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THE PROCESS IS A JOURNEY

by

VICTORIA MICALETTI
B.A. Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi, 2017

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

Actors are tasked with the opportunity to perform roles from multiple assorted styles of theatre performance throughout their career. How can performers best create an effective acting process that allows them to develop a pathway that is unique and dynamic across all styles to best embody the characters that they are cast as? I am seeking to refine and develop an approach that will be comprised of a series of steps which include exercises from the acting techniques of Jerzy Grotowski, Michael Chekhov, and Konstantin Stanislavski to create a character that is unique and dynamic. Through the investigation of the psychophysical connection, I will be analyzing how this dichotomy can support the actor when approaching the character development process to result in a specific and successful performance. I will be using my performances in *The Amphibians*, *Welcome to the Moon*, and *Shrek*, as a case study for the development of an effective acting process. [OBJ]

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CHAPTER ONE: THE THEORISTS

In this chapter, I will give a brief comprehensive history and background on 3 different acting theorists who have helped to shape the landscape of American theatre practices.

The theorists I will focus on are Konstantin Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, and Jerzy Grotowski. Each of these theorists has a unique approach to the art of acting, and I will note the similarities and differences amongst each of them and how they each had an impact on the art of acting. The focus on these three theorists is indicative of the work they did, and how that impacted me in my work as an actor.

The person credited with creating the first modern method for acting was Konstantin Stanislavski. His method has been revered in American theatre. Sonia Moore, the author of *The Stanislavski System* states,

“Ethics, profound knowledge, and a highly artistic form of expression are the essence of the Stanislavski System. It became Stanislavski’s goal to give an actor control over the phenomenon of inspiration. When an actor is inspired, he is in the same natural and spontaneous state that is ours in life, and he lives the experiences and emotions of the character he portrays.” (5-6).

The unique part of the Stanislavski method that stands out amongst other methods is that there was focus on the psychology of the actor. The mental components that tie into the craft of acting gave the Stanislavski method an edge because it focused on authenticity, which stemmed from the idea of truth. This concept was inspired by the works of Mikhail Shchepkin. Mikhail Semyonovich Shchepkin was a predecessor of Stanislavski and was well known throughout

Russia for his performances in Russia in the “Serf Theatre” realm. Shchepkin attended a live theater performance by one of the famous actors of his time and while watching the performance he realized,

“He must never invent his stage characters, but create them as living people with the help of his own experience of life... The theory of acting led Shchepkin to introduce on the Russian stage a naturalness of speech that was a great contrast to the then popular declamatory style of speech used by Russian actors.” (Moore 46)

The genesis of the theory that is continually attributed to the likes of Konstantin Stanislavski stems from a multitude of different Russian theatre artists. The various Russian theatre movements and the actors involved in them led to the development of the Stanislavski method. Stanislavsky’s focus for the actors’ work was to feel the emotions of the character they were portraying. These ideas were the basis for formulating key words that described the method's primary elements; some examples include the "Magic if" and "Given Circumstances."

Stanislavski's work is influenced by the character's given circumstances, which can cause reactions in the actor colored by their personality, characteristics, and point of view. With a melding of the personal reaction of the actor living in the imaginary world, we react "as if" it was happening (through the lens of both the actor and character). The method was developed at The Moscow Art Theatre. The Moscow Art theatre served as ground zero for the Stanislavski system. The work that was done by Stanislavski at this theatre is not only a creative feat, but a scientific one. In *The Stanislavski System*, Sonia Moore says that the system,

“...is the science of theatre art... Through the System actors learn natural laws and how to use them consciously in recreating human behavior on stage.” (7-12)

As a result of his exploration of human nature with his students being his test subjects, Stanislavski was able to conclude that,

“... an actor’s mind, will, and emotions – the three forces for our psychological life – must participate in the creation of a live human being on stage.” (Moore 12).

Stanislavski’s work was rooted in finding the truth and humanity of each character portrayed onstage. Stanislavski's method stipulates that the actor uses their imagination to generate ideas about the character's behavior that leads to a creation of a psychology of the character that then drives acting choices. Nothing is to be forced and there should be something organic about the process.

Konstantin Stanislavski worked diligently with the actors who became students at the Moscow Art Theatre. One of the Moscow Art Theatre students was Michael Chekhov, nephew of famed playwright Anton Chekhov. Michael Chekhov trained at the Moscow Art Theatre and then later developed his own method which had some contrast to the work done by Konstantin Stanislavski. In *Michael Chekhov*, author Franc Chamberlain provides background on the life and career of Michael Chekhov stating,

“As part of the First Studio, Chekhov developed his skills in the basic elements of Stanislavsky's method: relaxation, concentration, naivety, imagination, communication, and affective memory. Chekhov was eventually to reject Stanislavsky's emphasis on memory, but the other aspects of the Studio’s work were to find a place in his own method, though somewhat transformed.” (10)

Stanislavski focused on the use of imagination and memory to effectively build more information about the character an actor was playing, examining how it impacts the actor when

in rehearsal and performance. Chekhov focused on how to bridge the mind and body to foster connection through physicality that sparked psychological response.

In *The Rhythm of Space and the Sound of Time: Michael Chekhov's Acting Technique in the 21st Century*, author Cynthia Aspheger states:

” ... Chekhov developed Stanislavsky's system of acting by shifting the emphasis in training from the development of Stanislavsky's ‘sense of truth’ and achievement of verisimilitude to the development of body-mind connection through the use of imagination to foster theatricality, sense of style, and form in performance.” (2)

Michael Chekhov made a significant impact on the art of acting. After he died, some of his students continued his legacy by opening a studio in honor of him called The Michael Chekhov Studio. The Michael Chekhov Studio was just the beginning of the legacy that this famed acting theorist would leave behind. The Michael Chekhov Association (also known as MICHA) was created to continue the legacy of Michael Chekhov and provide resources for artists that teach or use his methodology. Chekhov stressed the importance of the use of the physical body and how it supported the psychological journey that Stanislavski initially focused on when developing a methodology that would best benefit the actor through rehearsal and performance. The importance of the physical body and its implications on the psyche was echoed in the work of Polish theatre director, Jerzy Grotowski.

Jerzy Grotowski, a twentieth century acting theorist and practitioner, sought to rid the actor of habits that inhibited the actor's process. Grotowski developed a set of physical training exercises that served to release whatever inhibited the actor's voice, body, or psychology;

anything that stood in the way of finding the character's truth. Both Chekhov and Grotowski stressed the importance of the use of the physical body and how it supported the psychological journey that Stanislavski initially focused on when developing a methodology that would best benefit the actor through rehearsal and performance. Grotowski was also heavily influenced by Stanislavski and his idea of 'physical actions.'

In *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, author Thomas Richards states:

“Grotowski took ‘physical actions’ forward from the point where Stanislavski stopped working because he died... In his work, Grotowski redefines the notion of organicity... for Grotowski, organicity indicated something like the potentiality of a current of impulses, a quasi-biological current that comes from the ‘inside’ and goes toward the accomplishment of a precise action.” (93)

Both practitioners have many ideas that correlate to one another that clearly defines the link between the work that they have both done as acting theorists and theatre practitioners.

However, Grotowski expanded upon the concept of ‘physical actions,’ originally crafted by Stanislavski, as part of his life’s work. A summation of Grotowski’s method is comprised into a set of guideposts in *An Acrobat of the Heart*, in which Stephen Wangh said,

“...The first was that the actor must use himself – his own feelings, thoughts, and opinions—in the work. The second was that all the acting was to be thought of as a series of ‘units of exchange,’ moments of listening and reacting that could be ‘scored’ as one might score music. The third principle was that ‘the actor, if he is to reveal something

significant, personal, and profound... must reach into the depths of himself, through whatever psychic or physical blocks might impede such expression.’ “(xix)

Grotowski and his approach to working with actors was similar in structure to that of Stanislavski, however Grotowski's approach focused more on the physical than psychological. For example, in Grotowski's essay *From The Theatre Company To Art As A Vehicle*, he states,

“... I prefer to limit myself to two distinct approaches... The first approach is to put the body into a state of obedience by taming it... The second approach is to challenge the body. To challenge it by giving it tasks, objectives that seem to exceed the capacities of the body... I have always been more interested by the second approach.” (129).

Grotowski dedicated most of his work to the physical actions associated with the craft of acting and how they impacted the actor, while most of Stanislavski's work focused on the psyche of an actor, and how the psychological perspective of the actor could support their work when rehearsing and performing. Grotowski took the work that was started by Stanislavski and continued to enhance it through his own process of experimentation that later influenced much of the experimental theater movement.

Stanislavski, Chekhov, and Grotowski are all famed for their contributions to the art of theater and the craft of acting. Each theorist and their respective methods contain valuable tools and exercises to aid the actor throughout the acting process. The main correlation between these three theorists is the importance of truth throughout their work. The main difference between the three theorists was the structure of the training, and what they each focused on that they believed would benefit the art of acting for generations to come.

I have devoted this thesis to the process of continuing the work that was done by these theorists to build a process for other actors and students of theater to help with the creation of a dynamic and unique characters rooted in the principles and exercises that were created by these 3 theorists. In the next chapter, I will focus on the Stanislavski System, and outline the terminology of “Magic If” and “Given Circumstances.” I will highlight some key exercises that have been beneficial to me as an artist and expand on past class assignments and productions that have been guided by the method of Konstantin Stanislavski.

CHAPTER TWO: STANISLAVSKI AND HIS IMPACT

The Stanislavski method was revolutionary because of its focus on the psychological aspect of the actor. He created his system as a reaction to the lack of such a system and to fix the prevailing "presentational" style of acting popular at the time. In *The Stanislavski System*, author Sonia Moore discusses the importance of the work of Stanislavsky because,

“Before Stanislavski, drama schools everywhere in the world taught only the physical elements of an actor’s training: ballet, fencing, voice, speech, diction... There was no inner acting technique.” (10).

Stanislavski's significant impact on the craft of theatre stems from the creation of one of the most intellectually advanced acting methods that start with roots in neurophysiology. Nothing like it had been done before. Stanislavski rode the wave of realism already happening in the visual arts and created his acting version of the realism movement by utilizing the concept of humanity and integrating it into the work of an actor to create the inner life of a character. The initial purpose of Stanislavski creating the system was the hope that,

“Through the System actors learn natural laws and how to use them consciously in re-creating human behavior on stage.” (Moore 12).

Stanislavski took this concept, and continued to further investigate it, discovering that the human psyche was more complicated than the conscious choices available to the actor. In *The Stanislavski System*, Sonia Moore highlights some of the discoveries made by Stanislavski:

“He discovered that there are mechanisms in human beings which are not subordinate to our control. For instance, we cannot will our heart’s palpitation or dilate blood vessels as we can close our eyes or raise a hand, nor can an actor who comes on stage with no personal reason for experiencing emotions of fear, compassion, joy, or grief command them, because emotional reactions also belong to such uncontrolled mechanisms. To these inner mechanisms Stanislavski gave the name subconscious.” (12-13).

The subconscious became something of an obstacle to Stanislavski in his work, and in response,

“He began studying the possibility of deliberately arousing emotions, of indirectly influencing the psychological mechanism responsible for the emotional state of a human being.” (Moore 13).

This led to one of the largest discoveries made by Stanislavski, in *The Stanislavski System*, Sonia Moore states,

“Stanislavski discovered that there is an unbreakable tie between the psychological and the physical in a human being. In every physical action there is always something psychological... There is no inner experience without external physical expression.” (25)

The discovery of the bond between the psychological and the physical helped Stanislavski to develop different principles known as physical actions. In *The Stanislavski System*, Sonia Moore outlines what physical actions are by stating:

“The only thing an actor can fulfill truthfully on stage as a character is a simple physical action. He can bang his fist on a table, he can slam the door; he can ask a question; he can

explain something to his fellow actor; he can threaten or encourage him- and he can do all of this truthfully. Stanislavski calls these 'physical actions.' "(26).

The extensive research and experiments done by Stanislavski which focused on the psychology of the actor, led him to the discovery of physical action. The power behind physical actions is that they can be executed regardless of the emotional state of the actor. From Stanislavski's findings he concluded that,

"Paths of nerves connect our physical actions with the inner mechanisms of emotions and the innumerable nuances of human experience. The tangibility of these actions introduces the actor into the sphere of the character's life. The building of the character's logic of action is simultaneously the building of the logic and consecutiveness of emotions. Physical action is the 'bait' for emotion, a pretext for involving the psychological life..." (Moore 27).

Stanislavski had been searching for physical action throughout the development of his system. Stanislavski developed several different elements that were meant to help in the process of igniting a physical action. These elements are called the elements of action and they are as follows, Imagination, Concentration of Attention, Truth and Belief, Communion, Adaptation, Tempo-Rhythm, Emotional Memory, The Magic If, and Given Circumstances.

The action of Imagination is to use the power from the actor and their own individual imagination to help in the creation of an alternate reality that translates from the stage to the audience. This alternate reality is the play that the actor is performing. The action of the concentration of attention is a principle used to aid the actor in focusing on the story that is

happening on stage and to not get distracted by anything out of that realm. This action led to the development of the circles of attention, which are various levels of attention employed by actors to help maintain focus while in performance. The action of truth and belief is outlined by Sonia Moore in *The Stanislavski System*, in which she states,

“The ability of an actor to make his audience believe what he wants it to believe creates scenic truth.” (42).

The action of communion is focused on the connection between actors and those they share the stage with, this principle highlights the importance of working together as an ensemble when in performance. The action of adaptation is outlined by Sonia Moore in *The Stanislavski System*, in which she states,

“An adaptation, or adjustment, is really the overcoming of the physical obstacle in achieving an aim.” (49).

The adaptation is adjusting to any outside circumstances that impact the character through performance. The action of tempo-rhythm is focused on the idea of tempo which correlates to speed and rhythm correlates to beat, and they are part of the structure of change for a character. In *The Stanislavski System*, Sonia more states that,

“Tempo-rhythm reflects the degree of inner involvement and depends on physical readiness to fulfill an action.” (53).

The action of Emotional Memory is focused on the idea of utilizing memories and experiences through a physical action, smell, or taste of something to help connect the emotions from that memory to the work that is needed to emotionally connect to the character that you are playing.

Throughout my personal process, I personally do not use the action of Emotional Memory in my process, because accessing memories and utilizing them to activate an emotion does not work for me. I do not utilize this element of action for purposes of safety and health. As previously stated, the power of physical action is that you do not have to rely on your own individual experiences to spring up an emotional response when acting.

All these elements of action are integral to the Stanislavski system. The two principles that have been the most influential in my work are “The Magic If” and “Given Circumstances.” Both principles work in tandem with each other to have a fully realized understanding of information needed for a three-dimensional developmental process of creating a character. The choice to apply both principles in my work was tied to the search for truth in character development. Understanding a character's context creates the best potential for the actor to create a fully realized character. A fully realized character should be unique in form and always strive for the truth. When utilizing the given information the choices made by the actor can be specific and informed.

The “Magic If” was a concept created for instilling the educated use of imagination inside the mind of an actor, regarding creating and building choices for the character they are portraying. In *The Stanislavski System*, Sonia Moore states,

“An actor must only try to answer the question, ‘What would I do if I were in King Lear’s position?’ This ‘magic if,’ as Stanislavski called it, transforms the characters aim into the actor’s. It is a strong stimulus to inner and physical actions. It carries the actor into imaginary circumstances...Through it an actor can create problems for himself, and his effort to solve them will lead him naturally to inner and external actions.” (31-32)

Using “Magic If” on its own can be beneficial to the work of the actor, but not create a fully realized understanding of the character they are portraying if there is no attention paid to the Given Circumstances. In *The Stanislavski System*, it says that:

“Given circumstances include the plot of the play, the epoch, the time and the place of the action, the conditions of life, the director’s and actor’s interpretation, the setting, the properties, lighting, sound effects – all that an actor encounters while he creates a role.” (33).

All the “Given Circumstances” provide information as a jumping-off point for the actor to answer the questions left up to interpretation by the playwright. The “Given Circumstances” for a play remain the same in every production regarding plot. However, the impact of a creative team and their vision can allow for deeper evaluation of the material and provide a unique perspective. The work of the actor regarding the “Given Circumstances” is to understand the purpose behind every choice made by the artistic team and use those choices to benefit their work as they continue to make discoveries about the character that they will play in whatever production they are in.

The “Magic If” and “Given Circumstances” are relative to each other. You cannot make an informed choice on what a character will do if you do not know or understand the given circumstances of said character. The “Given Circumstances” lies in the power of the playwright and the creative team on the project. I used both elements of action in the work I did while in graduate school at the University of Central Florida, and I will provide examples of how this work benefited me in my process.

In the Fall of 2021, I was cast in a production of *Welcome to the Moon*, which is a play cycle created by John Patrick Shanley. UCF (University of Central Florida) decided to produce these plays from the play cycle as part of their 2021-2022 season. I was in the titular play, *Welcome to the Moon*. This piece was about 10 minutes in length and featured 5 actors who were all connected in a story set in a lowdown Bronx bar. The plot focused on Vinnie, an Italian guy in his early thirties, who was meeting up with his friend Stephen. Stephen went into the army and later got out and is having a mental crisis because he is still in love with his high school sweetheart, Shirley Dunbar. There is also a mirrored crisis about love from the perspective of the character Ronny, who is secretly in love with Vinnie. Ronny has tried to commit suicide on multiple occasions because he is afraid to tell Vinnie how he feels. Meanwhile, there is an Irish bar keep named Artie who continues to provide food and drink throughout the play and sings a love song at the very end.

Throughout the process, there were many discussions amongst the cast about the purpose behind what is said and what is not. Our director pointed out some given information about the setting of the play and how it is beneficial when working to answer the unanswered questions. For instance, *Welcome to the Moon* is set in the Bronx, which happens to be one of the most

dangerous areas in New York City. Due to the date the play cycle first premiered, the director decided to set the play in 1982 to pay homage to the playwright. This choice was also informed based on some of the dialogue used in the play and the subject matter. I played Shirley Dunbar in this production and was not given much context about this character from the script. We were able to figure out a few different things about this character. In *Welcome to the Moon*, the characters of Vinnie and Stephen are having a conversation about Shirley where they discuss her relationship to Stephen,

STEPHEN. Shirley's coming here.

VINNIE. So?

STEPHEN. You know she was my girlfriend.

VINNIE. She was your girlfriend when you were seventeen. Hey, you been seeing her on the sly?

STEPHEN. I haven't laid eyes on her since the day we broke up.

VINNIE. That was fourteen years ago. (44)

Based on the information in the text, we can tell that Stephen dated Shirley while they were in high school, and they ended up breaking up. When Vinnie states that it was fourteen years prior, it tells the actors and the audience that Stephen is now 31 and still thinking about this girl. Stephen is later recalling more of his memories with Shirley and begins to tell Vinnie why he is still hung up on Shirley by saying,

” Don’t you understand?...I’m still in love with Shirley Dunbar.... The day we broke up, I knew it wasn’t over. I knew we’d have to meet at least one more time. I was crying. I could see that she didn’t understand, didn’t want to understand...I couldn’t stand seeing her walking down the street, knowing that she was not mine anymore... You were all part of that time, the time Shirley and I were together. The only time in my life I was ever really alive!” (45)

All this information is what we know from the playwright before Shirley enters the scene. The information above is an example of the “Given Circumstances” that exist inside the play. When utilizing the Given Circumstances, it is best to take the information at hand and continue to dive deeper into the play by trying to answer some of the questions that are unanswered. Throughout the rehearsal process for *Welcome to the Moon*, we continued to ask a series of key questions regarding each of our characters.

For example, when Shirley enters the bar, she sees two men with bags on their heads which is not a normal occurrence for a small dive bar. I decided to utilize the “Magic If” and ask myself, how would I respond if I saw two men with bags on their heads that made them look like they were suffocating? My first initial response would be to scream, because it is concerning behavior to witness. The next impulse I had when approaching this situation from the perspective of Shirley Dunbar was that I would immediately try and get the bags off their heads. “The Magic if” exercise allowed me to access this natural response which I ended up employing as an informed choice in my performance as Shirley. These questions cannot just be answered with the given circumstances because there are few to begin with. Throughout this process I had to utilize

the Stanislavski element of action, the “Magic If” to figure out the why behind all of Shirley’s responses and actions.

Our director, Tara Kromer, always continued to encourage imagination and play in the rehearsal room for this production. The conversations we had as a cast helped benefit the structure of each person’s performance. Once the choices are developed and there is an agreement made amongst the cast about how each character fulfills their process, each character can continue to carve deeper throughout the rehearsal process because the work is never truly finished. There is always more to explore, and Stanislavski’s system encourages the artist to use the system as a starting place. “The Magic If” and “Given Circumstances” only truly benefits the artist if they do their work outside of the rehearsal room to continue to further explore the text and dig in deeper to find out what causes everything to happen. The focus on impulse is extremely important when using Stanislavski's elements of action.

Throughout this chapter I outlined the development and principles of the Stanislavsky system of acting, while discussing the utilization of two of his elements of action during the rehearsal process of *Welcome to the Moon*. The two elements of action that I focused on were the “Magic If” and “Given Circumstances.” The “Magic If” allowed me to put myself in the shoes of my character and respond from a point of honesty to the circumstances of the situation. The “Given Circumstances” provided me with the opportunity to utilize context clues throughout the script, and suggestions from the creative team to help me to craft a character that was well informed and dynamic. The use of the Stanislavski system's actions helped create a unique and dynamic character that lacked much prior historical context from the playwright. In the next chapter, I will

discuss the Michael Chekhov method and how several principles from that method benefited me in my actor's process.

CHAPTER THREE: MICHAEL CHEKHOV AND BUILDING THE CHARACTER

Michael Chekhov was a student of Konstantin Stanislavski, and his work as a teaching artist was inspired by Stanislavski but rejected some of his principles. Stanislavski's work was focused on internal impulses and the use of creativity from a psychological perspective. Stanislavski did not dismiss physical approach as much as he searched for a method that elicited truth in the acting process, relying on experiences of the actor, the actor's imagination, and the actor's life experience to bring truth to the process. Michael Chekhov focused on the impact of the physical body and how that could be utilized to stir up some emotional response in the actor that supported the story they were trying to tell. In *To the Actor*, Michael Chekhov states,

“...the actor, who must consider his body as an instrument for expressing creative ideas on the stage, must strive for the attainment of complete harmony between the two, body and psychology.” (14).

Chekhov believed that the most effective way for an actor to create a character is through establishing and supporting the dichotomy between psychological and physical for an actor. In *To The Actor*, Chekhov states that,

“The actor's body can be of optimum value to him only when motivated by an unceasing flow of artistic impulses; only then can it be more refined, flexible, expressive, and most vital of all, sensitive and responsive to the subtleties which constitute the creative artists inner life. For the actor's body must be molded and recreated from the inside...” (17-18)

Michael Chekhov's system for acting was developed through a set of principles and exercises developed to help an actor understand how to respond and connect both the psychological and the physical with precision. As stated, prior, Chekhov speaks about the different requirements needed for the profession of acting. The first is, "...sensitivity of the body to psychological creative impulses." (Chekhov 14).

The body must be in tune with the mind. There has to be self-awareness of both mind and body of the impulses that begin to flow from the actor throughout their work.

The second requirement is, "...richness of the psychology itself." (Chekhov 17).

The actor must have a comprehensive understanding of the impact of how outside forces impact human nature, and the understanding of psychology only benefits the actor when approaching any work from the emotional standpoint. To understand the emotional life of a character, the actor must understand where the emotions come from.

Finally, the third requirement is, "...complete obedience of both body and psychology to the actor." (Chekhov 18-19).

The actor must work towards a psychophysical connection for their work to be fully realized. Chekhov believed that fulfilling these requirements led to a clear understanding of an actor's work. Through a series of ideas and exercises, Chekhov outlines his method through themed chapters in his book, *To the Actor*, to break down the process as much as possible. The titles of the chapters are as follows, The Actor's Body & Psychology, Imagination and Incorporation of Images, Improvisation and Ensemble, The Atmosphere and Individual Feelings, The Psychological Gesture, Character and Characterization, Creative Individuality, Composition

of the Performance, Different Types of Performance, and How to Approach the Part. Each of these chapters is comprised of different concepts with valuable information for the actor.

I will be focused on The Actor's Body & Psychology and Character & Characterization. These two concepts are some of the groundbreaking ideas from this methodology that differentiate Chekhov from all other acting theorists because of the application of the physical body and its connection to the actor's process. Initially, Chekhov focused on four basic qualities to begin the process which are Ease, Form, Beauty, and Entirety.

In *To The Actor*, Chekhov states their importance in saying,

“These four qualities must also be developed by the actor; his body and speech must be endowed with them because they are the only instruments available to him on the stage.”
(28)

Through his explanation of one of his famed acting exercises, he connects the qualities to each individual phase of the exercise. He uses nine separate exercises to breakdown how to effectively achieve these different qualities. I will go into detail about the nine exercises affiliated with the 4 different qualities, and how application of these in my work was beneficial for my process. I believe the use of these exercises can serve the actor in their individual process of creating a character that is both effective in performance on an individual level as well as a large scale when merging with the likes of an audience.

The first quality is Ease. In *To The Actor*, Michael Chekhov states that, “Ease relaxes your body and spirit...” (29).

Ease as a concept seems like something that would come easily, given its name. However, there are several hangups for the actor when approaching the concept of ease in their work. Chekhov states,

“... your character on the stage can be heavy, awkward in moments and inarticulate in speech; but you yourself as an artist, must always use lightness and ease as a means of expression. Even heaviness itself must be performed with lightness and ease.” (Chekhov 29).

When focusing on Ease, the exercise that correlates most to the principle is the Molding exercise. The Molding exercise is part of a four-phase sequence called Mold, Float, Fly and Radiate. The beginning of the sequence starts with Mold, which is to,

“Create strong and definite forms. To be able to do this, think of the beginning and the end of each movement you make... think and feel your body itself as a movable form. Repeat each movement several times until it becomes free and most enjoyable to fulfill... But in order not to lose the molding quality of your movement imagine the air around you as a medium which resists you... Then try to reproduce these movements by using only different parts of your body.... Avoid unnecessary muscular tension.” (Chekhov 23).

The exercise has guidelines that the actor should follow with finite detail, but the work does not just stop with the individual actor's body, but the objects and space that surrounds them when in rehearsal and performance. To further the work of the molding exercise the actor should focus on how their body is used regarding other pieces of the piece they are working on. This exercise was used when we were warming up for our graduate acting course. I love doing the mold exercise

because it highlights the power of strength in the body and how the actor can possess said strength and use it to their advantage. The molding exercise allowed us to start in a general sense and not to judge our work, but to enhance on general and vague choices. The general and vague choices would usually be the beginning phase of molding the work, but they would continue to change through exploration. Through the exploration of using the molding exercise, we arrived at a sense of form. For me, I would start with similar movements every time that I did this exercise, and as time went on, they became more defined and specific. The molding exercise is one that ties the physical and psychological together through the power of physical action. The molding exercise can be a physical action but also a psychological one when uniting the idea of completing an action and why you are completing said action. The focus for the actor should also be not allowing the level of tension that could be associated to the concept of mold to overpower them in their quest to complete the action. The next exercise in the sequence outline by Michael Chekhov was the floating exercise.

The exercise on floating still had a lighter level of physical tension associated but less overall tension than that of the mold exercise. The floating exercise is similar in nature but focuses on the actor utilizing their body to feel as if they are floating through water or a substance that allows their body to feel buoyant. Following the floating portion of the exercise is the flying portion, and then the radiate portion.

The exercises on flying and radiating are foundational for the actor. Both exercises connect to each other, and both echo the idea of the power of the psychological and the physical being connected. The relationship between physical and psychological aspects of the life of a character stem from the work of the actor and is one where both aspects are informative of the

other. Michael Chekhov's technique highlights the dichotomy between physical and psychological being intertwined in the work of the actor throughout. The flying exercise focuses first on the idea of flying for the actor, and says,

“Imagine your whole body flying through space.... Your movements must merge into each other without becoming shapeless... You may come to a static position outwardly, but inwardly you must continue your feeling of still soaring aloft... Your desire must be to overcome the weight of your body, to fight the law of gravity. While moving, change tempos. A sensation of joyful lightness and easiness will permeate your entire body.”
(Chekhov 26).

Through practical application, I was able to test this out in my Graduate Acting course. We used this technique to warm up daily, and it allowed me the opportunity to find a sense of freedom when preparing to work. The image that came to mind for me was that of Peter Pan flying through London, and completely defying gravity. In my own personal work, I saw how this could allow the actor the potential for feeling the light and airy feeling of soaring through the sky while not actually soaring through the sky.

Following the flying exercise was the Radiate exercise. The radiating exercise built upon the idea of flying exercise. Radiate focused heavily on the idea of your body having rays, and you are asked to,

“...send the rays from your body into the space around you, in the direction of the movement you make... this should be done with every movement that comes to a

physically static position...A sensation of the actual existence and significance of your inner being will be the result of this exercise.” (Chekhov 27-28).

The benefit of the Radiate exercise is not only something that impacts the individual actor, but the company of actors working with the actor that works on the exercise and uses it in their work. The difference between the flying exercise and the radiate exercise is that the actor would start with movement when flying and continue to move, while with radiate they would move and then come to a static position. Michael Chekhov continues to highlight the importance of Radiate by saying,

“To radiate on stage means to give, to send out. Its counterpart is to receive. True acting is a constant exchange of the two.” (Chekhov 35-36).

I used the radiate exercise in conjunction with the flying exercise in my warmups before jumping into scene work in my Graduate acting course and could decipher the difference between the two and how they made me feel both physically and psychologically. When I focused on radiating, it felt like I had the opportunity to acknowledge myself as the actor and bridge the actor with the character before openly exploring what I needed to do to honor the character I was playing and the playwright who created the character. The radiate exercise allowed me the opportunity to send out energy, and while I was not directly connecting to any of my classmates who did this alongside me, I was able to receive their energy at the same time as releasing my own rays of energy in the rehearsal space. There was an energy that started to fill the room and allowed for more openness and opportunity for exploration. This work was extremely powerful to me, as I felt less anxiety and worried about the work at hand. I tend to doubt myself and this warmup

gave me the opportunity to acknowledge that in myself and to not allow it to fill my mind, but to actively release that thought process before I started working.

When creating a road map for actors that are on the quest to create dynamic and unique characters, I wanted to focus on the power of completing actions. I have found that exercises that encourage me to complete an action allow me to get out of my own head and focus on how I can use my body in the process of storytelling. I gravitate towards exercises that are rooted in physical action because I myself am a physical actor and find that I can activate imagination and emotional response in conjunction with physical action. The physical work of trying to complete an action encourages further development from a psychological standpoint thus bridging the relationship between the physical body and the psyche of the actor. The use of the exercise also encourages the actor to use their imagination and explore each action from a different standpoint each time the actor utilizes them. The opportunity to explore the variety of choices that exist inside each action provides a larger vocabulary for the actor to utilize when they are in rehearsal and performance. The expansion of the vocabulary of choices allows for the actor to focus on specificity and use these exercises as a gateway to the creation of unique and dynamic characters. The next quality in the list of four qualities that are of utmost importance for the actor to master, according to Michael Chekhov, is Form. Regarding Form, he states,

“You may be called upon to play a stage character which the author has written as a vague, slack type of person, or you may have to perform a bewildered, chaotic type of man with no sense of form, with unclear and even stuttering speech... How you, the artist, play it will depend on how complete and perfect is your feeling of form... “(Chekhov 29-30)

Form provides a foundation for the actor to begin and end with. Following Form is the quality of Beauty. Chekhov states,

“Before the actor starts exercising on beauty, he must think of it as having its good and bad sides, its right and wrong, its apposite and opposite... An actor who develops a sense of beauty simply to enjoy himself fosters only a surface gloss, a thin veneer... If he can extract the sting of egotism from his sense of beauty, he is out of danger.” (Chekhov 30-31).

The idea of Beauty is a concept that goes beyond the looks of something and digs below the surface to reveal not what looks beautiful but what is beautiful in meaning and in form. The exercise with beauty encourages the actor to move through the previously discussed four phased exercises of Mold, Float, Fly, and Radiate. The beauty exercise begins by asking the actor to,

“Begin with observations of all kinds of beauty in human beings (putting aside sensuousness as negative), in art and in nature, however obscure the insignificant the beautiful features in them may be. Then ask yourself: ‘Why does it strike me as beautiful?’...Go over the four kinds of movement... Then do everyday movements and simple business... Resist the temptation to appear beautiful.” (Chekhov 32).

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This idea was something that I thought about particularly when I was working on a scene from *Our Town*. My scene partner and I wanted to reflect the beauty of the simple life of the characters that existed in this play. This concept of beauty drove everything we did in our scene. My scene partner and I did a scene from *Our Town* where George Gibbs and Emily Webb go on a date to the soda shop together. This scene we did in the

graduate acting course that I have highlighted throughout this chapter. As previously stated, we did the full warm up cycle that is highlighted by Michael Chekov, and once we got to the period in the class where we would go work on our scenes with our scene partners, I was tasked to think about beauty and how that would impact our performance. We moved through the four exercises, and I thought about how the work from the warmup would lead to choices rooted in beauty for Emily Webb in *Our Town*. This led to discoveries about the beauty of simplicity.

We initially approached our scene by overcomplicating the text and subtext that existed inside of the world of the play, but once we took out our own individual perceptions of beauty from our own personal perspective and focused on beauty as a concept from our characters perspective, we were able to access the inner life of character from a more truthful and honest perspective. When we focused on beauty of simplicity, it made room for inspiration and imagination to take hold and help us to create a beautiful yet simple scene that held the essence of the play inside of it. The idea of focusing on the moment at hand when approaching scene work is just as important as how the scene itself is integral to the framework of the play that it is from. This idea leads me to the final quality that Michael Chekhov talks about Entirety. When approaching the idea of “Entirety”, Michael Chekhov states,

“The actor who plays his part as so many separate and unrelated moments between each entrance and exit, without regard for what he did in his previous scenes or what he will be doing in the scene that follow, will never understand or interpret his part as a whole or in its entirety... You will intuitively stress essentials in your character and follow the main line of events, thus holding firmly the attention of the audience.” (Chekhov 32-33).

The concept of “Entirety” requires focusing on the work that you do scene to scene and connecting all the work into the through line of the play. To execute these actions using the exercises from Michael Chekhov, you should,

“... Divide the room in which you do your exercises into two parts. Step from one part, which represents off stage, into the other, which represents the stage itself, and try to establish the moment of your appearance before the imaginary audience as a significant beginning. Stand still before your ‘audience’ and speak one or two sentences, pretending that you are playing a part, then leave your ‘stage’ as though your disappearance were a definite end. “(Chekhov 34).

Walking through this exercise is extremely beneficial as you learn a script and understand how the character fits into the story that you are telling. I use this exercise when learning my lines for different productions and if I am understudying a role. At the University of Central Florida, I used this exercise when approaching one of the roles that I understudied. I understudied the Soccer Mom in *The Wolves*.

The Wolves is a play about an all-female high school soccer team and focuses on the dynamics that exist amongst the players on and off the field. The team experiences tragedy when one of the players gets struck by an automobile and dies. The teammates must rally together to play their biggest game despite the grief they have endured. The play focuses on adolescence and maturity through the lenses of teenaged girls. The Soccer Mom is the only adult in the show, as she is the mother of the player who has passed. The Soccer Mom is only on stage for a moment to deliver a monologue towards the end of the play. It is easy to focus on the moment in which

the character is speaking, but to effectively deliver the monologue of the Soccer Mom, the actor must consider all that has happened in the story up until the point where the Soccer Mom comes in to speak. The story cannot be effectively told of the inner life of the character if it is not explored from the beginning of the play to the end of the play.

This exercise benefited me when approaching the psychological aspect of the state of the character. The psychological must meet the physical for the audience to understand how this woman was affected. To give context, this monologue is delivered towards the end of the play after a large climatic action occurs. One of the players on the team was killed in a car accident where a car struck her while she was on a run. The Soccer Mom is the mother of the character that was killed and has come to cheer the girls on from the stands in one of their largest soccer games of the season. She speaks with the intention to show her support and acknowledge how each individual player impacted her daughter. She is trying to encourage the girls that she is rooting for them, and that her daughter is with them in spirit. This moment is heart breaking because she is trying to deliver an inspirational speech to the girls but breaks down when discussing the loss of her own daughter. She knows that the loss affected the other girls as well and is trying to encourage them to push forward the way they did when her daughter was alive. To effectively communicate what she means and show the relationship she had with each individual player, there must be an extensive amount of work done when thinking about the entirety of the arch of the character and how that initially impacts the words that she says. This exercise made the process of rehearsing for this role richer because it provides many layers of context, because up until this point in the play, you do not see this character at all. The actor that portrays this role must be expertly gifted at determining the information gained from the script to

connect this character to the rest of the players on stage. This is a moment of pure honesty and truth in the play.

In Sarah DeLappe's play, *The Wolves*, The Soccer Mom says,

SOCCKER MOM.

...in our house we have a quarter jar

Alex I know you've seen it

A quarter for every 'like'

And for 'um' every 'um'

And the oh the what do you do

The going up? At the end? Of the sentence?... (128)

The quotation above is piece of the dialogue that provides information about the character and her relationship to the other characters on stage. The Soccer Mom is the only one to call #7 by her name, which is Alex. The Soccer Mom's daughter was #14 on the team, and she had a close friendship with Alex. Mentioning the quarter jar in the house that she used was a reference to the times when she had some of the other players come into their home and hear about the jar. This text also provides context for those who have not been to their home. The audience is not aware of the jar up until this point because it is the first time that the jar has been mentioned. The information presented also serves as exposition to set up a story that the Soccer Mom talks about a fight, she got in with her daughter prior to the daughter dying. The information at hand is extremely crucial and provides a look into how the Soccer Mom is connected to the other players

and her own daughter. The text where the Soccer Mom talks about how saying words “like” and “um” do not benefit a sentence and will make someone who uses them look incompetent. This information allows the audience to understand that the Soccer Mom was a perfectionist and put a lot of pressure on her daughter.

I worked on this section through utilization of the entirety exercise by first saying the words on the page without applying any context. Rehearsing the words without thinking about the context for this chunk of dialogue was extremely difficult, which proves the beneficially of using the entirety exercise. Following rehearsing the dialogue without context, I then had to apply context of information known from the play and from the backstory of the character I was portraying. Through the exercise I discovered that this moment was when the Soccer Mom was trying to connect with the other teammates. Prior to this moment of story-telling the Soccer Mom is using very standard dialogue that does not display any type of emotional connection to any of the other players. The story being told is not scripted on stage but provides clarity and context to the before, which allows the actor to understand the headspace they should be in before performing this monologue.

The entirety exercise served to be beneficial for my work as an actor because it not only allowed for me to focus on actions and tactics of a scene, but how all the information provided in the play must be kept in context for the actor to effectively tell the story to audience. The entirety of the exercise allows for the actor to focus on how important their character is to the story. Every character in a story must acknowledge the overarching plot to best fulfill the role they are playing. The addition of the entirety mindset allows for success for the actor, the creative team, and the audience.

The next exercise I will be focused on is rooted in creation of character and characterization. I was initially introduced to this exercise, “The Skin of the Character.” in the graduate acting course that I previously mentioned. The exercise focused on transformation of the body while connecting to the psychological state of the character and lead to exploration that is rooted in the actor’s ability to exist inside of the skin of their character. When the actor puts on the skin of the character it can lead to a sound connection between mind and body. In *To The Actor*, Michael Chekhov states,

“You are going to imagine that in the same space you occupy with your own, real body there exists another body – the imaginary body of your character, which you have just created in your mind. The imaginary body stands, as it were, between your real body and your psychology, influencing both of them with equal force. Step by step, you begin to move, speak and feel in accord with it; that to say, your character now dwells within you (or, if you prefer, you dwell within it).” (111-112)

The “skin of the character” exercise gives actors the tools to explore and play inside of a creation that stems from their own imagination. When looking at a character that you will be playing, you should initially look at all the information that you have about the character that is given by the playwright and use it as a starting place. The playwright can help in some of the expected physical aspects of a character if they put a physical description of the character in the play. This exercise was used in my actor’s process to root the actor in the physical body so that they can approach different tactics and actions through their specified physicality. The approach to physical actions ignites an emotional response in the actor thus supporting the connection between the physical body of the actor and the psychological functioning of the brain.

I utilized the “Skin of the Character” exercise when working on *Shrek the Musical* at the University of Central Florida. I was cast as Humpty Dumpty, who is a nursery rhyme character that is usually depicted as an anthropomorphic egg. The physical depiction of this character gave me a great starting point. The nursery rhyme that features this character references that Humpty Dumpty fell off a wall. As I approached this character, I decided to focus on how my body would look if I were to wear the skin of the character. The “skin of the character” that I created for Humpty Dumpty had shorter appendages and a bulbous center. The stomach area was what led the movement of the character. I decided to play into the idea that Humpty Dumpty was not only a bulbous egg but a clumsy one at that. Humpty Dumpty is famous for falling off a wall, and I decided to attribute that to a clumsy quality in the character. The first part of the character that I focused on was the walk. In deciding how the character moved through space, I decided to employ the Michael Chekhov exercise that focuses on the Imaginary Center.

The Imaginary Center is outlined by Michael Chekhov in his book, *To the Actor*,

“Imagine that within your chest there is a center from which flows the actual impulses for all your movements. Think of this imaginary center as a source for inner activity and power within your body. Send this power into your head, arms, hands, torso, legs and feet. Let the sensation of strength, harmony and well-being penetrate the whole body...”
(21-22)

The statement made by Michael Chekhov on the imaginary center exercise is the foundation for the technique which can be utilized in a way that benefits every actor through use changing the physical center but has psychological components that cause for bursts of inspiration out of the

actor. Michael Chekhov suggests utilizing the center of the body when working on a character, that the actor can move the imaginary center to anywhere in their body that they prefer. In his book, *To the Actor*, Michael Chekhov states:

“...try to shift the center to some other place in your body, you will feel that your whole psychological and physical attitude will change, just as it changes when you step into an imaginary body... the imaginary center will suddenly or gradually co-ordinate all your movements, influence the entire bodily attitude, motivate your behavior, action, and speech, and tune your psychology in such a way that you will quite naturally experience the sensation that the thought element is germane and important to your performance. “(114-115).

I used the “Imaginary Center” exercise to move my center from my chest, which felt too confident for the character of Humpty Dumpty, to my stomach. I allowed the exercise that I focused on from my stomach to travel throughout my limbs. The result that I received when playing with this was a slight adjustment into how my body moved in tandem. I started to adjust my body to acclimate to this area being where I led from. The result of the belly button leading caused for the rest of my body to counterbalance. The counterbalance was something I had to dissect to make sure it would connect well with the character that I was portraying. The character of Humpty Dumpty is a large bulbous egg, and with the choice to make the limbs of Humpty Dumpty contrast with the size of the torso, the choice to counterbalance felt appropriate and necessary. When approaching the idea of counterbalancing weight, I used the concept of characterization, outlined by Michael Chekhov, to navigate how the rest of the body would be

affected. The exploration of characterization led to a few other discoveries that were built upon throughout the rehearsal process. When Michael Chekhov focuses on characterization, he states:

“A characterization or peculiar feature can be anything indigenous to the character: a typical movement, characteristic manner of speech, a recurrent habit, a certain way of laughing, walking or wearing a suit, an odd way of holding the hands, or a singular inclination of the head, and so forth... a characterization should be born out of the character as whole, derived from the important part of its psychological make-up.”
(Chekhov 117).

With this idea in mind, I started to develop different featured characteristics that align with the initial story of Humpty Dumpty. Humpty Dumpty is portrayed as a clumsy and cautious anthropomorphic egg. The narrative of Humpty Dumpty always refers to Humpty Dumpty falling off a wall and never being able to be put back together again. When thinking about how the psyche would be impacted by a traumatic event like a life altering fall, I decided to think about the lasting psychological impacts that a fall would have. Due to the fall being a large part of the character’s background, I decided to always have my arms out to try and make the body feel stable. The first time I applied this idea to my work on the character was using choreography in the show from the number, “Story of My Life.” The musical number focuses on the different fairytale creatures and how they each have their own stories that caused them to be considered a ‘freak.’ Each fairytale creature had a small solo in the musical number “Story of My Life,” that pertained to the narrative most associated with that character. As a part of the choreography, the choreographer suggested was that I fall forwards a little bit but regain balance as a choreographed choice about the character.

This discovery led me to the question: How did I use my body to try and feel balanced? Through trying to find a semblance of balance, I instinctively put my arms out to try and catch myself before I fell too far forwards. From this point, I wondered, since Humpty Dumpty would always have the concern of falling again, how could I utilize this storyline to affect my body to authentically remind the audience of what makes my character unique? This question's navigation led me to the answer of using my arms to best demonstrate character specificity. I decided that there was an unbalanced quality in Humpty Dumpty, which caused the character to always try to counterbalance. I used my arms as a means of protection. I put both my arms to my sides and flexed my hands, and that is how I always moved through the space. The specific quality of my arms being used as safeguards really helped me to lean further into the idea of counterbalance. The use of specificity in the arms still allowed for freedom throughout my body and a very stylized approach to the character of Humpty Dumpty.

I used this exercise in my acting process due to the need for specificity of choices that come from the imaginary center exercise. The imaginary center exercise allows the actor to use the given information to inform physical exploration. The actor should first focus on the physical body of their character and how it moves through space. The movement from this physical exploration can lead the actor to find physical choices that are then supported by the character's psychological standpoint. The way the body moves through space and how it impacts the psyche are related. Human beings can stand in various positions and from those physical positions, they can have emotion come up. For example, if someone were to stand with their chest poked out a little and allowed their chest to lead them through space, they would be impacted psychologically from this exploration. The chest being forward when walking is a universal sign

of confidence. The Given circumstances provide an avenue for the actor to determine where their imaginary center for their character lies, and then the exploration of the imaginary center allows for the actor to utilize physical movement to encourage the psyche of the character to emerge, thus bridging the physical and psychological and creating a clear pathway for physical movement to lead to further development of the emotional aspect of character based solely on the movement of the character.

Throughout this chapter, I discussed the Michael Chekhov acting technique and how I applied several of his principles to my work. I utilized the sequence of exercises: Mold, Float, Fly, and Radiate to help with focus on the psychophysical connection of the actor and how it would benefit my work in class. I utilized one of the four principles outlined by Michael Chekhov, the principle of Beauty, to help when working on the scene I performed from *Our Town* in my graduate acting class. This principle helped inspire the idea of beauty throughout the scene and provided further context on the psychological understanding of my character existing inside the world of the play by Tennessee Williams. I utilized the entirety exercise to approach the rehearsal process for my understudy role of the Soccer Mom in *The Wolves* to be able to approach the role and focus on the importance of previous context from the Given Circumstances to better inform the story of *The Wolves* through the performance of the monologue delivered by my character. I utilized the Imaginary Center and Skin of the Character exercises that help with the development of detailed characterization to aid in crafting the physical structure for my role as Humpty Dumpty in *Shrek the Musical*.

All these exercises helped create dynamic and fully realized characters from different genres throughout my graduate performance career. The famed technique by Michael Chekhov

focuses on the psychophysical connection that I focused on throughout my work. The focus on bridging the physical to the psychological should always be at the forefront of the actor's work. The physical component of the actor's process was important to Chekhov and another acting theorist, Jerzy Grotowski. I will discuss the connection of Grotowski to Chekhov and Stanislavski and how I applied some of the principles of Grotowski's work to my own personal acting process in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: GROTOWSKI AND HIS INNOVATION

This chapter will provide some historical background on Jerzy Grotowski, a breakdown of some components of his method, and context for the connection between Grotowski, Stanislavski, and Chekhov. Some exercises using Grotowski's methods as the inspiration for the framework will be outlined. I used my own personal work during my rehearsals and performances throughout my graduate career for application of these exercises.

Jerzy Grotowski is a Polish theatre artist known for his focus on psychophysical connections in the actor's process. The beginning of Grotowski's theatre career started as a part of his own personal journey to try and understand the world. As previously said, Stanislavski was highly influential to Grotowski. In *Jerzy Grotowski*, Slowiak, and Cuesta state,

“When Grotowski left for Moscow in August 1955, he was known as a ‘fanatic disciple of Stanislavsky’... Stanislavsky's system was the ‘official’ curriculum of the Polish theatre school, but most students regarded the Russian's contributions to actor training with disdain. Grotowski, however, saw the seeds of truth in Stanislavsky's system of physical actions, and he went to Moscow to study the system at its source.”(6).

Grotowski and Stanislavski are similar in their approach to life and their own personal philosophies; however, Stanislavski was not the only theatre practitioner to inspire Grotowski. In *Jerzy Grotowski*, Slowiak, and Cuesta state,

“In Moscow, Grotowski also discovered the theatre experiments of Stanislavsky's protégé Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) ... Grotowski said that from Stanislavsky he learned

how to work with actors, but it was from Meyerhold that he discovered the creative possibilities of the stage director's craft... "(8)

Grotowski was heavily inspired by the work of Stanislavski and Meyerhold, as well as the history and makeup of other cultures.

Grotowski created unique ideas about how to approach the art of acting through the different exercises he created that stemmed from all the different areas in life that he found inspiration from. In *An Acrobat of the Heart*, Stephen Wang talks about his experience with Grotowski and outlines some of the ideas that were present in Grotowski's work, by quoting Grotowski,

"The actor must discover those resistances and obstacles which hinder him in his creative task... By a personal adaptation of the exercises, a solution must be found for the elimination of these obstacles which vary for each individual actor... This is what I mean by *via negativa*: a process of elimination." (xxxix).

The idea of *via negativa* is also echoed by the likes of Michael Chekhov, in *An Acrobat of the Heart*, Stephen Wang quotes Michael Chekhov,

"What we usually call 'developing one's talent' is often nothing more than freeing it from the influences that hamper, occlude and frequently destroy it entirely." (xxxix).

While Grotowski had found inspiration from Stanislavski's physical actions, Grotowski also focused on the psychophysical connection by focusing on undoing what has already been previously created in the body, similarly to that, Michael Chekhov also focused on the psychophysical work of the actor as his main thread of his method. Grotowski took the principles

from all these different areas and applied them to help in creating his own unique methods and theatrical events. In *Jerzy Grotowski*, Slowiak, and Cuesta state,

“In 1958, Grotowski plainly states his reasons for work in the theatre and clearly articulates his search for liberation. His quest, one of the most fascinating artistic journeys of the twentieth century, would last for more than 40 years through five distinct phases named by Grotowski himself: Theatre of Productions, Theatre of Participation (or Paratheatre), Theatre of Sources, Objective Drama, and Art as Vehicle (or Ritual Arts).” (10-11).

The five distinct phases of Grotowski’s work inform how Grotowski’s views of theatre and motives behind creating it continued to evolve and change. He crafted and created ideas throughout all five of the phases of his work, which are still being discussed and analyzed. The work that I will focus on is how he impacted the process of acting through his artistry.

There are no clear pathways to approaching the work of Grotowski, as he spurred a lot of inspiration in his students and peers. The basis of his method focused on the growth of the actor as an individual, but also on rigorous physical training. Grotowski’s focus on physical training for the actor was called *Les Exercices Corporels*. In *An Acrobat of the Heart*, Stephen Wangh talks about the physical aspects of Grotowski's training by saying,

“The exercises corporels are a method of reconnecting with the enormous energies that lie locked in the lower half of our bodies. The Cat, the Headstands, the Backbends, and Rolls force us out of the perpendicular and put us in touch with our pelvis, with our legs, and with the ground itself.” (44).

Grotowski stressed the importance of mastering the body, as the actor's instrument by crafting Les Exercices Corporels. In Stephen Wangh's book, *An Acrobat of the Heart*, he talks about a workshop he attended that focused on this technique,

“... Grotowski turned to us and said, as if it were a simple axiom, ‘You see, it must be easy for you to enter the stage walking on your hands as on your feet.’ Our dismay at this pronouncement turned to curiosity when he explained the corollary to this axiom: ‘This means, it should be as difficult for the actor to enter the stage on his feet as on his hands.’ In other words, every step we take with our feet and legs should be as meaningful, as justified, as conscious as if we were walking on our hands.” (43).

Another component of the physical training of Grotowski's method is called Les Exercices Plastiques. The Plastiques outline and inform the psychophysical connection for the body that Grotowski was focused on when creating his method in structure. In *Jerzy Grotowski*, Slowiak and Cuesta discuss the research and work they did regarding Grotowski and talk about how they developed some exercises with Grotowski's conceptualities about the world in mind. When discussing the exercises in their book, they say,

“...we have devised workshops based on Grotowski's principles. Some of the exercises described here come directly from our years of work with Grotowski, while other exercises grew out of our own experience working with actors around the world. All the exercises serve one purpose: to create conditions where actors can attempt to eliminate any disturbing elements that prevent them from accomplishing four essential actions: to see, to listen, to reveal, and to meet.” (119).

Stephen Wangh also credits Grotowski as the main source of inspiration when he authored his book, *An Acrobat of the Heart*, and notated similar exercises that will be discussed and analyzed throughout the chapter. Both *Jerzy Grotowski* and *An Acrobat of the Heart* will serve as resources to breakdown some of the exercises in Grotowski's method that I used to help develop an acting process that benefits the creation of character work.

One of the most important parts of the work of the actor is the warmup. Warming up prior to rehearsal and performance can set the tone for the work period. The warmup is an important part of the work that Grotowski did regarding the actor's process. In *An Acrobat of the Heart*, Stephen Wangh outlines the importance of the warmup saying,

“A warmup is the bridge between the conditions of mind, body, and voice you have been using in everyday life and the conditions of mind, body, and voice you need in order to act... A warmup is a process, one that can keep growing and changing, and one that you must constantly reinvent.” (36-37).

There is no set way to warmup. Every actor has their own individual structure to a warmup; however, I took exercises that were inspired by the work of Jerzy Grotowski and used them to help my warmup experience. Prior to beginning the warmup, you must find a space to do this where you feel you can effectively complete your warmup. In connecting the psychological state and the physical state, I use the “Finding Safe Space” exercise to discover where I will complete the warmup, this exercise is from Stephen Wangh's book, *An Acrobat of the Heart*, he says the purpose of the exercise,

“In this exercise, the body’s sense of actual, physical space acts as a barometer of inner, emotional space.” (10).

I have used this exercise to aid in the choice of the place as to where I would walk through the warm-up exercises prior to rehearsals and performances. The exercise itself consists of taking a few minutes to find a space, and determining if the space allows for physical movement, mental focus, and connection. The exercise allows the actors to practice self-awareness and mindfulness when preparing themselves physically and psychologically to start their work in rehearsal or performance.

The “Finding A Safe Space” exercise proved to be very crucial for me when preparing to warmup, rehearse, and perform. I used this warmup to help with comfort and connection to the rehearsal and performance space. The use of this exercise at the beginning of my work stemmed from finding discomfort in a space that was unfamiliar to me. When an actor can find comfort in a space, they can feel safe and open to work. The work of an actor asks them to go to a vulnerable place to explore the depths of their character. If an actor does not feel safe or accustomed to the space they are in, the potential for nerves and outside circumstances can become a hinderance for them in their process of approaching the work. The “Finding A Safe Space” exercise is beneficial tool for actors to become accustomed to any space and discover what internal mechanisms cause them to find comfort in a space before approaching the work. The “Find A Safe Space” exercise allows for a level of awareness to take place that gets the mind and body centered on the tasks needed of them. The “Finding A Safe Space” exercise gives the actor the tools to take care of themselves and do a mental check in before applying physical mechanisms to their warmup routine. The mindfulness that is embodied in the “Find A Safe

Space” exercise gives the actor a level of autonomy and provides a steppingstone to approaching the work ahead of themselves. The “Finding A Safe Space” exercise is a self-care practice that will create better outcomes for the actor and their instrument in rehearsal and performance. Below I will share an example of how the “Finding A Safe Space” exercise was beneficial to me in my work.

During the performance period for *Shrek the Musical*, we moved from the rehearsal space at the University of Central Florida to the performance space at Dr Phillips Performing Arts Center. There were rehearsal rooms available for the show's cast to use, and many of us would use this space to warm up together before the performances. When entering a new space, there is a level of excitement but also a level of discomfort. I used the “Finding A Safe Space” exercise to slowly move around the room until I found a comfortable space to do my warmup in. The rehearsal room was a space where people would come and go, so I tried to be aware of the space that I took up, and how I could move through the space to effectively warm-up. I moved towards the front of the room near the mirror in the corner. Walking and sitting in an area that was not appealing to me, this allowed me the ability to tap into my own inner self-awareness to realize, the mirror would serve as a hinderance for me during the warmup. Mirrors tend to make me watch myself and to judge myself, which does not allow for the opportunity to find safety to work through my warmup. I continued to move through the room and ended up in the back of the room near a wall, and close to the window that looked outside. I did my own personal warmup in the room, after doing a group exercise to warmup and connect as an ensemble. The interesting part of a warmup process is that the warmup varies for every show. The way the body, mind, and imagination are used production to production will vary, and the warm-up should work in

tandem with the show that you are working on. The exercise was successful because it allowed for the opportunity to make decisions based on awareness, which is a key tool for the actor, especially when safety and health is concerned.

Following the use of the “Finding A Safe Space” exercise, is the use of the “Stream-of-Consciousness warmup” which provides the actor the opportunity to take their kinesthetic awareness to a deeper level prior to rehearsal and performance, by tapping into the connection of the mind and body to release any energy that could potentially counteract with the rehearsal or performance process.

Stephen Wangh talks about this exercise in his book, *An Acrobat of the Heart*, saying,

“...Your stream of consciousness can inspire your body to throw punches or to cry tears that have been waiting inside you for a chance to show themselves. Perhaps it is a little like sweeping your mental attic to make some space in which to do your work.” (13).

The ability to acknowledge thoughts but not dwell on them allows the actor to do their own mental and physical check-in before doing the work needed of them in the rehearsal or performance process. The “Stream-of-Consciousness Warm-Up” is broken down into seven simple steps. In Stephen Wangh’s book, *An Acrobat of the Heart*, he walks through the steps,

“2. Now, begin any warmup you would like to do for your body...

3. ... the next step is to notice what is going on in your mind as you work...

4. ...Every time your mind enters a new thought or feeling, purposefully change what you are doing with your body. Change it fully...

5. The next step is to make your outward choices reflect your inner states...
 6. Continue to work this way until the process of noticing and changing is clear to you..."
- (17-18).

The "Stream of Consciousness Warm-Up" works in conjunction with the "Finding A Safe Space" exercise because of the first step for the warmup focusing on finding a space to complete the warmup. "The Stream of Consciousness warmup" tasks the actor with focusing on their mind and body and how the two connect in tandem. The warmup is rooted in mindfulness and creates a space for the actor to take care of themselves psychologically and physically before starting their work. This warmup, being a part of the process, emphasizes the need for presence and supports the mental and physical well-being of the actor.

Throughout my work on *Welcome to the Moon*, I used this warmup to help me to focus on the work ahead of me. During our first performance of *Welcome to the Moon*, I walked through this exercise to help with focus on my body to better connect to my voice. I spoke with a Bronx accent that was different in tonality from my own. When walking through the warmup, I started out doing exercises that engaged the core, such as crunches, planks, and sit ups. Core engagement allowed me to feel connected to my body, as well as ground the breath so that I could most effectively approach the Bronx accent with more coordination. I switched from the core engagement exercises to more stretching of the spine. I focused on doing the "Cat Cow" exercise which allows for full engagement of my body and provides an area to focus my breath.

The Cat Cow Exercise is one of the "Les Exercices Corporels" that was discussed earlier in this chapter. The Cat Cow exercise starts with the body in the tabletop position (your hands on

the ground and your knees on the ground with the torso being held up in the air). The hands will be shoulder length apart and there should be a parallel distance between your kneecaps on the floor. When moving from the tabletop position, the body should first move into the cat position. The cat position is for stretching the spine. The cat position will cause the hands and legs to stretch, causing the spine to curve up towards the ceiling, thus giving a cat like shape, the feet should be pointed, with the bridges of the feet touching the ground. During the execution of this pose, there should be an inhale to relieve any tensions that try to form during execution.

The next phase of the cycle is moving down into the cow position. The cow position is in opposition of the cat position. When moving into the cow position, the back should become arched, with the head and the buttocks pointing in opposition. The feet will move from pointed to flexed with the toes curling against the floor. The position should look like a cow. The cow position should be accompanied by the release of air inhaled during the cat position. The air flow keeps the positions from remaining stagnant and allows for actions of breath to go with the body movements. There is a lot of focus needed to complete the cat and cow poses with the most efficiency. I did the cat and cow cycle multiple times to allow for the opportunity to acknowledge any thoughts that might disrupt the exercise or the performance. The Cat Cow exercise continues in “Les Exercices Corporels” into another phase where the knees come off the ground, and the Cat Cow exercise becomes more fluid, focusing on undulations of the spine. During the Cat Cow exercise, I noticed that I was more focused on my classwork that was incomplete as opposed to the work that I needed to focus on for my performance in *Welcome to the Moon*. Following this discovery, I decided to do some more stretching of my legs and arms, to continue to warm up my body and recenter my focus. I decided to do some lunges of different

varieties to focus on lengthening and stretching of legs. Following the decision to change from the cat and cow to lunging, I focused more on breath support and how that was present throughout the rest of my work. The focus on breath support allowed me to not have my thoughts wander as much. I was able to stay present. I switched from lunging to stretching my arms in many ways to make sure I was taking care of them, as they would also be in use during the performance.

Throughout the chapter, I discuss the history of Jerzy Grotowski, while discussing some exercises inspired by the principles developed as part of his training. I utilized the “Find A Safe Space” exercise to give myself the autonomy to start making choices that would directly affect the flow of mind and body connection that I would later need to utilize in rehearsal and performance to create the best possible outcome of a performance that effectively translates to an audience. I utilized the “Stream of Consciousness” warmup to help benefit the process of warming up the body to connect my mind to my body and acknowledge any prior thoughts from the day as the actor and allow them to be replaced by a physical action, which would help with focusing on the work ahead of me. The utilization of pieces of the Grotowski method allowed me to focus on the importance of the warmup and how it benefits the actor, setting the tone for the physical and psychological state of the actor prior to approaching character. The warm-up allows for freedom as the actors start with a clean plate, acknowledging the current physical state they are in before approaching the work ahead of themselves. In the next chapter, I will outline the process I developed from all the different exercises I have discussed theorists Grotowski, Chekhov, and Stanislavski and how to utilize them in the creation of character.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ACTING PROCESS

In the past 5 chapters, I have discussed the methodologies of Konstantin Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, and Jerzy Grotowski. These three men are notable acting theorists, and from each of their methods, I have developed a comprehensive process to aid the actor in dynamic character creation with a focus on the psychophysical connection. I have developed a set of nine crucial steps to help an actor create a unique character no matter the genre of play or musical that they are performing in. The nine different steps were chosen to aid actors that utilize physical action as the primary source for igniting emotions that will lead to a deepened exploration both psychologically and physically to benefit the development of a character.

The structure is flexible and can be done in the order needed by the actor day by day, as the order is not a fixed representation of what is needed to create a character. An actor's process is a uniquely individual endeavor. As an actor, I did not resonate with using my own experiences to connect to the experience of a character psychologically. I was on the hunt for an approach that would allow me to access emotions through the action of doing something. The journey that I went on led to the development of this process. The creation of this set of tools led me to realize that I am a physical actor, and the hope of this process is that it will aid actors who are like me. I have found remarkable success in playing pretend without having to jeopardize my mental health and physical health, and hope to encourage physical actors like me to embrace the process so that they may have longevity in their careers. The process below serves as a set of guidelines to follow and can be adjusted in day-to-day practice.

1. "Finding A Safe Space" - This exercise was outlined in Chapter 5 and was first inspired by the work of Jerzy Grotowski. This exercise is important because it is the first steppingstone in the process. The "Finding A Safe Space" exercise will set the tone for the rehearsal or performance. The exercise takes the actor through a multitude of steps to create self-awareness psychologically and physically regarding the choice of space in which they will warmup their instrument prior to rehearsal or performance. The actors walk around the space to find their own individual spot in the room to warm up. The actor is suggested to try a multitude of spaces and move through them according to the needs of their warm-up to determine if the space is compatible with the warm-up they will be doing during that day of rehearsal or performance. The exercise is beneficial for the actor because it starts the process of self-awareness in the mind and body. The actor has the autonomy to choose the space in which they will do the next phase of the method, which provides a springboard for actors to start making choices.
2. "Stream of Consciousness Warm-Up" - This exercise was outlined in Chapter 5 and inspired by the work of Jerzy Grotowski. The exercise is a multi-step process of the actor doing a mental check in with their thoughts tied to information outside the rehearsal room or performance space. The stream of consciousness warm up allows for actors to acknowledge any type of energy they have that exists in their body, to acknowledge it, and then to move towards focus. The exercise allows for actors to try different physical exercises and once they feel their mind start to wonder, to switch the physical exercise. The exercise is meant to bring attention to the psyche and body and to connect the two together in the artistic process. The exercise is a useful tool to allow for a physical and

mental check in, that leads to awareness of any thoughts that the actor has and creates the space for the actor to acknowledge them, and then move beyond them so they are not bogged down by any thoughts that are irrelevant to the rehearsal process. The physical and mental merging in this warmup allows actor minds that are not present to find focus through physical connection of the body.

3. “Open/Close” - This exercise was developed by Michael Chekhov. The exercise focused on movements that caused the body to feel as open as possible, and then to move in opposition by closing the body off as much as possible. In Michael Chekhov's book, *To the Actor*, he provides a guide for the exercise stating, “...Open yourself completely, spreading wide your arms and hands, your legs far apart. Remain in this expanded position for a few seconds. Imagine you are becoming larger and larger.... Now close yourself by crossing your arms upon your chest, putting your hands on your shoulders. Kneel on one or both knees, bending your head low. Imagine that you are becoming smaller and smaller, curling up, contracting as though you wanted to disappear bodily within yourself...” (pg. 19-20). This exercise is beneficial because of its aid in stretching the muscles that are associated with these movements. The exercise should promote awakening of the muscles attributed to these movements and serve as a steppingstone for the mold, float, fly, and radiate exercise that should follow it.
4. “Mold, Float, Fly, Radiate” - This exercise cycle is outlined in Chapter 4, and was developed by Michael Chekhov. The exercise focuses on the 4 principles that are needed for actors when performing. These principles are Form, Ease, Beauty, and Entirety. This exercise allows the actor to connect the body and mind together to participate in different

physical actions. The actor is challenged with pretending to use their bodies to mold the air, float through it, fly through it, and radiate in it. Each physical action should evoke an emotional response, thus bridging the physical and the psychological forces in the actor. These exercises give the actor the opportunity to creatively use their body in a variety of ways that approach tension at various levels throughout. The exercise's after effect is awareness of the importance of physical tension in the body and how it is connected to different actions and the subsequent emotions connected to these actions.

5. "Given Circumstances" - this concept was outlined in Chapter 3 and was developed by Konstantin Stanislavski. This concept outlines the information that should be acknowledged by an actor before approaching any scene work in a rehearsal. The Given Circumstances provide context for the actor to use when working on a play or musical and allows for them to understand the playwright's intention, and to take the choices made by the playwright and the creative team on what they are working on and apply them to the character they are portraying. This information is crucial to the success of proper storytelling.
6. "Magic If" - This exercise is outlined in Chapter 3 and was developed by Konstantin Stanislavski. The exercise gives actors the opportunity to discover information about their character that the playwright may not have answered in the script through exploration and play. The Magic If allows for an actor to approach a choice for a character, knowing the Given Circumstances (as stated by the playwright), and to play and develop response for the character from the perspective of being in the shoes of the character and their given circumstances. The Given Circumstances help to influence potential possibilities for the

Magic If. The Magic If can be used in the process to help an actor look at a scenario, and act as if they were that character and decide based on the premise that “if” they were the character, and existed inside of the set parameters determined, an exploration of the potential response that would be created by the actor, that help inform the audience about the character. The more informed the choice, the more clarity for the audience.

7. “Skin of the Character” - This exercise is outlined in Chapter 4 and was developed by Michael Chekhov. The actor is to think of the character they are playing and what attributes define the character. The attributes of a character can be physical or mental capabilities. The actor is to define the attributes and apply them to their own physical understanding of the character like they are putting on a costume. This technique allows for dynamic choices that can grow and change over time. The actor should focus on different physical choices that may be associated with certain behaviors and explore those before putting on the skin of the character.
8. “Imaginary Center” - This exercise is outlined in Chapter 4 and was developed by Michael Chekhov. The exercise itself focuses on energy, and where energy is stored in the body. The actor starts with the energy coming from their chest, and then moves the energy to various parts of the body. Through the exercise, the energy can lead the actor through the space wherever they choose to place it. For example, if I put the energy in my gut, then my gut can lead me as I move through space. The Imaginary center allows for a physical representation of the understanding of how the character is perceived. Where a person leads from can tell us a lot about who they are. This exercise provides an opportunity for creativity and instinct to come together to help develop a dynamic

character. The imaginary center should be informative of the type of character. This allows the actor to focus on physical components tied to psychological preconceptions about how their character might be lead based on a multitude of psychological barring's.

9. "Entirety" - The exercise is one of the principles outlined by Michael Chekhov, which I discussed in Chapter 4. The idea of entirety is linked to the concept of Given Circumstances that was first developed by Konstantin Stanislavski. The actor should know their character and the arch of the character in its entirety, but also in the growth in each individual scene for the character that they are playing. The exercise focused on entirety is an aid in the rehearsal process to help the actor to focus on the key elements of the character's journey throughout each individual scene, and then how all the scenes tie together to inform the trajectory of the character throughout the entirety of the play. This exercise gives the actor the opportunity to break down the character into fragments and focus on specificity in each scene. For the specificity of choices, they must be cohesive and informed throughout the entirety of the story to produce a story that translates to audiences.

The method outlined above has principles that can be applied to any genre or style of theatre and any character you play. These exercises foster imagination, kinesthetic awareness, and psychophysical connectivity. In the next few chapters I will discuss application of this tool through my rehearsal and performance experiences in *The Amphibians* and *Shrek*. Each of these characters and productions were different in style.

CHAPTER SIX: APPROACHING CHARACTER CREATION IN A NEW PLAY

In 2021, I was cast in an original play reading for a production of *The Amphibians* by Dan Caffrey, in which I played a creature that dwelled in the forest and swamp areas of Florida. This production was part of the University of Central Florida's new play festival called Pegasus Play lab, which is held annually at the University, but due to the pandemic, Pegasus Play lab was online. The play, *The Amphibians*, is about two teenaged girls that are friends and live in West Central Florida during a climate change crisis. One of the girls finds a creature in a park nearby and brings the other girl to show her. The girls do not know what to do about the creature, as it is an unidentifiable being. Throughout the play there is constant conversation about how the climate crisis is affecting their home, and eventually, the area they live in begins to flood. The creature is the thread between the two girls having commonality with each other. It is a common story of people growing apart throughout their adolescence. The creature was supposed to be an animal of some type that was affected by climate change in West Central Florida. The unique circumstances of this production were that it was a zoom reading, and I played a physical and vocal character. I was tasked with the job of creating a fully realized character that had no native tongue and only communicated through physical movements, facial expressions, and varied vocal capabilities. This was a challenge for me as an actor because I needed to effectively communicate through physical movement and vocal production that would translate through Zoom. The process itself took about 10 days (about 1 and a half weeks), and all of it was done from inside my room. Initially, looking at the script, it was difficult to understand what was needed of me throughout the reading.

At the beginning of the rehearsal process, I read the entire play, and focused on the given circumstances of my character. The information was vague, so there was a lot of opportunity for character development throughout the project. In the play, *The Amphibians*, by Dan Caffrey, the creature is described as,

“...probably seven or eight feet long. Its body is serpentine, scales covering the bottom half and fur covering the top half. It has four appendages that look like small legs... The best way to describe it is a hairy eel. With nubby little legs. The creature's sides are overrun with a series of large red gashes. “(16-17).

This character is described in detail in the physical presentation, but understanding what happened to it and its purpose were a large part of the rehearsal process. Due to the nature of the role, I was tasked with playing, implementing a physical warmup was crucial to the success of the role's performance.

I utilized the “Finding A Safe Space” exercise when I was trying to warm up my body prior to rehearsal. Due to the performance and rehearsal process taking place over Zoom, I needed to find a space in my house that would allow me to rehearse. I decided to utilize my back patio since I knew there was ample amount of room to move. I walked through the “Finding A Safe Space” exercise first, and I initially went to the corner of my patio and sat down. I realized that the corner would not provide me with any room for me to stretch and move through the space. I decided to move towards the middle of the room, and I started to move there. The middle of the patio felt more open, and I did not feel like I would accidentally run into something so there was a sense of safety in that area. Once I sat down, I stretched and moved around to test

if the space was fit for me to warm up in. I determined that the space was safe and secure for me to warm up in. The “Finding A Safe Space” warmup caused me to stay present and focus on choices that would be beneficial to my artistic process. The warmup allowed me to think about the work ahead, and to acknowledge what would make me as an actor feel safe in the warmup space. The “Finding A Safe Space” warmup also allows for the actor to utilize their time to the best of their ability to find a space to warmup because moving in the middle of a warmup does take away actual time from the warmup process.

The next exercise I did was “the Stream of Consciousness warmup.” This warmup allowed me to do a mental and physical check-in. During the rehearsal process for *The Amphibians*, I was working an extremely physical job, and would come back from work with just enough time to warm up prior to rehearsal. Once I was able to determine the space I would use to warmup, I sat down and began stretching. After a long day filled with physical exercise, it is easy to think that your body is already warm, but I had to fight that internal thought and stretch to prepare my body. There was some physical preparation needed prior to the rehearsal process for me because of the vocal and physical demands of the character that I was playing, as many of the scenes that involved the creature required me to be writhing on the floor while grunting to display the creature in a state of pain. The goal of “the Stream of Consciousness warmup” is to connect the physical and mental components of the actor together to reach a level of psychophysical connection. I decided to put my legs out and stretch towards one leg and then the other to focus on the energy in the lower half of the body and then move up through the body so that every single muscle could receive some attention throughout the warmup. Once I was done with stretching, I decided to get up on my feet and start doing jumping jacks. I did 3 sets of 10

jumping jacks with a 10 second rest. This was to increase airflow and speed up my heartrate. Cardiovascular exercises help to relax my mind and bring back into focus the task at hand. After I did the jumping jacks, my mind started to wander, and I was thinking about how tired I was from a long day of work. I realized that the idea of tiredness could be used to my benefit in the rehearsal process. My character was constantly tired and fatigued. I ended my “Stream of Consciousness warmup” with what I like to call the countdown shakeout. The countdown shakeout is when you start to shake out your legs, one by one, and then followed by shaking out your arms. The countdown portion of the name is in the sequence in which you of the countdown shakeout. The countdown shakeout will start with counts of 8. For example, If I started the sequence of the countdown shakeout with my left leg, I would shake it, away from my body, counting from 1 up to 8. Once I reached 8, then I would switch legs doing the same thing. After you shake out both of your legs, you would do the same sequence with your arms. Each time you complete shaking out both legs and both arms, you start over. Each time you start over, you decrease in number value. The second time going the sequence, you would count from 1 up to 7, and so forth. Once I completed the countdown shakeout sequence, I would simply just sit and breathe. This idea was implemented throughout the rehearsal process because of my role's physical nature. I also had to focus on breath and sound as that was one of my main forms of communication when playing this character. I made sure to breathe and release sound as it came up. Anytime that we are moving our bodies, there is a tendency to want to make some sort of sound in conjunction with our physical movements and I focused on allowing anything that came up in the warmup process out. I found the “Stream of Consciousness” warm up to be incredibly beneficial to me throughout the rehearsal process, as it allowed me the opportunity to take care

of my mind and body while completing physical actions. I did many different stretches and exercises to prepare my body for the work ahead. During my stretches, I would let out audible sounds as opposed to restricting anything and creating continued tension in the body. I realized that I could use some of those sounds in my work as the creature. From the beginning of the “Stream of Consciousness” warmup to the end, my mind and body would start to work in tandem. My thoughts started to inspire the next physical movement. This created kinesthetic awareness and focus.

After completing the “Stream of Consciousness” warmup, then I would start to walk through the “Open/Close” sequence that was developed by Michael Chekhov. The sequence starts with the actors opening their arms wide and having their feet spread apart. When I do the Open portion of the sequence, I am opening myself up to the world of the play and all the possibilities that are before me. There is always a form of excitement and warmth that is felt doing this part of the sequence, as these motions psychologically affect me. The motions are meant to engage your muscles in a more structured format than the “Stream of Consciousness” warmup because of the rigid structure.

After completing the Open phase of the sequence, then venture into the “Close” phase of the sequence. The task of the actors is to close themselves off first starting with the arms crossing like hugging yourself, and then to slowly move towards the floor. The actor should kneel on one knee and then bring the other knee forward to slowly crumble into a ball. The actor should be contracting while in the small ball. The feelings that accompany this motion are those of insecurity, fear, and self-preservation. This part of the sequence should create a feeling of opposition to the Open phase of the sequence. Exploring the range of emotion paired with

physical motions allows for the actor to really incorporate both the psychological and physical factors of the information that they need to effectively create characters that are dynamic and not one dimensional. The Close portion allowed me to reflect on what my character might be opposed to, what my character fears. This part of the exercise was inspiration for the physical movements I could do to connect these emotions to the physical movements I am doing my performance as the creature.

The choice to utilize the Open/Close exercise in my acting process stemmed from my previous experience of dealing with tension and fear. Using the exercise, I faced the fear and tension I had before starting rehearsals or performances. I could explore the choices between entering a rehearsal or performance space with an Open or Closed approach. This exercise allowed me to access the options through physical action which then ignited emotional responses. The Open/Close exercise allowed me to open my body and mind to the potential for anything in rehearsal or performance and then in opposition close myself off physically and mentally. The exploration of both choices ended up helping me to release tension and focus my mind on the completion of an action as opposed to my previous psychological state.

Following the Open/Close exercise, I did the “Mold, Float, Fly, Radiate” exercise. The first three exercises prior to this are integral to the process and should all be done in succession. The “Mold, Float, Fly, Radiate” exercise takes the actor throughout the journey of moving through a space and doing each of the name actions using the body. This exercise should encourage the actor to make unique and dynamic choices that stem from action-based exercises that utilize physicality and imagination to the benefit of the actor.

First the actors will start to use their body to mold the air around them. The actor should try several diverse ways to mold the air around them utilizing their body in various aspects. Initially, my first instinct was to act like I was pushing an object with my arms forward, which brought a lot of tension to my body, and used a ton of physical exertion. I then decided to try and mold the air around me using my back to move an imaginary gelatin mass with the backside of my body. A tip for this exercise is to imagine the circumstances around you to create the opportunity to mold a specific thing. I like using molasses or gelatin when I imagine this because it is firm but flexible. The utilization of something as your main image for the thing you would be molding leads to more specificity and allows for variety of choices when you change the thing you mold. There is a lot of opportunity for growth here, and the physical connection to the mental is made easier.

After completing “Mold,” the next phase of the exercise cycle is to float. I like to imagine I am floating in water. Water is universally understood, and it allows us to use experiences that we have previously had in water to inform us of the choices we would make throughout the exercise. I like to work the idea of opposites when approaching the float idea, by first moving through the space like I am moving and floating with the water and to see how the mind impacts the efficacy of the exercise. Then in contrast, I like to move against the water, like I am trying to walk through water. I still acknowledge the idea of floating, but there is a sense of resistance. The psychological difference between going with the flow and going against it can be beneficial when approaching the psychology of the character you are playing. Is the character someone that would follow along with the things that are happening to them and embrace them, or are they the type of character to work in opposition to the things that are happening to them? Asking these

questions allows for the exercise to be utilized in the creative process of crafting the character. The opportunity to get specific allows for the actor to play with different unique circumstances, and to eventually apply the principle to the character scene by scene.

The next phase of the cycle is “Fly.” The practice of “Fly” has less resistance for the actor to deal with. The actor is tasked to fly through space as if there is no gravity holding them down. An image that comes to mind when I work on this exercise is an open landscape that I am flying through. An example that I like to use is that I am like Peter Pan, and I am flying through the city of London, how would that impact how I choose to fly? Regarding *The Amphibians*, I chose to imagine that I am flying over the swamp and moving through the trees. If you are flying through open space, there is no resistance from a specific object, but there are areas you would avoid if you were trying to remain in flight. This idea is something that helped me to understand the character that I was playing better. How am I supposed to move through space? Do I acknowledge or have issues with the trees that surround me? Is moving through a space difficult for me? Am I agile? Before starting the rehearsal process or even throughout the rehearsal process, you can apply this to your own psyche to see how it might feel, and then apply the same logic to that of the character you are playing. The way you would be physically and psychologically affected would (or should) differ, but both stimuluses inform each other.

Following the “Flying” sequence to radiate. The “Radiate” portion of the exercise allows for more opportunities to be static with movement as opposed to always in motion. The best way to approach radiation is to think that you have beams of light that exist in the palms of your hands, your chest, and the tops of your feet. I like to start from a static place and explore the potential for movement with radiation. “Radiate” should give the actor the sense of being and

acknowledging where they are and how they impact space. If the actor feels inclined to move, then they can radiate throughout space. Radiation permeates everything that a character would meet, so the act of radiation is more focused on just being and seeing how that impacts the things around it. With the idea of radiate, apply it to your play, to radiate is to give and simultaneously share. These are important concepts for the actor to apply to their process. The act of existing and allowing yourself to take up space should provide a level of power, and then lay the personal application on top of your character. How would your character feel if they were to stand and radiate in space? The creature would not necessarily feel comfortable with radiation with other beings in the vicinity, but if the creature were alone, radiation would not be affected. Following the ‘Mold, Float, Fly, Radiate’ exercise is utilization of the ‘Given Circumstances.’”

The “Given Circumstances” is the information that the playwright gives you when you first read the play, and then you do external dramaturgy and work with the creative team to create a cohesive narrative. Initially, we focused on where we were, who was involved with the story, what was happening, why it was happening, and how everything came together. In *The Amphibians*, I utilized the “Given Circumstances” by approaching the work in totality, and then dissecting the information that will help focus on specific information that will aid in the character creation process. In the play, the main three characters are Simone, Bryn, and The Creature. The location is Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park which is a wilderness reserve that is in New Port Richey, Florida. The time is stated as thirteen years from now and the play was first written in 2019, so that would be 2032. There is a variety of vegetation and wildlife in the park, and that is where all the action in the play takes place. I first dissected the inner dynamics that

existed between each of the characters. After reading the play, it is best to break down the script by all the information about the play first.

Simone is 17, her mother is the Park Site Supervisor and does not pay much attention to her. Simone feels extremely lonely and holds on to others that make her feel less alone. Simone and Bryn have been friends since middle school. Simone is jealous by nature. Simone is not a fan of cheerleaders, and her best friend Bryn becomes a cheerleader. Simone enjoys making fun of other people but will still morally do the right thing when it is needed of her. Simone had a dog named Space Jam that ended up dying, and the relationship between Simone and Space Jam mirrors that of Simone and the creature. Simone feels like no one really cares for her, so she acts like she cares about nothing at all. Simone is excited by her discovery of the creature and does not want to lose it regardless of the climate crisis directly affecting her life. Simone tends to be more emotional, but also simultaneously tries to avoid her feelings. Simone's emotional instances stem from when Bryn will not hang out with her or the mere thought that the creature could leave. Simone's main goal is to feel less alone.

Bryn is 17, and she opposes Simone in a ton of ways. Bryn is a high school cheerleader, which she has always wanted to be. Bryn is much more positive than Simone. Bryn has extreme anxiety about the current climate crisis that they are living through and is empathetic towards others. Bryn loves Kesha and loves to play a variety of video games. Bryn acknowledges her friendship with Simone, but also wants to grow to be her own person. Bryn nurtures and cares for others. This is evident by how she continues to check on Simone and provide bandages for the creature throughout the play. Bryn is more logically driven than Simone. Bryn's main goal is to survive so she can go to her high school homecoming.

The creature has no specified age, or specified species. The creature is supposed to be some form of an amphibian. As previously stated, the creature should look like a hairy eel, but the actual scientific name of the creature is not determined in the play. During much of the play, the girls think that the creature is in pain and has gashes on its side, so they continue to bandage the gashes, until it is later revealed that the gashes are not injuries but gills. The creature is animalistic in nature and its preferred food is that of fish. The girls feed the creature tilapia and tuna throughout the play. The creature has no issue with the girls leaning on it or putting pressure on it. The creature seems to roar when there is more sound or conflict. The creature continues to rip off the bandages each time the girls put them on its “gashes” because they are restricting its breathing. The main goal of the creature is to survive and to leave the location it is in. The creature groans and gasps for air make it seem like it is dying, but it is preparing itself to leave the park clearing that it currently lives in and to live in the water that is slowly approaching. All these circumstances are provided throughout the play's script. As for the actual sounds and complete understanding of the character that I played, we decided to develop it in process. The playwright mentioned that the sounds coming from the creature should mimic that of an alligator prevalent in Florida ecosystems.

With the Given Circumstances I can understand the character arc that is needed, and the purpose of my character in the play. The creature is the last thing that connects Bryn and Simone together. There is a large level of desperation for Simone to keep the creature, meanwhile, Bryn is okay with letting the creature go and fulfill the purpose it was set to. The underlying messages that exist in the script become prevalent from start to finish, and the subtext allows for the actors

to continue to develop the relationship they have onstage further and further as the play progresses.

With the Given Circumstances I can understand the super objective for my character, to survive. The creature is weak when it does not have water, as it primarily lives in water, so it cannot cause harm to the girls because it is not in its proper ecosystem. The first time there is a real threat to the girls from the creature is when the creature starts to have water touch its gills. The more the creature interacts with the water, the stronger it gets. The actions of the creature are informed by that of the survival fight or flight instinct that exists in all living creatures. When the creature is weak, the creature remains in flight. The creature does not attack or show aggressive behavior towards the girls because it simply does not have the energy to. As the play progresses, the creature gets fed, which increases its energy. The creature gets access to water which allows the creature to properly breathe. It can be inferred that the creature primarily lives in water but can breathe outside of the water much like that of a fish due to the difference when the creature is interacting with water, and when it is not. All the Given Circumstances inform the “why?” behind the character. This information is vital as it will help translate it all to the audience. The Given Circumstances were super beneficial for me as I was building this character because we had a short rehearsal period, and so we were tasked with diving deeper each time that we approached this piece. This information provided a lot of context for me. The character I play never voices anything through language, but through nonverbal gestures and unidentifiable sounds. My task was to take all this information and apply it to my character using my body and voice.

The Given Circumstances applied to the “Magic If” can truly aid the actor in the character development process. I utilized “Magic If” a lot to inform how I would respond. Initially, I had to put myself in the shoes of the creature. Some of the first questions that I started asking were, how would I respond if I was weak and in an unfamiliar territory? I would be terrified. I would remain still and not move, because it is all I could do in that moment. The “Magic If” helped a lot with focusing on the “moment before.” The “moment before” is the moment before the scene that allows us to understand the current state of being even if we did not see it on stage. Sometimes the playwright will provide context for the moment before and sometimes the actor is tasked with developing the moment before. In this case, I had to create the moment before. The creation of the moment before allows the actor to be specific in their character choices.

When looking at the dynamic between Simone and the creature, there had to be a certain bond evident because Simone had been around the creature more than Bryn had been. In the script, Simone discovered what the creature liked to eat, so this tells us that the creature was being fed by Simone for some time. Utilizing the context of this information, it led me to another question, how would I treat the person that came to feed me daily and tried to take care of me when I was weak and suffering? I would be grateful; I would let them into my space because I can see the intentions are good. I would trust them because they have shown me the reason they have decided to show up. While continuing to dissect the dynamics between the relationships, another question came to mind, how would I respond if my caretaker showed up with someone else? I would be afraid and cautious. I do not know who that person is or why they are there. This discovery led me to realize that the first time that Bryn enters and sees the creature the

creature lets out a big roar. That roar signifies a scream of fear. The creature is terrified because she has no idea what that other person is capable of and is still fragile and weak. Over time, Bryn and the creature develop a level of trust with each other. Bryn later comes to the clearing alone to say hello and read her book. This scene specifically made me walk through the “Magic If” exercise. If I had a stranger walk into my home and just start reading a book or playing on their phone, how would I respond? I would be afraid and extremely confused as to why that person was in my home. This helped to inform the scene where Bryn enters and sits down to read a book in the clearing and the creature just stares at her from afar. There is not a level of trust that has been built up by this point between the creature and Bryn, so fear as the catalyst informs the narrative.

Throughout the play, the dynamic between Bryn and the creature changes, as Bryn begins to care for the creature, and presents herself as non-threatening. The next few scenes in the play focus on both girls just spending time together and talking, and the creature is there with them. The creature is not aggressive towards the girls but calm due to the state of weakness, until the most pivotal scene in the show. The final scene is where Bryn runs into the clearing and warns Simone that the town is starting to flood, and they must leave. Simone is trying to convince Bryn to stay with her and the creature to say goodbye to the creature as it leaves. The girls begin to yell at each other and the creature (according to the stage directions) coils up. Bryn then walks over to the creature and starts to pet it and then begins to walk away while Simone is begging Bryn not to leave. During this exchange, when Bryn starts to walk away, the creature is notated as to going to Bryn’s leg and rubbing up against it and then begins to leave. If I were the creature and someone showed me an action that told me they were saying goodbye and leaving, I would

want to return the favor. I would also like to say goodbye. There is an important part of the story happening, the creature is an animal at its core, so it can sense the water is rising and coming towards them. It starts to retreat towards the water, but Simone gets in the way of the creature. This causes an extreme amount of tension between the girls and the creature. Simone is blocking the way of the creature, which eventually leads the creature to growl at her. Out of desperation, Simone gets on top of the creature to make sure that the creature does not leave. This causes Bryn to yell at Simone to get off the creature. The responses from the creature are growls, groans, and thrashing movement underneath the weight of Simone. If I were the creature in this situation, how would I respond? I know that I belong in the water, and it is my ticket out of isolation. This girl is an obstacle in my way of survival, and I have finally gained enough strength to get out of the park area and back to where I belong. Nothing will stand in my way of survival. Bryn walks over to pull Simone off the creature. At this point, the creature has been thrashing underneath Simone and is finally released. The tail of the creature slashes Bryn across the torso, and whips around again. The creature moves through space and begins to be surrounded by water. The “Magic If” is used here to fuel the movement and what leads to the forthcoming actions of the creature. The creature slashes Bryn, and then turns around and looks menacingly at the girls, until it hears a sound in the distance and swims off never to be seen again. This final moment with the creature is crucial to the arc of the story for all three characters. I put myself in the shoes of the creature. If I had finally gained strength and could go back to where I come from, I would do everything I could to get there. There would be a large level of frustration accompanied by trying to escape what felt like a form of imprisonment in the park. From the standpoint of the creature, when Simone jumped on me, I felt like I was being

tricked by someone who gained my trust. The impulse in response stems from anger and outrage at Simone for trying to stop me from going back to where I belong. I am so desperate to leave I will do anything to escape, and NOTHING will stand in the way of that.

The use of the “Magic If” benefited me in the rehearsal process because it fueled the reactions of my character. The script had the actions written, but the “Magic If” allowed me the opportunity to contextualize the situation and find the subtext of the reason I would do any of the things that I did throughout the script. This exercise was beneficial in building this character because it allowed me to understand the nature of the creature. The character has violent undertones, and animalistic integrity.

The ‘Skin of the Character’ exercise aided me in the process of building the character of the creature because there is nothing that is familiar about this character to me in my own habitual tendencies physically. The character's description aided a lot in the process of finding the skin of the character. The character is portrayed as a hairy eel, with little legs, and gills on its sides. When approaching the initial exercise of development of the skin of the character, I first thought about the body of an eel, they are long, slick, and compact. Eels tend to move through water similarly to that of a snake on land. The description of the character also talked about the nubby little appendages on the sides of the body. The description immediately made me think of an alligator. Alligators are a large species, but their appendages are much smaller in size than their torso. I decided to try and merge these ideas together to create the image of the body of the character. To put myself in the “Skin of the Character,” I needed to think as though I was stepping into a costume. In my head, I thought of stepping into a tube of sorts that allowed for my hands and feet to peak out, and for a limited range of motion from my appendages. This led

me to the discovery that my head had the most range of motion in the body and was what led the movements that I would do wearing the “Skin of the Character.” The best way to utilize the “Skin of the Character” exercise is to first read the script and identify a physical descriptions or actions and determine how accomplishing the translation of the outlined descriptions or actions would look like on the body of the actor. The work of the ‘Skin of the Character’ was only furthered by the “Imaginary Center” exercise that I utilized to achieve the consistent and informed movements and structure of the character that I developed.

The “Imaginary Center” exercise was developed by Michael Chekhov. The exercise focuses on a specified area of the body in which the actor sends their energy from and can lead from. This center can be a choice made by the actor, or from specified information in the script that can support the choice of the location of the “Imaginary Center.” Throughout the process of developing my character in *The Amphibians*, I kept returning to the fact that the most movement that came from the creature was from its head. I wanted to utilize this information when developing how the character was presented to the audience. I initially started the “Imaginary Center” exercise by focusing on the head. I moved through the space with my head leading any of the action. Using my entire head, I moved around and realized it still felt too general in the movement and did not evoke the slithering movement that I was trying to create. I discovered that the motion of slithering that I wanted to present in the movements of the character would best translate if I focused my “Imaginary Center” in the middle of my forehead. This action led me to a more fluid movement that would create a structure that not only told the physical story of the character that I was aiming for, but also allowed for consistency and repetitiveness. I wanted to make sure I was supporting my body throughout the process because of the physical nature of

the character. This exercise was beneficial because it allowed me to connect all the choices and movements that are part of the character's story to a small source of energy that was focused. If I had kept the “Imaginary Center” in my entire head, then it would have resulted in a large amount of neck pain. The benefit of the “Imaginary Center” is that it provides the opportunity for an actor to play with an idea and move towards specificity that informs the physical story of the character they are playing.

Finally, I utilized the principle of “Entirety” to benefit my process. I wanted to build a character that translated from beginning to end and the “Entirety” allows the opportunity for the actor to create a fully realized character. Without thinking of the context of the play, you can miss some of the details that may inform the audience about the character that may not necessarily be said but seen or inferred. The “Entirety” exercise allows for the actor to compartmentalize each individual scene they are in and notate the rising and falling action of the scene specified, and then to connect the scenes to create a full narrative that is cohesive. For example, I approach the first scene of the character of the creature and see where it ends.

The first scene of the creature is the first time it meets Bryn and the first time that the audience sees the creature. The creature is seen as weak and in pain. The creature is non-threatening to the girls, initially, as it is out of its natural habitat and unable to utilize its strength. If you look at this scene as if it is its own piece of “Entirety,” you can learn about the nature of the character and the girls. How does this scene connect with the other scenes to propel the story towards the last moment where you see the creature? The actor should break down the “Entirety” exercise by performing each scene, beginning to end, as if it were its own entirely realized play. This process should provoke the actor into making informed and specified choices with the

information that they have gathered throughout working through the scene. The “Entirety” exercise should lead to a formed and realized emotional and physical connection. If this scene is all an audience got to see of the play, you must play it to the full length of truth to best honor the work itself. The “Entirety” exercise helps to raise the stakes (or importance) of each individual scene as standalone pieces, but also aids in bridging all the scenes together to find the thread that cohesively ties the story together to become a well comprehended and transformative story for an audience.

Throughout *The Amphibians*, the acting process that I utilized aided me in the rehearsal and performance process when it came to specificity and dynamic qualities. I utilized the “Find A Safe Space” exercise to help set the tone for the rehearsal process while also giving myself the space to connect the psychological and the physical components of the human body when working toward performance. I utilized the “Stream of Consciousness” warm up and allow my inner thoughts to no longer serve as interruptions that could be carried through the rehearsal or performance process, but as thoughts that I could acknowledge as an act of self-care to move towards mindfulness and presence in my work. I then utilized the “Mold, Float, Fly, and Radiate” exercise to test the psychophysical connection of the actor’s instrument (The body) through a multitude of different actions. These actions warmed up all my muscles and allowed for play, which fosters the use of imagination throughout my rehearsal and performance process. I moved from the ‘Mold, Float, Fly, and Radiate” exercise to the “Open and Close” exercise to connect the physical actions to the emotional response that could be determined through internal impulses. Following the use of the “Open and Close” exercise, I then utilized the concept of the “Given Circumstances” to serve as a tool to look at all the information that was given by the

playwright and the creative team. Comprehension of this information is integral to the artistic process because it will allow for the actor to psychologically use the information that they know about the play to their benefit when they are performing the physical actions that are associated with the text. The “Given Circumstances” helped to inform the next exercise, which was the “Magic If”. The “Magic If” is an exercise used for the sole purpose of psychophysical connection of intentions behind a character's actions. This proved to be extremely beneficial in my process because I had no text that could help convey my internal thoughts but only physical actions and vocalizations. The “Magic If” allowed for the opportunity to understand and implement any subtext that existed throughout the play. The “Magic If” and the “Given Circumstances” exercises should be used in tandem to help support any choices that provide structure to the character that you are building. Following the utilization of the “Given Circumstances” and the “Magic If”, I wanted to focus on specificity in the physical nature of choices that support the story of the character that I am playing. The “Skin of the Character” exercise provided me with the physical component of embodiment that was needed to bridge the psychological with the physical. The benefit of the “Skin of the Character” exercise is that the character can build a physical map of the character's body and how that may impact anything that they choose to do inside the world of the play. The physical descriptions in the play helped to inform my choices for the “Skin of the Character.” The “Skin of the Character” exercise gave insight to the specificities of the actions of my characters and the amount of physical tension that were or were not present during my performance as said character, be it in rehearsal or actual performance. The “Skin of the Character” can be built upon through the utilization of the “Imaginary Center.” The “Imaginary Center” takes the specificity of what leads a character

through physical representation of their body through the play. The “Imaginary Center” can be informed by the mental capacities of the character or its physicality. The “Imaginary Center” allowed for me to create a specific area for energy to flow from when I was creating the character of the creature, and allowed me not only to find something that aided in the translation of the physical story of the character, but created the best physical structure for me as an actor to be able to reproduce the same effect of the character each time that I moved through the space. Finally, I utilized the “Entirety” concept to best contextualize and inform each scene that I did, and the utilize key information from these scenes to knit together a performance that would be cohesive to the entire story as it translates to the other actors I am on stage with and the audience that experiences it.

CHAPTER SEVEN: HOW TO APPROACH CHARACTER CREATION IN A MUSICAL

In the Fall of 2021, I was cast in a *Shrek the Musical* production that performed in Spring 2022. The production was produced by the University of Central Florida's Theatre Department as a part of the annual UCF (University of Central Florida) Celebrates the Arts, which performed at the Dr Phillips Performing Arts Center. I was cast as Mama Ogre (which is the mother of Shrek that is seen in the beginning of the play) and Humpty Dumpty in the production. Both characters had humanistic qualities but were not actually humans. I will be focusing on the process that I utilized in building the character of Humpty Dumpty throughout this chapter.

This process is unique in form when creating a character because it is a musical, so application of character does not just end with scenes that have dialogue, but also applying principles to the music and the choreography that are part of the production. The fairytale creatures in *Shrek* are all unique and come from many different stories and nursery rhymes. Humpty Dumpty is a character that is from an English nursery rhyme that talks about a guy sitting on wall and then having a great fall, but no matter what they did, they could not put him back to the way he was prior to the fall. Humpty Dumpty is usually depicted as an anthropomorphic egg.

When we first started the rehearsal process, I utilized the process I created to help propel me forwards. When we were in the rehearsal space, one of the studios in the School of Performing Arts Theatre Building, I would usually move towards the back of the room, away from the mirrors, to find a space for warming up. Utilizing the "Finding A Safe Space" exercise allowed me to register the space that I was in and determine where would be the most practical

spot to take care of myself through the warmup process. At the beginning of the rehearsal process, I would migrate to the back room away from the mirrors. I had to ask myself, why was I not going near the mirrors? This question led to the discovery that when I warm up in front of mirrors, I tend to judge myself throughout the process. To affectively warm up the body, I needed to be focused on the actual warmup and not try to adjust the way I looked in the mirror while warming up. This discovery led me to the realization that without proper focus and presence in the room, the warmup may not be as effective. I needed to connect my mind and body together to determine where I would feel safe so that I could start my warmup. I would not feel safe or prepared by sitting in front of a mirror. The warmup process for me is a therapeutic experience because it allows me to unwind from the day and to focus on the show that I am working on and leave everything else at the door.

The rehearsal process for *Shrek* was interesting because, I utilized this exercise at the beginning of rehearsals, and when we were in performances, but mid-way through the rehearsal process, our vocal coach for the production developed an ensemble warmup that the graduate students were tasked with leading, intermittently. The other graduate students that were in the cast with me would swap in and out during each rehearsal and performance so that we all got the opportunity to lead those ensemble warmups. I noticed that when I first utilized the “Finding A Safe Space” exercise when I would warmup on my own, and then when I returned to it later in the process, it was similar but different. The similarities between the beginning of the process and the end of the process were that I tended to move as far away from the mirrors in the room as I could. This discovery led me to realize I feel safest when I cannot judge myself. I tend to work better when I am focused on the actions at hand, and watching myself only causes insecurities

and doubts. I wanted to put myself in a position to create the most optimum experience when warming up.

Following the “Finding A Safe Space” exercise, I would go through the process of doing the “Stream of Consciousness warmup.” I would utilize this exercise to find focus and acknowledge any thoughts that were not imperative to a beneficial rehearsal process, and not scold myself from having them, but shift the focus from my subconscious thoughts that were not related to the rehearsal process. I would shift my focus by changing the physical action that I was doing each time that a new thought would pop into my head. The physical action was linked to my mental state. If I were feeling tired, I would make sure the exercise that I did benefit the current state I was in. The practice of this exercise was beneficial because it allowed me to connect my thoughts to my actions, thus bridging the psychological and the physical portions of the work. For example, towards the beginning of the rehearsal process, I would walk into the room, find the space to warm-up, and begin doing some dynamic stretches. Dynamic stretches have some physical movement associated with them. Considering *Shrek* is filled with choreography and the performance location was large, I decided to start by placing my legs out and stretching my arms, reaching my fingertips towards my toes, I did this on both of my legs, so that I could get an even stretch. While I was doing this, I started to think about my exhaustion level, and I had no idea how I would get through the rehearsal. This thought was not beneficial to me then, so I acknowledged it and let it go. I moved my body into a different position so that I could continue to stretch my legs. I decided to do lunges that would shift from my back leg being off the floor and then switch to the knee being on the floor to vary the degree of stretching that was happening in my legs. I would switch between both legs. The lunging movement allowed

me to utilize different muscles but not physically exert myself beyond the energy level that I had. Another thought started to pop into my head when I remained in the lunging position. I was thinking about the lyrics for the beginning of the show, and while this would be beneficial to me, I wanted to stay focused on the present action and not get ahead of myself. Something that the “Stream of Consciousness warm up” taught me is that I tend to get ahead of myself and let my mind race into what I need to do following the present thing I am doing, which leads to a lack of focus and feeling of needing to rush. I do not find the feeling of being behind beneficial in a warmup, as I will condense the warmup period if I feel the need to rush. If I condensed the warmup period, I may not get fully warm during the rehearsal period which could lead to injury. If I jump too far ahead of what I am doing, I tend to doubt myself and to look at my scenes as a task to do, as opposed to a moment to be present in. The “Stream of Consciousness warmup” allowed me the opportunity to check in with myself and make sure that I was mentally present and focused on the needed physical actions of the body to help support the stamina needed for the rehearsal ahead of me. If I plan too much of the warmup, it will not give me the ability to remain present and focus on what exactly might be going on in my mind and body. Focusing on the “Stream of Consciousness” and how that can impact my train of thought benefits my body throughout the rehearsal and performance process. Connecting the mind to the body allows me to take care of myself so I am the most prepared for the rehearsal and work that lies ahead of me.

The next exercise in the method is the “Open/Close” exercise. The “Open/Close” exercise is supposed to aid the actor in awakening of the physical body and the mind. The actor should start by opening their arms wide and then conversely their legs in a standing position. The actor should utilize this as a moment to stretch their body and allow the mind to connect to the

body. While the muscles are being awakened, this is a chance for the actor to open their mind to the possibilities ahead, regarding the choices they can make as their character. The actors can also open themselves up to the opportunity to be open and vulnerable with those that they are rehearsing or performing with. I utilized this exercise to open myself up so that my mind and body were connected, and I was open to receiving anything outside of myself when onstage with other actors. This exercise allows for the mind and the body to open in conjunction prior to the start of a rehearsal and performance and allows the actor the opportunity to have autonomy over the choice of openness. Following the “Open” portion of the exercise is the “Close” portion. When the actor moves from open to close, they are going in the opposite direction. The actor will cross their arms then slowly go down to the floor by kneeling first and then bending over to turn into a ball. This motion should allow for muscle contraction but should also evoke the feeling of isolation and closure. The connection between the mind and body is made clear throughout this exercise because both actions physicalize the choices for how an actor should approach the rehearsal or performance process. The actor came in open minded and feel supported by their instrument and in turn support others, or they can close themselves off and lack connection. This exercise benefited my process because it allowed me to remain open to the other actors around me and challenged me to remain open to all possibilities that are available on stage for me as an actor. This exercise allowed me to find awareness in the amount of tension I hold in my body prior to a rehearsal or performance. Every day we have an opportunity to come new to the work, and this exercise can set the mood physically and psychologically for the work ahead.

Following the “Open/Close” exercise is “Mold, Float, Fly, Radiate” exercise. I used this exercise throughout the rehearsal process when I felt lost or confused about how I should

approach my character's movements and the effort that would be needed to approach my character most effectively throughout a rehearsal or performance. I would walk through the exercise first focused on me and my body, and then try to think about how my character might approach these exercises. Before approaching from the character's perspective, it is best to free up the body of the actor so that they can fine tune their instrument to be able to discover how the character they are playing might approach doing these tasks. The actor must vary the way that they approach the "Mold, Float, Fly, and Radiate" exercises. How would the character move through space to fulfill these tasks? Are there any obstacles that may stop the character from being able to do the tasks? The character that I was building was Humpty Dumpty. Humpty Dumpty would try to move through space with copious amounts of force, but there would be a tentativeness about the character. As previously stated, Humpty Dumpty was put back together again, but did not exist the same as before the great fall that made the character famous. First, I walked through "Mold" portion of the exercise, which has some physical tension in the body. The actor is to try and mold the air around them. I used my hands first to try and mold the air, which was then followed by my arms. This movement turned into an action like I was almost pushing a large box. My imagination started to run wild, and I pictured myself molding a slime like substance together. There was a sense of desperation that followed this action, and I started to use my back to try and mold the slime like substance. Throughout the exercise, I had full body engagement that allowed me to remain engaged in the action I was doing. This exercise allows for more levels of tension in the body to be present but challenges the actor to not allow the tension to have a strong hold on the actor. The exercise creates an opportunity for the energy used to complete the action to become focused and sustained.

After completing the “Mold” portion of the exercise I then moved onto the “Float” portion. I love to tie the actions in this exercise sequence to an image, so I imagined I was floating in the ocean, and I have the waves moving all around me. A wonderful way to utilize the “Float” portion of the exercise is to explore the opposites that exist within the action of float. The “Mold” exercise had a decent amount of tension present in the body. The float exercise can be done in two diverse ways. If you imagine you are floating among the waves, there are two ways you can do this. You can choose to go with the water's current or move in opposition to it. Playing the opposites allows the actor to explore the variety of movement and psychological impact that “Float” could have on them. For example, I first moved in opposition against the waves that I was imagining, to help engage the psychological and physical parts of the body into the action of floating. When moving in opposition, there was a larger amount of tension. The tension that was felt was still less overall physical tension than the tension that existed in the “Mold” exercise, but it was not completely tensionless. I moved my body in several ways, starting with my legs and then up through the torso to my arms. I used my imagination to simulate that I was walking deeper into the ocean to help aid the process of floating but using the idea of opposition in the floating. Following exploration of the opposition, I decided to try moving with the imaginary waves that I created in my head. Moving with the imaginary waves to feel the sensation of floating challenged my current psychological standing. In contrast, there was a decent amount of effort that I had used to move through the waves. The initial tension was high, but when moving with the waves there was a feeling of relaxation, a moment of relief. The floating movement with the waves was an intentional choice. This exploration allowed for my psychological response to change throughout the exercise. I did not feel like I was working, but

allowing myself to exist in the moment and respond to what was around me without trying to present what was happening to me.

Following the “Float” portion of the sequence is the “Fly” portion. The actors are supposed to imagine themselves flying through space as if gravity were not an obstacle for them. The mental image that I always got when approaching this exercise was that I was like Peter Pan flying through London, or a bird flying through the sky. Both images in my head helped me utilize my imagination and start moving around the room as if gravity were not an obstacle for me. I felt the true freedom of flying through my body. Flying felt like I had no tension holding me back. The psychological component of the exercise allowed me to imagine what it would feel like to fly. My body was utilizing a variety of muscles to do this action, but the overwhelming feeling of freedom caused me not to focus on the physical movements but the psychological feeling that accompanied the action. This exercise allowed for the release of anything that was inhibiting me both physically and psychologically.

Finally, following the “Fly” portion of the sequence was the “Radiate” portion. “Radiate” does not have to be accompanied by movement necessarily, meaning that the action itself can exist while the actor is static. The “Radiate” portion of the exercise should begin with the actor finding a spot to stand and imagining that they are sending rays of light out of their body. The static portion of the exercise should follow a set of movements. The act of radiating can happen while moving, but the action should end with a static position. The movement coming to a stop should allow for the actor to take a moment to acknowledge the act of radiation, and how that feels externally and internally. When I utilized the radiation exercise, I would imagine small beams of light that would grow the more I moved through space. The small beams of light that I

imagined started in the center of my chest and in the palms of my hands. The imaginary light that I had pictured would get brighter as I was moving but return to the small amount of light that I initially started with. The image of light coming from my body allowed me to acknowledge that the act of radiating was not just driven by physical motion but was an integral part of storytelling. The exercise should be utilized to remind the actors of the importance of presence and taking up space. How does that impact the story that they are telling? How does the act of radiating impact those around them? These are questions that the actor should ponder when exploring this exercise, because they will help to bridge the importance of the psychophysical connection that should be utilized when acting on stage.

After allowing my own physical body to be affected by the exercises, I superimposed the character of Humpty Dumpty, and how these actions would impact the character. Humpty Dumpty is a larger creature, that has a history with falls, and was not the same from the fall that he encountered. The history of this beloved character provided initial context to the choices that I made throughout this exploration.

The sequence starts with “Mold,” so I began to think of ways that Humpty Dumpty could mold the air around him. How would an egg-like being encounter something that they would like to mold? The first instinct discovered by this exercise was that the level of tension used to complete the action would be different than that of mine. I took the same image of molding a mass of slimy goo and approached it from the perspective of Humpty Dumpty. Humpty Dumpty did not press as hard or use as much force when trying to do this action. The character is a large egg. Eggs are notoriously brittle, and contextualizing this idea through physical action took me in the opposite direction of how I, as an actor, might approach the same exercise. The mold portion

of the sequence allowed me to delve deeper into the physical capabilities of this character, and inspired some of the physical choices that I made while building this character.

Following the “Mold” portion of the sequence was the floating portion. I once again decided to explore the concept of opposites that exist within the physical action of floating. Due to the strength of the image of water, I decided to utilize the image of floating once again amongst the waves in the ocean. Initially, I started moving in opposition of the water that I imagined, and thought how would Humpty Dumpty approach floating while moving in opposition of the waves that surrounded him? My instincts led me to believe that there would be a tentativeness about him because he takes up a lot of space, but usually if you are floating in water, you utilize your hands and legs. My initial vision of Humpty Dumpty was that the majority of his body was egg shape, and then he had small hands and feet that accompanied the larger torso. The smaller appendages would make it difficult to move in opposition, meaning that there would be an extreme amount of tension due to the amount of effort that would need to exist for Humpty Dumpty to affectively move through the space when moving in opposition to the waves that were surrounding him. This discovery led me to a physical notion that Humpty Dumpty may struggle with balance due to the nature of his body shape, which would inform how he could have potentially fallen. To follow this, I did the opposite. I decided to see how exactly floating amongst the waves and going in the direction of the floating would impact the physical and psychological nature of Humpty Dumpty. When applying this idea, there seemed overall to be less tension because there was less physical effort associated with the action at hand. The less effort, the calmer the demeanor. The physical action shifting directly impacted the psychological

response to the exercise. Humpty Dumpty would be swept away by the imaginary waves, and there would still be a sense of tension, but less effort that accompanied the tension.

Following the “Float” portion of the sequence was the “Fly” portion. As previously stated, I would imagine that I was flying just like Peter Pan to help sharpen the image of the action in my head. When approaching the action through the lenses of Humpty Dumpty, I noticed that there was a sense of ease due to the initial shape of Humpty Dumpty and how utilizing the shape to my benefit through the action caused less tension due to lack of concern for effort needed to properly do the physical action. The flying exercise utilizes the psychological process to benefit the physical process. We are acutely aware that there is a level of effort needed to make it feel like you are flying around the room, but the use of imagination aids the actor in feeling free and uninhibited throughout this portion of the exercise.

Following the “Fly” portion of the exercise is the “Radiate” portion. As previously stated, the Radiate exercise should have physical movements that end with static moments. The idea behind the exercise is that the actor will be able to connect and acknowledge the space that they take up and how that may impact their surroundings. The actor is supposed to make physical movements and imagine that they are shooting rays of light out of their body, and then come to a static stance. When approaching this portion of the exercise, I moved through the space, walking and trying to balance. The pattern that I was starting to notice was built upon the idea of how balance impacted the character of Humpty Dumpty throughout day-to-day life. This exercise was vital to my process for the creation of Humpty Dumpty, because while Humpty Dumpty was starting to develop into a clumsy character, this exercise allowed me the space to play with the moments where Humpty Dumpty feels powerful and confident in *Shrek the Musical*. I used the

discoveries that were made through utilization of this exercise to motivate the moments where Humpty Dumpty felt confident. One of the examples of this was during the song “Freak Flag,” where Humpty Dumpty had a solo. Humpty Dumpty sang to the other fairytale creatures talking about the individual things that make each of them special. This moment was a claim to the power each of the fairytale creatures had, and that their specialness was what made them powerful. The physical implications of being grounded in the stance of Humpty Dumpty, which was not seen prior to this moment, led to an outward feeling of confidence.

Following the “Mold, Float, Fly, Radiate” exercise, was the use of the “Given Circumstances.” The “Given Circumstances” are provided by the playwright. The “Given Circumstances” provides the context of narrative of the character from the beginning, middle, and end of the play. The “Given Circumstances” provides the answers to the questions of who, when, why, where, and how? The answers to these questions help provide information for the characters and their response to what is going on inside the world of the play.

In *Shrek the Musical*, the first thing that happens is that Humpty Dumpty and the rest of the fairytale creatures get thrown off of their land by Lord Farquaad and relocated to Shrek’s swamp. Humpty Dumpty and the rest of the fairytale creatures are angered by this misfortune and lament by singing the song, “Story of My Life.” The fairytale creatures come to realize that they were dumped in the swamp of an ogre. The fairytale creatures meet Shrek and are afraid of him. Shrek wants them off his land. The fairytale creatures tell Shrek they do not want to be there either, so they beg Shrek to tell Farquaad to put them back where they came from by singing the “Story of My Life Reprise.” Shrek sets off on his quest to tell off Farquaad and gets roped into completing a quest to save a princess for Lord Farquaad. Lord Farquaad tells Shrek

that if he completes the quest, that he can have his swamp back. Shrek completes the quest and Lord Farquaad decides to send the fairytale creatures to a landfill. The fairytale creatures are furious by this and decide to go stand up to Farquaad themselves because they refuse to be pushed around any longer. The information broken down provides context for the entire story from the perspective of Humpty Dumpty, and provides context for the actor and their specific scenes that they are in. The information that is happening on stage even if the actor is not necessarily in the scenes is still crucial to creating a fully realized character because the actor must know the entirety of the story to best inform the actions and responses of their character. The outside stimulus of the action should fuel the development of the character from beginning to end.

I utilized “Magic If” to help inform some of the choices that I made as Humpty Dumpty. The “Magic If” is an exercise in which the actors put themselves in the position of the character. The actor should take the circumstances that the character is in and see what their response would be and play off those initial impulses. This exercise can be used throughout a rehearsal period to help inform your character's choices. I utilized the “Magic If” to help me to better grasp the emotional life of the character and bridge the emotional life to the physical life of the character. The “Magic If” can help the actor find specific answers to questions that may be unanswered through the technique using play and their imagination. When approaching the character of Humpty Dumpty, I first had to try and figure out the life of the character before the action that was presented in *Shrek the Musical*.

What I knew about Humpty Dumpty was that he sat on a wall and had a great fall, which left him permanently affected. I had to ask myself the question, if I were Humpty Dumpty and I had a life

altering fall, how would that impact me? My initial response is that I would become more cautious. When terrible things happen, they give us the opportunity to approach life from a new perspective. If I knew the dangers of a fall, then I would be extra cautious to avoid having to go through that experience again. This discovery led me to decipher how I would tell that part of the story using my body.

The major incident that directly impacted Humpty Dumpty in the context of the story of *Shrek the Musical*, was that he was relocated from his home, due to being different. If I were Humpty Dumpty, and I was relocated from my home to a swamp, how would I feel about the situation? If I were relocated from the comfort of my home to a swamp, I would be confused and afraid. The first thing I would do is figure out a way to get myself off the swamp and back into my home. Following the relocation, Humpty Dumpty meets Shrek the ogre. Shrek is angry because Humpty Dumpty and all the other fairytale creatures have landed on his swamp. Shrek wants them to get out of his swamp and leave him alone. What would I do if I met a scary ogre that wanted me out of his swamp? I would beg for his help and make him realize that we both want the same thing, and that if we work together, we can both get what we want. As the musical progresses, the fairytale creatures again get relocated to a landfill because of Shrek coming back to his swamp after completing his quest to save the Princess. If I were Humpty Dumpty, what would I do if I were relocated for a second time? My first emotional response would be anger. For the fairytale creatures to be relocated once is one thing, but a second time is where I would draw the line. If I were relocating to a worse location, I would want to fight back as it is completely unfair. I would want to rally a group together to go up against what is causing us to be relocated from our homes. All the discoveries made from the use of the “Magic If” fueled the

emotional response to the physical actions being done against my character. The “Magic If” benefited me by informing me of the psychological connection behind the physical actions and information that was presented throughout the script. The instincts and impulses that were caused by asking the questions as if I were the character really helped to fuel the emotional responses throughout the musical.

I utilized the “Skin of the Character” exercise throughout my exploration of developing the character of Humpty Dumpty. The nursery rhyme that features this character references that Humpty Dumpty fell off a wall. As I approached this character, I decided to focus on how my body would look if I were to wear the skin of the character. The “Skin of the Character” that I imagined for Humpty Dumpty had shorter appendages and a bulbous center. The character of Humpty Dumpty being depicted as an egg led me to imagine my torso as being much larger and more pronounced than my appendages. This image in my head led me to wonder about the weight distribution throughout the body of the character. If I were to put the skin of the character over my actor body, how would I be impacted overall? I focused on the torso being bulbous and pronounced like an egg. If I had a larger torso, how would that impact my arms and legs? This question led to the discovery that Humpty Dumpty would never have his arms at his sides, as it would be physically impossible due to his round stature. How would the round stature impact the movement and capabilities of the legs?

Due to the structure of the “Skin of the Character” this would cause a sense of unbalance, because if I had a bulbous center, I would not even be able to see my legs. The skin of the character exercise made me continue to think about its physical qualities. The next portion of the exercise is to bridge the physicality's with the psychological component of the character When

thinking about how the psyche would be impacted by a traumatic event like a life altering fall, I decided to think about the lasting psychological impacts that a fall would have on a human. Humpty Dumpty is not human, but has humanistic qualities, and I decided to work off said qualities. Due to the fall being a large part of the character's background, I decided to use the background context of the character to inform the choice of keep my arms out to the side, not only because the arms of the character could not actually comfortably rest against the torso of the body, but because they were used as means of protection to keep Humpty Dumpty from once again falling over. How could I make the use of the arms more specific and unique to that of the character and their background? I decided to play with how the idea of safety would look in the hands. If the hands were too relaxed on the body of the character, this would not support the idea that Humpty Dumpty was always subconsciously afraid of sustaining a life altering fall again. The next instinct that I had was to put both my arms to my sides and flex my hands. The flexed hands became a staple part of how Humpty Dumpty moved through space, as if Humpty Dumpty were always walking on a tightrope. This action led to a psychological response of concern and uneasiness that existed in the character of Humpty Dumpty. The character never remained in a state of concern and uneasiness. Humpty Dumpty would find brightness and bounce in moments of joy and excitement, which contrasted with the concerned attitude that Humpty Dumpty started with. The arms were the appendages that could create the most semblance of safety for humpty Dumpty. The use of specificity in the arms still allowed for freedom throughout my body and a very stylized approach to the character of Humpty Dumpty. The "Skin of the Character" exercise was only furthered by that of the "Imaginary Center" exercise.

I used the “Imaginary center” exercise to help determine what area of the body Humpty Dumpty led based on the information that I had about the character. I initially used the “Skin of the Character” exercise to work with more generalized physical movement, and then fine-tuned the movement of the character using the “Imaginary center.” The exercise states that you should use the imaginary center to inform movement of the body through effective storytelling. I started by focusing on the imaginary center existing in my chest. I started to walk around, first utilizing my body as an actor to see how I would be impacted by allowing my imaginary center in my chest to impact me physically and psychologically. This action made me feel an elevated level of confidence. I felt like I was proudly walking around the room with no fear. This psychological state did not match that of the character of Humpty Dumpty that I had been creating. I still decided to try utilizing the “Skin of the Character” exercise and implement the “Imaginary Center” as my chest with the physical embodiment of the character. As I suspected, this choice felt like I was working in opposition to myself. Where could I move my “Imaginary Center” to help support the physical story I was telling using the “Skin of the Character” exercise? This question led to me playing with the location of the “Imaginary Center.” I first decided to put my “Imaginary Center” in my head and see how that impacted Humpty Dumpty. The use of the “Imaginary Center” in the head caused chaos in the body and created a large level of imbalance. The structure of the body being led by the head became so much effort that it felt like I could not properly tell the story of Humpty Dumpty who was traumatized by his fall. Using the head to lead the body and send energy out of after falling does not support the idea of trying to remain balanced and unharmed. I decided to move the “Imaginary Center” down into my stomach. I started to walk around employing the “Skin of the Character” while simultaneously moving from

the “Imaginary Center.” When I moved from my stomach, it felt like there was a strong psychical and psychological connection that supported the choice.

The story of Humpty Dumpty felt like it could be told through my physical embodiment. The psychological impact of leading from the stomach allowed for there to be more focus on how to utilize the arms to maintain control of balance. With the body moving through space utilizing the “Imaginary Center” of the stomach as my driving force, the arms started to move and to counterbalance the suspected weight of the body. I could not allow the counterbalance to overtake the body where I as the actor was not in full control of my instrument, but I had to make modifications to allow the idea of counterbalance to support the character's psychological and physical history that I was trying to communicate to the audience. Through this process, I dissected how the legs would be impacted by this movement. This led me to realize, If I have been moving through space with a heavy center, then my legs must be strong since I was able to walk around and keep the bulbous egg like torso of the body upright. This physical choice is supported by the psychological state of Humpty Dumpty who at all costs was trying to never fall again. The legs had to have strength due to the nature of the torso that they were holding up.

For health and safety, I early on determined that Humpty Dumpty would walk upright to better honor and complete the choreography that was required of the actors in the show. This exercise allowed me to be more in tune with my body and use it to physically and psychologically support the character that I had been building throughout the rehearsal process. The discoveries made during this exercise created healthy choices so that I as an actor could perform this role repeatedly without putting any physical strain on my body that could potentially lead to danger or injury.

Finally, I utilized the concept of “Entirety” that was one of the of the four principles outlined by Michael Chekhov in Chapter 4. The actor takes each individual scene, from start to finish, and rehearses it as if the scene were the entire story for their character. Following the rehearsal process of each individual scene, they examine how the scenes tie together in the overall plot of the play or musical they are performing in and if the choices made in those individual scenes support the overall structure of the character and the arc of the character in that storyline. I utilized this as an exercise when I was learning my lines and trying to connect all the scenes that feature Humpty Dumpty throughout *Shrek the Musical*.

The first time we see the fairytale creatures, they are brought to Shrek’s swamp by the orders of Lord Farquaad. The fairytale creatures are all singing the song “Story of My Life,” where each individual fairytale creature mentions a piece of their story to provide the audience with context of who they are. After the song ends, the fairytale creatures meet Shrek for the first time. The fairytale creatures fear Shrek because he is a big mean ogre. Shrek is so frustrated by this because the land does not belong to Lord Farquaad. The Fairytale creatures tell Shrek that they think he is the only one that could stand up to Farquaad. They all beg him to help them while singing the song, “Story of My Life Reprise,” and he says that he will go tell Farquaad to get them off his land. They all celebrate this as a victory. When I was running through the scene at home, I decided to use the beginning of “Story of My Life” as the beginning of the scene, and the end of the “Story of My Life Reprise” as the end of the scene. The choice to make Humpty Dumpty concerned about having another life altering fall worked well in conjunction with the choreography of the song “Story of My Life.” The guards under the order of Lord Farquaad were moving the fairytale creatures to their designated spots on the swamp and as Humpty Dumpty’s

name got called the guard pushed Humpty Dumpty forward with his sword, causing Humpty Dumpty to move forwards trying to catch balance. One of the internal goals that I implemented for Humpty Dumpty was that he was determined to never have a fall like his infamous fall ever again. I walked through this scene implementing the different psychological and physical components of Humpty Dumpty that I had crafted using these different choices throughout my rehearsal of the scene, and examined if the choices that I made supported the story at this point. After running through this scene as if it were its own entirety, I decided to approach the next scene that featured Humpty Dumpty. The next scene that featured Humpty Dumpty was mid-way through Act two.

There was a lot of information presented throughout the first act of the musical, and about half of the second act before the fairytale creatures were again featured. The next scene that featured the fairytale creatures was Act 2 Scene 7, where all of them were evicted from the swamp and moved onto a landfill they were traveling to. The Gingerbread Man said that the fairytale creatures should stand up to Farquaad as they should not be treated like this. The fairytale creatures then sang their anthem “Freak Flag” where they reclaimed their differences that got them thrown out of Duloc, as the things that made them special. The fairytale creatures then set off for Duloc. The “Entirety” exercise was super beneficial throughout the rehearsal process, because while time had passed throughout the plotline of *Shrek*, the fairytale creatures were picking up right where they left off. In “Story of My Life,” the fairytale creatures were aggravated by the situation, and this same energy was revisited during the scene leading up to “Freak Flag.” The fairytale creatures decided that they would stand up to Farquaad as a collective because their differences are not a terrible thing even though Farquaad made them feel

like they were. I utilized the “Entirety” exercise as I rehearsed the scene that led up to “Freak Flag” as an entirety and focused on the tonal shift of Humpty Dumpty. Humpty Dumpty was completely affected by the “Given Circumstances” of this scene. Humpty Dumpty was inspired by the words of the Gingerbread Man that he later sang a solo that reminded each of the fairytale creatures that their differences are what made them strong. The physical depiction of Humpty Dumpty throughout the choreography and during the solo line represented the emotional state of the character. The throughline of the journey of Humpty Dumpty was present even if there was a significant passage of time from the first time you saw him on stage until the song, “Freak Flag.”

The final scene that I utilized the “Entirety” exercise was the scene where the fairytale creatures crashed the wedding of Lord Farquaad and Fiona. The focus regarding Humpty Dumpty was the exposing of Lord Farquaad for who he truly is. The fairytale creatures bring out Lord Farquaad's father who is one of the seven dwarves, to help remind Farquaad of who he truly is. During this exchange, Humpty Dumpty calls Lord Farquaad a “loser,” not to make fun of him for being different but for forgetting that he was creating outcasts of people who were just like him. Lord Farquaad was still delusional and tried to crown himself king until stopped by the dragon. Shrek and Fiona share their final kiss, and everyone celebrates with joy while singing the “Finale,” which harks back to “Freak Flag,” which the fairytale creatures previously sang.

When going through this scene, I first approached it as if there were no story prior to it, focusing on the action at hand. The main action at hand was exposing a fraud, and Humpty Dumpty’s line that was said in the scene was “Loser,” which I initially thought he was calling Farquaad a loser, in the same way that Farquaad called them “freaks” as if it were a derogatory term. This discovery made me realize that was not the intention behind the line, so I decided to

try working through the scene again but applying all the prior context from the entirety of the musical, which then led to the discovery that Humpty Dumpty was not trying to belittle Farquaad in the same way Farquaad had belittled the fairytale creatures. This proclamation was made to serve as a reminder and not as a slanderous or hateful comment. The “Entirety” exercise helped me to look at all the individual moments that existed in each moment that Humpty Dumpty was on stage, and how they tied into the entirety of the show. The “Entirety” exercise is extremely beneficial when working on a musical, because it helps to break down the show and examine the rising and falling action throughout each individual scene, which leads to specificity in choices and opportunity for the actor to observe if their choices just serve the specific scene that they are in, or if they serve the entire story.

Throughout the chapter, I reflected on my use of the acting process I developed and how it benefits dynamic and unique character creation and development through practice as research during my experience in *Shrek the Musical*. The process I created and utilized allowed me to dive deeper into the character of Humpty Dumpty to create a fully realized and dynamic character that could be unique yet still serve the narrative of the story.

CONCLUSION:

The utilization of the exercises from Michael Chekhov, Jerzy Grotowski, and Konstantin Stanislavski aids the actor in their creative process when trying to build a unique and creative character. The essence of truth being ignited by action is the foundation of building a unique and dynamic character. The utilization of my actor's process was successful for me because it aided me in the process of making specific choices that were not only supported by the actions and impulses of my character scene to scene, but also in support of the entire narrative that I was a part of. These actions and impulses were driven by physical and psychological choices, and the method that I developed created a structure of how to bridge them together. The tool itself was built with the intention that it could be used as a pathway to the art of character creation using exercises and principles that are focused in supporting the work of anyone in any genre of theater performance. Throughout my work, I noticed a missing component in the development process of creating a character, which is the voice. The physical structure of the body works in tandem with the voice; however, there needs to be more focus on supporting the vocal component of building a character and how these exercises impact the voice. The voice and how it is utilized can benefit the actor in the creation of unique and dynamic character building. This is something I would like to further investigate in the future. The goal was to create a process that could be utilized by professional actors and in educational settings. I have found personal success and I plan to continue to utilize this on an individual level in my work and to use it as a tool in the classroom for any future students.

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