of a character, there was not a whole lot of time to work on playing out the scenes with our bodies. For me, as I was unable to collaborate with Scheie because of my lack of knowledge with the technique, I was limited in how far I could grow in a scene with my body and the characters. I am accustomed to ensemble-based shows; therefore, it took me more time to learn how to foster Karen Wright independently.

SECTION 9: Conclusion

Is it better to work with multiple techniques as an actor or to focus on one technique as one develops a part in a play? I began my research with this question. From my experience through this process, I learned that actors do not solely apply one technique to their practice. Similar to how we are in life, learning through experience, we act onstage based on our social personas and the knowledge we have acquired. This result is comparable to the commonalities in the Meisner and Hagen acting techniques, influenced by Stanislavski, curating new ways to learn acting. Although we may attempt to utilize a specific technique when preparing for a role or during the rehearsal process, our bodies tell a story from experience while onstage.

We need to teach acting students to be aware of these commonalities and to be able to recognize their preferences without diminishing the value in each of the various acting theories.

I believe that encouraging diversity in our acting techniques will ultimately aid actors to be more confident, as it will engender new thought and stimulate the imagination. This investigation itself is valuable even if it merely stimulates a fresh approach to actor training. Furthermore, the task of unpacking new and inspiring techniques similarly has immense worth in our training as actors.

I think it is important to explore our pasts to inform how we get to where we are today, and similarly to recognize the previous acting schools and theorists in which we attain our foundation as artists.

In the end, I was surprised by that conversation that Barón and I had before I auditioned for *The Children's Hour*. Something that he called simply naturalistic was actually a myriad of things. The acting and the techniques that Scheie utilized for the principal roles, like me, were naturalistic. However, the ensemble and the set were very much experimental. Additionally, the other actors in this process studied various acting techniques, therefore, not one person was solely a Stanislavskian actor, and Scheie too, was not solely a Stanislavskian director.

I have never entirely studied the Stanislavski acting method, so I cannot say with confidence that it does not work for me. There are fragments of his method that work with physicality and objects or impulses, which I could resonate with; however, I would still incorporate my energy and breathing practices. Overall, I would always have my influence of all of my previous experiences, and every technique that is in my toolkit. This includes what I have learned from Scheie as it has been very influential to my practice. Not only were the techniques useful, but it has helped tremendously with directing actors and teaching as well. I am an embodied actor, but now, I have added Stanislavski to my toolkit.

After some time with my fellow actors, I found that this piece of work was unique because of our differences in training. We were each able to utilize our styles to serve the piece and the story that we were telling. We entered the space as artists with openness, and all had something in common. There is diversity within this convention. Our diversity aided the production because, in the end, we had confidence in our ability to do something we were good at individually. But we each found our

way and a way that worked for everyone. In the end, we all created a beautiful piece that created an impact on our audiences. “If and when you have a predetermined idea of what it is you can or should be doing, feeling, or experiencing, your relationship to what you are doing will not be totally in the moment... You will not be inhabiting the bodymind and energy,” says contemporary American writer and director, Phillip B. Zarrilli¹⁶ in *Psychophysical Acting: An intercultural approach after Stanislavski* (86). If someone assumes that they know all there is to know about a play and what they are going to do, they are limiting themselves in their art. When people come together with various ideas and create a piece of work, the options are limitless.

¹⁶Zarrilli is an international scholar with teachings on the psychophysical process to performers influenced by Eastern traditions. His book, *Psychophysical Acting*, teaches actors based on Asian martial arts and yoga. He is the founding artistic director of the theater company, The Llanarth Group. He has received many awards for his scholarship and has taught internationally at universities such as NYU and Northwestern.

APPENDIX

Production Photos of *The Children's Hour*



1. The Interrogation. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Madgalena Travis, Allie Pratt, Rey Cordova, Melissa Cunha (actors). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Monica Ravitch (Scenic Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.



2. The Conversation. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Allie Pratt, Melissa Cunha (actors). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Monica Ravitch (Scenic Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.



3.



4. Break Up Scene. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Rey Cordova, Melissa Cunha (actors). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.



5. The Interrogation. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Ben Chau-Chiu, Allie Pratt, Rey Cordova, Melissa Cunha (actors). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Monica Ravitch (Scenic Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.



6. When Left With Nothing. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Allie Pratt, Melissa Cunha (actors). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Monica Ravitch (Scenic Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.



7. When Left With Nothing. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Allie Pratt, Melissa Cunha (actors). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Monica Ravitch (Scenic Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.



8. When Left With Nothing. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Melissa Cunha (actor). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Monica Ravitch (Scenic Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.



9. The Confession. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Allie Pratt (actor). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.



10. The Confession. *The Children's Hour*. October 26, 2018. Mainstage Theater, UC Santa Cruz. Allie Pratt (actor). Spenser Matubang (Lighting Designer). Mariana Briskin (Costume Designer). Photo Credit: Steve DiBartolomeo.

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