
Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020-

2021

Emotional Availability: A Practice-as-Research Exploration on Acting in Film and Theatre

Janice Munk
University of Central Florida



Part of the [Acting Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2020>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020- by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

STARS Citation

Munk, Janice, "Emotional Availability: A Practice-as-Research Exploration on Acting in Film and Theatre" (2021). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2020-*. 737.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2020/737>

EMOTIONAL AVAILABILITY:
A PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH EXPLORATION ON ACTING IN FILM AND THEATRE

By

JANICE MUNK
A.S. Brigham Young University–Idaho, 2012
B.A. Brigham Young University–Idaho, 2016

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2021

© 2021 Janice Munk

Dedicated to:
my thesis committee, cohort, family, and friends who helped me get this thing done.

ABSTRACT

Actors are frequently required to be emotionally available on the spot, in situations ranging from an early morning acting class, to filming a scene well past midnight after a full day on set. In theatre, there is the expectation to deliver the right emotion every performance, and in film, when the camera and crew are ready, the actor is expected to produce the emotion at that moment. This demand to give emotionally compelling performances can cause an actor to stress under the pressure to deliver. Acting for stage and film have similarities and differences, and an actor needs to learn how to adjust for the emotional nuances of each.

This thesis explores an actresses' practice-as-research experience with emotional availability on various films (independent and student feature, short, and industrial films), and an outdoor amphitheater production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The techniques used, and each situation's circumstances, are analyzed to find what helped or hindered access to emotional availability. With what is learned from this practice-as-research, the actress decides the next steps in her journey to increase her emotional availability.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Journey to the Topic of Emotional Availability	1
Guiding Questions	6
Emotional Availability	7
What is it?	7
Why is Emotional Availability Important?	9
Experience Going into This	11
What I Want Coming Out of this Process	13
CHAPTER 2: FILM EXPERIENCES	14
Student Feature Film – <i>Pestilence</i>	15
Week One	15
Difficult Circumstances	15
Pressed for time	15
Adding intimacy	17
Scene reflection	18
Expectations From Without and Within	19
Implementing techniques	20
Working for the closeup	22

One more attempt.....	23
Questions and insights.....	24
Gurning and Soft Focus for Subtlety	25
Alignment and Stamina.....	26
Benefits of Script Analysis	28
Week Two.....	29
Act Until Cut.....	30
Laughter	31
Week Three.....	33
Beach Hypothesis.....	33
Cancelled Filming.....	35
Other Film Projects	36
Industrial Short Film – Surviving the ‘Rona	36
Memorization Freedom.....	36
Independent Short Film – Melody.....	37
Self-Tape Discoveries	37
Filming.....	38
More than one emotion	38
Ask for what you need	39

Independent Short Film – 115 Grains.....	40
Day One	41
Learning from watching others	41
Emotional prep while waiting	42
Filming my scene	43
First day thoughts	43
Day Two.....	44
Goals.....	44
Relaxing into my character	45
Student Short Film – A Secret Battle	47
Preparation	47
Wall exercise	48
Soft palate.....	49
Tear stick	50
On Set Experience.....	51
Day one	51
Day two	52
Independent Short Film – Seeing Squatch	54
Help Each Other Out.....	54

Actor Tool kit	55
Intimacy Direction Addendum	55
CHAPTER 3: AMPHITHITHEATER EXPERIENCE	60
Text Work	60
Paraphrasing	61
Breath.....	61
Rehearsals.....	62
Emotional Distress.....	65
Working With It.....	67
Effects on Others.....	68
Performances	69
Outside Elements.....	69
Matinee sunlight, heat, and sweat	69
Opening Night Cold.....	71
Noises.....	72
Rain, Wind, the Elements	72
Acting Discoveries	74
Warmups	74
Getting out of a funk	74

Bad mood combat.....	76
A developed routine	76
Freedom Without Masks.....	78
Breath.....	78
Increased presence and discoveries.....	78
A change in meaning.....	79
Development Over Time.....	80
Have fun, and experience for the first time!	81
Getting Rote	83
Perfect Never Happens	83
Eye Contact.....	84
Scene Partner Check-in.....	84
Lift others up.....	85
Ending thought.....	86
CHAPTER 4: OUTSIDE RESEARCH	87
Difficult Set Culture	87
Difference Between Theatre and Film	90
Applying Theatre Technique to Film.....	91
How Other Actors Work	92

Preparation.....	92
Maintaining Emotional Preparation on Set	95
Filming Your Scenes	97
Mentors.....	100
Communication	101
Spontaneous Fluke?.....	103
Building Stamina.....	104
Exhaustion	104
Physical Exercise	105
Sleep	106
Energy	106
Memorization.....	106
Emotional Regulation	107
Nutrition.....	109
Body Function.....	109
Nutrition’s Effect on the Brain, Gut, and Emotions	110
Emotional Stamina	112
Learning from long distance runners	113
Final Thoughts.....	115

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	116
Hinderances to Emotional Availability	117
Distractions	117
Emotional Distress.....	118
Helps to Emotional Availability.....	119
Preparation.....	119
Warming Up	120
Breath.....	120
Let Go of the Pressure and Have Fun.....	121
Key to Spontaneity?	122
Crying on Cue	123
What Has Worked For Me.....	123
Are Tears Necessary?	124
What Truly Matters	125
Communication	126
Ask For What I Need.....	126
Get Clarity from the Director	126
Stigmas	127
Insights From Watching My Film Performances	127

Moving Forward.....	129
Habits.....	129
Take Care of Myself and Build Up Stamina	129
Continued Exploration.....	130
Accept What You Can Give.....	131
APPENDIX A: EXPLANATION OF EXERCISES	133
Vacuuming out the Lungs	134
Panting Sequence	134
Wall Exercise	135
Crying Exercise.....	135
APPENDIX B: ACTOR TOOL KIT ITEMS	136
LIST OF REFERENCES	140

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Journey to the Topic of Emotional Availability

Selecting and completing my thesis project has been a bumpy road full of roadblocks and detours that were as unanticipated as they were unavoidable. I was initially drawn to the idea of creating my own one-woman show, liking the task of captivating an audience entirely by myself, the challenge of transforming into numerous characters back-to-back, and having a performance piece to take with me after graduation. I started down that path but realized that the amount of time it would take to craft the script made me anxious about having enough time to do the “actor work” for the performance. I am getting an MFA in acting after all, not in writing. I could write the play in the future but should use a published play now.

Making the shift to selecting a published play, I realized the process would be quite beneficial to me. Due to the limited performance opportunities that UCF provided me, I did not have much experience with practical application of the techniques I was learning in my studio classes on a full production. I wanted to not only experience the powerful moments my professors said the technique utilization would create on a full production, but I wanted this to be an opportunity to truly train myself to kinesthetically understand and grasp these concepts so I would not forget them but take the skills with me to use in the future.

I ended up selecting the two-person play *Brilliant Traces* by Cindy Lou Johnson. A two-person cast would provide me more stage time to utilize my technique and give me the logistical ease of only needing to find one other actor. I chose *Brilliant Traces* because I knew my role would not be an easy one to play believably; it would be emotionally, mentally, and physically demanding to pull off, and I wanted that challenge.

Next, I thought about what techniques I wanted to focus on. What was I discovering in my program? What specific elements of my training did I want to explore and test? We had been working on process and I needed to work on product. Synthesizing my thoughts brought me to three main categories: Breath, Habits, and Risk & Safety.

Breath, in some way, was brought up by almost every professor as a key element to good acting. This was fascinating to me that something as simple as breath could have such a profound effect on an actor's performance. Using breath to be fully present in a scene, to make discoveries or "create" an impulse as the character, accessing the character's emotional center, and many others. I wanted to see how I could use breath to bring my character to life in a captivating way.

As for Habits, we did a lot of work in movement and voice studio classes to release physical tensions that we individually had in our bodies to help us find our "neutral." We talked about the concept of getting to our neutral to create a blank slate, and then discovering and putting on our character's tensions and habits of movement, and vocal patterns. This would help us to transform into our characters more fully, rather than putting a character on top of our own personal habits and tensions. Primarily working to find neutral in class, I wanted to put into practice finding my character's habits and tensions to see if I could achieve this drastic change from self to character.

Finally, Risk & Safety were brought up somewhat regularly in relation to various exercises in our movement class. This point is a bit more abstract, but the general idea is having the knowledge and preparation of how to do something (safety), but not anticipating how it will turn out, and leaning into the unknown (risk) to make new discoveries, or fresh honest moments. Incorporating the ideas of breath and habits, I imagined if I knew my character's "palate" of physical movements and vocal pitch tendencies (habits), and had my lines deeply memorized, I

could then take the risk of being so present I might forget a line but using breath to remember the line, and see what engaging moments could be found in the honesty of living in the present.

With these concepts in mind, my script for *Brilliant Traces*, and having secured a director and fellow actor, I moved forward with personal prep, and planning the performance. After a few meetings, and a table read, we were notified that UCF campus was going to be closed for two weeks due to COVID-19, and then went virtual for the rest of the semester, therefore canceling all live performances.

Not knowing how COVID-19 would develop or subside, it was difficult to make any plans to reschedule the performance. We postponed until the end of the summer in hopes that it would be safer by then. I pressed forward and did dramaturgical research, text work, began memorizing my lines, and investigated off-campus performance venues for small, socially distanced audiences.

Due to the way COVID had progressed, we ended up feeling that a live performance at the end of summer would not be a good idea. We decided to shift gears and make a short film instead, using a different script, so I could have some performance in which to write about for my thesis. With a film, our in-person contact would be limited to fewer days than the play, the crew would all be masked, and the audience would be able to watch the film at home without needing to congregate together. Making this switch, I felt that I could still utilize the ideas of *Breath, Habits and Risk and Safety* as my research and data collection; the performance piece was just changing.

I started to look around for a screenplay we could produce, as well as continued to submit to film projects in the area. A little over a week later, I was cast as the female lead in a feature film, *Pestilence*, being made by master's students at Full Sail University. Seeing that this could

be the only solid performance opportunity that I would have in time to write my thesis that would follow COVID regulations, I spoke with my thesis chair, and the director and fellow actor I had been working with and changed plans for this to be my thesis role.

When we were going to do the play, I had initially intended the bulk of my research to come from testing techniques out in the rehearsal hall, by picking focuses for each rehearsal. This would have provided me at least a full month of working scenes with my director and fellow actor, and I would have used time between rehearsals to evaluate and readjust how I was executing these techniques. I would have invited the members of my thesis committee to attend a rehearsal here and there to evaluate how things were going and give me insights for how to improve my process moving forward. Then I would have had live performances where I would be able to finally test out these techniques and sense the audience's reaction.

Switching to *Pestilence*, my process for practical application and data collection had to shift dramatically. The quick turnaround—receiving the script the day before filming, then three back-to-back full days of filming the bulk of my scenes—gave me very little time to prepare and meant the rehearsal research would be nearly impossible, and performance data collection would be limited. Without the luxury of having numerous rehearsals leading up to a performance to test out techniques, while on set I essentially evaluated how I worked, and made notes about which techniques I used. I primarily had to go off instinct. Knowing this was now my thesis role there were times I made a point to use certain techniques in the moment to see how they would help, but I was not able to plan out the research process as anticipated with the limited time I had. Each day on set, and each film take was not a rehearsal, it was a recorded performance, so this trial and error had a bit more weight.

To supplement the limited research and data collection that I was able to do on *Pestilence*, I decided to include evaluations from my process and performances on a few different short film projects I did in the months following: *Surviving the 'Rona*, *Melody*, *155 Grains*, *A Secret Battle*, and *Seeing Squatch*.

With one camera acting class among my stage-focused training at UCF, I had to make a shift from stage to film and see what techniques transferred, and what adjustments needed to be made. I found many differences between the two mediums, as well as similarities. During these film projects, I had situations that my training did not fully transfer or prepare me for, causing me to make hypotheses for how to handle the situations on the next film day or next film gig. For example, how long to plan for getting emotional for a scene, how to cry on set, how to best work with a film director, and how much to prepare before filming vs. trusting in the moment.

Taking stage focused techniques and trying to apply them to film acting, when the process of film making is so different than the process of a play, was not as abundant in research and analysis as I had hoped. I tried to use and evaluate breath, habits, and risk and safety for my thesis, but due to the specific needs of the roles in the films I was in, I found my focus shifting to figuring out how to cry on command. Various scripts described my character on the verge of tears or crying, the situation was such that tears might come, or the director requested tears while filming the scene. I had to figure out what I needed to do to deliver the right type of emotion at the right time. I continued to keep journal entries of these film experiences.

When I sat down to write about the ideas of breath, habits, and risk and safety, I felt like I was trying to shove a square peg into a round hole. I started to wonder, why not write about what this shift to film caused me focus on? I could still include my work on breath, habits, and risk and safety with how they contributed to my emotional availability. The ability to access

emotions has been fascinating to me and realizing this frequent pattern of film roles I was getting made me want to research this topic specifically. I had a journey working with the emotional demands of these film projects trying to figure out through trial and error what worked and was worth discussing.

At the time that I realized emotional availability would be a more cohesive topic for my thesis, I was in rehearsals for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Orlando Shakes; the first live production since COVID for the Orlando Shakes and me. Rehearsals were in an outside tent with actors masked, and staging was always blocked 6 feet apart. Performances were at the Lake Eola outdoor amphitheater, where we were able to remove our masks only while on stage. I decided that including evaluations of testing my emotional availability in a theatre setting in my practice-as-research would give a greater range of experience and perspective. I could build on what I had learned during my films and evaluate how I worked returning to this medium. My performance in this play did not call for tears, but I still needed to be available for a range of other emotions, with the added task of needing my performance to reach an entire outdoor amphitheater while being 6 feet away from my fellow actors. There was a lot worth talking about.

Guiding Questions

With the practical experience I gained with emotional availability in these films and stage performances, I had new questions come about that I wanted to research further.

What techniques for emotional availability are universal to film and stage, and which techniques are specific to each medium? What can an actor do to combat less than ideal circumstances that make emotional availability difficult? How can an actor combat and overcome the expectations to “get it right” for the close-up shots in film, or for repeated stage

performances? How does one get emotionally available, or mentally present, when they arrive emotionally closed off to a film set or theatre? What can an actor do to have more emotional resilience and stamina for long days on set?

Giving an honest and believable performance is most important, but in some cases the director might be set on having natural tears. Can an actor learn to cry on cue? What various techniques can an actor have on hand in case the go-to methods are not working? These were questions that I wanted answered because of times on set where I was not able to produce the tears the director asked for, and I felt like I had tried everything I knew how to do within the time constraints we had, while still being safe. I did not want to be stuck in this type of situation again.

With the somewhat backwards process of my thesis being a practice-as-research followed by more standard research, I then went through books, articles, interviews, and such to see what answers I could find to these questions, and what techniques I can plan to try in the future. Whether in a film or on stage, in a comedy or drama, actors need to have access to their emotions, and I wanted to better understand my relationship to mine.

Emotional Availability

What is it?

Being emotional is generally thought of as getting choked up or crying. But there is a wide range of emotions that we can experience. An emotion is “a mental state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes; a feeling: the emotions of joy, sorrow, and anger” (“Emotion,” [The Free Dictionary]). This definition specifically points out that experiencing and expressing emotion happens as a

reaction rather than on purpose. Yet actors, are required to experience emotional reactions as if they are happening for the first time, most likely knowing what is going to happen. We must learn how to get to those emotional states while still appearing spontaneous. Actors do have to exert varying levels of conscious effort depending on the circumstances of what they are acting to tell the story of their character.

Added insight from Merriam-Webster tells us that emotions are “subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body” (“Emotion,” N. 1a.). Each person experiences emotions differently due to their personal life experience, opinions, and relationship to things and people. Certain news or events can cause excitement or joy in some, while causing sadness or disappointment in others. As mentioned, these emotional changes can have behavioral changes in the body such as increased breathing, clenched hands, a furrowed brow, a smile, tears. These physiological changes in the body signal to the outside world that an individual is experiencing a change in emotion. There are some acting techniques that approach emotions starting from the behavioral changes in the body (Discussed more in Chapter 4).

When emotion comes about in real life, we experience it spontaneously, and as a reaction without cognitive planning. But actors need to do that cognitive planning to have the emotion their character would be experiencing for the first time, in a scene that the actor has memorized and rehearsed, at the right time.

Many people can be emotional throughout their personal lives, but the job of an actor is to become emotional when needed during a play performance or filming a scene. They need to be readily available to the necessary emotion at the right time, under prepared situation. The definition of available is “present or ready for immediate use” (“Available,” [Merriam-

Webster]), and “at hand; accessible” (“Available” [The Free Dictionary]). If an item is at the bottom of a bag covered by everything else, it will be difficult to retrieve at a time of need. But situated at the top of the bag in preparation for the time it is needed, it will be at your service at the right time. As with emotions, if we allow tense muscles, unfocused thoughts, unmemorized lines, or lazy preparation to get in the way of our ability to access our emotions, they will be difficult to retrieve when needed most.

Then looking at an opposite situation, if an “item” of emotional availability is at the top of a bag—like emotions caused by personal life issues—there could be times when the emotion might ‘spill out’ uncontrollably and undesirably. An actor needs to learn how to have the right type of emotion available when needed, and learn how to check and maintain their own emotions when they could get in the way of the storytelling of the scene.

Like an athlete needing to warm up and stretch before a game or competition so they can perform to the peak of their ability actors also need to warm up. Without warming up, an actor can greatly stunt the dexterity and range of their emotion.

Why is Emotional Availability Important?

The job of an actor is to play a character in whatever the given circumstances are of the script, and with it, the emotional implications of the situation. In order to tell the story truthfully, and actor needs to be able to emotionally go where the scene needs to go.

Jamison Hasse, actor and owner of L.A. On-Camera Training Center says “If an actor is Actively Listening, they will begin to have real genuine emotions; but it’s their Emotional Availability and Vulnerability that will carry those emotions through” (Hasse, par. 1). An actor can feel something, but unless it is perceptible, or able to be brought to the surface, the audience

will not notice it. Hasse says that “It’s more interesting to struggle NOT to cry than to actually cry,” because the audience will identify with your struggle and find themselves much more emotionally affected. Emotional availability and vulnerability are what make you human and what the audience identifies with (Hasse, par. 3)

On a film when the lights and camera are ready, the actor is the last puzzle piece to film the shot. There is respect for the actor to be able to perform, but there is a schedule that needs to be kept, so the actor cannot take 30 minutes to get in the right place emotionally. The actor needs to be ready when the crew is ready; for bigger films, time is money in these situations. In these moments be able to cry on cue can be a helpful skill to have. The stress of needing to deliver in that moment can cause extra tension that makes performing even harder. Oftentimes people see being able to cry on cue as a badge of honor, but in my experience, this is a practical skill that can come in handy. If an actor has a tried a true skill to get themselves to cry, filming that scene will not only go more smoothly, but the actor will feel better about their performance.

Within film, various angles, and numerous takes can be edited together to show a character’s emotional experience, but there is only so much time during filming to get each shot. An actor needs to be available when the cameras and lights are ready. In theatre, whether the actor develops emotion while on stage, or enters mid-experience, they must recreate this night after night in a believable way. And they only have that one chance to give a believable performance for each audience.

The primary thing is being able to access the right emotion at the right time. There are certain circumstances that can help or hinder emotional availability, and actors need to learn what hinders and helps them, so they can give more and more compelling performances, and deal with the circumstances around them.

Experience Going into This

During studio classes there were several times when I was surprised at how readily I was able to tap into genuine emotion or be quickly affected and get choked up or shed some tears. These experiences usually came from an exercise we were working on in class, working on a monologue or scene in a studio class, during a presentation of something I had been working on for a while, or at an evening rehearsal. These moments and discoveries made me feel like I had some good emotional availability, and I had classmates comment on it which reinforced that.

In the middle of my second year, I was in a short film called *The Inexplicable* that filmed over the course of two 12-hour days. On the first day of filming the director told me about a previous short he had filmed where in the scene a 12-13-year-old girl was listening to a recording with headphones in, and he asked if she could cry. She said “sure,” they did the take again, and she shed a few tears. He said it was a moment where he felt like they were making true cinema. With my experience in classes, and some plays up to that point, I thought to myself that I could probably produce tears in that situation too.

On the second day of that short film at 2 am, after I had been actively filming for over 9 hours, the director decided to add a scene of my character reading a pregnancy test, and my character is grateful it is finally positive. I did the scene as honestly as I could. I knew that a woman finding out she was finally pregnant after trying for a while would most likely cause her to cry. I tried to lean into that emotion within the reaction I was giving, no tears came, but I felt like my reaction was still genuine. The director popped his head into the bathroom I was being filmed in and asked if I could try for tears. Thinking to myself “Well, I already have been,” I told him I would try. He cleared the set and had everyone go into different rooms, except for the camera man, to give me space. I remembered a classmate saying that in a scene where she was

sitting down, when she was in the emotion if she leaned forward to be on her alignment, the tears would come. I tried being in the headspace and getting on my alignment, but it did not work. Having worked on breathing into the lower abdomen as a way to connect to the emotional center of the character in our movement class that had gotten me teary eyed before, I tried that, but it tears still did not come. I cannot remember all that I did, but I was not able to cry. The director asked if I was willing to do a “Visine trick” and use a tear dropper to get a tear, and I said I was fine with that. I knew tears were not coming and I wanted the director to be happy. But no tear drops could be found on set.

The director then came into the bathroom to see if there was anything else we could do to get me to cry. Feeling the presence of another person coming near me made me start to feel a little choked up. I then remembered a time at the end of a voice class where I was choked up and a classmate noticed, so once class was over, he came over and gave me a hug, therefore causing me to fully cry. I gave as a suggestion, that if I hugged someone, maybe it would cause me to cry. The director opened his arms and gave me a big hug. But I was not feeling the emotion build up like I was hoping. I eventually let go, he immediately left the room, and I sat down back in position. I whispered to the camera man that I did not think it was going to happen, but he encouraged me to just try. I did the scene again, trying to lean into the emotion as much as I could, but the tears never came, my eyes were dry. The director eventually came back and ended the take, and I got a sense that he was a little disappointed.

I felt so discouraged that I was not able to deliver the performance that the director wanted, especially after having heard about his experience on his previous short film and having had my successes in studio situations. But I had to remind myself how late it was, how exhausted I was from a full day on set, and the pressure I felt knowing they needed to get onto the next

scene. I utilized what I had learned about easing myself into emotion rather than trying to force it, and it did not happen. I was still learning, but I did not want to be caught unable to deliver in a situation like that again.

As I was leaving the bathroom, the camera man held up his hands for me to put mine into and he said that even though I did not cry, my performance made him get choked up. This was a great reminder; how the audience is affected is more important than how affected I am.

But since then, because I was unable to cry after trying a handful of things, I was worried I had developed a “complex” that I couldn’t cry in a scene anymore.

What I Want Coming Out of this Process

At the end of this process, I want to have a greater command and dexterity of my emotions. I want the ability to get to varying levels of emotions in a short amount of time. To have a number of techniques to use depending on the circumstances I am in, with confident backup plans in-case the usual go-to techniques are not working. I want to know how long I need to get to varying levels of emotion, depending on my current state of emotion and level of exhaustion. I want to learn how to cry on cue to enhance my ability to tell a story, even under stressful circumstances.

CHAPTER 2: FILM EXPERIENCES

Making the transition from exploring the ideas of breath, habits, and risk and safety within the context of a stage play to working on a student feature film, I had a mixture of relief and excitement at having a performance to use, but also intimidation with trying to utilize my stage training for film. I had the preparation of my training from the previous two years of my MFA program, including a camera acting class (albeit interrupted by COVID), and some experience on a few short films.

In theatre I am used to working a scene numerous times to establish things like pace, character relationships, and what emotional heights are needed. But with filming, I had to learn and adjust from take to take. And the run throughs of the scenes were not just rehearsals, they were recorded performances.

On each of these films I approached the text and character work as necessary per project. But to refrain from being redundant, I will share some general things I did in most processes. First, I found everything that my character, and other characters, said about her in the script. Secondly, I scored out my lines focusing on the images my words described. I also defined words for a deeper understanding of what I am saying, or how a scene is described, which frequently became inspiration for further research. I then looked up inspiration images and researched pertinent topics for each script.

What I have termed “memory creation” is what I do to give depth and meaning to the backstory of the character, fill out the relationships, and discover my character’s opinions and point-of-views. The memories, when filled out with the five senses, help me get into a character’s humanity, and become a well-rounded three-dimensional person. As part of this I do

stream-of-conscious journal entries to gain a better sense of the stakes of the scenes, what is important to my character, and what she is fighting for.

Student Feature Film – *Pestilence*

Getting involved with *Pestilence* happened very quickly, adding to the intimidation of using this project for my thesis. Auditioned on Thursday, callback and booked the role Saturday, received the script Monday, and started filming Tuesday. This truly became a test of my training to see if I could produce a believable performance with such a quick turnaround.

Week One

Difficult Circumstances

Pressed for time

Filming the first scene on Day one of *Pestilence*, there were several circumstances that created a less than ideal situation that hindered my emotional availability. Limited time, an anxiety inducing rushed atmosphere on set, and unclear communication were among the top factors.

The day before, we had received the script, and I felt rushed to read through it quickly, only getting a general sense of the script. We blocked the scenes we would be filming the following day and talked a bit about the story. That evening I got home and did as much text work, character development, memory creation, and memorization as I could, only getting through half of the following day's scenes. Right before heading to bed after 1am, I got an email

with an updated script containing a fair amount of description added to the blocking, with a few of my lines altered.

The following morning, I did quick basic text work with my remaining lines. I did a simple warmup at home, stretching, shaking out, and lying on the floor to expand my breath in all directions. Because the filming location was over an hour drive away, I planned to do a better warmup once I was there. When I got in my car to head out, I got an updated call sheet listing an earlier call time that, leaving at that moment, would be impossible for me to make. As instructed, I had waited until getting to set to do my hair and makeup, but there must have been a lapse in communication, because they had not scheduled time for that. As I was doing my hair and makeup, I was rushed to finish as soon as possible, and I tried to stretch and warm up what I could while doing so.

The crew was already running behind schedule, so the first scene of the day was pressed. We did not have time to rehearse the first scene but had to get straight to filming. This caused me to be even more anxious because we had received a revised edit of the scene since the day before. I could sense the time pressure was affecting our performances, causing us to get through our lines faster than we had rehearsed. I had so many ideas/actions/subtexts from the text work I had done the night before, but because of the pressure to get through the scene, I forgot to do them. I almost felt like I was on “survival mode” so I focused on using my breath to abate the stress from the time crunch, and to release any personal tension from creeping into my character. Our performances felt stiff and flat, and my scene partner and I agreed that section of the scene was not that great.

Adding intimacy

Adding to the stress of the situation was trying to figure out a kiss between my scene partner and myself at the end of the scene. Intimacy direction is still somewhat of a new thing that has not permeated throughout the industry yet, and I was the only one on set with experience in a recognized process of intimacy choreography; and perhaps the only one with experience with a kiss in a scene at all.

After blocking the previous day, my scene partner and the director discussed adding a kiss at the end of the scene, and my scene partner and I discussed it, but the director never discussed it with me directly. The director was also the writer, and the kiss was not added into the script rewrites we received in the middle of the night, so I was not sure if the director truly wanted a kiss in the scene or not.

When we got to filming that moment, my scene partner and I asked the director what he wanted, but the director felt awkward talking about PDA and did not give direct or specific input. Because the moment was not detailed out in the script, only written as us hugging and my scene partner lifting and spinning me around, it was a little confusing as to what point we should kiss. I felt awkward and uncertain, never having the kiss confirmed by the director, and not knowing my scene partner's "limits" or have choreography to go by. I was worried about doing anything that would make my scene partner uncomfortable and were still pressed for time during the scene which made everything worse.

Rehearsing the scene, we only did the lift and spin like the script said, so I was not sure if we were doing the kiss. Then when we filmed, we did kiss, but I felt hesitant because, again, it was unclear. My scene partner then said that he realized we had not decided who would initiate the kiss—case in point that choreography needed to be established.

I tried to talk out the moment, so we were both on the same page for timing, storytelling, and boundaries, but I felt a resistance from my scene partner to discuss it. I sensed that he only wanted to talk about general blocking, not the specifics of the kiss, or do the kiss, more than truly necessary. He may have felt the standard “it’s just a kiss” or did not understand the importance of the choreography, and just found it awkward. We were rushed to film without getting to fully block out the moment.

Because I sensed he was holding back, I felt like I had to be delicate with the scene and therefore, did not feel the freedom to do the moment how I felt was true to our characters and the situation. I was in my head as myself not wanting to cross any boundaries of my scene partner, and therefore unable to be emotionally available as my character to live in the moment truthfully. Preoccupied by the uncertainty and lack of direction my performance was visibly hesitant and awkward.

I was following my scene partner’s lead because he was married and I did not want to make him uncomfortable, but I later found out he was following my lead because he did not want me to think he was taking advantage of kissing someone who was not his wife. If we had an outside party as the intimacy director to establish a common language, lessen the stress, and find the solution to this issue sooner, we would have felt free as our characters to tell the story correctly. More detail about the necessity of intimacy direction for the sake of emotional availability is at the end of the chapter.

Scene reflection

My experience with this entire scene made me wonder: how can I perform when the circumstances are not ideal? What tools could I have in the future to better navigate these types

of situations? The rushed pressure made me anxious and get in my head. I did not feel the freedom to have fun, and my emotions became limited. When there are too many distractions, an actor must exert more attention and energy into blocking out the distractions to be present and honest in their performance. I did not feel the freedom to play or have fun, an important element to bringing a character to life, even in serious scenes. If there was less frenetic energy and the need to move on was done with calmer voices, some stressors could have been avoided. Timeframes are a real thing to be taken into consideration, but if the environment is not conducive to the actors being able to live in their scene, the potential for re-shoots is increased. However much I would like to think this was only because it was a student film, I am sure there will be professional sets that have similarly stressful situations with short script time, and a very tight filming schedule. But with my continued seeking of knowledge and experience, I will have a better understanding of how to handle those situations and more confidence to communicate when I need something in the future.

With this scene finished we had gotten back on schedule, and I was told we could relax, and the following three scenes would not be as rushed.

Expectations From Without and Within

The next scene was the beginning of an argument broken up into three scenes that are shown throughout the film. The way this scene began felt like it was mid-argument, so I had imagined the moment before to help fuel me into the scene. My focus was to stay present and react off my scene partner to naturally build the scene, as I knew I would need to get more emotional.

After a few wide-angle shots, when the camera was being moved to a different angle, I was waiting in a dressing room with my scene partner going over lines. The director popped his head in and asked, “how do you do with water works?” Having experienced a similar in-the-moment request from the director on the short film I was not able to produce tears for, mentioned in Chapter 1, I said I would try but could not promise that I would have tears running down my face; I would do what I could and give solid emotion.

Implementing techniques

My scene partner offered to leave, but I said he could stay if he did not mind my weird stretches, so he stayed. In hindsight I should have accepted his offer to see what privacy would have done for my emotional availability; I am quite certain I was holding back to a degree with him there. Knowing that I was gathering data for my thesis, I focused a lot on my use of breath (as breath, habits, and risk & safety were my thesis focuses at that time) which inspired what things I chose to do to get “emotional.”

I started doing whatever stretches I could think of that would release the tension in my body and expand my breath to get a connection to my emotional center, the transversus abdominus or the Dantian, as I had been taught in my studio classes. I shook out my body to activate my muscles and breath. I did a small version of Fitzmaurice’s Scrunch Stretch Shake Release, in the space that I had. Stretched out my legs both standing, and on the ground, to loosen my hips flexors, and sat in a deep squat for a while to expand and deepen my breath into my pelvic floor. I did this while thinking about the given circumstances of the scene, and what my objective was. Extending from the squat I did some quiet Lecoq-based expansion and reductions to see how that would amplify what emotion I already had (full explanation of

exercise in Appendix A). My body was more active, but my eyes were dry, and I felt like tears were not close to coming.

Next, I thought to do a Catherine Fitzmaurice and Nancy Houfek crying exercise I had learned in my voice studio (exercise explained in Appendix A). Doing this, I felt like I was just pushing and trying to squeeze the emotion to come. If I tried too long, I was worried it would instead cause more tension and prevent my ability to release into the emotion if I tried to force it too much.

During this process of trying to get worked up, I had wished that in my UCF training we covered real world scenarios like this. But, as I had learned, I did not want to push the emotion, but rather ease into it and have it come naturally if it was going to come at all. So, I focused on the relationship between our characters, and pursuing my objective.

Doing the scene a few more times I was not getting to the emotional depths I had set the expectation for based on the director's request. But I remained focused on my breath trying to breathe deep into the emotional core and was trying to live in my character honestly.

The director told me that I did not have to worry about getting too emotional for every take because he did not want me to expend my emotional energy. He said to hold off on the more intense emotion until later when we were doing closer shots. This idea seemed a little odd to me. For the sake of continuity, shouldn't I give the same amount of emotion in every take? I was also not quite sure how to reserve the deeper emotion for later shots if I was playing the same scene again and again.

Working for the closeup

When they were moving the cameras again it sounded like we were transitioning to closer shots, so I asked if this was when the director wanted me to be a more emotional, and it was. I went into my dressing room to see what I could do to get the tears he had wanted.

Leading up to that time, I had been doing a daily practice every morning; going on a walk, stretching, and then listening to music while doing a physical and vocal warm up. I first started playing music while I warmed up to help me be less self-conscious about my housemates hearing me but doing so, I found out the music helped with expanding my imagination and accessing emotion because of the emotion in the music. A few days in a row before filming, I was easily able to get “emotional” during the part of the warm-up when I laid on the floor in a big X. I would feel affected, an ease behind the eyes, the sense that I was on my way to crying if I continued with the emotion. In my dressing room I tried to do a condensed version of my warm-up but having the stress and pressure of needing to produce emotion and within a short timeframe, it was harder. I felt like my body was saying, “No! Not doing it!” I still had dry eyes. I was shortly called back to places.

After a few more takes, the director asked for more emotion. I decided to just take the risk and trust the director and lean into not knowing if I was going to be too big. I zeroed in on intensely pursuing my objective and on a few lines my throat got a little choked up which affected my voice giving the sound of crying. I did not have any tears, but I felt more invested. The director thought a few of those takes were nice.

I ultimately felt like I was pushing the emotion too much, which caused me to be whinier, and therefore the honesty of my performance suffered. It felt like my scene partner and I were playing two different scenes; but I was trying to trust what the director was asking me to do. The

times when I focused more on my objective helped me to have more honest emotion. I think I was focusing too much on breathing to access my emotional core during the scene, trying out the concept to get research for my thesis. Even though I tried to release, I still had tension in my face.

In theatre I am used to working a scene numerous times to establish things like pace, the character relationships, and what emotional heights are needed. But with this project, I was learning I had to adjust from take to take. These run throughs of the scene were not just rehearsals, they were recorded performances.

The stop and go nature of only doing snippets of a scene at a time you lose the momentum. Redoing a scene numerous times from various angles and being expected to deliver the right emotion on their schedule under their time constraints can be difficult.

One more attempt

After that scene we had a dinner break. In my dressing room, even though the scene was over, I was determined to figure out if I could produce tears. I ran around the room a few times and remembered I could vacuum out my lungs (full explanation in Appendix A). I did so a few times and at first it was painful, like a running cramp in my abdomen, which was unusual. My stomach may have been a little shrunken by not having eaten in a while, combined with the stress of filming. But after a few vacuum sequences, the pain subsided and I was able to have better access to my pelvic floor, and I could feel my breath was deepened. I then did a Linklater-based panting sequence which helped me to get into a better headspace (explained in Appendix A). I used images that were pertinent to the current situation I was in as well as the given circumstances of the film. This helped me release, and to feel that my eyes were freed up to be

able to have emotion. Kinesthetically, it previously felt like there was a block around the back and underneath my eye, but after this, my eyes felt more relaxed and available in those areas. My eyes got misty, with a little tear lingering on outside of one eye. The removal of stress was probably helpful in this little experiment, but it was such a relief to finally have some success with getting teary. I now knew that vacuuming out my lungs and doing the panting sequence with powerful images will be an earlier go-to in the future.

Questions and insights

Something I was not prepared for was how exhausting this filming would be. Needing to repeat an emotional scene again and again from different angles was a challenge to keep up the energy for continuity. Trying to be present and honest, while going for the emotion the director wanted, needing to hit a specific mark, and trying to get my half-memorized lines out properly, was a lot to think about at once. The start and stop nature of the process, and having breaks between scenes, I knew I needed to find how to have better emotional, mental, and physical stamina. It can be hard to stay “warm” for so long.

In my classes we had been taught to never have emotion be the goal, but rather pursue your objective and emotion would be the byproduct. But what can you do when emotion is the directors goal? What various techniques can I use when previously successful methods are not working? Am I capable of learning how to cry on cue? With that, how can I know when to start warming up, so I am at my peak when we start filming emotional scenes? I do not want to be ready too soon, but I also do not want to keep the crew waiting. Emotion is spontaneous and can be fleeting, I would hate for the camera to miss the honest moments, and for my emotion to become stale and exhausted.

I learned that I need to be more proactive in discussing with the director what they want, generally, and specifically. Are actual tears important to them, or is heightened vulnerable emotion what they want? What is the story they are wanting to be told with the tears?

Acting is hard and I need to not be hard on myself. I did what I could under the circumstances I was in. All these things I am sure I will get better at with practice.

Gurning and Soft Focus for Subtlety

The final scene of the day was the end of the argument sequence when the issue is resolved, and we are seeking understanding. My character hears a lot of things for the first time, and I wanted to be simple with my discoveries and line deliveries. When the camera was getting set up for a close-up shot on me, I remembered from my camera acting class the importance of warming up facial muscles for close ups to make the nuances of my expressions more visible. I did some gurning, making successive exaggerated facial expressions, which activated my face and increased the circulation. I was surprised with how present and available I then felt. I gurned between takes for the rest of the scene and felt like it helped me have more subtle and honest reactions.

During the scene I was looking at a book, and my eyes went out of focus. I recalled that in play or scene performances when intensely present and emotionally invested, sometimes my eyes would go out of focus. Out of context, the largest discovery my character makes in the scene sounded humorous, but in the world of the film it is legitimate. The soft focus I had at that time made me feel enveloped in the situation and fully present, so I could take the scene seriously.

It was fascinating how I remembered these tactics in the moments that I needed them. Experience and training will support you.

Alignment and Stamina

In my dressing room was the only time I was able to do text work for my scenes for day two, making me nervous because I had even less time to prep than the day before. But the scene partner I was working with that day said “You got it. Trust that you got it.” Which helped immensely, and I felt more confident.

After filming for a while, I had realized that I had forgotten to implement something to evaluate for my thesis. Trying to think of a way to not have to sit in the emotion the entire time between takes, and rather pop in and out of the headspace, I thought of getting onto my alignment before the take.

When the crew was doing the slate, I put my feet hip distance apart, found my weight center and lifted my spine so my vertebrae were stacked and leaned forward until I could feel the impulse to move just in time for “action”. I felt a slight mental shift that propelled me into the scenario. The shift was small, but I felt that it helped to focus me, and align my mind, body, and breath to shift to the moment I was going into. Then when we heard “cut” I released the character tension in my body and was back to my reality, but still with an active body. Because of the tense and dark nature of the scene, the shift from my alignment was helpful to refocus me to my character’s present moment. I got onto my alignment for every take for the rest of the scene.

The ending section of this scene was emotionally intense as my character dies within seconds from a sudden onset of symptoms, like tuberculosis, that overtakes her. I looked up how

tuberculosis effects the body and the order of organ failure to have a guide for the progression of my death.

We had filmed the section of the scene leading up to my dying several times, but we always cut before I started coughing. But during one take, the director did not call cut in the usual place, and rather than stopping because we had not rehearsed or blocked me dying, I decided to go for it. I had only half-way rehearsed how I would die in my dressing room, but I fully went for it not entirely sure how it was going to turn out. It felt great to have a moment of freedom like that. Throwing myself into it without worry of doing it wrong, but wanting to discover how I would react physically, facially, and vocally as I imagined the progression of the sickness and pain overtake me.

In the dying scene, my scene partner gave me great energy and I felt really connected to him, especially at the beginning. But as we went on, I was naturally expecting things more and more. I tried to use my breath, but it still felt a little forced. I wondered if my stomach was too empty, causing me to be too tense to get a good breath.

At the end of the day, I wrote in my journal “I feel so spent. Like my nerves have soaked up my chance to have my tear ducts available.” Part of the issue was that I tried to have a high level of emotion for every take. Which is good for consistency, but I need to make sure I do not expend myself. “Was I getting drained from having to be ‘on’ for so long?” I had a thought about how to do better with emotional stamina: “Maybe I need to truly let go as if we aren’t filming anymore, between takes, so I can release. Then rev up quickly to shoot.” Having an acting coach there to help talk me into a state, like in my studio classes, it would be helpful.

I felt that I needed to do more personal rehearsal of the scenes, because with film, you do a blocking and rehearsal run or two, and then shoot it. If more than that is needed for me to feel

like I can ‘get’ there, whatever the level of emotion is, I should rehearse before getting to set to make sure I feel prepared. This week was a unique quick turn-around, but something to try for scenes in the coming weeks, or future projects.

Benefits of Script Analysis

When I got into wardrobe on day three, I was told to put on the same outfit as the three-scene argument sequence we filmed on day one. It was at that time I realized this scene was part of that sequence. I checked with the director, and this was the beginning of the sequence, leading into the scene I was asked to be emotional, that I thought was the beginning of the argument sequence. The call sheets described that scene as “beginning of fight” and the scene we were about to do as “Dorian packs for South America.” The segments of the conversation are broken up as flashbacks with other scenes between them, and the order we filmed the scenes made it seem like this scene was a separate conversation, as they were treated like different conversations.

The hinderance of only having time to quickly read the script once, limited conversation about the story, and the quick turn-around, seemed very apparent with this discovery. Having created my own moment before to fuel me into the emotional scene, and now realizing that the real moment before was much calmer than I had imagined, I would have played the emotional scene very differently. I desperately wished we could refilm that scene so I could have the proper level of emotion and have it as a logical continuation of the first scene of the sequence.

Even though I felt like I did not have time to re-read the script cover to cover the night I was preparing for the first day of filming, wanting to focus on memorizing, I should have. All my scenes were flashbacks, so the scenes that were not mine did not really have any bearing on

my part of the story. So even if I just read through my scenes in the order they were in the script, rather than focusing on preparing for the scenes in order of importance as per the filming schedule, I might have been able to make this connection sooner.

It is important to have a thorough understanding of how each of the scenes relate to one another. Having a timeframe of the story and what happens between scenes is necessary to incorporate the proper level of emotion and discovery into how you act each scene. For example, if a character is injured, the level of pain or healing matters in the chronological order of events. Thorough reading of the script and transparent communication with the director are necessary to be successful at this.

To get a sense of the progression and natural build of this sequence of scenes, after blocking on the first day, it would have been helpful to run through the conversation as a whole, the three scenes back-to-back, rather than only rehearsing scene by scene as per the script breaks. Having that experience to call upon during filming would have been helpful for continuity of our levels, development of the story, and build of our character relationship. If I am in a project with a similarly formatted script in the future, I will suggest this approach to see how it will affect our performances.

Week Two

Doing so much by instinct the first three days of filming, I did more script analysis and character prep before my scenes that were filming two weeks later, to see how my performance would be affected, albeit having few lines in my following scenes.

One of the most helpful things I did was my daily practice—warming up my body, voice, and imagination with stretches and vocal exercises—as if I were my character, Angelica, rather

than myself. This was a great way to fill in the gaps from page to person to make her feel more real. Insights about her opinions and perspectives, memory creation to call upon, a deeper understanding of her emotional states.

Learning from the first week of filming that I needed to be far more outspoken and proactive asking questions to clarify the director's vision, I compiled every question I could think of for the next scenes to ensure that I would not later wish I had known more. It felt great to make this adjustment in my process. Having these questions answered helped me to feel more confident when we filmed the scenes.

Act Until Cut

Filming the scenes this second week I felt more ease. This could be in part that I had very few lines, and familiarity with my fellow actor, director, and crew. But I think the extra script and character work, and the questions I asked the director, helped me to have less distractions so I could be present, and focused on living in my character. I felt more comfortable in front of the camera.

Harkening back to the first week, getting on my alignment before each take during the first day helped me to center myself. If my weight was shifted back or to the side, I did not feel ready. I got on my alignment, breathing out as Janice, then breathing in as Angie, and I felt ready.

During a scene on a couch that had no lines, I realized that I was acting until the director said cut. When we had filmed the ending of the last scene on day 1, also on a couch, my scene partner and I got to the point where we felt "okay...we've done what we can...you can call cut now." But there can be some beautiful stuff if you live in the moment for as long as you are

allowed. Doing so you have to improvise more and more, and that is where discoveries can be made. I felt like my reactions to my scene partner's reactions were honest. I was taking him in, not anticipating how he would act. Without the structure of lines to stick to, we were able to live in the blocking. I want to take the freedom I felt in this scene and see how I can find it in scenes that have dialogue. Would that come from having more time with the script and being confidently memorized?

Laughter

The description of one of my scenes, as an apparition, made it sound like I was lying on the ground in the position I died in, with fake blood dripping from my mouth. I did not warm up before getting to set just to lie on the ground. Once arrived, I learned that I would be standing on the outside of a sliding glass door looking at my husband in desperation, as a hallucination.

There was very little space for me to do a warm-up, but it was mid-day so I had been awake and doing things for hours already and I wondered how I would do at my current level, without adding pressure to be warmed up just right.

I got my makeup done, got into costume, and ended up waiting for 2 hours before my scene. During that time, I was chatting and laughing with some crew members.

When I was called to position, we discussed filming the scene as a continuous shot where I would react to seeing my husband four times in a row giving a different reaction every time. The director wanted one to be desperation, and we discussed that in the last one I would touch the blood on my face. The two in between I decided to not preplan but follow impulses and improvise.

I was on a porch on the outside of a sliding glass door waiting for the camera to get set up, and a crew member with me applied some fresh fake blood and had a handheld fan for me to use because of the heat. Remembering a time driving in my car where the air conditioning was blowing in my face and starting to make my eyes well up, I angled the fan toward my eyes. I was surprised at the effect of the slightest bit of extra moisture helped me get into the right headspace—present, vulnerable, and invested. I shook out my body, and right before action, I got on my alignment, was looking at the ground, and started breathing quicker to induce more panic.

Between each take I would look down, release, recenter, and begin again.

Take One: Desperation, thinking “Dorian, help me, I’m sick.”

Take Two: Feeling more and more ill, thinking “Is something going to come up?” During this one I recognized that my eyebrows were doing a “center scrunch” that I had found as a habit I tend to use to get across sadness. I wanted to let go of that habit and to find a different way of expressing. Making the conscious choice to not choose my habit helped me with how I did the third option with a more relaxed brow. As my head started to go down after this take, I had the thought to touch the glass, but I was already releasing from that take.

Take Three: Really terrified. I started shaking spontaneously. I followed the impulse for when to touch the sliding glass door, and my scene partner touched the glass from the other side.

Take Four: Knowing that I was going to notice the blood on my face in horror, I needed to start more pleasant to make the discovery. I started happy, thinking “Hi honey.” Notice something is not right, sense the blood, touch blood, start to panic.

We had an honest acting connection, and focusing on each other’s reactions, the scene felt very present and spontaneous; we were truly living in our characters. Leaning into the

emotion and playing in the unknown, I was able to make discoveries and follow impulses. I was able to breathe.

I am quite certain having good deep laughter before filming contributed to my emotional availability in that scene. My facial muscles were active, my breath had been outside of my regular pattern, and my emotions were warmed up. Not to mention only having to do the scene 4 times in a row in a running take helped me to have some momentum and give a solid performance without having to maintain stamina all day. It felt so good to finally have a scene where I was able to improvise and feel and express emotion.

Week Three

Beach Hypothesis

For my last days of filming, I wanted less focus on getting the “right” emotion or using a technique just to use it. I wanted to live in the characters given circumstances and let that fuel me; we are acting real people with real emotion. But at the same time, I wanted to have something specific to research for my thesis.

Hypothesis for the day: If I can get myself to deep cry in the morning, I will be much more susceptible and available to cry throughout the day. Not that I want to be sobbing, but I want to be emotionally present, so I am more available to feel emotion and have the camera pick up on that. I imagined the director would be wanting welled up eyes for a reunion scene, so I wanted to be prepared just in case. Also, for the sake of wanting to figure out how to cry on command, and sheer curiosity.

This idea came from listening to Drew Barrymore’s audiobook “Wildflower.” She shares an experience of being in a play as a child and being in awe of the lead actress who “had to be in

the greatest turmoil throughout the whole play, every night. Crying, screaming, fighting for her life” (“The Acting Lesson,” par. 5). Drew was in awe that this actress could be that emotional every night and was curious how she did it. The actress would disappear for a while before each show, so Drew looked around to find her to see how she prepared. One night she found her in a different little theatre in the building, lying on the stage with her legs dangling off the edge,

Crying. And she would beat her chest and conjure up these monumental tears. Then it would subside a little. Then she would beat her chest again, and moan as if she was dredging up the ocean floor of her own personal painful memories. And like the waves, her sobs ebbed and flowed from loud war cry to vulnerable smaller tears. And I realized that when she went out there every time, when she entered the stage, she was already in some truthful-beyond-upset, flipped-out state, and that was what she would provide to the audience of people (Barrymore par. 8).

Not only did this cause the actress to have truthful emotion and bring herself to the role, but I saw this as a technique to get herself to the highest emotional point in the play to ensure she would be able to get there during the performance. I found this fascinating and wanted to try a similar approach myself. Would this be the key to having the “waterworks” flow when I needed them?

The morning of filming I went on a quick run, stretched out my legs, and turned on some music to do my daily practice. I was conscious to warm up as Angelica, so my images were in the world of the film. I was able to get welled up and had enough tears and height of emotion to feel confident about testing my hypothesis.

There were a handful of times throughout the day when I tested to see how long it would take to access emotion and I was surprised at how well my hypothesis worked. On the drive to the beach, I got misty. Thinking about a psychological gesture I had come up with for the reunion moment got me misty. Another time, people in my surroundings were taking me out of

my zone, so I moved to a quieter spot; then thinking this would be the last time I would be on set, I was able to access emotion easily.

I was not needed for a while, so I was given the choice to go back to the actor's motel break room, and I knew the peace would be helpful to keep me from getting distracted by the chit chat of the other actors. I let myself relax, and before heading back to the beach, I was given time to warm up how I needed. I did a shake out of my body and remembered that I could pull out my phone to listen to a song. I had started to wonder if I had conditioned myself to be able to get more emotionally available when listening to a particular song during my daily practice, and I listening to it while on my alignment I got a little welled up.

After filming my last scene, standing at the shoreline, feet in the water, sunglasses on, I wondered if I could still get there, and around my eyes got wet. This time it was fueled by so much gratitude for being in this project and having some good acting moments that day.

Hypothesis checked out. Even though I ended up not needed to use mistiness in a scene that day, the idea worked.

Cancelled Filming

We needed to have pick-up day of filming at the beach to get what we ran out of time for, as well as a day at the first location to do some re-shoots. I was looking forward to the re-shoots in specific because they would be of some moments from the first day of filming. Having had the time and experience to be more comfortable with my scene partner, a better understanding of how to work with this director, and a stronger sense of who my character was, I wanted to evaluate the differences from the first day of filming.

Because of various reasons, those last days of filming were cancelled. I was disappointed I would not get to experience filming those scenes, try out more hypotheses, and that I did not get the closure of saying goodbye to my scene partners, the crew, and my character.

After *Pestilence*, I booked a handful of short films, a mix of student films and independent films, that I was then able to continue my evaluations.

Other Film Projects

For the rest of the films projects that I will discuss, I did similar preparation with memory creation, defining words, researching pertinent information. I will primarily share instances when I tested out a hypothesis or had an experience with seeking emotional availability.

Industrial Short Film – Surviving the ‘Rona

Memorization Freedom

I was cast in this short film before *Pestilence*, but filming was postponed until afterward. I had memorized my lines the week before the initial filming dates, so when the actual day to film came, I felt totally prepared. Because I was so memorized, when we filmed, I was able to breathe. My body and lines had a sense of ease that I did not feel in my work on *Pestilence*. The nature of these scenes being less intense could have partially attributed to this, but I was able to focus on the given circumstances and my scene partner, rather than have my mind partially picturing the words on the page.

This reinforced to me the importance of being so memorized that you can LIVE in the character, and the dialogue. Know the character, relationships, given circumstances, and your character point of view so well to be able to improvise. This does not necessarily mean come up

with new dialogue, but to lean into the risk of finding new ways to say things, have a more spontaneous performance and live in the character.

Independent Short Film – Melody

Self-Tape Discoveries

For *Melody* I did a self-tape submission of two short scenes for the audition, which ended up being a great way to prepare for filming. Rehearsed the first scene until I felt it was ready to put it on camera, then filmed it, watched the take, pinpointed adjustments, and then filmed again. This was a great way to self-direct and helped me to better understand what the camera was catching, and how I needed to adjust to be more precise with my storytelling.

In the second scene my character is humming while taking off jewelry, goes to take off a “nano-glamour” mask, but realizing she has already taken it off, she examines her face in the mirror, and says a single line at the end exits the frame. For this scene I read through the description of actions numerous times, marked out the way I wanted to act it, and decided to just start filming it. It was an emotionally contemplative moment that needed to be very honest. I was a little intimidated by it, but I decided to just go for it and start recording. I was feeling a little more available to emotion at that moment than other times that day.

Recording my first take of the scene, I was surprised at the genuine emotion that came up. I felt the effects soften the muscles around my eyes and they became glossy. I made some discoveries in the moment, this being my first true attempt, and it being a fresh experience living as the character in this moment. I allowed myself to lean into it and take my time and explore the thought process. I felt quite good about that take and watching it I was pleased. But I saw a few things I could tighten or clean up, so I did a handful of other takes to see what else I could do. In

the end, watching the takes one after the other, the first one was the most compelling because it was the most honest. The other takes were decent, but the more I did the scene, the more tense and planned out it got. There was a sense of trying to recreate or force the discoveries I had made in my first run. I needed to stay with the honesty of the first take.

I was excited and confident to submit the audition, but also worried I was sending in something I could not replicate. I was unsure if I would be able to reproduce such honest emotion with that much ease. If I had done the same recording process on a different day, or even a different time that day, I am not sure it would have turned out as well; my emotional availability felt like a fluke due to whatever was going on that day. I did not have all the stressors of being on set and could choose to film when I felt in a good emotional spot.

When I booked the role I felt a bit like an imposter, knowing that through my self-tape experience redoing the scene made it less believable, I hoped that my work with becoming emotionally available would prove true, and I would find the spontaneity at the right time.

Filming

More than one emotion

The first scene we filmed was the audition scene of me evaluating my face in the mirror. I was grateful to get the scene out of the way and be filming when I was fresh.

Prepping for this scene I did flat-footed squatting, stretched out, gurned, and tried to access emotion with by breath pace. What I found as an important element was incorporating more than one emotion, as mentioned by the director during a Zoom rehearsal. Thinking about the conflict, as per Michael Shurtleff's 12 Guideposts, along with a childhood memory I had created to justify the beginning of her insecurity, helped to charge the moment.

After the camera and sound were rolling, the director would say “settle,” and once the set was silent, she would say “action.” Her saying the word “settle” was a great reminder to breathe and not get too tense. A couple takes in it started to feel good. The director had a specific vision of timing and marks to hit, and I incorporated her notes with my work by having an inner dialogue justifying her direction.

When we got to the closeup shots, I appreciated that the way the camera was set up, I did not have to look at myself in the mirror. Rehearsing the scene at home when I was in the bathroom looking at myself in the mirror, I felt like I was going through the motions and did not feel honesty. But while at my desk looking at the wall, practicing the moment, I felt more honest; I was able to not judge myself and my facial expressions but experience the moment. After all, during my self-tape I was not looking at myself, but a spot on my camera. Imagination can be powerful.

The last take was the strongest as I had been getting worked up a bit more each take, and the timing of my movements hit all the director’s marks. In this performance, my emotions ended up being more fueled with frustration than the self-loathing in my self-tape. I tried to live in the moment, but it was hard to keep myself from trying to recreate my self-tape because the director liked how I had done the scene. I still need to find a good balance between being prepared but not having overworked scenes, as I think I may have overworked that moment.

Ask for what you need

During a long break waiting on set for my last scene, not knowing when I would be called to places, I listened to music frequently. I stretched and laid in a big X. I would listen to see where they were with filming the other actress, and wondered, “Now? Now?” I think I

understand better the need to fully release sometimes. You cannot be in a state for too incredibly long. It is draining and your performance will be weak because of it. So, I tried to let go and hold off until they let me know what was going on.

For my final scene, my character is exhausted from finally getting off the “nano-glamour” mask that was starting to take her over, and her energy is drained. I let the director know I would need a moment after blocking to prepare, so we blocked out the scene, I walked through it a few times, and made sure I knew the beats of each moment of the director’s vision, and then I went outside. I ran around for a bit to activate my body so the frenetic energy pulsing through me would help me get to the emotional state I needed to be in.

With the mask on my character changed into another person, played by another actress, and when the mask was off, it was me. Filming the scene, I acted out the moment of the masked version of my character trying to get the mask off to get me to the level I needed to be for the beginning of the take when the mask is finally off. Doing several takes I started to realize that the moment before was plenty helpful, and that I maybe did not need to run around beforehand. Either way, I was grateful that I had the initiative to ask for what I needed, and to notice the ways I had grown in advocating for myself on set.

This film was made for a local film challenge, the Orlando Independent Filmmakers ESCAPE Challenge, and my performance got nominated for Best Lead Actress.

Independent Short Film – 115 Grains

Learning about emotional availability from observing others can be just as important as personal practice. *115 Grains* gave me that opportunity a couple times, as well as the chance to try out some different approaches to accessing my emotions while on set. The contact I had with

the director prior to being on set was only logistical, so it was on set where I found out the director's vision for my scenes.

Day One

Learning from watching others

After getting into wardrobe and having my makeup done, I waited on set for about 5 hours before my scene was filmed. I watched what I could of the previous filming to learn from them.

For one scene, after running through it, the director's initial feedback was for the actor to have his lines be totally numb, like he was not feeling anything. A few takes. Then direction to have no inflection. A few takes. Direction to take a gasp before saying the line. A few takes. The actor's delivery did not change much between directions. I could tell the director was grasping at straws to think of how else he could coach the actor to give what he wanted, and the actor was getting frustrated he was not getting what the director was going for. I felt for them both.

The director then had the actor breathe almost like he was hyperventilating. He coached the actor to intensify the breathing, and then directed him to start the scene. It was fascinating how adding the intense breathing made such a drastic difference. The actor was more emotionally invested and reacting in the present. It completely changed the way he said his lines, as there was more intensity, more importance, and more at stake. A great reminder to use my breath more to work me up into emotion, to not be too natural but make sure there is still enough importance in a scene, and fully trust the director that they will push me forward or pull me back when needed. I appreciated how specific the director was and how he worked with the actor until he was satisfied with the shot.

In another scene, they filmed a moment again and again trying to get the camera work right. Before each take, they gave the actor eye drops to have a tear fall from each eye. This was eye-opening to me. With how many times they filmed this scene, it would have been wrong for them to require the actor to produce new tears every time. This helped me see that the tears themselves are not an indicator of talent and do not necessarily have to be made naturally. They can be manufactured. If the shot is specifically to get the tears, use drops.

Emotional prep while waiting

The scene I was in that day called for tears, “She wipes several tears away.” While waiting on set I frequently would stretch out my legs so I would not get stiff because I had learned through my daily practices that stretched out hip flexors usually loosened and opened me up to emotions. We were in a therapist office, and several times I would go into the single occupant bathroom that had a large clean floor where I laid down in the big X. Sitting where I could hear them filming, I heard the lines right before mine, and hearing them with the emotion of the actors helped me to get into a zone. But then they then moved on to filming other parts of the scene.

There were various things I did to get back in the “zone” when I thought they were close to needing me that I had not tried on previous films. Looked up pictures and gifs of some actors looking emotional, which was very moving. Another time I listened to music on my phone. After talking with the director about my scene and getting clarity on the given circumstances, I read through the memories I had created and my stream of conscious journaling I did as my character. That really helped me to get present and vulnerable. But then, of course, I had to wait another hour or two after that.

When I found out they were setting up for my part of the scene. I watched a video that has gotten me to cry before, and I got somewhat affected and had a crumple face but no misty eyes. I tried a few of the things from earlier in the day that had worked, but I did not want to push it.

Filming my scene

When I was sitting in my place and they were getting things prepped I looked down at an object, focused on a detail, released, and deepened my breathing, and did my soft-focus trick. I tried to be present and have my character preparation and given circumstances help me to get the tears the script called for, but they were not coming.

When the camera switched to straight on me, the director asked if I needed eye droplets. Even though I had been able to get misty several times earlier in the day, I was not sure what would get me there right then, and I did not want to take the time. The other actor using eye drops earlier gave me permission to feel okay using them myself.

Just the sheer feeling of the tears on my face and getting to wipe them away helped me get into the right headspace and felt the ease of being able to live in the moment. The emotion became more real.

First day thoughts

How can I have tears when I am supposed to? I had done a great deal of preparation to have a deep understanding of the characters and the situation and trusted that the emotion would be able to come through. Exploring given circumstances while doing text work I can make discoveries that are moving. But thinking about the same things on set tend to not hit as deep.

Using the tear drops does not mean my preparation was in vain. I am used to the nature of theatre where the dynamics of doing a scene in its entirety can be a great help to fuel emotion. Filming snippets of a scene at a time, for camera angles, takes away that type of momentum. I need to figure out how to get into the headspace and into the moment and not wanting to hold up production to get there.

Actors do not have to create tears, they can use eyedrops. When there is simulated sex in a scene, do the actors have to have sex? No, they pretend. If a character breaks their arm in a scene, does the actor have to break their arm? No, they pretend. If an actor can create their own tear drops, more power to them. But if they cannot, it does not mean they are a bad actor. A journal entry from after filming I said, “Part of me thinks, that maybe tomorrow I need to not be in it at all until they are setting up the shot, and then I will get into the space.” Perhaps I had used up the power of the images and preparation earlier in the day while waiting for my scene.

Day Two

Goals

Going into filming I had 4 goals: One, only warm up right before filming the scene and be more on top of communication so I know when that will be. Two, utilize my breath to work me up to the emotion and to make discoveries. Three, when I get direction, go full force into it. Four, try to conserve energy between takes by relaxing into the character.

This fourth idea was inspired by Clare Danes filming approach. Jordan Woods-Robinson, in talking about his experience working with Clare Danes on the TV series Homeland, said, “She doesn’t have transitions between life and scenes. She’s herself until ‘action’ and then jumps in 100% immediately, without thinking” (Brevard Talent Group).

Discussing this quote with a friend, he said Danes was probably not fully herself between takes but relaxing into the character; like keeping your car in idle, rather than parking, at red lights. Between takes, idle in the character, and then jump to a higher speed when action is called. This approach was interesting to me, and I wanted to see how relaxing into my character could help me maintain stamina and have increased honesty in my performance.

Relaxing into my character

I arrived to set during the lunch break, so I ate, had wardrobe pick from my clothing options, and drove a few streets over to the filming location. The whole day leading up to filming I specifically tried to not get stressed about getting emotionally available. In the morning I did standard stretches to be pliable and massaged my tongue and cheeks in the shower. I cannot remember exactly what I did on set, but my preparation was simple. When I was set in my place I started to get into the headspace and the given circumstances and waited until we were close to filming to really get into the emotion.

Sitting in my filming spot, while the director was getting things set up, he told me, “Save the juice for when the close up is on you.” Moving to his next task, he said to a crew member “some actors only have so much juice in them”. Which, of course made me wonder if he wanted me to cry. But he never said anything about tears, which I appreciated. Tears were not detailed out in the script for this scene, but it was an emotionally charged moment. I took his meaning of “juice” to be raw honest emotion, whatever that would elicit.

We started filming this scene from a side angle. The director was watching from a monitor and gave me some direction for how he wanted me to say the line. He then came over to talk with me. He talked me through the thought process, telling me to think about what I wanted

so badly was for my husband to want me, but he did not. This type of coaching helped me get to where I needed to be; it raised the stakes and deepened the emotional life of the moment. It was a good reminder to think “In my wildest dreams, what would I want?”

The next few takes were probably the most genuine, in terms of emotion, as I felt the spontaneous effects in my throat. The director said the delivery was way better.

The shot was then changed to be straight on me. While they were moving the camera and lights, I walked around a bit to be in my own space. I did not want to relax entirely out of the emotion, so I briefly tested, felt a little emotional, and backed off. Keeping my toes warm if you will. Luckily, this scene shift was not too long.

Between takes, I did a lot of deep breathing to help me access my pelvic floor and lower back. Tried to stay in the zone when my hair and clothing was readjusted by wardrobe crew. Then when the slate was getting set, I looked at a spot on the ground in my eye line with soft focus to help me sink back into the moment and added heavy faster paced breathing to work up to the emotion, and then create the need to speak. I tried to find a balance between leaning in full tilt while filming and finding a relaxed readiness between takes; being in “idle” as my character. There were some moments when I was starting to better understand how this all worked.

There is something to be said for continuity, but during these closeups, part of me felt like I was just trying to recreate those earlier good takes. The spontaneous stage of emotion is at the beginning, and having so many takes with film, you cannot expect to have that same spark in every take. Just because I felt less genuine internal emotion than earlier takes, does not mean the visual aspects were not still believable for the later ones.

It seemed like my idea of waiting to truly deep-feel until right before we were filming, and “idling” between takes, seemed successful overall—at least for this scene. Holding off

getting into emotion until right before can be a good method to not dry out or exhaust yourself emotionally. If I had tried to get in that emotion and stay in it for the entire time from when I was driving there, prep, wardrobe, and between takes, it would have been unnecessarily exhausting, and I would have become rigid and lost the honesty in my performance.

Student Short Film – A Secret Battle

Preparation

In *A Secret Battle* I played two characters, a college student named Mary who has obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and a personified version of her OCD. Because of the amount of preparation I had done, most of the filming I was able to enjoy the process a bit more without the unnecessary stress of tracking things for my thesis. I let myself do whatever I felt I needed to, and it felt like a simpler filming process. Learning from my previous film experiences I felt like I had a better grasp on how to be more “natural” on film, rather than feeling the need to emote because there is a camera there.

Between casting and filming was a little under three months. The director had two zoom rehearsals with the cast where we discussed the script, the character relationships, and ran through each scene a few times adjusting according to the director’s notes. Since most of my scenes were between Mary and OCD, we would run those scenes with me playing one character and the director or her assistant reading the other lines. Then flip-flop roles and do the scene again, repeating moments as needed. The director asked me a lot of questions to help me establish motivation for every line and action. I did my own research and character and text work.

I made sure to ask about everything I could think of, so I was sure I understood what the director wanted. I wanted to set myself up for the relaxed readiness that comes from being prepared so that I could then feel free to make organic in-the-moment choices while filming. If I know the parameters of what the scene needs, and what the director wants, I know the size of my playground. But if I do not have that clarity, the fogginess of being unclear with what the director wanted, would inhibit me from stepping into the unknown.

Wall exercise

In my movement studio class, we worked on an Alexander alignment wall exercise, and “rooting” the words in the core through the breath, as related to the work of Kristen Linklater. Working on a monologue in preparation for class I had success finding emotional depth, and therefore found interest in trying the technique on a full script. I remembered this while preparing for *A Secret Battle* and used the wall exercise to learn my lines for OCD as a method to connect to my emotional center, root my words to come from my core, and endow my words with meaning as I was memorizing them.

I vacuumed out my lungs and did the panting sequence to warm up for the exercise. Doing this exercise, I felt that it connected by body, voice, breath, and words. I made my voice much more grounded. Focusing on each word, the various meanings it could have, picturing what those words meant, and stringing phrases together, the images became quite clear. My characters point of view came into place, and I made discoveries about the various ways I could say her lines to provide more variety in my performance.

The repetition of the words and phrases started to feel like it was becoming a Meisner repeater exercise. It seemed like I was memorizing my lines faster, finding the importance of

what I was saying, and the objective became very pressing. This exercise was proving to be helpful for this character, not to mention, a great leg workout. With how this exercise went for me, I figured that it could be good to help me get worked up while on set.

A note I made in my acting journal while doing the exercise was:

Wall exercise connects words to core then when I perform if I breath into that place I will be able to access that emotion I put there. Proper deep breath access will help you to be more present AS YOUR CHARACTER. If you are breathing with your habitual breath capacity, are you truly there? Blank slate/expanded lungs give opportunity for character to breathe how the dialogue makes them breathe.

As I established the given circumstances and thought process, I was also able to find her character gestures. The script's descriptive words and her lines gave me clues for her habits and I was able to find her quite innately. I found that OCD's Laban energy level was wring, her resting breath was shallow and moderately fast, mirroring a rather quick inner tempo rhythm which manifested frequently in fidgeting.

Soft palate

Since this script called for "wells up with tears," "begins to sob," and "chokes on sobs," within a single scene, I searched online for new ways to cry on cue so I would not be caught dry again. I came across a video of Bryce Dallas Howard on the Conan O'Brien show getting herself to cry in just over a minute, and then a video of her explaining how she does it, trying to help Conan cry. Howard says it is technical and can be learned and taught (Team Coco).

You want to be hydrated, and when you yawn, your soft palate lifts, and your eyes start to tear. If you practice and "do it enough times, then when you're talking, you can continue to lift [the soft palate]," and it triggers the tears. This lift is a physiological thing, and just talking about the process caused her to well up with tears (Team Coco).

Conan was not able to get tears and marveled at Howard's ease getting teary just talking about it, and she said, "I started practicing very young." As with any technique, the more you practice, the better you get. But I imagine with this method, strengthening the muscles and creating muscle memory over the years helped give her gain the ease of access to do so in such a short amount of time. It is a skill that takes time to develop. I wanted to try out this technique but could not expect her level of execution being newer at the technique.

Tear stick

Another video I came across was of a film and television make-up artist, Arielle Toelke, explaining 4 different methods she uses when actors need a little bit of help. "We employ 1 method, 2 methods, or sometimes a lot of different methods to get them to where they need to be visually for the scene" (Insider). The tactic from this video I wanted to try was a tear stick, a menthol wax in the shape of lip stick that you put under the eyes. The menthol irritates the eye to create natural tears, and this irritation will also cause the eye to get red.

I was a little worried I would feel like a cheater using a tear stick rather than producing real tears. Would I be able to fully own the performance if I were not able to produce the tears myself? Especially if the performance was recognized at a film festival? There is certainly an element of pride in wanting to be able to develop my tears myself. But with more thought, I realized, anyone can use a tear stick and have tears fall from their eyes, but not everyone can act the part in a believable way. Telling the story is still a skill, and an actor's ability to do that is why they book a film. The tear stick just speeds up the warmup time and primes the eyes to get welled up faster. It is more emotionally safe, so actors do not have to resort to depressing topics, or emotional recall of personal memories to get there. Given Circumstances can sometimes lose

their power after so many takes, and an exhausted emotional bank is hard to keep working. So why not use a tear stick?

Within this research I was glad to find a video of Anna Faris talking about using a similar menthol method, a tear blower, in a film and being fine with acknowledging that she has a hard time crying on *The Late Late Show* with James Corden. What is important is the story you are telling. As the make-up artist said, she helps actors get where they need to be visually. Every other element of the film is manufactured to tell a story—the other actors are most likely not your family members or friends in the same way as the character, any film set in a year other than the present is manufactured, and an actor does not have to have a real scrape on their body, it would be makeup. Who knows how many film tears are real or manufactured? The story is what matters.

The days prior to filming I tested out the tear stick a few times to see how long it would take to activate, with and without my contacts. It can take up to 20 minutes to fully activate, but once there, welling up by will was much easier. The effect was not the same every time and I did not have time to find the tricks to get consistent results, but I had had some practice.

My general preparation, and having the tear stick, helped ease anxiety about the moments that required crying. I also knew the director would have eye drops just in case. In a way this felt like a culmination of play and film experiences to finally test.

On Set Experience

Day one

When I got to set, I had time to do a solid warm up outside the house. I ran around, stretched, vacuumed out my lungs, a panting sequence, a standing Scunch, Stretch, Shake,

Release, did the wall exercise against the side of my car for a few lines, got onto my alignment and felt connected. I felt more ready for filming than previous projects.

Throughout the day I went back and forth playing Mary and OCD. In my first scene as OCD, before sitting in my spot, I did some wall sitting to activate and engage my body and breath. I got on my alignment when they were setting up the last things, and I felt the shift into my character's present moment. Once I sat down the habit of hand fidgeting and nervous leg bouncing totally got me into her headspace. Because of how the filming equipment was set up and the pace of filming I was not able to stand and get on my alignment before every take, which made me think that it might only be necessary at the beginning of a scene, and whenever I feel I need it, not as a formality every take.

Filming this scene, my breath was also a key element, paired with my fidgeting hands and bouncing knee, to get me to feel authentic and active as the character in her anxious state of mind. Feeling active seemed like the key. The fidgeting and quicker breath patterns were helpful to get me into her emotional states throughout the day, and really live in her.

For my scenes as Mary, I focused on subtle honesty and not playing anything up for the camera to see. Trusting in my preparation, and that the camera would catch it.

Day two

For the earlier scenes of the day when my character was minorly agitated I used a small amount of the tear stick to help me feel more present and invested. During a break while in my dressing room I felt emotionally available, so I gently leaned into it and raised my soft palate and within seconds produced a tear. I was not quite sure how this happened so fast but figured that

the small amount of tear stick had lingered long enough to have this sort of residual effect. I still needed to learn the nuances of the tear stick, but I hoped it would be this easy later.

Waiting for the sun to go down, I spoke with the director and asked about the emotional descriptions in the script. I knew that she wanted tears, so I wanted to get a map of when she specifically wanted them so we would plan the tear stick or tear drop “choreography.” Having that random tear earlier, I was feeling more confident with being able to control when I had a tear fall.

The climax of the film was the most emotionally intense moments for both of my characters. It was easy for me to get into OCD’s mind and body. As Mary I had had an idea of how I wanted to play her, but with the various elements of having a camera right there, a PA reading OCD’s lines, occasionally second guessing my lines, I let go of any preconceived ideas of how to play the scene and let myself live the moment how it was happening. I did not necessarily have my eyes “welled” up and I did not get to the point of “sobbing” as was described in the script, but the freedom of not having the pressure to do so, I was able to get the essence of those descriptions across.

When it came to the moment where the director wanted tears, I had some time while they were moving equipment to take out my contacts and apply more of the tear stick. I fanned my eyes to get the menthol working faster. Having filmed the scene up to this shot I had some residual energy from that. I did the Bryce Dallas Howard soft palate rising to help develop the tears. I started to feel the emotion deepen and the tears potentially close to coming, but they were not ready yet. I was a few minutes too early. I had to “sit” on the emotion for a bit while they got ready, hoping it would not go away.

By the time we started filming, the soft palate work was not having quite the same effect, and the images and given circumstances I was thinking of were not helping as much as I had expected, and no tears were falling. We did not have too much time for this shot and I was not sure if I would be able to get the tears in time, so I told the director to get her tear drops just in case. While she was getting the drops, I continued leaning into the emotion, and the camera man gave me a prompt of what to think about and started to talk me through the image to deepen my emotion. This was just what I needed, and we filmed the scene again, and it went well. In the future, I can ask for help like that when I need it. I do not have to be on my own.

This was a great experience and example of the necessity of letting go of unnecessary expectations. Having the practical preparation of the tear stick eased my stress, and my character preparation allowed me to have less stress. This self-given freedom was necessary to help me be present and make discoveries in the moment.

Independent Short Film – Seeing Squatch

Help Each Other Out

During a close-up on my scene partner, the director wanted one of his lines to be more of an outburst. Doing the line a few times, the director kept asking for more frustration, but the actor was having a hard time getting there. I suggested we do a Meisner repeater exercise to help him get worked up and give the director some options. We started the exercise, both of us adjusting each repetition reacting to the other. His line deliveries became more charged, honest, and compelling. The director was able to get what he wanted. Having times where this would have helped me, it is so important to be a good scene partner. Sometimes actors need help to get

to where they need to be. We are building this project together, and the success of others will add to your success.

Actor Tool kit

Throughout this trial and error, not only did I learn more about my metaphorical actor tool kit, but also found out what items would be helpful to have in a literal film actor tool kit. The list I came up with is in Appendix B. Some of the things listed are more specific to low budget films and may not be needed on higher budget professional sets, as there are designated hair and makeup and wardrobe crew members, so some of these things will be on hand. But I do not want to be stuck without them again, so I would rather be safe than sorry.

Intimacy Direction Addendum

The topic of intimacy direction for both stage and film productions over the past few years has become more of a talked about issue, but still needs further discussion and implementation. In addition to what I shared earlier in the chapter, there are a few points that are pertinent and timely that I need to add to the discussion, as related to emotional availability.

Having had a good experience of being in a play at UCF that had an intimacy director and having had a bad experience on a previous show without one, I had learned the importance of an intimacy director. At my callback interview for *Pestilence*, I found out my character would have a kiss in the script, and I had asked if they were planning to have an intimacy director on set. I offered to contact a few friends of mine who had knowledge and experience in that role. The Director of Photography said he did boudoir photo shoots, so he felt they would not need anyone, but they would consider it. But then, on set when we filmed the scenes with kisses, the

Director of Photography never spoke up or directed us at all. And since the kisses on the first day were not in the script, if we had an intimacy director, they would not have even been on set that day.

Earlier in the chapter I briefly explained one of the moments in *Pestilence* when we added a kiss in a scene that was not in the script, and the way it was handled was awkward and limited our emotional availability and the storytelling of the moment. Similarly, later that day at the end of one of the scenes, that did not have a kiss in the script, the director he told us to “kiss if you feel like it.” I tried to get a straight answer from the director if he wanted my scene partner and I to kiss or not, but he did not want to pressure us, so he left it up to us. The trouble with this is that actors need to be able to give permission, or agree, to intimate moments. I tried to clarify with my scene partner if he was comfortable with it and if we were going to kiss, but I did not seem to get a direct answer from him either. So, I left it up to him. He kissed me in the first take, so I was more confident in also initiating the kiss in the second take, which I am sure made it look more in character. But I was still unsure about what type of kiss he would be comfortable with, so I was mild with it.

At the end of the day, I was quite frustrated because I felt like both scenes were lost opportunities. If I knew what the kisses would end up like, I would have had the confidence and freedom to just do them as my character would. But because of the director’s indecision, lack of discussion regarding boundaries, what story we wanted to tell with the kisses, and my fellow actor’s resistance, those scenes are going to be awkward. I talked with one of the producers after the first day of filming about how there needed to be more direct communication when filming the intimate moments.

Learning from the first day, when we filmed the scene with the scripted kiss, I tried to clarify as much as I could with my scene partner and the director. Even though there was still lack of input from the director, we at least had the description of the kiss in the script as a guide for what he wanted, and my scene partner and I had become more comfortable with each other. My discussion with the producer the first day must have either not been passed along, or had been disregarded by the director, as the day with the scripted kiss was not any better. We were not told the timing or camera work of the shot.

Even though the scenes we had left to film did not have a scripted kiss, while chatting with the producer about future filming days I pressed the subject again. She advised me to email the director personally, thinking that would have a bigger impact. I hoped that communication through email could establish what was awkward and difficult to do in person.

As a precaution if the director wanted to add in any kisses, I produced a protocol for the director to follow referencing “The Pillars: Rehearsal and Performance Practice” by Intimacy Directors International, that would address the specific communication issues we were having:

1. Decide definitively that a kiss is needed, and which takes the kiss is needed. (Whether you know before filming, or if you decide during the shoot, that is fine).
2. Have a discussion with the actors, at the same time, about the context of the intimate moment, and what story we are aiming to tell with the intimacy.
3. Clarify your vision with any preferences for who initiates the kiss, the type of kiss, duration of the kiss, or things like cupping the face, brush the hair, look at each other, etc.
4. Actors discuss, choreograph, and rehearse what they are comfortable with, according to their personal boundaries.

5. You give direction to the choreography, as needed, to better fit your vision; whether to pull back or to ask for more, etc.
6. Let actors know the technical aspects of the scene (i.e. necessary timing for camera movement, which shots are long/mid/closeup, so they know their range of movement and what is being seen, etc.).
7. More rehearsal, as necessary.

The director was receptive of the emails and apologized for any discomfort he may have caused. Those future film days were rescheduled a couple times and ended up being canceled, so I did not get a chance to put this protocol to practice. But I have since had in-depth conversations with my scene partner, talking about the situation and how we could have handled things differently, and what we can do on future films.

As mentioned, actors need to discuss intimate moments so they know the context of the moment, what story is being told through it, and to ensure that they and their scene partner are comfortable with what will be done. With this framework, actors will have the freedom to be emotionally available as their character, and tell the story with honesty. Intimate moments can be great additions to storytelling if the actors are not tip toeing in their own uncertainty.

As taught by Marco DiGeorge, owner of Truthful Acting Studios, when a moment of intimacy is choreographed the spontaneity comes from the characters. But when intimate moments are not choreographed, the spontaneity comes from the actors; and spontaneity in intimacy and crosses the line into reality (DiGeorge). Without any direction I was in my head and felt the line from reality was not fully marked.

The moment does not need to have each kiss blocked out in the sense of whose lip is on top or bottom, and when you switch sides, but knowing each other's boundaries, the storytelling,

and a general sense of the types of kisses and their duration. Within that framework, there can be spontaneity as the characters.

For any future films or stage productions that require intimacy I will request an intimacy director or coordinator to be provided, and if that is not possible, be clear about the protocols that need to be in place to make sure the actors are safe, and the story is told well. With this experience I feel more equipped to advocate for myself in a more direct manor and ask the questions I need to ask. I have a better way to articulate what needs to happen, and why. Easier said than done, because as I experienced, some situations can be tricky to navigate in the moment, even when I have those intentions. But I can also step forward when I see others in similar situations and be the outside advocate that they need. First, the actors need to feel safe as individuals. And secondly, they need to be set up for success to do their job well, in the headspace and world of the character, telling the story true to our character's relationship and the given circumstances not insecure in their own.

CHAPTER 3: AMPHITHEATER EXPERIENCE

Some actors choose to stick to film or stage, while others go back and forth as the opportunities present themselves. For actors doing both, learning how to adjust for a stage play performance and a film performance will be necessary for their success.

During my thesis process, COVID-19 had begun to lessen enough for Orlando Shakes to get permission from Equity to have live outdoor performances of a 100-minute version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Rehearsals were outside under a tent, all present at rehearsals wore two masks, sanitized frequently, and the show was blocked with actors 6 feet apart.

I was cast as Helena, and even though the emotional demands for this character did not call for tears like my film projects had, I still needed to find emotional honesty in the world of the play. With this play, I had the added elements of performing in an outdoor amphitheater where my performance needed to reach the back of the house as compared to a close-up shot in film, as well as the necessary text work for the classical writing of Shakespeare.

Getting to evaluate my acting in both mediums within a short timeframe helped me to see and feel how believability in a performance is different in film and theatre, but that the honesty in the performance is the same. Many elements of warming up and getting into character apply to both.

Text Work

When doing a Shakespeare production, text work is imperative to understand what you are saying, get the most out of the words, and make them accessible to the audience. A couple of steps in my approach to classical text analysis that helps infuse a performance with emotion, learned during my Shakespeare class at UCF, is paraphrasing and grammatical breath.

Paraphrasing

First, defining words I do not know, and even words I think I know, both in standard dictionaries as well as a Shakespeare Lexicon to gain any insight from meanings of words during Shakespeare's time, frequently provides me with insight to the characters emotional or mental state, elements of their personality and what they want.

With this understanding, I paraphrase every verse line into words that I would personally use to get the same point across. Practice saying the paraphrase of the lines numerous times to get the essence of my point of view and emotional levels. Then say Shakespeare's lines, but infusing "all the inflections, emphasis, movements and gestures you found with your own text" (Helsing 11).

This enlivens the Shakespeare text with real, relatable emotion, with inflections that the audience will understand; so even if they do not understand the words, they will connect with how the words are said.

Breath

Another way to get a better handle on the thought process and emotional stakes of the scene is to try out different places to breathe in the text. When we speak in real life, we take breaths that match the length of our thought, as influenced by our emotional and mental states. Two ways to practice finding how a character's breath is associated with their thought process with Shakespeare text is verse-line breath, breathing at the end of every verse line, and grammatical breath breathing with the punctuation.

Since thoughts generally last longer than a single verse-line breath, it is necessary to have and upward or circumflex inflection at the end of the line to keep the thought going. These

breaths can be indicators for times when the character is having the ideas come to them as they are speaking at times when the quick choice would be that they know everything before they speak.

With grammatical breath, the punctuation in the First Folio version of Shakespeare plays gives clues for how to breathe. Following Skinner guidelines, each punctuation mark signifies a type of breath; for example, a period is a full breath at the end of a thought, a colon is a “full breath with the intent to continue,” and a semi-colon is a “half-breath with the intent to continue” (Helsing, 60). If there is a lot of punctuation in a section, the character might be out of breath or trying to find the right words to say, but if there are long passages with very little punctuation, they could be very sure of what they are saying and may have even planned it out. The frequency of punctuation can also give insight to the emotional state of the character.

Rehearsals

We had four weeks of full-day rehearsals starting with four days of video chats on Zoom going over the text work. Once we were in person, we had to wear two masks, and stay 6 feet apart, even throughout blocking the show. Not having the ability to clarify or add to the storytelling with physical closeness or touch between characters, I worried about the audience members staying with the story. Without any physical closeness to inform emotional reactions, it had to be primarily with our words, gestures, and facial expressions (which were hidden behind our masks).

With the first while of rehearsals focusing on blocking, cleaning up the movement and words, and setting a pace going scene by scene, the scenes were their own moments, but not quite connected to the whole yet. We were taking care of the necessary logistics that come from

doing a full Shakespeare production. Once we were able to do full runs more frequently, I was better able to understand the emotional state of Helena. Going through what Helena would be doing or feeling right before my entrances were great fuel to have a more honest entrance, rather than just doing what was rehearsed. During a scene there was a section when I was listening to Lysander and Hermia's talk to each other for a while. Going scene by scene I found myself watching them, but my mind checked out frequently. During the runs I was able to find importance, make more discoveries, in listening to them. I wrote in my rehearsal journal, "rather than playing the part I feel more like I am Helena."

Making this discovery, I noticed the surface level understanding I had during previous rehearsals. I knew the situation intellectually and put on how a person in that situation would feel. But with living the story as a whole and developing my character relationships with how my scene partners developed their characters, I was making choices and get to know my character as a person with true emotions. I was getting to the point of "being" rather than "acting."

This discovery rang true to my expectations for how to improve my preparation for film acting. Only running through a scene a couple times right before filming will give you a surface understanding of the situation. But with more exploration will come more insight. That insight frequently comes when I am memorized enough to have the freedom to do so, so even if on set we only get a couple rehearsal runs, I need to do a solid script and character analysis so I can feel like I am being the character, not acting like them.

Rehearsals were consistently exhausting. I had a fair amount of running in numerous scenes, and having to go over moments again and again, while trying to project my lines past my mask to prepare for hitting the back of the audience, took a lot of energy. I especially felt this once we moved to the Lake Eola Amphitheater where the stage had steps for various levels on

the stage, as compared to our one-level rehearsal floor that had the levels taped out. We were no longer shaded by our rehearsal tent, so we had the sun shining on us, and the extra heat. During tech rehearsals going over the running moments again and again were even more exhausting; especially in a scene where I had to say a monologue while running around. Luckily when we got to performances, we just had to run the show once, and on two show days, we had some time between performances to rest a bit. Examining the idea of emotional availability, having these exhausting moments could either be a hinderance to the emotional variety that an actor could use, or could be used as fuel for the emotional state.

At the amphitheater we were given mics, but as advised, I chose to project as if we did not, to keep myself from letting my physical gestures get smaller with a smaller voice. I still wanted the physical part of my performance to be able to reach the back of the audience.

In previous theatre productions I had done in a large proscenium theatre without mics, during more tender moments I felt there was a difficult balance between being loud enough for the audience in the back row to hear and being genuine in the emotion. If I had to shout everything, how would I be able to have emotional levels, or a variety in how I said things?

During these tech rehearsals, times when the mics were out, I felt like I was just yelling, but noticed that the emotion of the scene still seemed to work fine with talking loudly. Granted, that might not have been the case if the nature of the scene was different but feeling like I could still emote at that volume was an interesting discovery. This could have had something to do with the repetitive running of physically demanding scenes in tech rehearsals, building up my stamina and therefore becoming able to make strong choices in an exhausted state.

Having all our rehearsals wearing masks, and then once at the amphitheater adding a hat and sunglasses, I felt so closed off. These barriers made an inadvertent impact on how

emotionally available I felt. But being on the stage helped “up” my acting in times when it might have been easy to give a repeat of a previous run, being there helped me to still be invested.

When we finally had our first dress rehearsal and we were able to be on stage without our masks, it was amazing to finally get to see what my scene partners were doing with the bottom half of their face. Being able to move my own face freely, and breathe without hindrance, I felt an increase my honesty and ability to be present.

Emotional Distress

The morning of our second dress rehearsal after I had left my house for the day, I got an email with inspiration images for how to do my hair for the show. I would be given a hairpiece to put over a bun of my own hair and was told to experiment and find something I liked and was easy to do with the front of my own hair. I planned to try a new style each rehearsal before opening to see what I liked.

I had second day hair that had been under a hat all day, and knowing I would be washing it that night, I did not want to curl it as I would rather use the curl for more than one day to refrain from unnecessary heat damage. After the afternoon rehearsal, getting ready for the evening run, I tried a hairstyle that was not my favorite, but was easy and worked with how my hair was, and within the time I had to do it.

When we were given the half hour warning to top of show, we were told that there would be a photographer there taking pictures of the show. My response was “WHAT?” We were never notified of the photographer in a call sheet or in any announcements during the rehearsals leading up to that night. If I had known we were going to have a photographer, I would have planned my shower schedule accordingly and spent my dinner break differently to allow for

more time to figure out my hair. I had already stretched, meditated, and prepared myself for this dress rehearsal, but now having this information “pounced” on me, I was flustered, frustrated, and anxious. Being an intern during COVID, this was the only show I was going to be able to do with Orlando Shakes, and therefore my only production photos, and once a picture is taken it is set in stone. I was incredibly upset.

Continuing to get ready, I added my hairpiece, which was numerous shades darker than my hair, and its style made the way I did the front of my hair look out of place. I did not have time to redo my hair so I asked for help from my dresser to see what we could do in the time we had left to fix it. There were jeweled headbands that had been situated on the mannequin with the hairpiece in a way that made it look like the designer wanted the headbands to stay up against the hairpiece. But as my dresser put them on me, I realized the headbands were to be worn as normal on top of my personal hair I styled. Yet again, if I had known that I would have done a different hair style, as what I did looked odd with the headbands.

I was getting worked up more and more and could not help but start to cry. It was nice to have my dresser there to rub my back and tell me my hair looked fine and that it would be okay. “Oh, don’t ruin your makeup!” I dabbed my tears away, and she helped me get into my dress.

As had been done during the first dress rehearsal, there was a curtain speech, but this time I heard “and I know a lot of you here today are teachers, so thank you.” This was another last-minute surprise: we had a proper audience that night. This was a dress rehearsal and previews were not until the next day.

My warmup had now gone to waste, and it was so hard to focus and be present, when the only thing on my mind was the frustration that we were not told beforehand about the photographer or the audience. Now with this mental block, I was worried that my performance

would be tainted, therefore making the pictures even more frustrating. My heartrate was up, and I wanted to tell someone off. Not a great way to start a performance.

Working With It

Before entering for my first scene, I wondered if I could use, or channel, my frustration into my performance, because Helena gets frustrated a lot through the play. Thinking of the concept that when you are off your normal breath pattern, you are more present, I was hoping it would prove true. But, I would not exactly say that this was the case. I had to use so much brain power to focus on what was going on, and I was more-so powering through. The scenes seemed to go fast, so it felt like I was not really making choices. It is a good thing I was solidly memorized because I was still able to do the show, but it felt like I was going through the motions.

It took about halfway through the show to get myself to be more present. I was not able to make discoveries as my character in my first three scenes, but in my fourth scene, I was in a place where I was more emotionally leveled and able to live in the scene and make choices. Physiologically, there is only so much I could do to get myself down from being worked up.

Then in the scene where Demetrius expresses his love to me, and Theseus says we will all go with them to get married, I was able to have more genuine emotion than normal; I was affected, no tears, but I felt honestly touched and was getting choked up. I assumed I had this reaction because I had cried before the show, calling upon one of my hypotheses I tried while filming. This was more evidence that if I cry before a show, or filming, I will be warmed up to get to that emotion more easily in the moment. My crying that day was caused by a real-life

issue, so this might not be the case if I cry before a show for the sake of crying. Real-life issues hit differently and stick much longer.

My dress was quite see-through and had large sleeve holes, and with no slip, I was self-conscious the whole performance that audience members could see everything. I requested a tank top for future performances to feel more secure in my costume, and having that off my mind, I could focus more on telling the story.

Effects on Others

Emotionally distressful situations like this inhibit an actor's attention and ability to be present, limiting the actor's emotional availability and range, causing the performance to be rote, or safe, rather than in the moment. The performance misses out on the spontaneity that comes when an actor is fully present mentally and emotionally. Surprises will come up and things will inevitably go wrong here and there, so stressful situations that can be avoided, like this experience, should be avoided.

If the timing of letting the actors know about the photographer had taken into consideration how finding out a half hour before the show could affect the actors, seeing how they are the ones in the pictures, this could have been avoided. The actors should be in the loop from when the photographer was scheduled, and reminded in the call sheet, as that is one of the purposes of a call sheet. I now know to make a point to find out if, and when, production photos are happening for all future shows so I can mark it in my calendar and can be prepared.

Films and theatre productions are a collaboration and looking out for the emotional state of all involved is necessary. A distraught stage manager could call the cues incorrectly in a play performance. A make-up artist on a film set feeling emotionally distracted could miss when an

actor's hair or makeup needs to be fixed therefore messing up the continuity and voiding a take. We need to think about how our interactions, our communication, or lack thereof, will affect those working with us, as everyone's wellbeing is integral to our success of our common goal to produce a great story.

Performances

Outside Elements

Having the show outside meant the matinee and evening performances were quite different experiences. Changes in the amount of sunlight, temperature shifts, wind, rain, and traffic noises.

Matinee sunlight, heat, and sweat

During tech week all our dress rehearsals were in the evening, so our first matinee performance was an adjustment. The afternoon performances had even more distractions than the evening shows, namely the sunlight, heat, and resulting sweat.

No longer having our sunglasses and hats from tech week, the sunlight was difficult to endure depending on which direction I was facing. Having to squint limited my range of facial expressions, and therefore, my emotions. On stage I had to ignore feeling sweat dripping down my body, and then stay still while "asleep" lying on the hot stage while sweat tickled across my face. It was a challenge to stay present and live the story "for the first time." With sun in my eyes, it was easy to fall into going through the motions, as so much energy had to go into enduring the sun, heat, and sweat, and trying to focus past it. It was difficult to give fresh performances, felt there were times we all reverted to auto pilot to push through.

The afternoon distractions made it feel like some moments did not quite click or were not as clean as they usually were. One matinee in specific, during the lover's quarrel I could tell that my scene partner and I were not as invested. At the end of the scene when I said my last line, I blanked on a few words, skipping one verse-line, where that had never happened before. I was not sure how or why this happened, but figured it was from feeling less invested and more in my head from dealing with the sun. With these elements I may have inadvertently checked out a little too much.

I decided I needed to think of the sunlight as being bright for Helena, as most of the play is set in a forest, rather than Janice the actor having to deal with this natural element of my world. The performance after that idea I wrote in my journal: "I made a point to keep acting in my first scene with Demetrius when he was talking rather than letting the squinting get to me." The sun was still there, but making that conscious effort activated my breath more, and I was more engaged and mentally present.

The audience was certainly distracted from the heat and sunlight too. Onstage, depending on our placement and the time of day, we had a half-dome proscenium on the amphitheater that provided some shade, but the audience was in direct sunlight the entire time. They had to squint or shade their faces if they did not have sunglasses or hats, and I could see people covering up for fear of getting sun burnt. They were socially distanced, but were required to keep a face mask on, which would have been uncomfortable after a while on a hot afternoon. Without having the darkness around the stage that comes from an evening or indoor show, outside movement was just as visible, and another attention grabber. With all these things in the way, the audiences were in a situation that made it difficult to enjoy the performance. The energy from the audience was less active during matinees, but the movement of fanning themselves was ever present.

Actors having emotional availability is great, but if the audience is too distracted to see and appreciate it, what is it for?

Opening Night Cold

As opposed to the afternoon heat, on opening night the performance was freezing, getting down to 49 degrees in Florida humidity. The amphitheater is right next to a lake, and with the windchill, it was not pleasant. Audience members were bundled up in parkas, beanies, and blankets. I had a thin, flowy dress that gave very little warmth at all. Needing to be asleep onstage for around ten minutes, then sit onstage to watch the play within the play was especially unpleasant. I had to try to not shiver or let my teeth chatter. One way to help when I didn't have lines was to have my jaw slightly parted and press the front of my tongue to the roof of my mouth to stabilize the muscles.

During the performance I had notes in mind to apply and tried to stay present despite the cold. In my first monologue there were flashes of moments where I thought I had forgotten my line, but with a breath I remembered what was next. The idea of an actor being so present they forget a line, but then taking a breath they remember it is something we talked about in a studio class about the ideas of risk and safety. I had wanted to experience that, but I had never really known HOW to make it happen. Part of me wonders if this instance was the good type of "forgetting" my lines from being so present, or if it was from being distracted by the cold; or possibly a combination of the two.

A similar moment happened towards the end of the lover's quarrel when I got worked up to saying, "keep the sweet jest up." I had a flash of not knowing what was next, but then when I took a breath, I knew what my next line was. I think this instance came about because I was in

the moment, going all in on the direction I had been given for that line, so as Helena, I was truly “out of control.” I had liked the idea of saying that line out of control, take a beat, then say the rest of the line collected. I had been able to do that to degree previously, but this performance, the moment after my exclamation when my mind was blank, provided a perfect beat before my inhalation, creating right comedic timing and shift of energy when I said the rest of the line.

Even though the cold was not pleasant, I was grateful for the ways this distraction helped me to make new discoveries with how to be present, and utilize my breath.

Noises

The road nearest the amphitheater was a one-way street with a hospital a few blocks down, and therefore the only road ambulances and firetrucks could go. We had a few emergency vehicles go by during performances, but more frequently we would be interrupted by cars with loud mufflers, loud music, loud engines, or honking.

Depending on the times these sounds were present, we were encouraged to either pause and then continue, or if there was a way to play off the sound and acknowledge it, try to use it. There were a few humorous moments because of this, but all these noises took both the audience members and actors out of the world of the play.

Rain, Wind, the Elements

Another unavoidable element of outdoor theatre is rain, and we had a few shows rescheduled because of it. One matinee performance rained out, but we still had our evening show, and the show felt weird. We needed to be careful with running, or even walking, which

made me a more “in my head.” It was chilly, and the audience was extra quiet with a controlled energy.

Our closing night performance was one of the make-up performances from a canceled show the previous week. There was a lot of rain in the afternoon and right before the show was going to start it rained again. Since we were already there, we held out for the rain to stop, and were able to go through with the performance. A decent amount of the audience stayed with us. The stage had been mopped by the crew, but it was still unavoidably damp, and water dropped from the top of the proscenium. We were told to modify whatever we had to, and to not run at all.

During the first rainy performance having to “run” differently in my scene with Demetrius, it turned into something like a quick tiptoe. Adjusting the rest of my body and how I said my lines to match how I was “running,” Helena’s personality felt sillier and quirker than usual. In that same scene during the closing performance, we decided to do the same movement but to walk with purpose rather than run. There was a moment my foot slipped a bit, so I was more deliberate with my movement after that. Not being able to run, I could not use the urgency of my movement to fuel my emotion, so I said my lines differently and they turned out bit more whiney.

Closing night was not our best performance, but we had fun, and I feel like the audience was on our side since they understood our limitations with the stage being wet, and they were grateful the show was even going on.

Not so sure I want to do outdoor theatre again. Not unless there is a covering for the audience, or it is a different time of year. So many elements that are distracting and uncomfortable for performers and audience members alike. My next indoor theatre production

will be such a luxury to have light, sound, and temperature more controlled, and those distractions out of the way for the actors as well as the audience.

Acting Discoveries

Warmups

During rehearsals, I was at the amphitheater all day. I lived far enough away that going home during the dinner break was not worth it. When we got to doing evening dress rehearsals, it was hard to not be able to do a proper warm up. At the park there was not the type of privacy I would have liked, and I was exhausted from the sun and heat all day. This was not entirely unique to rehearsals, as I would be stuck at the park between shows on days that we had a matinee. I started going to my car during the break to take a nap, get some privacy, and run around the parking garage as part of my warmup. Having the change of pace and place could help me reset and get into gear.

The day after opening when we no longer had rehearsal, I was able to do a full warm up at home which felt great. Did my hair and makeup at home as well, and once I got to the theatre, I did my mic check, got in costume, put on my hairpiece, and ran through my lines. I finally was able to prepare properly for the show. Then I had to deal with the sunlight in my eyes, the heat, and adjust to the afternoon elements after having only done evening shows for the past while. Even when you have a good warm up there will be hurdles you cannot quite plan for.

Getting out of a funk

Before one of the matinee's the first week, I was feeling "over" the show. This did not make sense because we were only a handful of shows in, I knew I enjoyed the show, so I

wondered how I could be tired of it already. Part of it, I concluded was the fact that it was a matinee, and I dreaded all the distracting elements. But I told myself, “No! I love acting, and I am grateful to be acting right now! I have no idea when I will have the next opportunity to be in a play.”

I did what I could to see if I could get revved up mentally. I did the shakeout and spin-wheel with each arm. Vacuumed out my lungs. Stretched and breathed into my sides, chest, and back. When the show’s opening music started, I felt myself become more vulnerable. I had been wanting to get a song that would get me into gear, and figured I could just use this one.

Waiting in the wings for my first entrance, I got onto my alignment to get fully entrenched in my character and the moment, and I felt that vulnerability again. My first monologue I truly “felt it.” I was not “acting” as I had before, but because I had stretched out in a way that allowed me to feel, the monologue was honest. I felt my honesty and vulnerability continued throughout the show. Followed impulses and ended up saying lines with different subtext, which was fun to experience. A monologue that was starting to feel stale was fresh again. I was finally getting the “risk and safety” experience I wanted with this show.

It can be hard to get yourself to do a physical warm up when you are not “in it.” But this was a great example that sometimes you need to just make yourself do a warm-up, and that having a good moment onstage can snowball your excitement into having a good performance overall. Get in the zone, so you do not give a half-hearted performance. Each audience deserves an invested actor.

Bad mood combat

One day before heading to the theatre, I had a conversation with an individual who expressed annoyance and frustration about something. I had similar feelings about this topic that I had chosen to not think about for a while, but their comments resurfaced negative feelings and got me into a bad mood. Having these feelings present right before our matinee was not good. While driving to the amphitheater I tried to think of what would make me feel better. I figured this gave me a chance to try out what I had been working on, focusing on my breath before each entrance to center me.

Another time while on the ride to the theatre I got annoyed by some things that happened on the road, but I purposefully tried to not let them get to me so I would not be in a bad mood that I would then have to work down from. I started going over memory creations of scenarios that would have happened leading up to the start of the play. Went over my lines in each scene and thought about what Helena was doing between each scene. I parked and did my makeup in the car finishing up going over my lines.

These experiences were good reminders that I needed to learn my personal limits. Whether on a film set waiting for the equipment to change angles, or about to head to the theatre for a play, I need to be aware of what topics and activities to avoid to not get too far out of my “zone.” But then also, learn what to do when upsets unavoidably happen.

A developed routine

Toward the beginning of the run, I noticed I had the notion that I needed to do an extensive 20-minute warm up or else I would not feel prepared. But not having the ideal situation or location to do that warm up, but still having good performances, I was noticing that was an

unnecessary expectation. No need to get in my head if I did not warm up “right.” I allowed myself to be okay with a simplified warm up.

Over the course of the show, I warmed up each day according to the time I had and what I felt like I needed, but there were some standard things I started doing consistently.

While driving to the theatre I would “hum” and “ha” or sing along to music to gently warm up my voice. Once I was in the parking garage, I massaged my face and did my makeup either listening to music or going over my lines. Walked to the theatre and did my hair backstage, and when I had my mic on, and was in costume, I did my physical warm up; usually once 5-minutes to places was called.

To activate my body, I did arm swing wheels, leg wiggles and swinging attitudes, jumping jacks, and occasionally slow wall pushups. To activate my breath, I vacuumed out my lungs, stretched and breathed into my sides, back, and chest. Then stretched where I felt I needed it. Next, I would get onto my alignment to center myself. I tried to time my warmup so during the opening music I could get on my alignment to help me get into the right headspace and into the world of the play. Many performances I would feel myself getting available to emotion, like the beginnings of mistiness, at some point of this preparation. I would try to lean into the emotion to see what would happen. Once in place before my first entrance I stood on my alignment, watched the onstage business, and increased the pace of my breath.

Something I noticed that helped me feel a bit more active while backstage between scenes was sitting forward. I made a note during a show, “I just realized I was slouching back in my chair [which] made me feel lackadaisical. But leaning forward so my weight is over my sits bones, I feel like I am ‘relaxed ready.’” There were some longer moments backstage than others, but I did not want to risk getting too relaxed.

Freedom Without Masks

I realized that having rehearsals all be with masks on, it had taken time during our dress rehearsals and performances to be able to explore without a mask on. There is an element of feeling closed off with a mask, both physically and emotionally, so once the masks are off we needed to explore the scenes with the freedom to fully express. I now know what facial expressions my scene partners are making. Getting to act without masks caused me to notice just how much “acting” was happening with the masks, but now we are starting to get into the “being” of acting. The masks made it feel a bit more artificial, but then it felt like we were people going through an experience.

In the lover’s quarrel, I felt more emotionally invested when listening to Hermia and Lysander talk. I had the goal for that show to have that scene build up more, to have the stakes be higher for me, and I felt like I was listening and reacting as Helena, rather than inadvertently slipping into myself. I did not have a mask to cover any wondering expressions.

Breath

Along with the instances previously shared when taking a breath helped me to remember my line, over the run of the show, I was able to make some valuable discoveries about the use of breath in my acting. I truly came to feel like breath is the ticket to genuine present performances.

Increased presence and discoveries

Before my first entrance, I would stand on my alignment, watch the onstage business, and increased the pace of my breath. This breathing helped me to get more present and in an emotionally available state, so I was in the world of Helena’s given circumstances. I had started

to realize that while I was on stage, I was using the focused intent of my eyes and listening to be present, but I was not paying attention to my breath.

Noticing this, I made the effort to be conscious about using my breath to stay mentally active in the scene, and a way to take in what my scene partners were saying, and let my breath fuel my thoughts and reactions. After a while I wrote in my journal “Choosing to wiggle and stretch and increase the pace of my breathing before my entrance, and then keeping my breath purposeful throughout the scene makes all the difference.” I felt more alive in my character and was able to be spontaneous. “I made the conscious choice to activate my breath a bit more, and I feel like it propelled me to make better discoveries.”

Some days I did not warm up as much, and I think I end up sitting on my breath, just breathing how I was when sitting backstage. But when I am purposeful about using my breath to get present, I can be far more vulnerable, or available, to emotion, and therefore give a more honest reaction or performance.

A change in meaning

One evening during my first monologue, for some reason I breathed at different points than usual, so my phrasing, and therefore thought process, was a bit different than usual. Felt a little weird, but it was not bad. It was nice noticing that I was letting my breath adjust my thought process and therefore how I said my lines. I was going along with the moment rather than trying to still do everything the way I usually did.

For example, the biggest breath difference this run changed the meaning of what I was saying. I usually said:

“...and for this intelligence if I have thanks *breath* it is a dear expense.”

That placement of breath referred to the “intelligence,” or, information I would share, as being the dear expense.

Whereas in this performance I said:

“...and for this intelligence *breath* if I have thanks it is a dear expense.”

That breath made the “thanks,” or if Demetrius likes me more, the dear expense. This changed the entire meaning of the line, which was not exactly in line with what would have been true. A good example of the importance of breath and using it well.

Development Over Time

I felt like I got my first monologue to be pretty good in rehearsals, but when we moved to the amphitheater, I had to work to get it to feel good again. With the pace of the show, and being the only person on the stage, I think I subconsciously felt the need to get through it.

One performance I let myself take a bit more time to breathe to think of the thoughts, rather than feeling like I had to get through the monologue quickly. That performance I felt like the monologue made more sense and I was able to paint the picture better for the audience.

Another element I started to realize was when Lysander said his line and walked away right before my monologue, if I felt vulnerable emotion then (by truly taking in what he said), I knew the monologue was going to be good. Those moments of being “in it” made the monologue feel honest and spontaneous, as I was living in it.

In a different performance the monologue was great because I was truly feeling it. I was not “acting” as I had before, but because I had stretched out in a way that allowed me to feel, the monologue felt honest. Because of the amount of preparation that goes into Shakespeare text work, it can take some time to feel the transition from “acting” to “being.”

Over time the monologue got better and better, and I ultimately got to where it felt like I had the audience right there with me almost every time. It was cool to think I was the only one on stage during that time, and it was up to me to move the show along.

Have Fun, and Experience For the First Time

The Sunday of opening weekend we had an evening performance that was professionally recorded. I was excited my out-of-town family members would be able to see the production, but was nervous from the pressure of the set-in-stone nature of a recording, we only had one shot. Some of my moments in the play that were great in the rehearsal hall, did not seem to be “hitting” at the amphitheater the same. Were those moments only funny to the director? Had I not found the right timing yet? The audience for the recording would be full of UCF Theatre students, and I projected that they would be extra critical of the show.

Being worried about all this, I talked with a fellow actor and asked him to talk me down. He said these people have not seen live theatre in a year, so they were most likely excited to see the show, and being theatre UCF theatre students, they were probably rooting us on. He quoted our late professor Mark Brotherton and said to “just have fun,” and “it’s called a ‘play’, not a ‘serious.’” I needed to give myself permission to have fun. He told me I did not need change anything that night to try to fix those moments. I was doing well. I have rehearsed, I knew what I was doing, so there is no need to worry. I just need to do what I have prepared. My previous thinking will only make it more difficult and nerve wracking.

Both thoughts helped immensely. Reframing the audience expectations, and my personal approach to the night, I gave myself permission to let go of the pressure and have fun. With this, I made a focus for the performance to experience everything for the first time.

Utilizing my breath helped me to stay active and present. The scenes felt fresh, and I was much more engaged. When Lysander woke up and was in love with me, I realized I would be way more confused than I had previously been playing it. Some of the moments I had been worried about before the show worked out well. The honesty in the reactions, rather than the calculated knowledge as an actor of what was going to happen, made it funnier. Active breath in the lover's quarrel, especially in listening, helped me to hear these things for the first time as discoveries to Helena. This ended up being our best performance yet. I wrote in my journal, "Experiencing everything for the first time (being able to do that because of breath), I finally felt I truly was Helena. I was breathing her to life and letting her live!" I still hoped that moments that we had worked would hit, but rather than trying to focus too much before entering on "testing out technique," I just experienced, which lessened the pressure.

These discoveries helped bring home the need to rehearse enough to have the reassurance as an actor that I know what I am doing—this is when I think about my technique—then allow myself to not worry about the details, have fun, and utilize my breath to let my character experience things for the first time. If I am only concerned about hitting the marks I hit a previous night, or worried that something might not work, it is going to be a mechanical performance. This is easier said than done. But, having moments of success renews my hopes in being able to get to a point where I can be far more consistent.

This applies to both theatre and film. Prepare, prepare, prepare beforehand, and then let go and let live while performing. If you try to muscle through something, to force a certain ending into existence, the life will be choked out of it. I do not need to get it "right," I need to have fun. Allowing myself to have fun will increase my chances of getting it "right."

Finally getting to experience having fun during a show and how it can be the key to the whole performance, I stuck to it for the rest of the run. During future performances when I was in a more closed off mood, I decided before entering that I needed to have more fun. “I get to act! I am in a live play! Gratitude!”

Getting Rote

One night I was able to experience Lysander waking up in love with me through the discoveries of the audience members, as they were vocal when they made discoveries. This helped remind me the depth of the stakes of that scene. Performing a show so many times, we can get into a routine. I can learn a scene making the discoveries as written in the script, and then just play those discoveries the same way again and again and forget the true depth of the stakes. But I need to make these discoveries every time.

Having fun was proving to be a great way to get out of routine performances. One night I wrote: “Well, that second entrance was fun! I left the stage and laughed. At the end of my last line, I did a "ha-ha" that I have never done before, which I think came from my having fun.”

Perfect Never Happens

Frequently I try thinking of the perfect scenarios for preparing a role or performing the role. But those scenarios usually never happen. Reality happens. A single performance cannot get every little detail just right. There will be some performances that overall feel great, and maybe feel like every moment clicked. But getting to that point for every show cannot be the expectation. I just need to expect myself to be present and try. Some moments will work better some days than others.

It is okay if I do not feel 100% “in” every single show. Sometimes actors, myself included, can get self-indulgent in that they feel like they need to feel what their character is feeling. Whereas sometimes you can still give a good performance even when you personally feel like you are in your head. Making this connection was in part due to reading Jordan Woods-Robinson describe his self-tape audition that booked him a role on Homeland. “I hated my audition. I was in my head the entire time, but I kept going and trusted my coach. I showed up on set and every producer and producers’ assistant found me to tell me it was the best audition they’d had all season” (Brevard Talent Group). This reinforced to me that how I personally feel about my performance is not the only indicator of how it is being perceived.

Eye Contact

There were a few moments in the show that I had realized I wasn’t making eye contact with my scene partners when I could have. This small adjustment made those moments feel more human, as we were having a human connection. I received more fuel for making discoveries as my character, I was able to feel more hurt, joy, or frustration in those moments, because I was taking in what they were giving me.

There are times when actors have moments where they have a scene on their own, but when you have other actors there to connect with and build off of each other, do so! This is not a job by yourself.

Scene Partner Check-in

During the run of the show, the actor playing Demetrius and I started to have check-ins before the show began. We realized that it was a little odd that the first time we saw each other

was right before our entrance for our first scene together each performance, since our dressing room spaces were so separate from each other. Making a point to check-in with each other before the performance, we could discuss if anything was “off” in the previous performance and share how we were feeling that day. This moment of human connection was a nice way to feel grounded.

For scenes when we entered together, we would have a small check-in, like making eye-contact and giving each other a thumbs up. Having this connection as actors, I felt more connected to our characters, and the humanity of their story that we were telling. When we exited together, we would often have a short check-in after our exit in a similar way.

Lift Others Up

After one show, an audience member told an actor with a “small” role how much she loved his highlighted bit. The actor was so jazzed and grateful to finally have his moment recognized because he did not get that much laughter. It was lovely to see how this raised his spirits. Later, talking about saying goodbyes at the end of shows, one actor said he likes to say things to people throughout the run, rather than wait for a super sappy goodbye at the end.

If you think to compliment someone, do it during the run, whenever you think of it, so the actor can have a boost during the show, so they know they are appreciated and doing something right. This will totally improve the moral of the actor, and give them more confidence, and help them be more emotionally available, especially if they had been feeling self-conscious or unsure about their work.

Ending Thought

From a journal entry towards the end of the show: “I feel like I am finally learning how to [have fun and create spontaneous scenes] more frequently. Recipe: getting emotionally available before, being stretched out, purposefully utilizing breath to be present, having fun...”

CHAPTER 4: OUTSIDE RESEARCH

During my experience on the film projects there were numerous questions that I was not able to answer on my own through trial and error. Such as how to build up stamina for long emotional days on set, or how other actors produce emotion at the right time on set. With these questions, and general interest in emotional availability, I sought outside answers.

Difficult Set Culture

In searching for how other actors access emotional availability, I came across a lot of agreement on the difficulty of film sets. Ringing true to my experiences, Jennica Schwartzman, an actress, writer, and producer, explains that set culture and operations are “counter intuitive to emotional availability in your acting preparation” (par. 2). With the amount of people, noises, personalities, and interactions, there is a lot working against the preparation an actor has done. Not everyone can get the same type of treatment as A-list actors who are made to feel comfortable and receive special treatment. Set operations and culture are set up to “support the entire team and you are just one part of that vast team” (par. 12). Whether or not you find yourself in the position of an A list actor, these are necessary techniques for all levels to engage with emotional availability.

Even for those A list actors, such as Kate Winslet, the atmosphere can be distracting. She says the biggest challenge on a set is to stay focused. In an interview with BAFTA Guru, Winslet says that you can rehearse, plan everything, have a framework you want to stick with, or a few ideas you want to remember to keep in your back pocket, “but sometimes the craziness of an on-set environment can be so intense that you can find yourself forgetting all of those things you had planned” (BAFTA Guru). She says that it is okay to take yourself to a corner to remember

what you had set yourself out to do. With my on-set experiences, like filming the first scene in *Pestilence* where we were so rushed, I forgot various choices and subtext I had planned to try, I felt too shy to ask for a moment to gather my thoughts like Winslet said. But taking a moment to regroup will improve an actor's focus, and therefore presence and emotional availability, more than hammering out stressful takes.

In an Actors On Actors interview between Brad Pitt and Adam Sandler, Pitt recounted an experience filming a scene with Anthony Hopkins where the scene felt great to Pitt, but it was not working for Hopkins. Hopkins did something like what Winslet described, as said by Pitt, he “turned his back to us all for about 30 seconds and turned back around, and he came in, it was just a completely different tone. The words were the same, but the tone was different, and it was glorious” (Variety). Not only is that a great reminder for acting, that when a scene is not feeling right, to try a different tactic, but to take the time to recenter yourself to do so. Speak up when the scene is not working for you, take the time you need, and let yourself breathe.

In that same interview, Adam Sandler said while filming a scene, if “you know you’re gonna get a few shots at it, it frees up so much in your head.” He knows he can play with the scene and “come at it with different directions.” But circumstances when you are on the move, time is pressing, and you need to get this shot and get out of there. He says that you have to make a decision, “better get my ‘A’ take, or we’re gonna end up with something that’s not enough energy” (Variety). These moments can be incredibly stressful with the necessity to deliver on a timeline, and it looks like this happens in every level of filmmaking. Since this will be an inevitable hurdle throughout a film career, actors need to learn how to deal with the stress of a time crunch while still being emotionally available. But how?

Filmmakers rarely talk about how intense and debilitating the process of making films can be. Joshua Sanchez, director of the film *Four* experienced the deepest depression he had ever known once the hubbub with *Four* was over. He says “I’d put everything on the line to make this movie. Every resource I had and didn’t have” (Sanchez, par. 5). If mental health is not considered during filming, there can be some negative repercussions. One of his tips for how to stay sane on a film set is to breathe and meditate. Sanchez says to take a moment and breathe when things are getting chaotic so you can recenter yourself, regain focus, and be far more creative. With the stressors that come from being on set, “concentration training will help you keep a laser-like focus” on what you are trying to do. Sanchez says that meditation makes it so much easier to “get into the artistic zone and stay there for as long as you need to” (par. 40). Moments may seem like a crisis or end of the world, or as an actor you feel the pressure to get the perfect shot under a time crunch, but using breath and meditation can “calm you down and will likely improve the quality of work you’re doing on set” (par. 41). Ultimately, it is okay if I do not give an Oscar winning performance. Actors should prioritize their personal mental health over the performance, because a film is a film, and the memories and mental health that lingers will affect you in a different, more intimate way.

Reading an article about set etiquette, I realized that for actors newer to film, learning about the vocabulary and protocols of set etiquette before getting to set can be quite helpful. Going into a situation of the unknown can be nerve wracking and can drain your emotional stamina sooner than you would like. But having done the homework of learning what you can about set protocols, can give you some reassurance so that more of your focus and energy can be on your performance. This is something I did not think to do before my film projects and, being a

stage actor with minimal film experience, I think knowing set protocols would have given me a greater sense of ease.

Difference Between Theatre and Film

Going from theatre to film, as I have mentioned, has been a learning curve to figure out the nuances of emotional availability with filming. I again found that other actors who started in theatre and moved to film have had similar struggles.

In an Actor On Actor's interview between Michael Shannon and Adam Driver, Shannon said that between television, film, and theatre, he preferred theatre. He said there is less interference, less people in your business; no one walks up and starts touching your face as is done between takes on a film set. In theatre, "you go out on stage, say your lines and when you're done, you're done." He adds that it is easier to get momentum on stage. "It's so hard to get momentum when you're filming because you're always stopping and waiting and stopping and waiting." Then right when you feel like you are finally in it, they call "Cut" and it is time for the lunch break, and you go "sit in your trailer and hope that you don't lose that thread" (Variety). I also experienced this struggle. Developing a connection with your scene partners and working together to build a scene can take some momentum, so maintaining the continuity of energy and emotion levels can feel difficult. Getting to certain emotional levels can take time to work up to, so having to start and stop so much is difficult and draining.

But Shannon said that he has started to really enjoy camera work because he feels a lot more comfortable with it. Shannon said that when you start acting on camera, "it's just very stressful and awkward and you just feel like it's impossible." Shannon adds "And then, you know, 20 years go by and you're like 'Well, it's not impossible. It's not *that* bad.' But it takes a

while to get used to” (Variety). As I had experienced from film to film throughout my practice-as-research, I started to get a better sense for how to handle camera acting. But things like how to be emotionally available at the right time under the stress of filming are still somewhat of a mystery to me, it will take a while to learn. But as I keep working, like Shannon, I will get used to it, and find out that it is possible.

Applying Theatre Technique to Film

When asked about the differences between stage and film acting in an interview, actor James McAvoy says that there are more similarities than there are differences. “The process is different. Theatre is like running a marathon and doing a movie is like a series of sprints” (Cineworld). Rather than thinking that I need to find entirely different techniques for each medium, I just need to adjust what I know how to do for the different processes.

Through this research I noticed there were ways I could incorporate my theatre process into my film process. Michael Shannon said the most comfortable he felt on set was when his director rehearsed every scene and had a full run through like a dress rehearsal. That director “really understood how to rehearse.” On the flip side, Shannon said that there are some films where you show up to a rehearsal, read the lines, and walk out “just as confused as you were before you got there, there’s no real consensus.” This proved to me the necessity to not ignore my theatre process but use what I can, since I already know it works. If I have a director that has very little contact with me before filming, I need to do my own rehearsing, so that I feel comfortable and confident. I can run through my scenes on my own like a dress rehearsal so I can feel prepared for the “opening night” of filming.

In a similar vein, when filming a scene numerous times from several angles, lines might start to feel stale. But I can utilize my experience of performing a play over a 3-month run and having to bring spontaneity to each line every performance. The same tactics I learned that made my performance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* feel fresh each show, I can use on a film set: Think about each take as its own performance, experience the situation for the first time, and allow myself to play and discover.

In an interview about how he conveys emotion, Tom Hiddleston says that for him, acting is about “recreating the circumstances that would make me feel how my character is feeling” (par. 4). Doing theatre, while in the dressing room, he practices recreating those circumstances in his head and he tries to not get in the way of himself. “Some nights I would burst into tears; other nights I wouldn't but I would still feel the same emotion, night after night. Just as in life, the way we respond to catastrophe or death will be different every time because the process is unconscious” (par.4). Just like the external manifestation of an emotion might not always look the same from one stage performance to the next, not every take in film will have the same external manifestation. So long as the listening and reactions are honest, it will be believable.

How Other Actors Work

Preparation

Almost every actor that I researched spoke of the importance of preparation. I found this to be the case, having the freedom that came from doing *A Secret Battle* when I had done ample character research and discussed with the director, compared to the lack of ability to prepare for *Pestilence*.

On movies where Adam Sandler has had to break down, he usually gets nervous for a few days leading up to it, and the anticipation really messes with him. But once he does the scene, and if he gets there, it is a great relief. But when he was filming *Uncut Gems*, he chose to not put as much pressure on himself as usual. He thought to himself “I’m feeling like this guy, I really did my backstory, I worked hard at this character.” He understood the way his character thought and where he went mentally. Sandler was confident he knew the character, so he was more confident than usual on the days his character had to break down. On set those days he said, “I was just like ‘Let me just go, let me just do it,’ instead of doing that whole thing of worrying and worrying.” He did his own process of getting emotionally available, and called his wife, and talked about what he needed to do, she gave him some thoughts and he went and got it done (Variety). Preparation was his key to not only feeling confident, but in truly knowing his character inside and out, so his availability to the emotion he needed was there and honest.

Film actress Margot Robbie said she is a “crazy person” when she prepares for a film. She does timelines, backstories, works with a dialect coach, a movement coach, and an acting coach. She does a lot of work before, so she can throw it out the window when she gets to set. “But if I hadn’t done the work before, I’d be too scared” (Project, par. 4). Robbie throwing out what she prepared once she gets to set allows her to be fully present and truly live in the scenes. She is not preoccupied with unanswered questions or uncertainties about her character. As she says, she would be too scared to go to set without that preparation; it would be too distracting without it. Robbie has learned what works for her.

Kate Winslet says that she has learned a lot about preparation over the years and says that it is so important to let the preparation go. She said you can get stuck in a little tunnel working away at home and preparing who you think the character is. But the reality is, “you have to leave

so many blank spaces for other people to fill,” such as the director and the other actors. You have to incorporate “what that they think. and what they are bringing to the project through the roles that they are playing” (BAFTA). Actors need to be flexible and adjust to how things are going. Making a film, or putting on a play, is a collaborative process. Winslet advises that you rehearse in your bedroom but try not to look in the mirror too much. You like the way you have said or done something “all you will do is keep picturing yourself doing it the way you liked rather than being completely present in the moment.” Trying to hit a specific emotional mark will not be as free and honest as if you allow yourself to experience the moment as it is happening. We need to be present and work off what we are given, as emotional availability can be greatly enhanced by working off a scene partner. When we work together, what we create is far better than what we bring to the table by ourselves.

Another type of emotional preparation is for your own personal emotions. Joshua Sanchez says that you need to take the initiative to prepare for any mental or emotional challenges that come your way (par. 61). Just like physical strength, tending to emotional and mental health are important to thrive through a filming or play process, rather than merely surviving. Similar to airplane safety demonstrations that say to put on your own oxygen mask before someone else’s, we need to maintain our mental health before putting on the mental state of another character. Sanchez says that meditation, therapy, medication, exercise, and spiritual practice were helpful to him (par. 7). I have found writing in a journal to be a great way to sort out my thoughts and feelings, process them, and gain insight for how to press forward. Prayer and gratitude have also been helpful in regulating my mental state. Sanchez says you need to remember why you got into the business (par. 44). A reminder of your “why” will help you to return to authenticity and a greater sense of perspective. “Define what you consider to be

‘success’ early in the process and do not measure yourself against anyone else’s definition” (par. 61). Reminding yourself of why you got into the industry, and what you set out to do can bring great perspective when you start losing your way.

Maintaining Emotional Preparation on Set

As mentioned, set culture can be difficult when you need to get to emotional heights in a scene, and in the article “Maintaining Emotional Prep on Set,” actress Jennica Schwartzman shares what has been helpful from her numerous experiences of needing to cry on set. Schwartzman has “crying” listed on her resume as one of her special skills, which has booked her some jobs, however she clarifies that you do not have to be a “crier” to be emotionally available and vulnerable in your acting work. Emotional preparation is not always for tears, as crying is not even the most interesting type of vulnerable experience to watch in a film. She says authentic relationships, emotional prep, and communication with your team will “put you in a place to bring about scenes naturally in an unnatural environment” (par. 11).

Her first tip is to do the work before the day of filming. “Read, memorize, visualize, rehearse, and get to your dark places.” Actors want their performances to be in-the-moment and fresh, creating the temptation to wait until filming to really go for it, but it is your job to make sure you know you can really get there, so practice at least twice beforehand (par. 4). You can run out of tears if you do not drink enough water, so be sure to hydrate. Schwartzman drinks a lot of water the day leading up to filming and throughout the filming day.

Schwartzman says that once you arrive to set, trust that you can get to the emotional heights later, put the prep away, and be yourself. Actors have a short amount of time to get comfortable and familiar with their surroundings, scene partners, and crew members. It is

important to meet these people, making eye contact when you do, and learn the culture of how that film set operates. During rehearsals, be present. Get a sense of the vibe and energy and take it back to your dressing room and “meld it with your emotional prep” so things do not surprise you later.

Then while getting into hair and makeup, Schwartzman says to communicate with the hair and makeup crew members, if you expect to cry, and if you will need their help to look as such (i.e. tear drops), as well as any anticipated things you may do in the moment like rubbing your face or messing up your hair. These crew members are your only advocates on set, and will be your number one point of communication once filming starts. They will be coming into your space to do touch ups and check on you if you need anything. It is important to have the comfort of knowing that your performance in multiple angles is going to match and will not get cut out “for something as simple as running out of tears for one angle.”

Schwartzman says the real prep happens in your trailer. “Whatever your process, do it in private as much as you can,” and communicate if you need more time (par. 9). The time between final hair and makeup and being escorted to set can vary, so she says to “bring whatever you do with you.” Schwartzman prefers wearing headphones, even if she’s not listening to music, to signify that she is in a private space. Then anyone who needs to communicate with you will keep to themselves. After doing your work in your trailer or dressing room, you will be going back out into the surroundings that are not conducive to your emotional preparation. These headphones will preserve what you have done.

Schwartzman says music can be a great way to help you get into an emotional spot and stay there. Schwartzman made a “cry” playlist on her phone so she can tap into what she needs to

in any space. “I can just close my eyes and connect, and the music really keeps me in the place I need to be” (par. 10). Use whatever songs work for you.

No one likes getting rehearsal exhaustion, and all actors have their own ways to take care of protecting their personal preparation. Schwartzman says to find a way to marry your personal emotional prep with the set operations schedule and put people first whenever you can. “A pitfall we want to avoid is over preparedness early in the day” to keep your emotion from brimming over and you become angry with the set operations, or while filming you are unable to be flexible when dynamics change (par. 12). Learning when to start getting emotionally prepared for a scene, and how to keep from getting exhausted too soon is still something I am learning how to do. Personal practice and more experience on set will help me gain a better handle over time.

Filming Your Scenes

While filming, Jennica Schwartzman advises that you do not save your emotion for the close ups. You may feel pressure to deliver your best moments for those shots, but you need to do your job authentically for every camera set up.

If you save your emotion for the close up, you might be missing the two-shot that the director may lean towards or the wide shot that fits the scene better. Your close-up may take extra time to get a clean take in focus and it may be cut because a close emotionally wrought face ‘could’ be too much for the overall arc of the scene. You have no idea! It’s not your job to know for sure, but if you can take the time during rehearsal to ASK your director for their preferred framing for the climax of your performance, they may tell you exactly what they want. Communication beforehand is key (Schwartzman par. 11).

Similarly, Adam Sandler described a film he was in saying he did not know what the camera was shooting half the time. The crew was using such long lenses, they would be way off

and they would be “in tight on you” and you would not know it. Sandler started going “I can’t walk through anything, I gotta like really give every take my all” because he did not know what they were getting each take (Variety).

In an interview with actress Margot Robbie, she said if there is a scene where you feel like you are going to make a fool of yourself, tell yourself, “you gotta go all out.” You need to fully commit because if you go half-way, “it will look so stupid. But if you do it with complete conviction, oftentimes you can pull it off” (Evie). Giving yourself permission to let go and fully play, frees your emotions to build in honest ways you might not have planned for. If you let go of feeling silly as yourself, you can live in the characters emotions. The character does not feel silly or self conscious; they are fully experiencing the moment and it is true to them.

Each actor has different approaches while filming if they pop in and out, like Clare Danes, as mentioned in Chapter 2, or like La Kieth Stanfield who stays in it all day. Adam Sandler described his experience working with actor LaKieth Stanfield, saying “He is deep, and he goes all day long.” When they were not shooting, and they had to wait for an hour to set up between takes or scenes, Stanfield was never not working hard. Stanfield was “on the side either going over his stuff, or just staying in character, or being on his own and then come back.” They had real conversations, but Sandler said there would come a point when he felt like he needed to step back and let Stanfield get back into his world (Variety). Hearing about various approaches that actors have, I imagine that each film will have specific needs for what the role requires. Although, with more practice, an actor will find what works for them to stay present and emotionally available.

Kate Winslet says that she tries to not judge their process, and I would add, to not judge yourself. Winslet says, “Often, we all just have to go through a bunch of silly stuff first in order

to get to that place and that doesn't happen unless you just let it, you know?" It is easier said than done to not feel shy trying my various tactics to get emotionally available when I have people around me. It can be easy to wonder if people are judging my failed attempts, but the sooner I can trust myself to let go, I will reach the emotion.

Winslet says that seeing how other actors work on set is a privilege, but at the same time "it can really affect your day and how you're playing a role if you allow yourself to be caught up in someone's stuff or someone else's process." This is a great reminder to not lose sight of what you set out to do, and to not judge your process against others. I had a few moments where I found this to be difficult myself. Noticing what other actors were doing, and then questioning if I was doing enough, or if I should change my process and see if theirs worked better. Winslet says to be accepting and enjoy the other actors for everything that they are, but to not lose focus in what you are doing.

Even when you are doing your best to be present in the moment and honest in your reactions, you might get direction that throws you for a loop. When Jessica Alba was filming *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* she had a scene where she was supposed to be emotional and the director said to her, "It looks too real. It looks too painful. Can you be prettier when you cry? ... Don't do that thing with your face. Just make it flat. We can CGI the tears in" (par. 2). This made Alba question her talent. It made her question her instincts and emotions and if they were enough. Learning about her experience was disheartening. An actor's job is to honestly portray an emotion, and some directors care more about an aesthetic than the truth. On a similar note, James McAvoy said that in film the post-production messes with what you did. "You could do a scene that you were trying to do for laughs and they turn it into a tragic scene...or you were trying to play something sad, and you're crying, and they literally CGI out,

take away your tears” (Cineworld). The actor is one element in the process, and there is only so much you can do to give your best performance. From these mentions of using CGI to put in or take away tears, I do not think there should have to be the same type of expectations for tears like I had on a few sets. My job is to give as honest a performance as I can, they can adjust as needed in post-production.

Sanchez says that pinning your emotional wellbeing on whether a film gets made, or is funded, or in my case I would add whether you are able to produce natural tears or not, is a “surefire way to fall into the traps of depression and anxiety” (par 9). Focus on the present to keep perspective on what is truly important in life and appreciate the experience while it is happening. He says “Remember that films are great because they tell great stories. Period.” (par. 13).

Mentors

Sanchez suggests that you identify your mentors and keep them close. During filming have them close by, either physically or virtually, as much as you can. Sanchez said having his mentor on set, “gave me an emotional and psychological grounding in the middle of a chaotic movie set” (par. 20). I had this thought during filming, that for the scenes where I have my “big moment” where I know I need to hit more intense and demanding emotions, or subtle and genuine ones, having an acting coach that I trust on set with me as an outside guide could be beneficial. I would have the relief that I was not alone in getting to these important emotional levels, as I would have someone there that spoke my language and could help monitor me, so I would not expend too much too soon. Even if a mentor could not be on set, checking in over a phone call or video chat at the beginning of the day, or before a particular scene could be a

possibility. Sanchez adds, “Your mentors have likely gone through everything you are going through and can lend wisdom and guidance when things get stressful” (par. 22). Mentors can bring much needed perspective, support, guidance, and advice. If mentors or friends found out after the fact that you needed help, it is likely that they would say they would have wanted to help. You do not have to go at this alone.

Communication

Actor’s individual needs aren’t met without communication or learning to work around what you have. As mentioned above, communicate with the makeup crew if you might need artificial tear drops, or ask for more time if you need a bit longer to get to your emotional height. Or if you need a moment to collect your thoughts, you can ask for a moment to do so.

From Brad Pitt’s experience working on *Ad Astra* he said he told the director that he saw it as being very still. He said “I’m gonna see how still we can be. And when it gets flat, you know, just pull me out” (Variety). In *Ad Astra*, Pitt’s character maintains calm, apathetic, and constrained demeanors throughout the film which is where the struggle between giving an entertaining performance while maintaining a lack of emotional response lies. This was a great example of figuring out how to talk about a scene and communicate your interpretation with your director. Being on the same page with a director on the expectations for a scene, especially before getting to set, can allow for more specific performances.

When Jennifer Lawrence was filming *Mother!* there were a lot of scenes that were emotionally intense. She had to get to emotionally dark levels she had never gone to before. She said, “One scene was pretty tough to shake, I had anxiety before it and after it” (The Feed SBS). She wanted to make sure she could come out of it and be okay. With the scene having so many

background actors, she said “if I was going to have some sort of weird melt down, I didn’t want it to be in front of a bunch of strangers. I wanted to have a tent that was away” (The Feed SBS). She asked for a tent so that she could have space away. She had never had a tent like this on set before, but she had never had to hit these emotional levels before. For one of the scenes, she had trouble calming down and coming back after “cut” was called. “Sometimes it’s hard when you summon all of this, these feelings, to kind of just snap out” (Variety).

Reaching to those emotional heights would not only be exhausting, but they would need rehearsal and a sense of comfortability. Lawrence knew what she needed to protect herself if she lost control, and she took initiative and asked for a tent. Not every set will have the same budget, or ability to cater to the actor’s needs, but actors need to speak up *when* they have needs. Everyone working on the film is investing time, energy, and for some, money. It is in everyone’s best interest that actors do not shy away from requests like these. The actor, the producers and director benefit because not only does the performance do well but then requires less takes, less time, and less resources if an actor's initial requests are honored.

In an Actors On Actors interview between Scarlet Johansson and Chris Evans, Johansson gave some good advice for actors that are starting out in film, saying “I feel like if you have an idea for something, you should ask for another take. Or you feel like you have something else left in you that maybe you are curious about, you should ask for another take. Because it will haunt you forever” (Variety). You are the one who knows how your emotions are feeling in you and if you feel you can get more emotionally available for it. This point is not just for the emotional work as the character, but as the actor, if another take will solidify to yourself that you did all you could, it is worth it to ask.

Each film experience will be different. In the interview between Johansson and Evans they discussed the different ways their directors worked. Some film directors give you two takes and you are done. Others are extensive doing 40-50 takes using one camera and needing various angles. Some directors allow for improv, and some are set on the words in the script (Variety). With such a vast range of ways that directors work, actors need to be able to figure out how to thrive in both situations. Before getting to set it would be helpful to find out the style of your director so you know what type of experience to expect.

Spontaneous Fluke?

In the movie *I, Tonya* there is a scene where the lead actress, Margot Robbie, is putting on makeup and the camera is set up as the mirror. In the scene, emotion keeps bubbling up, but she suppresses it, and eventually it tips over and she has tears fall. As an actor watching this scene, I was amazed at how she could get that emotion to come so spontaneously, and believably, and at the right time for the camera to catch it.

In an interview, Robbie shares that this scene was not in the script. They had just finished filming some scenes that had her in the mindset of being at the Olympics, feeling the pressure of the world, and being down. The Director of Photography suggested they do a quick shot of her looking at the camera. She said, “Okay what should I do?” to which the DP responded, “I don’t know, put on the makeup or whatever.” Robbie said she was trying to do a clown face, like trying to put the mask on and it just kept cracking. She said:

We had been filming for a while by that point and all those emotions were kind of bubbling under the surface, and I finally had a release for it. I did not expect to release it in that scene in that way. But it was just one of those things that just kind of happen in the moment, and ends up making it into the film (Hayes).

This was a great discovery to me. It was so compelling because it was genuinely honest. Not every scene in a film is a moment that was in the script and the actor had to prepare for. Not to say that she could not film that scene just as beautifully if she had rehearsed it before, but it is comforting to know that others also have spontaneous “flukes” that come about because of the actors' personal given circumstances. Like my self-tape audition for *Melody* I had great spontaneity with my emotion that I wasn't expecting to happen, but because of where I was emotionally that day, it did. Sometimes, spontaneity hits when the camera's are rolling.

Building Stamina

Exhaustion

Many of these actors talked about how exhausting filming can be. They know they are up for an exhausting kind of day, and whatever the upset is in the scene, they must get there. Or at least as Adam Sandler says, “I hope to get there” (Variety). The physical and emotional demands on a tough shoot can take a toll, and sometimes they are grateful when the process is over. With each film I am sure actors are able to learn how to handle the long hours, but what can be done to build up stamina?

The answer to building up stamina for long days on a film set, or several theatre shows a week, was simpler than I had imagined; it is the same as building up stamina for physical health in general; namely physical activity, sleep, nutrition. With this physical stamina, an actor will last longer before getting exhausted, and therefore elongating the life of their emotional availability. We need to do what we can to maintain our physical and mental health during the course of filming, or the run of the show because “when your physical and mental health falter in the slightest, it shows in your acting” (par 1).

Physical Exercise

Dr. Priyanka Makini says that it is common for people to feel fatigued after a long day at work or hitting the gym. “When you learn how to increase your stamina, it brings down the exhaustion levels” (par. 2). Having the capability of maintaining energy for longer can help keep your performance alive during the last few shots of the day and will help to keep the continuity of the film. For stage plays, especially those involving large amounts of movement, or the need to vocally project, having physical stamina built up will keep your performance strong through the end of the night, through the week, and make for a quicker recovery. Making sure you hydrate yourself, “allows you to push your body for longer periods.” (Marakini). Not only while exercising to build up your strength, but especially while on set or at the theatre.

For long term techniques to increase stamina, exercise is necessary. “Strength training is crucial when it comes to increasing stamina” (Marakini par. 10). Not only building the mass of your muscles, but having stronger muscles improves your endurance, and your energy levels will continue to rise over time (Marakini par. 10). Regular physical activity, like dancing, yoga, or going to the gym, can build up physical strength. These changes from building muscle and increasing endurance are gradual, but there will be a huge difference in the long run.

Andrew Kiaroscuro, a film director, producer, and owner of production company Kiaro Pictures, says, “Anytime I’m in between shoots I try and focus on building my body, my vessel, back up to be as strong as possible so I can manage to do these really long hours on film sets” (Kiaroscuro). During filming, the hours may not allow for you to exercise as regularly, so being sure to work on your body between projects is essential.

Sleep

Energy

Late rehearsals, long film shoots, and the varied schedules of each project, are not always conducive to get the rest you need. It is easier said than done, but it is important to establish as regular a sleep schedule as possible. Various drinks and food may give temporary energy, but there is “no better way to boost your energy and focus than getting restful, regular sleep” (Mink, par 8). Sleep is a time for your body to repair your muscles, ligaments, skin, and refresh your mind and mood. Studies involving memory tests have shown that “after a single night of sleep, or even a nap, people perform better, whether on a test, in the office, on the athletic field, or in a concert hall” (DerSarkissian, WebMD). Translating this scientific finding to practical application as an actor, if I have enough time on set between intense scenes it could be worth it to take a nap to gain energy to keep up my overall energy and ability to utilize my emotions.

Memorization

Sleep is also a key element to memorizing lines. Jordan Woods-Robinson, owner of Book From Tape acting studio says that adequate sleep is “the secret to making sure that the lines from the page are locked into your brain” (The Best...). He says actors should memorize lines 110%, well enough to speed through them emotionlessly, ignoring punctuation or pauses, and in neutral. Then sleep. While sleeping, your brain compartmentalizes what you learned during the day, and “it goes into a molecular structure” (W-R). When you can effortlessly say your lines without having to actively recall them, you can be truly present with your scene partners, and you are open to collaborate with everyone around you. You will not be stuck trying to visualize your lines on the page. “Lack of sleep impairs a person's ability to focus and learn efficiently... your

brain has a harder time absorbing and recalling new information” (DerSarkissian, WebMD) With limited time before filming, making time for sleep to solidify the words in your brain for recall later is paramount. Having the freedom to be present, and not trying to remember lines, will allow for you to be true to the emotions of the given circumstances.

Emotional Regulation

Not only will sleep help you avoid the visual signs of lack of sleep, “but it’s necessary for emotional stability.” (NY Film Academy). Sleep works to reset moods and emotions and provide a higher functioning vessel. A single night of sleep deprivation sets us up to “react more strongly and impulsively to negative or unpleasant situations” (Breus, par. 6). Being on a short fuse limits the range of your emotional capabilities and therefore your acting choices. Even if you are supposed to shoot a scene that is fueled with anger, aggravation, or other short-fused emotions, your choices of expression will be limited.

In the article “How Sleep Deprivation Hurts Your Emotional Health” Dr. Michael Breus explains what happens in the brain that affects the emotions. When we are sleep deprived, there is increased activity in the “emotional rapid response center” of our brain, the amygdala. The amygdala controls many of our immediate emotional responses. Without enough sleep, this part of our brain goes into overdrive, which causes us to have more intense reactions to situations. Studies have shown that we are “more reactive across the whole spectrum of emotions, positive and negative” (Breus, par. 6).

While the amygdala is fired up, sleep deprivation also dampens the communication with the prefrontal cortex, another area of the brain that is involved with emotion regulation. One of the tasks of the prefrontal cortex is to regulate impulses. When you have not gotten enough sleep,

the prefrontal cortex “can’t do its job as well, and you become more impulsive and less thoughtful in your emotional responses” (Breus, par. 8). This might sound good for an actor, as following impulses is a great way to keep moments honest and fresh, but the actor needs to be able to have control of their emotions. Following impulses needs to come from the actor being mentally and emotionally present and leaning into having fun and taking risks, not as a hampered ability to make decisions.

The process of REM sleep processing memories also “helps your emotional mind return to a less-charged, more-neutral state. This nightly emotional re-set is important for your ongoing mental health” (Breus, par. 9). Over the course of a night, REM sleep occurs in episodes that get longer later into the night, with most of the REM sleep happening in the last third of the night. “When your sleep is shortchanged, your brain doesn’t get the benefit of this restorative work, and your emotional life can suffer” (Breus, par. 10). The relationship of sleep to our emotional lives is an important example that “sleep is a necessity, not a luxury” (Breus, par. 25).

Within the industry, and working world in general, there can be a stigma that those who really care about their work sacrifice sleep. Under special circumstances on an infrequent basis, this might be necessary, but as a regular rule of thumb, taking care of yourself should be praised more and made possible. Short distanced deadlines and high demands of performance are some of the things that cause people to give up sleep to get things done. The powers at be should care just as much, if not more, about the wellbeing of their people just as much as they do about getting the work done. When people have the rest they need, their performance levels go up. The world should be encouraging people to value their basic human essentials, rather than following the status quo of how things have always been done, or trying to get ahead.

Nutrition

Body Function

One way to increase stamina is through eating healthy, nutrient dense food to give your body the energy it needs. Imagine your lack of concentration and limited emotional capacity when you are incredibly hungry, not an ideal state to be in while acting. When we do get food, what we eat can weigh us down or give us energy. A car needs gasoline to power the engine, along with other fluids to function properly. If someone puts sugar in a gas tank, it will not power the engine and ultimately ruin the car.

Since actors tend to have erratic schedules and multiple jobs, it can be hard to maintain a healthy diet, but what we put into our bodies greatly affects the way we perform and how our bodies function. Eating right needs to be a priority, not only when convenient or we feel like it. Take responsibility and only buy what will help you, do meal prep so you have quick healthy options easy to choose. Set yourself up for success by bringing snacks to set and only select “healthy options at craft services” (Mink, par 10). Portable snacks to bring with you that improve stamina are bananas, apples, citrus fruits, dried fruit, dark chocolate, peanut butter, nuts, pumpkin seeds, and beetroot—as a powder to be added to a drink (Sadhukhan par. 3-44).

Being mindful about eating nutritious foods also includes avoiding foods and substances that set stamina back, like alcohol, and fried or processed foods, as said by Dr. Priyanka Marakini (par. 33-36). Having to deal with difficult digestion or mental fog that can come from some foods, will be distracting and put a damper on an actor's ability to be fully present, and therefore emotionally available.

Dr. Priyanka Marakini says that when we experience fatigue, there is inflammation in the body, and eating foods with omega-3 fatty acids reduces the inflammation therefore “allowing

you to get back up on your feet faster.” (Marakini, par 30). Researching how long it would take for these omega-3 fatty acids to take effect, the School of Medicine and Health at University of Wisconsin says that levels start to build up quickly once you start taking supplements, “but it may take 6 weeks to 6 months to see a significant change in mood, pain, or other symptoms” (4). A quick snack or meal including omega-3 fatty acids might not have as immediate an effect as the previously mentioned snacks but being diligent with regular consumption can help in the long run.

Not only what we eat, but when we eat can have a difference on our energy. Rather than having a couple large meals, Marakini suggests that you break them down into smaller ones and have nutritious snacks in-between to maintain a steady stream of energy which helps you last through the day (par 4).

Nutrition’s Effect on the Brain, Gut, and Emotions

The food that we eat not only influences our energy and how our bodies build and function, but the nutrients, or lack thereof, in our food can have a great impact on our brain, gut microbiome, and emotions.

The brain is always “on,” in charge of movement and thoughts, breathing and heartbeat, whether we are awake or sleeping. Therefore, the brain requires a continual supply of fuel which comes from the foods we eat, and what is in that fuel makes all the difference. Dr. Eva Selheb in “Nutritional psychiatry: your brain on food,” says that “what you eat directly affects the structure and function of your brain and, ultimately, your mood” (par. 1). Emotional availability is therefore directly linked with the neurochemicals in our brain which are greatly affected by our consumption choices which is why nutritional health goes beyond general physical wellness.

Marwa Azab professor of psychology and human development at California State University, Long Beach says that there is a relation between gut bacteria to various states of mental health, as there is “bidirectional communication between the gut and the brain,” causing many scientists to believe that we have a “second brain” in our gut (Azab, par. 2). Chemicals that are associated with happiness and depression, like serotonin, are found in the gut. The bacteria in the gut produce many neurotransmitters that are critical for “mood, anxiety, concentration, reward, and motivation” (Azab, par. 4). The food we eat is the fuel our bodies must work with. If we eat nutrient dense food with a variety of vitamins and minerals, our gut bacteria will be different than if we eat junk food with empty calories. This buildup of gut bacteria over time will influence our emotions, so having chocolate or ice cream when you are feeling sad might feel nice in the moment, but in the long run could affect your emotions negatively. Selhub explains that “about 95% of your serotonin is produced in your gastrointestinal tract, and your gastrointestinal tract is lined with a hundred million nerve cells, or neurons, it makes sense that the inner workings of your digestive system don’t just help you digest food, but also guide your emotions” (par. 6).

It is vital that we maintain our bodies’ needs for nutritious energy in order for us, as actors, to control our emotions when delivering a performance whether on-stage or on-camera.

The type of bacteria in our gut not only affects the development of chemicals like serotonin, but also how we react. “Good gut bacteria or the absence of some bad ones can make us more resilient to depressive states after stress or trauma” (Azab par. 9). With the proposition of being able to recover quickly from difficulties, depending on the type of bacteria in the gut, makes a healthy diet seem even more important. Thinking about the unavoidable times of stress, like my first day of filming on *Pestilence* or when production photos were taken during A

Midsummer Night's Dream, I wonder what type of gut bacteria I had built up, and if more good bacteria would have made emotional recovery happen faster; not only for the sake of the performances, but also for the residual mental state after the fact.

Selhub suggests paying attention to how eating different foods make you feel—not only in the moment, but the following day. She challenges people to try eating a “clean” diet for two to three weeks, “that means cutting out all processed foods and sugar.” Evaluate how you feel, and then slowly, one by one, reintroduce foods into your diet, and see how you feel (Selhub). When some people go “clean” they are surprised at how much better they feel both physically and emotionally, and then how much worse they feel when they introduce foods that are known to cause inflammation (par. 10).

“Being healthy means taking care of yourself and committing to a healthy lifestyle, eating the right foods, and making sure your body is strong enough because you never know when that role is going to come around that you’ll need to be ready for.” [Douglas Tural, Actor and Producer] (Mink, par. 12). It is the responsibility of the actor to maintain their health when participating in a production because they would otherwise fail their production team when turning in a less-than adequate performance. Ultimately it is important to take care of your gut bacteria “for good quality of life, better mental health, and a sharper brain” (Azab par. 16).

Emotional Stamina

Just as physical endurance comes by regularly exercising to build up muscles, emotional endurance can come by regularly exercising. To be as emotionally available and vulnerable as possible, Jamison Hasse says to “WORK. Stretch your range and work on roles and scenes that are outside your comfort level. Work on giving yourself easy access to those emotions so that

you can bring them up on a whim” (Hasse, par. 4). He says that you need to be present and truly feel the feelings, do not push them, or show them.

As I experienced during phases of my research process when I was able to do a morning daily practice routine every day, I was able to get available to emotion far quicker. It tracks that same as anything, regular practice will help you get better. If you regularly stretch for the splits and stop for a while, you will not pick up where you left off, your body will have lost some flexibility from not keeping it up. Similarly with emotional flexibility, consistent practice is necessary for actors when preparing for a scene that may require a wide range of high emotional levels in a short period of time. In these *sprints* of emotional energy, actors will be grateful to have practiced engaging with multiple shades of emotions.

Learning from long distance runners

Running long distances takes a great deal of physical stamina, but at a certain point, the emotional stamina is really what will make or break a runner. If a runner feels like their emotional energy is high, they are likely to have a good race. But if negative thinking creeps in, their emotional energy will be lower, and they will not perform their best (Drohan, par. 10). This concept can be taken into acting. If I allow negative thinking to creep in, like doubting my ability to hit an emotional level, or doubting my stamina, my overall performance level will weaken. But if I keep positive and have “fun” in the discoveries of the moments, I will probably be able to push through the tough moments like a long-distance runner does.

Dr. Jarrod Spencer, a sports psychologist, says that if a runner is dealing with a breakup, a bereavement, or something else in their personal life, before a race they should say to themselves, “I’m still going to compete, and this is my best in the given context” (Drohan, par.

13). Similarly with acting, personal upsets will happen, and we will have long days on set which can be exhausting. Under the conditions we are in, with so many distracting elements out of our control, doing our best is all we can expect of ourselves.

When asked if emotional stamina can be learned, Dr. Spencer says we can be born with great emotional stamina, but it is also something that can be learned, as a big part of it deals with the environment. “The fastest way to build emotional stamina is sleep. The second fastest is talk therapy. The third way is head knowledge: learning skills, listening to podcasts, reading books, working on breathing techniques.” A fourth element is “faith (whatever that means to you in your life)” (Drohan, par. 18).

Dr Spencer said the fourth point referring to a British runner Eric Liddell who said, “The secret of my success over the 400 meters is that I run the first 200 meters as hard as I can. Then, for the second 200 meters, with God’s help, I run harder” (Drohan, par. 19) Being religious myself, this concept rang true. After reaching the point where you feel like you have hit your limit, you have to call upon help outside yourself to do what you feel you are incapable to do on your own. In these instances, you frequently find out that you are able to push a little harder and go a little further.

Not only is this concept helpful for the times on set when you are doing take after take of an emotionally difficult scene, but can be a way to allow yourself to let go of how you think the scene is supposed to go, and take the risk of leaning into the unknown. Rely upon your preparation, and then let it go, and have faith, drawing upon outside strength, and trusting in the moment that a great performance will happen.

Final Thoughts

Knowing that other actors have similar struggles and have found ways around them is helpful to know that as I keep working and trying out new things, and take good care of my body and mind, I will find what works for me. There are a lot of tips and tricks for how to prepare, manage your emotions, and access emotional availability, but there is no right way.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

As I went through my practice-as-research, and sought outside answers, whatever I found seemed to bring about more questions. My practice-as-research inherently lends itself to the debate between Strasberg and Adler. The dialogue about which school of thought is better suited for stage or film acting. I realized that many of the guiding questions I had would not get “real” answers. With the nature of emotions, it can be hard to find fool-proof solutions. Techniques that might work for one person, might not have much effect on another. Something that worked for me on one project, might not be as efficacious on another project. The questions that I had, and the goals I set out to achieve through my research, are not easy answers and are not easily attained abilities. But this curiosity to learn, I imagine, will help me to improve my skills and better understand myself over time.

Through this practice-as-research evaluating my emotional availability, trying various methods to see what would increase it, and learning about other actor’s experiences, the fundamental element that I keep coming back to is being deeply present.

When someone experiences an emotional reaction in real life, it is because they are fully entrenched in their given circumstances. They have a personal relationship to the people, places, things and events around them. Their entire life experience built who they are, and therefore have specific opinions, points of view, desires, and what they hold to be important. The same experience will affect different people in different ways.

For an actor to portray that type of scenario believably they need to be deeply present in the character’s world. Physically, mentally, emotionally. The character would not be having thoughts belonging to the actor, like the temperature of the theatre or film set, or how they have

done this moment so many times; for the character it is happening for the first time. If there are elements of uncertainty or insecurity in a scene, they should belong to the character, not be stemming from the actor's reality.

Hinderances to Emotional Availability

Whatever keeps an actor from achieving deep presence is a hinderance to emotional availability, for any emotion. What I found to be the primary culprits are distractions, and emotional distress.

Distractions

Distractions are anything that take away brainpower from focusing on the character's present, whether from within the actor or from without. If the actor has too much of their own world taking focus, it will limit their ability to be in the moment as the character.

There are external impediments through extreme temperatures that do not correlate to the setting of the scene. Doing a play outside with blinding sunlight and heat, or cold and rain. Loud surroundings during an outdoor play, or the noise and hubbub on a film set between takes taking you out of "the zone." Costumes that you worry might be see-through or will reveal more than it should. Trying to hit a mark to be in frame while implementing several other things.

Some internal impediments are stress from a rushed schedule and limited time for a scene. Inadequate time with a script. Spotty memorization. Unclear or indirect input from the director. Uncertainty with lack of Intimacy Direction or communication. The list goes on.

There may be spontaneous flukes that these distractions fuel an emotional response, but that is not something to count on. The distractions can keep an actor in their head and cause them to not feel the freedom to live in the moment, explore, and make discoveries.

Emotional Distress

Emotional distress happens when your personal emotional cup is already full, and there is not much room for the emotions of your character.

Expectations for how a scene will turn out can cause do this. Whether the expectations are self-imposed because of what you think should happen or want to achieve, or the director has expectations for a specific reaction, it can get to you. The need to deliver can stress you out and close you off to the emotion you are trying to reach.

Personal life events can also create emotional distress. Receiving frustrating news after already warming up. Having a triggering conversation before a show or between filming scenes. A personal loss that is hard to shake. There are so many ways our personal life can limit our emotional capacity on a given day, and moments that cause distress can be hard to work around.

It can be difficult to power through when it takes energy to focus past the elements against you, whether internal or external. Continually being brought back to your present, rather than being able to stay in the mind and emotional state of the character, makes it hard to be deeply present and establish a connection to your character and scene partners, and be emotionally available.

Helps to Emotional Availability

Emotional availability comes from being present, a willingness to be vulnerable, getting off your normal breath, and using your imagination. Whatever is helpful in achieving deep presence will aid in becoming available to a range of emotions. The circumstances and process that I found helped me be present were preparation, warming up, breath,

Preparation

Personal preparation is one of the most important ways to get rid of distractions, build confidence, and truly become the character. An actor's preparation for a film or a play is one of the things within their control. The amount of time to do so will change from project to project but as thorough as possible will be a great benefit.

A thorough script analysis, text work, character work, any necessary research, be fully memorized, understand character relationships, establish what your character is fighting for. Understand the progression of scenes and how they relate to the whole story to know what levels to reach, and what it all means to the character. Find out what you can from the director about their vision for levels, tone, and style, and rehearse on your own. If you know you have gotten there before, you can have some reassurance that you can get there again. Then when you get to the film set or the theatre, review what you prepared for that day, and then let it all go and trust in the prep and live in the moment and take risks.

The freedom that comes from truly knowing your character and their given circumstances is liberating. The most compelling performances happen when the framework is set up so you can then play in the moment. Not every scene will have straightforward dialogue or blocking descriptions you can prepare for, so do the preparation that is within your power to know your

character and the story so that when you are given direction in the moment or are in a situation that you were not expecting, you can follow your instincts and do what you can.

Warming Up

Warming up the body, breath, emotions, mind, and imagination before a performance or filming is paramount. The amount and type of warming up will differ from gig to gig, but actors need to have access to their full range.

I noticed that when my body was more active, especially my hip flexors were stretched out, I was able to access genuine emotion much faster. A lot of an actor's job is to use their imagination, so warming up that part of the mind can help you to feel more enveloped in the given circumstances of your character and feel what they feel. Because we can so easily get stuck in a regular breathing pattern, using exercises to get off your breath will help in several ways, detailed in the next section.

Times when I was emotionally closed off, distressed, or did not excited about a performance, doing a good warm up helped me out of the funk, and I was able to be present and available again. For intense emotional scenes, you need to take the time to work up into it, because you cannot expect a deep believable emotional response from nothing.

Breath

Breath proved to be one of the most important elements for emotional availability in many ways. It is difficult to be emotionally present if I am breathing at resting rate. While warming up, vacuuming out the lungs connects the breath to the emotional core, and opens the possibility for deeper emotional availability.

When I am off my natural breath pattern, my attention is brought to the present. While acting, focused eyes and listening can help you be mentally present but being conscious about your breathing will help you be emotionally present and susceptible to be influenced.

To experience a moment for the first time while acting a rehearsed scene, breath is key. Being active with your breathing, with each inhalation, take in what is happening around you, with no expectations for how the scene will build. Along with cognitively seeing and hearing what is happening, “listen” with your breath and allow what is happening to effect how you are breathing, your breath will create a discovery or impulse. The nuances of each performance will always be something new to experience.

Depending on the emotion that a scene needs, quickening or slowing the pace or intensity of the breath helps illicit various emotions. For working up to bigger emotions, activating the body with breath helps to get worked up to emotional state you need.

During stressful experiences on set or backstage that threaten to get you out of sorts and creep into your performance, deep breathing helps to manage your stress, level your emotions, and get mentally focused. Along with the ways breath has affected my acting, breathing has also become a great tool in my personal life.

Let Go of the Pressure and Have Fun

Let go of any unnecessary pressure. Release yourself from the expectations of a specific emotional outcome, preconceived ideas for how the scene “should” turn out, or how past performances were. Being worried about getting it right will not help you get it right. Letting go and living in the moment will help you “get it right.”

Mark Brotherton, a late professor at Theatre UCF always said, “It’s called a ‘play’ not a ‘serious.’” Having fun in a film or stage performance, whether it is a comedy or a drama, is about making new discoveries, which is hard to do if you are trying to force a moment you think should happen. Listening and reacting to how the lines are said that performance keeps things from getting rote and helps it be fresh and alive with honest reactions.

Key to Spontaneity?

My fascination with emotion in this process has frequently made me wonder how to create spontaneity. Since emotion in real life experiences is brought about as a reaction to something, how can an actor recreate that same type of “spark” when they know what is coming?

Bringing together the elements I just described, here is my current recipe for how to get spontaneity with any kind of emotion. After having done the preparation to know the character and their given circumstances, to have the safety of that framework:

Be stretched out and warm up to be emotionally available. Let go of expectations for how the scene will build. Purposefully utilize breath to be deeply present in the moment and take things in for the first time. Accept how the scene is currently happening, working off what you are given, and act on your impulses.

Spontaneity comes within the letting go and taking the risk. Trying new things, leaning into the unknown, and having fun. Spontaneity in real life reactions are difficult to recreate, so choosing to live in a scene as it is happening will be a new experience with new stimuli specific to that moment.

Trying to force anything to happen will surely take away the opportunity for a spark or discovery. A common actor saying by David Mamet is to “Invent nothing, deny nothing”

(Playbill). Being honest to what is happening in that moment will create a more genuine response than recreating a past performance.

The physical manifestation of an emotion doesn't have to be the same every single time, we experience emotions differently each day, and our characters will too. And during the 15th take of a film scene, if there is less internal spark, that does not mean the external is not just as believable.

Crying on Cue

Even though crying isn't the only emotional manifestation that actors need to be able to express, this journey for me started with the struggle to produce tears on set, and a desire to learn how to do it.

What Has Worked For Me

Through practicing on my own I have learned a bit about what to do with my breath, my body and muscles, combined with my thoughts, to become available to tears. Following are things that have helped at different times. Not every point is needed every time.

Physical things: go on a walk or run and then loosen up my hip flexors with stretches, gurning, getting on alignment, soft focus with eyes, laughter, lifting the soft palate, getting off the regular breath pattern.

Mental things: imagining a scenario and how I feel about it in detail, having a running inner monologue, raise the stakes "In my wildest dreams, what do I want?", integrating more than one emotion, find relatable substitutions (thinking of a loved one).

Outside aids: fan to cause eyes to well up, music playlist, video clips, picture, gifs. As well as tear sticks and tear drops. Being hydrated, not just in the days leading up, but the day of, and especially right before.

The same recipe might not work the same every time, but one that I wrote down was: Quickening my breath, thinking about the given circumstances of a scene, raising my soft palate. I got teary and “pushed it” soft palate-wise, the back of my head started hurting, then I eased up and a tear fell.

Learning how to cry takes time, and I still have a lot to learn to be more consistent. When you are trying to cry give it time. Be patient and take time with imagining the scenario and the details, it can take time to work up to it. To cry in a scene, it can be helpful to get to a higher emotional level before, so it is easier to tap into it in the moment.

Are Tears Necessary?

When a script says a character cries, how necessary are tears? Not everyone has tears when they cry. Throughout this process whenever I cried in my personal life, I evaluated what it felt like and paid attention to what triggered my crying. Numerous times I felt genuine emotion without a single tear falling from my eyes, and I am positive if those moments were caught on camera, they would be far more intriguing to watch than any of the scenes where I was trying to produce tears to please the director. Honest reactions are better than forced ones. The outward manifestation of a tear does not make the emotion any more real.

An actor living in the character in the moment, may have a far more interesting interpretation of the scene than a director’s tear drop vision. There are several emotions that lead up to “crying” and therefore there are plenty of nuanced ways for those emotions to be

expressed. The emotional development could be more organic when there are the parameters set up in the scene, and you trust the actor's process to explore where the emotion takes them. There could be a more compelling and honest performance without any tears at all.

If the script calls for tears or crying, before getting to set find out if the director's vision is for you to interpret that however you want, or if they are set on having actual tears. If the director asks you to cry on the spot while filming, get clarity if they are asking for more vulnerable emotion or for actual tears and discuss the storyline purpose for them. Then ask for the time, space, and whatever you need to get there. If you are having difficulty getting there, or if there is not enough time, just ask for tear drops. (That you brought in your actor kit, of course.)

Using tear drops or a tear stick do not make you any less of an actor. Anyone can use them, but you still must act the part honestly, and you got the role for a reason. With time crunches, a tear stick can help shorten the warm-up period and get the eyes primed. We are telling a story where every other element is manufactured, the timeperiod, relationships, injuries, etc., so it is okay to use outside helps to achieve the visual look of what the scene needs. Looking out for your own emotional wellbeing so you do not have to resort to uprooting difficult personal memories or topics if there is an extensive amount of takes, using tear drops can be well worth it. If the director has a set vision for tear drop "choreography"? Use tear drops.

What Truly Matters

Being able to cry on cue can be a very useful skill. But when it comes down to it, a truthful performance is what is important. We are trying to tell an honest story. Our characters are having a human experience, and there is a wide range of emotional expression. When an actor pursues their objective, genuine emotion is the byproduct, tears or not.

Communication

Ask For What I Need

If I have a question, ask it. If the call sheet is unclear about when each scene is being filmed, ask. If I have an emotional scene that day, rather than trying to guess when to start warming up, I can ask for someone to keep me in the loop for how the schedule is going or ask for heads up when we are a half hour out. While filming if I need extra time, space, quiet, or help to get where I need to be emotionally, ask. If I want another take, ask for it. If I need a moment to discuss the scene with my scene partner, ask for it. I need to speak up and ask for whatever I need when I need it. I do not need to feel like a burden. I may be one of the many cogs in the machine making a film, but I am still part of the machine, so if I have needs to do my best, I can ask for them to be met. They can say no, or they can say yes, but I need to ask.

Get Clarity from the Director

All directors have their own way of working, some have discussions or even rehearsals before getting to set, and some do not talk about the scene until you are close to filming. I experienced both types of directors and compared to the amount of time I am used to working with a director before doing a stage performance, I am going to have some questions about the director's vision.

Find out what tone the director wants for the film and for each scene, and what level of emotion they want. If the director wants the lines to be word perfect, or if they prefer general memorization and the added improvisation in adlibbing. Talk about the character relationships and how your part drives the storyline. There are so many things you can ask a director to get a better sense of what they are looking for, before getting to set, and while filming. If a director

gives a note between takes, ask for clarity if you do not understand. If you feel there is a communication barrier, maybe bring it up and see what can be done.

Some scenes will need more direction than others, but, if you do not have parameters for what the director wants, you will not feel safe to freely take risks and make discoveries that produce those spontaneous powerful moments.

Stigmas

There are stigmas about actors being divas both within film and theatre when they have a list of things that need to be in place for them to perform. But when situations like this happen, I realize that those stereotypes are not fair.

There are some actors that get the title of diva from letting their level of “fame” get to them, and they make demands to establish their superiority. But experienced professional actors have learned what they need to do to set themselves up for success. With so many factors outside of an actor’s control, it is in their best interest to take charge of what is in their power and make requests. Outside people might not understand the actor’s process, but they are not the ones required to be emotionally, mentally, and physically vulnerable, on someone else’s timeline, and have it watched by a live audience, or recorded for many to see.

Insights From Watching My Film Performances

But getting to see each film afterward, it was nice to notice my progression in finding the subtlety of film, while having the importance of the stakes. There needs to be importance to the scene whether you are on stage or in a film. Transitioning from stage acting to film acting, there is the learning curve to finding the subtlety of film, but not getting so “natural” it is boring. From

watching fellow actors work and evaluating how I felt while filming and then seeing my performances, I noticed that making sure the scene has importance is key. There can still be the subtlety of film, but the importance will add in the character's point of view.

Because of the different location of the audience, the size of the performance needs to be bigger or smaller. The way to achieve believability changes for each medium, but the necessity of honesty stays the same. In theatre when the reaction is big it can still be believable if it is honest. In film a reaction needs to be smaller to be believable, but it still needs to be honest.

It was also interesting to see which takes were selected, and how the editing changed the scenes. The first rushed scene in *Pestilence* turned out better than I expected because lines were cut, and they were able to edit out the chunky moments. But another one of the scenes, some lines were moved around and there were reactions I had in places I had not acted them. Being used to the numerous performances in theatre where if one night it was not an exceptional performance, the next day I had another chance to do the show to get it right, it was hard not being able to change a film performance after it had happened. After filming, my performance was set, and it was in their hands. The final product of a film is not always what the actor performed.

This realization really brought home the fact that I prepare when I can, I act as best I can the day of, and that is all I can expect of myself. Then when I watch films, I may see other actors with performances that I wish I could emulate. But I do not know how many different takes were used to piece the scene together. I do not know if they were able to get to those emotional heights every take or if it was just that one. There is no way to know, and therefore no reason to judge my current skills against theirs. With so much magic that happens during postproduction, it is interesting that there are awards for actors' performances, when so much is out of their control.

Moving Forward

Habits

Developing and keeping good habits is paramount. Over the course of my thesis, I had phases of being diligent with my daily practice, and times where I went weeks or even months without a “proper” warm up. I felt a difference in my physical, mental, and emotional availability as well as my level of confidence overall in those times. When I was consistent, I was creating habits so I could know my body, myself, and what it would take to get me to wherever I needed to be emotionally.

It is important to keep up your craft, in all your skill areas, so when an opportunity arises, you are not caught off guard and unprepared, but can go for it with confidence. Even if the opportunity is out of your current wheelhouse, you can have the confidence that you can learn and adapt, because you are already a well-oiled machine, rather than needing to be dusted off and start from the beginning. If you keep up, you will be ready for anything.

Take Care of Myself and Build Up Stamina

I plan to build up my stamina to not only give better performances, but to be able to enjoy those projects more. Make more of a priority to eat healthy food to fuel and build my body and mind with clean nutrients, so I have more energy, my gut will produce healthy bacteria, and my emotions will be more easily leveled. I will put importance on getting ample sleep to refresh my emotions, get clarity of mind, and gain necessary energy to function at my best. I want to memorize my lines early enough to have a night’s sleep to retain what I have learned, and since sleep is truly a necessity and not a luxury, I want to evaluate when I need to acknowledge I have done enough and need to value my rest. I am going to exercise regularly to build up my body so I

am more confident in my capabilities, feel better about life, have a wider range of physical skill, and have the physical stamina to last longer on set or in a play run before I get exhausted. I will practice meditation, journaling, positive thinking, practice different techniques, and try out difficult roles to build up my emotional stamina.

Continued Exploration

In my journey, I am still learning what levels of preparation I need before filming. After the first week of *Pestilence* where I felt underprepared, I felt that being as memorized, researched, and rehearsed as possible would be the perfect scenario. But then, when I recorded my self-tape for *Melody*, the first take was so genuine with barely any preparation. Then getting to film the scene on set, I had done the rehearsal and preparation that I had wanted, but the scene felt forced, and in watching the finished film the performance was pushed, lacked authenticity, and left me wanting. I had overprepared. How much rehearsal should I do? Frequently it seems like true emotion comes within the first few rehearsals, and then after that I am trying to get to where I have been before. I do not want to unwisely never rehearse hoping the magic will happen in the first run and have a scene not turn out well from being underprepared. But I also do not want to rely so much on my preparation, that I am not able to deviate from my plan and embrace any risk. This will be a trial and error to learn what works for me, and each project.

I still need to learn how to live within a film scene keeping continuity in mind. How can I have spontaneity and try new things when the scene is filmed from multiple angles? I do not want to void out the takes from one angle because I am finding new ways to the scene when the camera is at a different angle. I have felt a limitation needing to hit my marks and do the scene similar enough for the sake of continuity. I am used to the theatre rehearsal process where I have

a month to play and make discoveries, and during performances I do not have to worry about continuity in a scene because the entire performance is one continuous go. I am sure I can take classes and talk to mentors to learn how to deal with this while filming. But when it comes down to it, I can ask the director if I am unsure.

I want to keep figuring out how to take what happens at home while rehearsing or doing a self-tape, on my time, in a comfortable space, as many takes as I want, and then transitioning to set and doing the scene on their schedule, as many times as they need me to, under those stressors. With that, I want to figure out how to pace my emotions in case a director tells me to “save it for the close-up”. Having a few stressful minutes to get there is vastly different from hours of a daily practice I can luxuriate in.

Accept What You Can Give

“The more authentic and honest you are in your interaction with the world, both professionally and personally, the better you will be placed to do the kind of work which will touch others and move their hearts and minds. Because if you mean it the chances are it’s going to mean something to somebody else,” Tom Hiddleston (Guru).

Reflecting on past acting moments or learning about how other people work, I can guess what could have worked in the past or would work in the future. But that is easier said than done. How do I really know? If I did something different in a scene how much would it have really affected my performance? There is a lot of trial and error within acting, and in theory a lot of things sounds great, but I will never know unless I try it out. Great moments will happen, and with practice they can happen more frequently, but perfect never happens. Not every scene will feel great, and that is okay.

When it comes down to it there are so many factors within the process of theatre and film that I do not have control over, but I need to own what I can control. Take care of my body, memorize my lines, and prepare as best I know how. Ask questions when I need clarity. Be aware of those around me. Let go of my preparation, trust in myself, my training, my scene partner, and have fun. When I make an acting choice, forget about getting it right or the worry of getting it wrong, and have confidence and do it. Trust that I am doing the best that I can under the circumstances I am in.

Acting is a hard and vulnerable thing to do, and I can do hard things.

Prepare, let it go, and be deeply present.

**APPENDIX A:
EXPLANATION OF EXERCISES**

Vacuuming out the Lungs

Standing with your feet angled out, and a little wider than shoulder width apart, slightly bend your knees and bend forward at the hip flexors just enough to rest your hands on your upper thighs with fingers at the inside of leg, and thumbs at the outside, arms slightly bent, neck and head in line with spine, gaze is at the floor perpendicular to alignment. Body is loose, without tension. Breathe in and out through the mouth.

Take a big inhalation, and gently exhale as much air out of your lungs as you can without adding tension. Once empty, put tongue at roof of mouth to close off airway. Suck tummy in and up into your ribcage as a “vacuum” effect. You should begin to feel your muscles start to release down. Once you need air, breath in through the nose in a burst, while keeping your tongue at the roof of your mouth. Evaluate the depth of your breath as compared to before the exercise. Repeat once more.

Panting Sequence

Standing on your alignment and looking at a spot directly in front of you; feet hip distance apart, weight balanced in all directions, lifted through spine. Breathe through your mouth for the entire exercise. Take a big breath and release it, like the weekend has just arrived. Then think of something that you want, like ice cream, and while looking at the spot across from you, take 5 deep breaths with intent. Then think of something you want even more, and with this intent, take 10 breaths that are a bit faster. Next, think of something you want even more, and with the intensity of this intent, take 20 breaths that are even faster. Keeping in mind that you are trying to access your pelvic floor with each of these breaths. You then release your breath and do

fast soft panting, gradually adding in voice on an “ah”. This helps you to connect your breath and voice to your emotional core.

Wall Exercise

Stand with feet parallel, shoulder width apart, and about 8 inches away from the wall. I squat and shift weight back until bum is leaned against the wall. Lengthen back up and against the wall, with head lifted. Breathe into the emotional core. Say the first work of text, repeating the word until you sense a connection to the emotional core. Endow purpose and meaning to the words. Be sure to keep tension out of the face and return to ease if you do.

Crying Exercise

Sitting in Japanese meditation. Contract eyebrow muscles and depress the depressor anguli oris muscles. Imagine an image or what someone says as a trigger, take a quick breath into the back, expel air and contract oblique muscles, and you will feel flutter in the solar plexus.

**APPENDIX B:
ACTOR TOOL KIT ITEMS**

Actor Tool Kit Items

- Script
- Call sheet
- Tear Stick/Tear blower
- Eye drops
- Aquaphor
- Handheld fan
- Makeup
- Makeup wipes
- Nail kit
- Deodorant
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, floss
- Mints, Listerine strips, gum
- Tampons, pads
- Lotion
- Shaving razor
- Tweezers
- Q tips
- Tissues
- Dry shampoo
- Hair ties, bobby pins
- Hairspray
- Hairbrush, comb

- Curling Iron, Hair straightener as needed
- Headband, hair clips
- Contact case, contact solution
- Spare glasses
- Eye soothing gel
- Mirror
- Hand towel
- Button down shirt (to cover clothes while doing makeup or eating)
- Face wash
- Shampoo/soap
- Sunscreen
- Chapstick
- Headphones
- Snacks
- Water
- Water flavor
- Scarf
- Tea bags
- Throat lozenges
- Hand sanitizer
- Phone charger
- Portable power bank
- Small sewing/mending kit

- Safety pins
- Scissors
- Band aid kit, pain killers
- Change of underwear, socks
- Top sheet (to have a clean surface to lie down on)
- Small portable humidifier?
- Business cards
- Pens, pencils, highlighters, eraser
- Thank You cards, envelopes, stamps
- Journal
- Batteries
- Exercise band
- Dollar store handheld massage tool
- Rice pack
- Hand warmers
- Bug spray
- Pass along cards
- Fake wedding ring

LIST OF REFERENCES

- “Available,” def. Adj. 1. *Merriam-Webster*, 2021, [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/available](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/available). Accessed May 2021.
- “Available,” def. Adj. 1. *The Free Dictionary*, 2021, <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Available>. Accessed May 2021.
- Azab, Marwa. “Gut Bacteria Can influence Your Mood, Thoughts, and Brain.” *Psychology Today*, 7 Aug. 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/neuroscience-in-everyday-life/201908/gut-bacteria-can-influence-your-mood-thoughts-and-brain>. Accessed 2 July 2021.
- Barrymore, Drew. “The Acting Lesson.” *Wildflower*. E. P. Dutton, 2015.
- Breus, Michael. “How Sleep Deprivation Hurts Your Emotional Health.” *The Sleep Doctor*, 1 May 2018, <https://thesleepdoctor.com/2018/05/01/how-sleep-deprivation-hurts-your-emotional-health/>. Accessed 3 July 2021.
- Brevard Talent Group. “Brevard Talent Group Presents: From Audition to Booking # 3 Jordan Woods-Robinson.” *Facebook*, 8 Sep. 2020, <https://fb.watch/v/2cawHIRSD/>. Accessed Sep. 2020.
- “Bryce Dallas Howard Can Cry On Command – CONAN on TBS.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Team Coco, 10 June 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pabK7LRANiU>.
- “Bryce Dallas Howard Teaches Conan How To Cry On Command – CONAN on TBS.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Team Coco, 25 Oct. 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fILTeGDom_U.
- “Crying Lessons with Anna Faris & Joshua Jackson.” *YouTube*, uploaded by The Late Late Show with James Corden, 11 Nov. 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7tl_O48gto.
- DerSarkissian, Carol. “Sleep Deprivation and Memory.” *WebMD*, 7 Aug. 2019, <https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/sleep-deprivation-effects-on-memory>. Accessed 2 July 2021.
- DiGeorge, Marco. Breaking Down the Boundaries: Actors and Directors. Orlando Independent Filmmakers, 2 Sep. 2020. <https://independentfilmmakers.org/actors-and-directors-workshop/>.
- Drohan, Freya. “How to Build Emotional Stamina.” *Triathlete*, 7 May 2020, <https://www.triathlete.com/training/how-to-build-emotional-stamina/>. Accessed 3 July 2021.

- Ekman, Paul. Paul Ekman Group, Paul Ekman Group LLC,
<https://www.paulekman.com/about/about-paul-ekman-group-llc/>.
- “Emotion,” def. N. 1a. Merriam-Webster, 2021, [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emotion](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emotion).
 Accessed May 2021.
- “Emotion,” def. N. 1. The Free Dictionary, 2021, [thefreedictionary.com/emotion](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/emotion). Accessed May
 2021.
- Evie. “Margot Robbie interview ‘I want to be a strong woman.’” *YouTube*, Uploaded by Evie, 12
 Nov. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8-EjN3Bt0E>.
- Fierberg, Emma. “How Actors Fake Cry In Movies.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Insider. 19 May
 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGrW7E8gx-s>.
- Graves, Ginny. “Unlock Your Emotional Intelligence.” *Time*, 17 Oct. 2017, pp. 9-13.
- Hasse, Jamison. “Emotional Availability and Vulnerability.” *L.A. on-camera training center*, 17
 Sep. 2012, <https://laoncamera.com/acting-tips/2012-09-17-emotional-availability-and-vulnerability>. Accessed June 2021.
- Hayes, Hazel. “Topsy Talk with Margot Robbie.” *YouTube*, Uploaded by Hazel Hayes, 2 Mar.
 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrA28iiWpig>.
- Helsing, Jim. *Acting Shakespeare’s Text*. 9 Sep. 2018. Collection of Jim Helsing, Florida.
 Unpublished textbook.
- Hiddleston, Tom. “Case study: Actor Tom Hiddleston reveals how he conveys emotion.” *The
 Guardian*, 6 Mar. 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/mar/07/tom-hiddleston-conveying-emotion>. Accessed June 2021.
- Hollywood, Access. “Alba reveals she considered giving up acting.” *Today*, 5 Nov. 2010,
<https://www.today.com/popculture/alba-reveals-she-considered-giving-acting-wbna40035511>. Accessed July 2021.
- “Jennifer Lawrence: Anxiety on set; Auditioning alone in NY; Diversity in Hollywood.”
YouTube, Uploaded by The Feed SBS, 14 Sep. 2017.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxxD2tAnAw4>.
- “Jennifer Lawrence Tore Her Diaphragm While Filming ‘Mother!’” *YouTube*, Uploaded by
 Variety, 12 Sep. 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyZVUC5jeVw>.
- “Kate Winslet shares her acting secrets.” *YouTube*, Uploaded by BAFTA Guru, 12 Jan. 2016.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWJaRlNsNAo>.

- Kiaroscuro, Andrew. "Results Oriented Work." *Facebook*, 24 June 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/AKiaroscuro/videos/4190464541011385>. Accessed 24 June 2021.
- "Mamet Publishes Controversial Advice to Actors." *Playbill*. 17 Oct. 1997, Accessed 23 July 2021. <https://www.playbill.com/article/mamet-publishes-controversial-advice-to-actors-com-71757>.
- Marakini, Priyanka. "How to Increase Stamina Naturally: Diet and Fitness tips." *HealthifyMe*, 26 Aug. 2019, <https://www.healthifyme.com/blog/increase-stamina-naturally-foods-exercises-tips/>. Accessed 3 July 2021.
- Mink, Casey. "An Actor's Comprehensive Guide to Self-Care." *Backstage*, 6 Nov. 2017, <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/self-care-actors-secret-weapon-2929/>. Accessed June 2021.
- "Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Some Frequently Asked Questions." Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. Digital PDF Handout. https://www.fammed.wisc.edu/files/webfm-uploads/documents/outreach/im/handout_omega3_fats_patient.pdf.
- "Present," def. N. 2. *Cambridge Dictionary*, 2021, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/present. Accessed May 2021.
- Resources, Student. "Self-Care Tips for Actors from New York Film Academy." *New York Film Academy*, 2 Feb. 2018, <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/self-care-tips-for-actors/>. Accessed 3 July 2021.
- Sadhukhan, Priyanka. "How to Increase Stamina Naturally Through Food." *Stylecraze*, 22 June 2021. <https://www.stylecraze.com/articles/best-foods-to-increase-your-stamina/#gref>. Accessed 4 July 2021
- Sanchez, Joshua. "How to stay sane and healthy while making a film." *The Creative Independent*, 7 Nov. 2018, <https://thecreativeindependent.com/guides/how-to-stay-sane-and-healthy-while-making-a-film/>. Accessed June 2021.
- Schwartzman, Jennica. "Tips for Actors: Maintaining Your Emotional Prep on Set." *Ms. In the Biz*, 10 June 2019, <http://msinthebiz.com/2019/06/10/tips-for-actors-maintaining-your-emotional-prep-on-set/>. Accessed June 2021.
- Sharma, Shaan. "Why Actors Must Take Care of Their Bodies." *Backstage*, 13 Oct. 2014. <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/actors-must-take-care-bodies-11715/>. Accessed 3 July 2021.
- Selhub, Eva. "Nutritional psychiatry: Your brain on food." *Harvard Health Publishing*, 26 Mar. 2021, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/nutritional-psychiatry-your-brain-on-food-201511168626>. Accessed 2 July 2021.

- “The Pillars: Rehearsal and Performance Practice.” *Intimacy Directors international*, 2016.
Digital handout.
- “Tom Hiddleston On The Best Advice He Got – ‘You Can Do This If You Want To.’” *YouTube*,
Uploaded by BAFTA Guru, 24 May 2013.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCHeI5BDrLs>.
- Variety. “Adam Driver & Michael Shannon - Actors on Actors - Full Conversation.” *YouTube*,
Uploaded by Variety, 1 Dec. 2016.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcK6ksHKcMY&t=747s>.
- Variety. “Brad Pitt & Adam Sandler - Actor on Actors - Full Conversation.” *YouTube*, Uploaded
by Variety, 12 Nov. 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xI-nAEIOtmM&t=1770s>.
- Variety. “Chris Evans & Scarlett Johansson - Actors on Actors - Full Conversation.” *YouTube*,
Uploaded by Variety, 11 Nov. 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKSzrJkHtVg>.
- Woods-Robinson, Jordan. “The Best Memorization Tool.” *YouTube*, Uploaded by Book From
Tape, 31 Dec. 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XnFO7mIHQ8>.