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KEEPING THE BALL ALIVE:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MARRIAGE BETWEEN SPORTS AND ACTING

by

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B.A. University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2019

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

This thesis examines the link between sports and theatre from the actor's perspective and concludes that these two practices should be used together to achieve optimal performance. Using context provided by great physical theatre practitioners such as Jacques LeCoq, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Rudolf Von Laban, the candidate used his past experience as a gymnast and a soccer player, and the teachings of Timothy Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis*, to craft a rehearsal and performance regimen for Theatre UCF's production of Paula Vogel's *Indecent*. This regimen included an experiment where he alternated days in which he swam to days in which he did yoga flow, in order to analyze his physical awareness and mental focus on stage every night while using some of Laban's effort actions; the result being that yoga benefitted his process more.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	V
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: PRACTITIONERS.....	2
Jacques LeCoq	2
Jeu, complicité et disponibilité.....	5
Ecllosion.....	6
Suiting the energy to the action	7
Personal examples.....	8
Vsevolod Meyerhold.....	10
Biomechanics	11
Rudolf Von Laban	14
Playing with the efforts.....	15
The Inner Game of Tennis	17
CHAPTER TWO: THE WOLVES	26
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	30
The initial idea	30
The new question.....	31
Parameters.....	32
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	34
Preparing the different characters for Indecent.....	34
Using sports	37
The benefits of swimming and yoga	37
The benefits of growing up as an athlete	37
The connection with Meyerhold	40
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	43
APPENDIX	46
Selected Journal	47
REFERENCES.....	59

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Eight Efforts.....	15
Table 2: The Inner Game way of learning.....	21
Table 3: Cold shower vs warm shower.....	56

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to popular belief, growing up in a city like Florence, in a country like Italy, did not make for an artistic upbringing in the least. Instead, it made for one heavily involved in sports, from a young age, all the way to adulthood, both playing and watching. As the will to become an actor became stronger and stronger through the move to the United States, the connection between sports and the Theatre became more and more apparent. A formative teaching experience in grad school kickstarted an explosion of ideas that this thesis will explore.

The connection between sports and acting is not revolutionary, but one that saw its birth between the Seine and the Volga, passing through the Swiss Alps, where masters like Jacques LeCoq, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Rudolf Von Laban exported their teachings to the rest of the world.

This thesis will examine said connection, concentrating specifically on whether previous experience in individual and team sports benefit the actor on stage, and in what way, from a kinesiological and psychological standpoint. It will also experiment with an exercise regimen as an accompanist to a rehearsal and performance schedule heavily focused on the technique of Laban's effort actions, as applied to Theatre UCF's production of *Indecent* by Paula Vogel. Chapter One will be an overview of the practitioners mentioned above, alongside a description of Timothy Gallwey's process recounted in the book *The Inner Game of Tennis*; Chapter Two will provide more context by analyzing the work done in uTheatre UCF's production of *The Wolves*; Chapter Three will delve into the methodology used to answer how sports can affect the actor's process; Chapter Four will analyze the results in detail, while Chapter Five will look at the future.

CHAPTER ONE: PRACTITIONERS

Jacques LeCoq

Jacques LeCoq, born in 1921 in Paris, was a product of his upbringing like many other theatre artists and teachers. Unlike most, however, he came to this artform from the world of sports and physical education. In fact, as a teenager, he was very keen on several sports at school, but one in particular resonated with him on a deep level: artistic gymnastics. His 1999 classic *The Moving Body* opens with a succinct explanation of the initial sparks that eventually became his pedagogy.

“At seventeen I discovered the geometry of movement through exercising on the parallel and horizontal bars at a Paris gymnastics club known as En Avant. The movement of the body through space demanded by gymnastic exercise is of a purely abstract order. In doing these physical movements I discovered extraordinary sensations which could be carried over into everyday life. On my way home in the metro, I would go over them in my mind. I would then sense all the rhythms perfectly ... I adored running, but it was the pure poetry of athletics which attracted me most: the contraction or elongation of the runners' shadows thrown by the sun slanting across the stadium when the rhythm of running sets in. This physical poetry had a powerful effect on me.” (LeCoq, 3)

This newly found passion for movement led him to attend a physical education college outside Paris that eventually allowed him to teach physical education, coach swimming and lead a rehabilitation program for people with disabilities. However, his time in college did not prove to be worthy only for the degree, but for the connections he built. It

was there that he met Jean-Marie Conty, who proved to be very influential in his life because of his ties to the theatre, and in particular, his friendship with a mentally declining but still popular Antonin Artaud and an up-and-coming Jean-Louis Barrault. It was during those years, specifically in 1939, that Artaud's seminal work *The Theatre and its Double* was published. In the text, he describes the actor as a "heart athlete". This working and social relationship affected acting forever through the lens of breath. In fact, Artaud first found the connection between the actor and the athlete, and LeCoq later developed his friend's discovery of a shared experience between action and breath, by also seeing the ideal actor as an athletic and agile individual who could effortlessly combine movement with emotion.

It is interesting to note that physical education blasted to the forefront in Europe throughout and after the two world wars, forming strong young individuals who could eventually be called to defend their country. Discipline was championed under the guise of nationalism. This was the world in which LeCoq formed his thoughts that would inevitably contrast with the demands of a devastated Europe for a rigorous physical education that was mechanical and martial. For him, movement became important for personal development and as an artistic expression. In fact, it was never about the exercises for exercising's sake; in his own words,

"Purely athletic exercises are... insufficient for actor training. I have known actors who were extremely stiff in the gym, who nevertheless moved with wonderful suppleness on stage, and others, who were very supple in training, but who were incapable of creating an illusion". (69)

According to him, an actor trained in another sport or practice is doomed because of

the repetitions practiced in a certain style, or the inclusion of specific “formal gestures”.

“... they set up physical circuits in the actor’s body, which then become very difficult to justify, especially when the actor is young. In these cases, actors only retain the outer, aesthetic form. Fencing, t’ai chi ch’uan and horse-riding might perhaps contribute something extra. But they can never replace the true physical education of the body of an actor who lives in the world of illusion.” (69)

This anti-aesthetic sentiment can seem surprising because of his upbringing in artistic gymnastics, a sport whose name suggests its love of form and grace; in reality, however, it’s founded in fact when looking at athletes who have aged and do not practice their sport anymore. The body may change, but the impact of repetition is everlasting. According to Anne-Marie O’Connor, a podiatrist who has worked with professional soccer players in England,

"Footballers generally have quite bowed legs. If you stand on one leg and kick with the other, your weight is always going to be on the outside [of the leg], so over a period of time the bones will evolve into that shape. Wingers especially tend to be quite bandy-legged because they do a lot of crossing the ball inwards. If you have straight legs, you can't put spin on the ball because you can't whip round as much, so it's actually advantageous for them to have more bandy legs. Repeatedly placing all your weight on your standing foot when you kick the ball can even have an impact on the relative lengths of your legs. For normal people whose legs are different lengths, the disparity tends to be no higher than 4 millimeters. For footballers the difference is commonly around 6 millimeters." (Williams)

Gymnasts tend to be hunchbacked because creating that shape with the thoracic and

cervical vertebrae is a fundamental aspect of their sport's form. Mark Reifkind, a former national level gymnast, and current Olympic trainer states that

“Gymnastics focuses on hollow chests, the forward head position, tucked hips and a flexed lumbar spine. This is especially problematic with young athletes who do ONLY gymnastics training and do so during the crucial developmental years from puberty through the end of their growth cycle. It is very easy to get "stuck" in that posture. And that can have serious side effects for life.” (Reifkind)

These physical habits could get in the way not only of character creation, but of the search for the neutral mask, a prime LeCoq concept.

Jeu, complicité et disponibilité

More than anything, LeCoq doomed formalized athletic training because it lacked the concept of “play”. When sports training becomes “serious” around the early pubescent age, coaches and clubs tend to prioritize the individual or team's betterment on a competitive level, rather than allowing them to merely play and have fun like in the early years. Especially during the aftermath of WWII and subsequent Cold War, sports were a demonstration of a people's will to survive and dominate any field. This vision tends to dampen the neurological effects of sports practice in the individual's mind, making it a job, or hassle, rather than a pleasure. However, for LeCoq, the work of the actor and the athlete need to be enjoyable to both the performer and the spectator. The performer specifically learns throughout LeCoq's process three qualities: *jeu*, *complicité* and *disponibilité* (play, availability and openness), which lead movement study from the simple acquisition of a skill set to something more profound: the acquisition of principles that were universal and could unify differing perceptions and engagements with life and the world that surrounds us.

“Sport, movement training and indeed even theatre itself are ... about an athletic, playful and creative engagement with space, weight and direction. They deal with the essential movement efforts of pushing and pulling, of balance and imbalance. It is in this respect that sport, for Lecoq, provides a vital basis for understanding how the body works in space and how it expresses itself, and for understanding how the training of the actor can best be achieved.” (Evans, 168)

Eclosion

LeCoq analyzed human movement based on the principles of undulation and eclosion. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word *eclosion* as “of an insect: the act of emerging from a pupal case or hatching from the egg,” which is a beautiful connection to Mother Nature. It was first used in 1889 by entomologists and biologists, and a century later it would be used in application of a neutral mask to explore the limits of the actor’s body. Eclosion starts from the center of the body, where the transversus abdominus lies, the deepest muscle in the abdomen, that is responsible for supporting the lower back, supporting lumbopelvic movement, and in acting, reaching a target vocally without straining the vocal folds. It starts from a crouched position and finishes upright with the arms extended over the head, consisting in movement without any interruptions or inconsistencies. The objective is to go from starting position to ending position with each part of the body following the same rhythm. The arms and legs are supposed to extend at the exact same time, attempting to use the least amount of muscularity possible in order to convey neutrality, a concept that is impossible to reach because of every single body’s journey through time and experiences. The difficulty lies in the attention the mind gives to the various parts of the body; it is supposed to move in unison, creating a global mind,

rather than a compartmentalized one. Unfortunately for Western culture, we have perfected the idea of separating our parts of the body, instead of seeing the whole organism as one. Eclosion is a practice that helps achieve that goal, and is done in sequence, up and down. What it creates is a relationship between action and energy.

Suiting the energy to the action

Shakespeare in Hamlet, Shakespeare writes: “suit the action to the word, the word to the action,” but what about suiting the *energy* to the action? Too often, actors will start low in character creation and build throughout the rehearsal process, while the successful ones will do the exact opposite: they will start large, and then find nuances to refine the intimacy of the character’s moments. What the beginning of the rehearsal process looks like is an exploration of the limits of the character, like putting broad strokes on a canvas, to find a general outline of the picture. The character ends up getting defined like Michelangelo’s sculptures: starting from a slab of marble and ending with the closest thing to perfection.

“We always begin by expanding the movement to its maximum in order to find its spatial limits, taking it to the limits of balance (i.e. just before over-balancing)” (LeCoq, 75). It is the toying with balance that ultimately helps create a riveting performance. Imbalance is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as “a condition in which two or more things are not equally or fairly divided or spread,” and from an acting standpoint can generally be physical, mental, and emotional. Physical imbalance was explored in class and constitutes the elementary idea of standing perfectly balanced in alignment, and letting the body fall in any direction. In most cases, the brain is fantastic at keeping the body upright after millions of years of evolution in order to maintain the species towards the top

of the food chain, so when letting go, a step or two faithfully come and rescue it from collapsing onto the ground. Balance is something that the brain continually searches in order to promptly respond to fight or flight situations, and when placed in moments of imbalance, it corrects the body's course immediately. Mental and emotional imbalance are often inter-connected, and they happen in specific contexts. Neuro-divergencies like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or even depression are often talked about as chemical imbalances in the brain, and they often lead people suffering from those to act out emotionally. Outside of these perpetual conditions, characters can go through mental/emotional imbalances on stage too, leading the dynamic of the play towards conflict and possible resolution. If Theatre is the exploration of conflict, then imbalance is a pivotal concept. In fact, LeCoq believed that actors must be comfortable within the bounds of balance, stretching themselves to the point of maximum expansion "and reducing the same movement to the point where it is almost imperceptible from outside." (75). It is in the exterior space of eclosion, that the actor allows themselves to reach for the moments their character is in turmoil, and it is through that experience that the audience is more susceptible to catharsis, because moments where context or dialogue provokes imbalance are common shared experiences.

Personal examples

It was during one of our Movement classes, that the concept "Suit the energy to the action" was coined; our professor had us sit in a horizontal line in front of the mirror and await our turn to juggle. When it was our turn, we would get up and juggle until we dropped the ball. Then it would move on to next person. We did this individually for a bit, then the stakes were raised because the prompt now was to do as two teams. Whenever

one person would drop the ball, the whole team had to stop as well, therefore “losing” the battle. Even though it was never put into those terms, competition was inevitable, and the “weaker” jugglers always felt worse than the better ones. Our professor, throughout the breaks, would ask us what was happening. What I saw was that many of my classmates were putting so much energy into the task because they simply did not want to fail.

However, failure is inevitable when there is a lack of practice. I too would struggle when I became too conscious of my movements or the fact that people were watching me or counting on me. Most of those times, the ball would drop; the more I felt the pressure to excel, the more I concentrated on the act of juggling, the more my arms would overcompensate in the throws, and the balls would drop. I then tried something else: thinking about something entirely different, like reciting a monologue in my brain, or simply thinking about what I was going to have for dinner. The ball would still drop. The question then naturally arose: what is the right level of effort to put into a task for maximum results? In acting, one does not want to tense up to deliver emotion or convey a message. Much less energy is needed to do that, and tension is unsustainable, especially on the stage performing eight times a week. Juggling proved to be a determining factor in the discovery of this concept. Another prime example was trying to learn a poker chip trick for my character Antoni in Shahrzad Dadgar’s MFA thesis film *Eternity Road*. He is an expert poker player and, in the film, wins flight vouchers to Las Vegas, so the idea was to convey this expertise by including chip tricks during the scene. Poker players often use them to intimidate the competition, and it would have fit my character very well. The first days that I was practicing the “up and over” trick were challenging, but once I learned, it got harder to do it either under pressure or when looking directly at my hand and the chip.

It was basically flawless when doing it in conversation or without putting too much thought into it. With more practice, I was able to seamlessly execute it, and while filming the scene, I concentrated on my inner monologue and the dynamics of the fictional game; it worked, and Antoni now clearly looks like he is comfortable at a poker table with somewhat high stakes.

Vsevolod Meyerhold

Vsevolod Meyerhold often needs no introduction in the world of Western theatre; a Russian theatre maker, he revolutionized movement on stage, specifically for the actor, and his efforts to reject Stalinist ideals in artmaking led him to be arrested by the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) and tortured between 1939 and 1940 until his inevitable execution by firing squad on February 1st 1940. His career started at Moscow Art Theatre, where he studied under Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, becoming a successful actor. However, he left in 1902 with clear ideas of innovation: he fervently advocated for Symbolism, and throughout his career kept bringing classics to life through a Commedia dell'Arte lens. It was at his own theatre, the Meyerhold Theatre, that he further developed his techniques; for the actor, he sought to shy away from American method acting, which is primarily psychological and can have terrible mental health consequences, and alongside Stanislavski, he believed the emotional state is inextricably linked to the physical state, creating a psychophysical approach. Through this, the actor can conjure up emotions through physical gestures, assuming poses, and creating movements; and the audience experiences catharsis not through the actor's mental state, which is thought to be internalized, but through the

actor's physical storytelling capability.

Meyerhold contributed to the ageless and generic question of which acting style is better: psychological, psychophysical, or physical; whether the audience needs to see the emotion on the actor's face, rather than the actor's body to be able to properly receive and react to the story; and whether an actor should be a mere marionette or is an artist equipped with agency.

Biomechanics

Biomechanics is defined by *Britannica* as "the study of biological systems, particularly their structure and function, using methods derived from mechanics, which is concerned with the effects that forces have on the motion of bodies," a fancy way of saying the way the body works, and the reason it does so. This study pertains to many fields, ranging from microscopical biology, to engineering computational tools, to continuum mechanics, to plants, and to sports. In theatre, however, it is strictly an acting technique invented by Meyerhold between 1913 and 1922 no more important or revealing than a musician's scales; an underlying technical discipline, the bread and butter of every physical performer.

"You never see a pianist practicing his scales in a concert hall. But you know the beauty of their playing is the product of thousands of hours of practice. In the same way, the physical forms of biomechanics – the études – are not to be seen on stage, but they nevertheless inform everything the actor does in front of the audience." (Pitches, 67-68)

What is interesting is the socio-political context in which Meyerhold's biomechanics blossomed: the machine age. With the advent of the First Industrial Revolution, art

immediately answered, most notably with Italian Futurism; biomechanics was the actor stepping into a robot, a machine capable of anything. "... all actors willing to take part in theatrical performances must be ready to assume the form of a marionette... Meyerhold's biomechanics therefore argues that for actors to get their desirable emotions and joy, as well as to achieve desirable responses from the audience (spectators), there is need for them to accomplish appropriate and apt kinetic pattern and concept." (Adora, 37).

Seeing the actor as a machine means that rigorous physical activity is key "in order to make them as efficient as machines in carrying out acting roles on theatre stage." (Adora, 37). Meyerhold held gymnastics, acrobatics, ballet, and circus movements in the highest regard because they were, in form, the more mechanical and stylized of the sports that were popular back then, and still managed to tell a story and transmit emotion, while cultivating form and grace.

Jonathan Pitches' book *Vsevolod Meyerhold* makes a profound case of what Biomechanics' influences are, one being theatrical, one being industrial, and one being psychological. Meyerhold's 1913 curriculum for his students included commedia dell'arte, musical reading, and movement on stage, so it is easy to deduce the theatrical influences. The industrial influences were mentioned above, with the new Soviet culture attempting to bring its country to the same forefront in which the rest of Europe was living, with an emphasis on efficiency, productivity, and collectivity. The psychological influence not only refers to the James-Lange Theory, but also another Russian celebrity: Ivan Pavlov. This towering figure in physiology skyrocketed to success with his studies on reflexology, something that Meyerhold retained another key element to an actor's work. This new concept was based on the idea that we can only respond to something outside of us, like

Pavlov's famous dogs who salivated at the ding of a bell. Therefore, the actor reacts to what happens on stage, rather than looking inward to find the emotion, but also can react to physical positions and gestures that indicate that very emotion. Meyerhold called this *Reflex Excitability*; "From a sequence of physical positions and situations there arise *points of excitation* which are informed with some particular emotion." (Braun, 199-201).

Emotion was soon becoming, in all effects, a reflex.

"In creating the biomechanical études, Meyerhold drew on the following ideas: the physical dexterity and playfulness of the popular theatre, including *commedia*; presenting the essence of a story in a short physical performance; dividing up the action into a number of efficiently performed tasks; and connecting those tasks in a long chain of reflexes. He effectively synthesized the *form* of Taylor and Pavlov with the *content* of *commedia* to produce a set of études designed to address all the basic skills of the actor." (Pitches, 73)

These basic skills are nine and are interdependent, supporting one another and combining to produce the 'perfect' actor:

- Precision: the act of repeating a gesture or moment the same way over and over again.
- Balance: the act of being grounded and confident.
- Coordination: the act of being in control of one's body and in harmony with the space.
- Efficiency: the act of using energy appropriately with no waste.
- Rhythm: the pulse that governs Time, which mechanically can get manipulated into three parts, the *otkaz* (preparation), *posil* (action), and *tochka* (end point).

- Expressiveness: the means by which one communicates with an audience.
- Responsiveness: the ability to be always *on* and react instantaneously to impulses.
- Playfulness: the spark of creativity and joy it takes to make anything worthwhile.
- Discipline: the focus it takes to always seek the truth.

Rudolf Von Laban

One of the most influential dance and theatrical movement practitioners of the 20th Century, Rudolf Van Laban is credited with having created the Laban movement analysis (a system of documenting human movement) and Labanotation (a movement notation system). He was born in Austria in 1879 but lived and worked all around central Europe and Britain, where he led a Bohemian lifestyle, surrounding himself with like-minded collaborators and pupils.

“Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is a theoretical framework for observing movement” (Adrian, 31). Its major concepts are Body, Effort, Shape, Space and Relationship:

- **Body** is the physical instrument we use;
- **Effort** is the manifestation of physical and/or vocal impulses and is governed by four *factors*, called Time, Weight, Space, and Flow, which live on a continuum:
 - Time goes from quick to sustained;
 - Weight goes from strong to light;
 - Space goes from Direct to Indirect;
 - Flow goes from bound to free.

- **Shape** is the emotional investment;
- **Space** is how the body moves in relation to the environment;
- **Relationship** is the interplay between the above concepts.

Playing with the efforts

Throughout drama training, movement practitioners and teachers tend to focus on the Effort part of LMA because it is the basis on which the rest of the concepts live. There are eight efforts that are born out of the four factors; these efforts are the maximum expression of the combination of their respective factors.

The Eight Efforts are: Punch, Slash, Dab, Flick, press, Wring, Glide, and Float. The Four Components are:

1. Direction: Direct or Indirect
2. Speed: Quick or Sustained
3. Weight: Heavy or Light
4. Flow: Bound or Free

Table 1: Eight Efforts

	Direction	Speed	Weight	Flow
Punch	Direct	Quick	Heavy	Bound
Slash	Indirect	Quick	Heavy	Free
Dab	Direct	Quick	Light	Bound
Flick	Indirect	Quick	Light	Free
Press	Direct	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
Wring	Indirect	Sustained	Heavy	Bound
Glide	Direct	Sustained	Light	Free
Float	Indirect	Sustained	Light	Free

The Direction component addresses the attention to outside elements, with its maximum points being Direct and Indirect. Being Direct means focusing the attention on an

element, like examining an artifact, while being Indirect means the opposite, being more aloof and juggling multiple elements, like the speech pattern of an individual with severe ADHD.

The Speed component addresses the attitude one has toward the time it takes to make decisions, with its maximum points being Sustained and Quick. Being Sustained means being indulgent and expansive, like leisurely smoking a pipe, while being Quick means the opposite, being more condensed, like getting a child ready for school. This does not necessarily mean there is a drastic difference in tempo.

The Weight component addresses the intention and force behind the action, with its maximum points being Heavy and Light. Being Heavy means applying more exertion, like moving a boulder, while being Light means approaching the action with gracefulness and precision, like a caress.

The Flow component addresses the continuity of the action, with its maximum points being Bound and Free. Being Bound means feeling restricted, like being in a metaphorical or literal box, while being Free means engaging in an activity with abandon, like running down a hill carelessly.

Playing with these components and mixing them together is what created the eight efforts, that are used subconsciously and unwillingly by every human being on the planet doing any daily activity, but consciously and purposefully by the actor, who intends on portraying said daily activity realistically or not. These are also wonderful character-creation tools, and when used properly during rehearsal and play, can open up possibilities for character movement that were not previously being considered.

The Inner Game of Tennis

The *Inner Game of Tennis* has proven to be a book successfully utilized by athletes and actors alike. It was written by Timothy Gallwey, an American tennis coach who had had a successful career as a young player, and it was published in 1974, wildly changing the landscape of teaching and practicing sports before moving to corporate America, where training leadership became its focus. In it, Gallwey stresses that “Every game is composed of two parts: an outer game, and an inner game.” (2) The book falls under the self-help/motivational category for athletes, and not just for tennis players.

Whereas the practical examples all concern that sport, and some sections of the book require at least a base knowledge of it because of its use of tennis lingo, the reader can easily apply the theory to any part of life, which is why it spawned a whole school of thought and successful brand for Mr. Gallwey. In fact, it was easy to superimpose any human issue onto his examples. The biggest lesson was undoubtedly the two halves of each person.

According to Gallwey, the mind can be divided in Self 1 and Self 2. The former is also called the conscious teller; quite simply, the voice inside our heads, the ego, the created identity. The latter is the unconscious and automatic doer, the body and its impulses. Gallwey makes the case that the key to success in any sport, or in life in general, is bettering the relationship between the two Selves. The problem that arises is that “Self 1 does not trust Self 2, even though the unconscious, automatic self is extremely competent” (12). It allegorically ends up being the bully who aggressively and vehemently pushes around and chastises the poor worker who just simply wants to do its job but is constrained by a seemingly higher force. “The first skill to learn is the art of letting go the

human inclination to judge ourselves and our performance as either good or bad” (19), which is in itself a task that could take a lifetime to master. Judgment is obviously a good skill to have in certain trivial situations: we learn early on the effects of a flame on our skin or the use in bundling up in freezing weather. It helps by defining the world in terms of safety but does not help us some of the more artistic and creative ventures. When it comes to sports, the reactions some players have in the space they perform in say a lot about the inner working of their mind, or as Gallwey coined it, the “Inner Game.” Amateurs will be quick to curse themselves or the gods when they see the ball hit the net, to keep it in tennis examples.

“.. Judgment is the act of assigning a negative or positive value to an event. In effect, it is saying that some events within your experience are good and you like them, and other events in your experience are bad and you don’t like them. You don’t like the sight of yourself hitting a ball into the net, but you judge as good the sight of your opponent being aced by your serve. Thus, judgments are our personal, ego reactions to the sights, sounds, feelings, and thoughts within our experience.” (21)

When the ego gets involved with anything, it exercises control and power over the body, other people, and situations, often leading to effects that were not previously desired. When an athlete lets the ego control them, their muscles tend to tighten and not perform at the peak of their excellence. “When more than necessary is used, not only is there a waste of energy, but certain tightened muscles interfere with the need of other muscles to stretch.” (46) Furthermore, “self-judgments become self-fulfilling prophecies” (23) sometimes and Self 2 will automatically reproduce what Self 1 flagellates it with, and

therefore begins to live up to those expectations, making the saying “You become what you think” perfectly relevant.

What Gallwey taught his tennis students was to “simply” observe the error without judgment, often making use of one’s reflection. If one had a problem with their backhand, he would make them swing, imagining the ball, and watch their own form either in a mirror or a glass window, whatever was more convenient. With the right technical direction, the student was able to watch their form change, and before long, had that correction ingrained in their body. The process took different people different amounts of time but was successful; if they could just physically see what the issue was, they could correct it, still using eyesight, and with enough practice, they could effortlessly repeat it. This requires a great deal of trust. “Trusting your body in tennis means letting your body hit the ball. The key word is ‘let.’ You trust in the competence of your body and its brain, and you let it swing the racket.” (44), which does not mean making it happen, because that would still involve the overbearing presence of Self 1. It is indeed challenging to revisit the child-like mentality, full of curiosity, and trust in the process of discovery and growth. He uses the analogy of watching one’s kid learning to walk. When the toddler loses their balance and falls, the parent often does not scold them or condemn them but does quite the opposite: they accept the fall as a natural part of growth and development; without it, walking would be impossible, seeing as it is a mechanical reaction to imbalance. If Self 1 could just notice the event that is transpiring and give words of encouragement, Self 2 would adapt much quicker. Considering that “the actions of Self 2 are based on information it has stored in its memory of past actions of itself or of the observed actions of others”(48), any negative judgment can only harm the process. But Gallwey also

remarks that positive affirmation is simply the opposite side of the same coin. The existence or use of a compliment only reaffirms the existence of its counterpart, the insult. That is why non-judgmental observation is key, according to this practice. Non-judgmental observation must be done in relation to competitors as well, so as to not fall into the comparison trap, which only fuels Self 1's negativity. Gallwey also spends time talking about habits and how it is difficult to break one when there is no adequate replacement. This requires a certain level of programming in the mind: creating and breaking habits is one of the most difficult things a human being can do, because they are what define us and our growth. The deeper a habit is ingrained in one, the harder it is to change it. Substitution is always the viable option, for example when a smoker is attempting to quit, chewing gum sometimes is enough to help cool that oral fixation. Gallwey compares the "usual way of learning" to the "Inner Game way of learning":

Table 2: The Inner Game way of learning

Usual	Inner Game
Step 1: Criticize or Judge Past Behavior	Step 1: Observe, nonjudgmentally, existing behavior
Step 2: Tell yourself to change, instructing with word commands repeatedly	Step 2: Ask yourself to change, programming with image and feel. No commands are used
Step 3: Try hard, make yourself do it right	Step 3: Let it happen
Step 4: Critical judgment about results leading to repetition of process	Step 4: nonjudgmental, calm observation of the results leading to continuing observation of process until behavior is in automatic

There is a great deal of ego-less practice in the Inner Game’s process. Gallwey even noticed that it is easy for people to fall back into the pit of trying hard even after having learned to let go: this is because Self 1 likes to impose its will and its ways regardless of what it has learned.

“When you try hard to hit the ball correctly, and it goes well, you get a certain kind of ego satisfaction... But when you simply allow the serve to serve itself, it doesn’t seem as if you deserve the credit... If a person is out on the court mainly to satisfy the desires and doubts of the ego, it is likely that in spite of the lesser results, he will choose to let Self 1 play the major role.” (93)

The paradox gets thicker the more one tries to better themselves because Self 1 can very well be disguised, when in reality, it is that exact part that is trying to better themselves. This is where Gallwey gets into the tactic to use in order to circumnavigate Self 1's endless ocean of thoughts: quieting the mind. Developing stillness, or parking the mind, as he likes to call it, is the only way to achieve greater levels of concentration, which according to him, is the key to better performance. Using our senses wisely helps with focusing the mind on one thing: for example, the biggest lesson he teaches is to watch the seams of the ball as it is hurdling towards you and witness the pattern they create. "The mind is so absorbed in watching the pattern that it forgets to try too hard... it tends to not interfere with the natural movements of the body." (98) Sound too plays an important part.

"When one listens to the sounds of his forehand, he can hold in his memory the sound that results from solid contact; as a result, the body will tend to repeat the elements of behavior which produced that sound." (102)

Feeling the body as well is part of it, by simply focusing the attention on the body during practice and being more aware of rhythm. "Rhythm can never be achieved by being overly purposeful about it; you have to let it happen." (105) Concentrating on the other senses, like smell or taste, work in other practices that are not specifically tennis. It is important, however, to keep the mind occupied by changing the elements to focus on. "Even yogis who practice concentrating on a single external object, such as a rose or a flame, rarely succeed in stilling the mind for long; it simply loses interest and then wanders" (98). The question obviously arose for tennis players, seeing that the ball is all they see during their practice; for Gallwey, the solution is Love. "Concentration is

fascination of the mind. When there is love present, the mind is drawn irresistibly toward the object of love.” (100) He mentions Bhakti yoga as a very good skill to practice in order to further the relationship between the mind and the breath. The idea is to practice focusing one’s attention on the breath and a specific image with Love in order to quiet the mind, and whenever a thought pops in, to let it fluctuate off without judgment. The more time spent on this practice, the less obtrusive thoughts present themselves, and the mind will quiet itself more effortlessly. This will inevitably help with concentration in performance. “The greatest lapses in concentration come when we allow our minds to project what is about to happen or to dwell on what has already happened.” (110) The classic case of the athlete who despairingly hits himself in the head after they missed a shot, or, when finding themselves in front of what seems like an easy task, like scoring a penalty kick, miserably shoots it to the stars. A simple movement that has been carried out countless times in practice will be utterly failed when the athlete is thinking ahead. The greatest ones are those who know to breathe in high intensity moments, squashing anxiety of failure and carrying out those movements in the here and now. Gallwey makes excellent points when defining the differences between playing for excellence and playing for mental or physical health. Those who play for excellence are often only searching for meaning in their lives, so they place enormous amounts of insecurities and existential dread into the search for victory. Playing well for them means achieving a certain status and feeding that Self 1 outer and superficial respect, love, and admiration, which is ingrained in us from a very young age when we are taught that “excellence is valued in all things” (126) and that if one is not good at something, why bother wasting that time. Those who play for mental and physical health, or just for fun, tend to lack that pressure

and the will to better their game. Therefore, the mentally successful athlete is the one who knows and operates within that sweet middle spot.

Competition is something that he heavily touches on in the final parts of the book:

“In contemporary Western culture there is a great deal of controversy about competition. One segment values it highly, believing that is responsible for Western progress and prosperity. Another segment says that competition... pits one person against another and is therefore divisive... Those who value competition believe in sports such as football, baseball, tennis and golf. Those who see competition as a form of legalized hostility tend to favor such noncompetitive forms of recreation as surfing, frisbee or jogging.”

Here is perhaps the biggest lesson from this book: the value of winning. Wanting to win against others only stems from one's insecurities and the need to place immeasurable value in being the best. That is often why being a sore loser is not regarded as a positive quality, but instead is seen as one's inability to accept loss or failure in life. Wanting to win against the obstacles is where the true value of sports lies. When talking about surfers waiting for the biggest wave, he states that “The more challenging the obstacle he faces, the greater the opportunity for the surfer to discover and extend his true potential... The value of winning is only as great as the value of the goal reached”(142). That is perhaps the reason why we love underdog stories so much, or why we particularly admire humans like Diana Nyad or Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay who have achieved greatness; their victory was directly proportional to the challenge they faced. That is also why we value competition so much: “It is the duty of your opponent to create the greatest possible difficulties for you, just as it is yours to try to create obstacles for him... True competition is

identical with true cooperation.” (143)

When faced with a formidable foe, the point is not to try and beat it to receive the glory that comes with victory. The point is to shed light on the parts of our own consciousness that sometimes are left in the dark, in order to expand the knowledge of our capabilities and use everything we are equipped with, and everything we have been trained in, to keep showing ourselves that we are stronger than we think.

CHAPTER TWO: *THE WOLVES*

It was during the experience of coaching actors to embody the roles of soccer players that this thesis was born. Theatre UCF decided to produce *The Wolves*, a play written by Sarah DeLappe in 2016 about a high school female soccer team and their battles with their social environment, the hopes of playing college soccer, and global politics. There is a tight clique within the team, with the obvious outsider being #46, a homeschooled girl who is new to the area. Every scene chronicles their warmups before a match, which makes this a very physical play that also requires the actors to demonstrate a certain skillset that comes with having played soccer for years. This is especially notable for #46 who, closer to the end of the play, has a solo juggling sequence that is meant to be impressive and threaten #7's comfort within the team's hierarchy.

After having been appointed the title of "Soccer Consultant," the goal was to prepare the cast members to resemble an AAU women's soccer team. Only four of them had played soccer growing up, while most of them had no experience, making for a good range of comfort with the ball, and a good challenge.

Two hours were slotted each night for almost two weeks of rehearsal to get the cast in the best shape possible. Each practice started by running around campus and doing drills; the latter were particularly important because those same drills would then be used for the show itself as part of the characters' warmup. In the second half of practice, they were guided through ball exercises, consisting of dribbling and passing. It was fundamental to get them comfortable with the ball between their feet, so that when the time came to perform in front of an audience, muscle memory could kick in, instead of the

drills preventing them from being in the moment as an actor. Therefore, the dribbling exercises escalated from simple Point A to Point B trajectory, to slaloming through cones. The passing exercises escalated from small group circles to long range, and by the end, a combination of dribbling and passing was achieved.

It was during the passing drills that something occurred: there was more to these practices than just training the cast's physical prowess and dexterity with the ball. There was exchange and dialogue, and in that, an opportunity to relate everything that was being taught on the field to everything they had been taught in the rehearsal room. *The Inner Game of Tennis* only came to mind once, with the cast, the discovery was made that the amount of energy given into the ball will be directly proportionate to how the opponent receives it. Because balls are spheres, physics comes into play to the point that anybody who plays a sport with a ball must deal not only with technique and their opponent's technique, but also with the laws that govern this Universe. With these similarities in mind, the actors were instructed to focus their attention on the relationship between their foot and the ball. If dribbling forward one touches the ball slightly to the left, it will automatically go right, and vice versa. If one hits it with this much power, it will roll this fast and this decisively. Newton's second and third laws of motion apply themselves perfectly to a sphere. In any sport with a ball, the way the pass is performed greatly influences the way it gets received; the goal is to always put the fellow teammate in the position to attack or defend. In soccer, someone's stronger or weaker foot plays a vital importance in the game, and preferably, one would pass it onto the stronger one.

For example, during practice the actors were divided into groups of four and instructed to make a square. They then had to pass the ball using their right foot, aiming

for their teammate's right foot. After a few minutes, they were instructed to switch feet, passing it with the left foot to their teammate's left foot. This task played a vital role in understanding what it means to be a giving actor, one who delivers a line that will allow the scene partner to respond according to the context of the scene, the world of the play, and their character's wishes. The lesson there was to set up the teammate for success: something that should always happen on stage.

Usually, in the ending stages of rehearsal, as the actors are very comfortable with the lines, they are asked to pick up the pace because the audience will lose interest and mentally wander off if the dialogue is choppy or loaded with thought and breaks. This does not mean everything needs to be fast paced, but dialogue that is cutting and that picks up the cue is easier to follow and more *exciting*. It tends to set up a punchline or the climax of a scene and it makes the pauses earned. In fact, actors and directors tend to use the term *Keep the ball in the air* when referring to the energy between people on stage. A missed cue or miscalculated energy on stage will snap the audience out of the magic that is being created, much like what happens in team sports, with the added difference that there is an opponent trying their best to prevent you from being successful. In soccer, when the ball is moved at a fast pace, the game is more enjoyable to watch and the chances that get created are even more worth it. Not only that, but entire soccer philosophies have been built on the great work of Josep Guardiola, who was one of the first to dominate midfield possession with small and quick passes that tire out the opponent, a practice called *tiki-taka*. There always is some sort of dialogue in team sports and the ball is the metaphorical line.

These observations were very well received from the cast of *The Wolves* who tried

their best to put them in action while getting more and more comfortable with the ball around their feet. It also led to some important discoveries happening on stage, particularly between the ones who already had soccer experience: they started using the ball within dialogue as an added layer of energy, making for some fascinating subtext. They found the operative words and experimented with kicking it before the line and after. When they would do it before the line, it seemed like they exerted most of the energy before they had gotten the thought through; kicking it after sometimes worked, specifically if they were looking for physical or emotional emphasis after the thought is completed; but on the operative word, or one of them, hit just right. They quite literally kicked the line into life.

The overall lesson learned during the experience as soccer consultant for *The Wolves* was that performance is performance; Antonin Artaud, a French dramatist best known for his conceptualization of the Theatre of Cruelty brilliantly stated that “The actor is an athlete of the heart” (Artaud, 260), which resonates perfectly in rehearsal and performance. When a player or team under-performs, it is not a sign of physical incapability, especially at high levels, but rather a sign of mental disengagement, something that also occurs on stage, for example, my experience in *Indecent*. When a team overperforms and wins a major trophy, it is most likely not because they have the best technical players, but because they are a cohesive unit all working and breathing together to reach the same goal. This proved fundamental to my understanding of my role in a production such as *Indecent*.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The initial idea

While coaching the cast of *The Wolves*, the similarities there are between the world of sports and the world of theatre became more and more apparent. Teaching actors how to play soccer and move about a field in ways that were intelligent initially seemed like a daunting process, but once the soccer techniques were tied to the acting ones, it all made more sense. What was missing was a direct approach in character development, a technique that would help the actor create a character from the outside-in using sports, with the question *Which sport would my character play or practice if they did? What tension would their body hold and how would they move on stage?*

The questions are interesting because sports and certain practices do take a toll on the body, leading to a more specific way the character moves about the stage. In my journal, on December 14th, I played Nakhmen as a wrestler because I felt like it would help the aggressiveness the character displays throughout the first scene. Greco-Roman wrestling was a popular sport in those times, especially in Eastern Europe, where strength training was crucial to raise the new generation. Tightening the latissimus dorsi made my shoulders broaden and made me square up with Sholem Asch as if I were to fight him, which was an interesting choice to play. However, it did not feel right, especially when considering the character's entire arc and his intellectual side. I would have stuck out like a sore thumb amidst the rest of the intellectuals in Mr. Peretz's salon. Discouraged, I quickly left that idea because I felt like I was imposing a character trait strictly for the purposes of this thesis. It was fun to explore, but did not pose a large

enough question for academic inquiry.

At the same time, I was developing a routine that would prove to be successful. Thinking of myself as an athlete, I gave myself specific hours of the evening where I would rehearse on my feet and challenge the brain through memorization and playing; those specific hours were the same as the rehearsal period, 6:30pm to 10:30pm. Because we had five weeks off (the college Winter break), I took three to rest and go on vacation, one to start getting my mind back into the idea of working, and the last one to prepare myself properly. It ended up benefitting me, considering that my cast mates were tired halfway through the rehearsal period the first couple nights, while I felt *in form*. In *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*, Daniel Pink examines timing and how it shapes human behavior daily. Based on chronobiology, the study of biological rhythms, humans abide by a pattern that affects our mood and performance. Pink explains that we go through three stages in one day, “Peak” “Trough” and “Recovery” respectively for most people in the morning, afternoon, and evening. By giving myself a specific routine where I was forcing my body and mind to work at certain hours, I was helping them shape the Recovery stage into a highly active and productive one.

The new question

This vision and subsequent commitment made me change the question from *Which sport would my character play to How does my understanding and a practice of sports affect my process as an actor and my role in the production?* By digging back into my memories and realizing that I never performed gymnastics and soccer during competitions or games as well as in practice because they were always at different times,

and by teaching a group of actors how to pass a ball, I started to apply this past knowledge to my current situation as an actor, and more generally as a person in the theatre.

Parameters

To answer this new question, parameters were set in place during rehearsal and performances of *Indecent* that would allow me to see myself as an athlete, other than an actor. I therefore decided to concentrate on nutrition, sleep, and exercise to see how they would impact my physical awareness and my mental focus on stage. I knew I did not need to make harsh changes in diet and sleep because I was already eating balanced meals and sleeping the right amount in roughly the same timeframe every night, so the real lifestyle changes came with an exercise regimen designed as an experiment. I wanted to see which of two practices would benefit me more on stage: swimming and yoga. The experiment would consist in alternating days in which I swam to days in which I did yoga, with some in which I did both. Swimming was recommended to me during recovery of a surgery I faced because of a tear of my acromio-clavicular ligament in my right shoulder, seeing that it has a low impact on joints, while being highly effective in muscle building. Yoga was a practice that I slowly came to admire because of movement training in drama school, and because of my inflexible body. Another reason for these choices was accessibility; the UCF Recreation and Wellness Center offers a lap pool free to use for all students, and yoga is easy to perform with a mat and YouTube videos. It occurred to me to alternate a team sport as well, but I chose not to solely based on a fear

of getting hurt. The risk of injury was not worth it, especially if it would have prevented me from performing in the first place.

From the acting perspective, I opted to use Laban's effort actions to create five different characters. It was important to choose such a whole-body movement technique in order to fully determine which practice, between swimming and yoga, would benefit my physical awareness more. I included Gallwey's mirror technique in *The Inner Game of Tennis* to properly watch myself apply Laban and bridge the gap between my awareness and what my body actually appeared to be doing, while focusing on the relationship between my Self 1 and my Self 2. I also tied Meyerhold's Biomechanics in at the end of the whole process in order to see how effective those nine skills are in my body.

Throughout the latter half of the rehearsal process and the performances, I kept a journal where I wrote down my feelings and experiences, in order to have a more specific process on which to reflect when it was all done. This journal has been transcribed and attached in the appendix of this document.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Preparing the different characters for *Indecent*

As I mustered up the energy to delve back into the intense routine that grad school fosters by rehearsing alone in the space in front of large mirrors, I knowingly used techniques I had learned in class, like LeCoq's seven levels of tension, and Laban's eight energy efforts; I also, unknowingly, was encountering difficulties explained in *The Inner Game of Tennis*, which only made sense after reading the book. In my journal, I mentioned the complexity of the mind that every performer goes through, ranging from *Is this a good choice* to *Should I even be an actor*. This was Self 1 getting in the way, micro-managing Self 2 without letting him play with no consequences. Every night it was only in the second or third hour of rehearsal that I would break through to new discoveries, and these came only when Self 1 was either too tired to care or occupied with something else, like watching myself in the mirror. Mirror play was not a technique new to me, seeing that I often create characters by watching myself, so the section in *The Inner Game of Tennis* about slowing down the technique in front of a reflection in order to correct it made complete sense. That is exactly what I was doing with Nakhmen, Harry, Bailie, and the Rabbi. I started to believe myself once I was watching myself make clear choices. The sense of play was wonderful. Self 2 was fully in control, while Self 1 analyzed the movements in the mirror without judging.

For Nakhmen specifically what helped immeasurable was looking at a photo the costume department had provided for their own process in choosing the right garments. It was the look on this nameless gentleman's face that stuck in my head, as I rehearsed the

character implementing clear choices through Laban's effort actions and conjugating different voices to them. Nakhmen and Harry switched a couple of times as I tried to decide which set of choices was more effective for which character. I finally opted for an airier quality to the first, provided by Laban's GLIDE, which is Direct, Sustained, and Light. This was a very different approach considering the initial idea, a wrestler, which would have made him more aggressive and heavier. He was the only one of my characters to have an arc, which is why I concentrated more specifically on him; this allowed me to glide in the beginning of the show (quite literally), and then DAB (Direct, Quick, and Light) in his final scene, when he is desperately trying to get a visa to move away from Poland. This choice also helped with the foreign languages my character was speaking (English, French, Spanish, and Chinese), seeing that his native language, Polish, is full of plosives. Interjecting spurts of DAB throughout his first scene as well, when being offended and baffled that Sholem would bring such a monstrous creation to Mr. Peretz's salon, made for more variety and for toxic leaks, where the character's true emotions burst out. Because of GLIDE, I found myself feeling a lot taller than I usually am; by leading with the crown of the head towards the ceiling and dropping the chin towards the neck, I was very erect and pointed.

The choice I made for Harry Weinberger was PUNCH, which is Direct, Quick, and Heavy; this helped with his role as a lawyer, who assertively explains to the cast of *The God of Vengeance* the reason behind the cuts that were made. Being in a room full of actors who mostly disagreed with him, it was imperative to find the stability and confidence in his actions and speech. It came naturally, with his long pattern, and interjecting thoughts, to *punch* certain parts of the line; rhetoric is pivotal to lawyers. I opted to lead

with my belly, to help overenunciate his wealth and confidence. As opposed to Nakhmen, he felt lower to the ground, which is also why I decided to have a coarser voice, something that would prove to be a learning curve for me, because playing that quality without hurting the vocal folds needs to be learned, by sending the vibrations up to the soft palate, rather than keeping them in the throat.

The Hasid who started the song *Vat Ken You Makh* was a much older character, weathered by life and its hardships, especially after having emigrated to the United States. In an effort to chide the younger immigrants beside me, I still used PUNCH, which worked nicely with the Yiddish because of its heavy consonants but opted to lead from the thoracic part of my spine, creating a mild hunchback. This helped me immensely with my fear of singing, because I have found that when I sing as myself, I am a prey to anxiety, while changing the voice and physicality helps me get out of my head.

Officer Bailie led from his pelvis, a clear sign of his sexualization of what was happening on stage during *God of Vengeance*, and I used PRESS, which is Direct, Sustained, and Heavy, to mirror not only the confidence and assertiveness a police officer can have, but also the relentless approach the Vice squad had towards anything and anybody that was perceived as a threat from the United States Government.

Rabbi Joseph Silverman was my most confident character from very early in the process because I modeled him directly after the Rabbi who came to talk to us about Judaism and more particularities inside the play. I was struck by his comfort, confidence, and sense of humor, with which he painted pictures for all of us to see, so I wanted to emulate that for our audience. Because of the tallit on my shoulders, I opted to lead from there, which made my arms and hands a very pivotal part of the performance. I liked to

think of the reach a preacher has over his crowd and community, and I wanted to uplift that holy garment on my body without necessarily touching it with my hands more than I had to. The main effort actions I used were PRESS to get through long thoughts and PUNCH to assist with my rhetoric, by emphasizing certain concepts on which I wanted my audience to linger.

Using sports

The benefits of swimming and yoga

The result of the experiment was clear: yoga was the best option for me. Swimming made me feel energized at first, but upon eating and heading to the theatre, the fatigue from moving through an element that is 800 times denser than air, even just for 15 to 20 minutes, set me up for a low energy and heavy performance each time. My mood and metabolism boosted significantly, as did the perception of my muscles, but ultimately, I approached and left the stage feeling more drained than usual. On the contrary, when I gave myself the luxury of doing yoga flow for 25 to 50 minutes at the theatre before the show, not only did my mood boost, but I felt relaxed, confident, centered, and aware of my body moving through space to a degree that I had not felt before. I was engaging the transversus for extended periods of time in poses that were unnatural to me, which made for better control of my characters' alignments, and for a more liberated voice on stage, as if I were not bound by my habitual tensions anymore.

The benefits of growing up as an athlete

As a past gymnast, I have benefitted throughout my theatrical career of the life-changing discipline the sport has taught me. Being a highly challenging activity that I

performed competitively for years at a young age, what I learned the most from the mental aspect was the determination and discipline life needs in order to strive. The precision and balance needed to execute a cartwheel perfectly cannot be achieved in one day; it can only be done through repetition and imagination. Exactly as Mr. Gallwey explained in *The Inner Game of Tennis*, in order to execute and fine-tune, one must be able to see it in the mind, which was a skill I developed as a young child, and that has translated into the theatre. It was only through these acquired skills that I have been able to reach the height of an MFA in acting. When other people lacked the ambition and discipline to do community theatre even when they were tired, I jumped up to the opportunity, not just because of the passion I feel, but because I am aware that anything worthwhile takes time and dedication.

As a past soccer player, the values and lessons learned in theatre seemed to be repeated. Soccer, being a team sport, concentrates on the creation and destruction of space, and the awareness of everybody's presence and movement, linking individuals that can have completely different upbringings and cultures to achieve one single goal, pun intended. The movement aspect of *Indecent* that we called *altitudes*, which were the company of actors transitioning through the events of the play, were a prime example of how I used my experience as a team sports player. Consciously or not, we used Laban's effort FLOAT to move furniture and give the sense that we were bringing the audience on a journey through time, but it was the sense of oneness we found that made me feel like I was on a well-oiled team. I quickly picked up on my cast mates' movement patterns and tried, to the best of my abilities, to fit in the picture with the same amount of energy, in order to complement the picture. A team sport like soccer also teaches one to understand

their position in the team, not only physically, but purposefully. Just like a central defensive midfielder has a specific purpose on the pitch that must never be sacrificed for the sake of individuality, each actor, especially in an ensemble piece like *Indecent*, must not sacrifice their purpose in the play for the sake of individuality. My purpose was revealed easily at the beginning of the process, because each of my characters opposed Sholem Asch's play in some way: Nakhmen opposed it early on in the salon calling it a disgrace, the Hassid had snarky remarks regarding the naivety of fresh immigrants, Harry Weinberger made the cuts to the play on Broadway, Officer Bailie helped shut it down, and the Rabbi Joseph Silverman, not only was a driving force of that closure, but also uses his role and voice to denounce it to a large Jewish crowd. It was clear that I was the opposing force to the play, so whichever character's outfit I donned, I knew I was playing in order to fulfill my duty as a member of this team. This lesson was learned during a play that preceded *Indecent*, called *Scaramouch in Naxos*, which was a Commedia dell'Arte style romantic comedy, where I played the stock character *Innamorato*. When I attempted to make a joke at the end of the play for a laugh, the director corrected me, observing that that was not my purpose in the play, that that stock character was not known for being funny, and that the play needed those grounded characters, like the one I played, so that the audience could laugh harder at the real comedic ones. This made me realize that as much as I like to play and offer a variety of things to the director, I still must play within my own box, or within my own role. The right back in soccer would not randomly abandon their position to go be a striker just because they think that is what the team needs. Abandoning that position would open up lots of space for the opposing team to score. Abandoning the set of rules of a stock character like the *Innamorato* would not benefit the rest of the cast

and the audience's perception of the play as a whole.

The connection with Meyerhold

My experience with sports also marries Meyerhold's vision of what an actor should be. As discussed in chapter one, he established nine interdependent basic skills that combined, produce the perfect actor. I now see them as aligned with sports as they are with theatre.

- **PRECISION**, a cornerstone of gymnastics, helped me be as respectful as possible with the Rabbi's tallit: receiving it from my cast mate, unfolding it carefully, and draping it over my shoulders was a scary action to play as a non- Jewish actor. I learned from the Jewish members of our cast and crew, and carefully made sure that every time I performed that action, I was doing it exactly as I was taught, with the utmost precision, so as to not tarnish my character's identity.
- **BALANCE**, a key component to gymnastics, was used in all of my characters' physical choices, and once I had cemented them, I felt grounded and confident physically, especially with the Rabbi and Harry. However, I did not feel as confident in my actions sometimes.
- **COORDINATION** comes with both of the sports I played and it definitely helped with the *altitudes* we performed between each scene. The purpose of those was to be in harmony with one another and the space, and my gymnastics training helped with my individual coordination while floating with furniture in my hands, and my soccer training helped with filling out the space around us and respecting the space between us actors.
- **EFFICIENCY** was one I played with constantly during the run because of my

experiments with swimming and yoga. I was forced to be more efficient after having swum because of the toll my body took in the water those afternoons, but that also made me feel heavier and more tired. Yoga helped me be more in control of the energy I was spending for specific tasks on stage.

- RHYTHM was constantly used throughout the play, specifically in the *altitudes*, where we had clear *otkaz*, *posil*, and *tochka* for each gesture that involved the placement of furniture or luggage. I also used it conjoined with PRECISION for actions like the one involving the tallit.
- EXPRESSIVENESS was used throughout Laban's efforts in order to communicate the character's point of view to the audience, specifically as the Rabbi, where I had direct address, and I could look people in the eyes and communicate with all parts of my face, on top of my body.
- RESPONSIVENESS, a crucial aspect of a team sport like soccer where you have to always be on and react to the ball and the opposing team's players and tactics they use, is a must-have in the theatre because "acting is reacting", as Stella Adler coined. It is my most favorite part of being in a production with actors who are comfortable with their parts and are allowing themselves to play, because every night ends up being slightly different. Nakhmen's initial scene and Harry's scene were perfect examples of the company reacting to each other on a nightly basis. The Rabbi's monologue gave me a chance to respond to the energy in the audience, whether it was stale, or peppered.
- PLAYFULNESS, what makes soccer exciting, was crucial to the preparation of my characters, because had I not played throughout that week by myself in the room

before the semester picked back up, I would not have arrived at and cemented the choices I ended up using. It is always wonderful to play with someone on stage in front of an audience, something I am fine-tuning as a professional actor at Orlando Shakes, where we perform eight or nine times a week, and therefore are forced to keep things fresh and exciting.

- DISCIPLINE, the cornerstone of every sport, task, activity, and what makes living worthwhile. The absence of it induces one to commit the sin of sloth. I used my past as a gymnast and as a soccer player to drill the mechanics of my characters' physicalities, my lines, and the ambition and drive to succeed in a business like entertainment.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

It is clear that the link between Theatre and sports is strong and present: the actors who abstain from practicing sports or keeping in shape may lack a certain awareness of the body and of their role in the production. Some actors, even successful ones, have ego-centric tendencies on stage because they lack that drive to be part of a team, no matter how hard they work individually.

When looking back at the question that started the thesis, intrigue and curiosity strike. The idea of character creation through a specific sport is one that needs to be workshopped for years before being presented to an academic community with precise results, a time frame that simply does not exist in the world of an MFA Actor. Instead, the question “*How does my understanding and the practice of sports affect my process as an actor and my role in the production?*” can be answered every day in any rehearsal room or on stage. The path of an actor is a never-ending process of discovery, both of oneself, and of the world. Having an understanding of individual sports through the gymnastics experience has paved the way for determination, ambition, and the continuous search for perfection, even during trying times like a Master’s program. Having an understanding of team sports through the soccer experience has paved the way for an awareness of the role in every production, for the respect and camaraderie that comes with being on stage every night, and the will to silence the ego in order to better achieve the desired result. This marriage of a determined individual and an intelligent team player is what I wish to bring forth with me in my career. The experiment of swimming or yoga during the run of *Indecent* helped immensely in understanding what my body and mind

benefitted from the most. Although swimming is one of the best physical activities for humans because of its low impact on the joints, but high muscular use, it ultimately was too tiring before going on stage, suiting less energy to the action, especially compared to a yoga flow or power yoga, which relaxes and revitalizes the muscles, centers the breath by opening up floodgates, and boosts mood. In most of those cases, the right energy was suited for the right action. It is important to notice, however, that the concept of suiting the right energy to the right action, is entirely subjective: although the performer may feel one way, the audience might get a completely different story. These conclusions are solely based on a subjective consideration of the post-workout effects and the post-show effects, which can also be manipulated by other factors, like nutrition, sleep, and the daily workload of a grad student. Because of this experiment, yoga flow was used during the entire season at Orlando Shakes. The rare times it was not used, the effects were felt, with less availability of the breath, and more sluggish behavior, prompting a strong commitment to that pre-show habit. It is also important to notice that there was no accessibility to a lap pool prior to shows at Orlando Shakes; swimming as a pre-show warmup and workout could be more effective in a professional setting rather than an academic setting because of the lighter daily workload.

Ultimately, many factors go into the daily performance, but one thing is for certain: the pressure of making *Indecent* a “thesis show” unfortunately made it less enjoyable. The constant application of the technique, made for a stark and constant awareness of the body on stage, which in turn made for a more doubtful, over-analyzing, and judgmental process, both in the moment, and after. It was not, by any means, a series of performances that are thought of with pride and happiness, but with reluctance and

heaviness. It was during the season at the Shakes that a more light- minded approach was taken; even with clear technique, like Laban's (more noticeably used for Nym in *Henry V*), flow state was achieved on most nights, making these characters feel more inhabited and these productions be memorable experiences.

It would be ideal to propose a workshop where actors and athletes work together to play a sport and perform a show, in order to fully determine the marriage between these two crafts and their people, especially considering the divide that exists since a young age. If educational programs focused on uniting the two, rather than separating them, or worse, forcing the student to choose between one or the other, society might benefit by having better artists and athletes, paving the way for even brighter human endeavors.

APPENDIX

Selected Journal

12/14/2021

Came in Studio 1 and did a comprehensive warmup including Position 1 & 2 of tremors. Started playing with Nakhmen but got interested in what the Viewpoints book had to say. There's nothing in there that points to an individual rehearsal in character creation. I started thinking about diving back into LeCoq training to create these characters. So far, this is what I have.

Rabbi: high nasalized voice, entertaining character, very good public speaker, physicalizes hardships of being Jewish. So far, it's my most developed character. Must go to a temple to see other Rabbis. He's loosely based on Rabbi Rick who came in to talk to us. I think that making the character charismatic and entertaining will present a dichotomy in audience's perception.

Bailie: Irish accent, not much physical work. It'd be interesting to make him engaged with the play. Definitely doesn't go to the theater much. Is he upset he's there though? Super interested in the lesbianism of course. Need to blend Irish with NYC.

Harry: Fauci's voice. Very restrained in the throat, I'm destroying my vocal folds. Need to ask Viv how to manage that. He's a smoker. Big chest, tall.

Nakhmen: Potentially could use the Fauci voice, but right now has a blocked nasal cavity, resonating in chest. Might be on the flamboyant side, but definitely going to play with the glasses. Is he a wrestler? I tightened my latissimus dorsi and played like that.

12/15/2021

In Vivian's office for accent work.

Play with Chinese tone with Yiddish musicality.

Think up in soft palate for raspiness and croaky voice.

01/04/2022

Took a little too much time in between the last rehearsal and this one. I had a good conversation about my thesis with David and it is more and more apparent that it's going to be about the process rather than the end product. I've got bags under my eyes but I'm here. From now on, I'll be constantly working on Indecent from 6:30 to 10:30 to start getting the body and mind used to performing at that time. This will have to account for two dinners, one at 5:30/6:00 and one at 10:45/11:00. Both light but full of sustenance. I need to start thinking like an athlete, allowing myself one or two cheat days this week. I am an hour late tonight, but tomorrow I'll be on time. Nakhmen almost with a head voice un-nasalized but I have to go lower for the bit in the script. It seems to be working now, specifically after I looked at the image the costume department hung up. It gave me exactly what I needed to envision the character. The great work – character work - I've done in the past was accomplished because of a clear image in my brain of what the character looked like and how they moved. It'd be nice if Nakhmen had an almost perennial smile, that way his transition into desperation is worthwhile. A free and flowing upwards neck helps me with the posture, thinking long and airy. Crossing the legs while sitting down and playing with reading glasses. Harry - I want him to have a raspier voice but I can't technically do it yet without damaging my voice. I also don't want him to sound like Fauci. I need Vivian's help on that. For today I figured out Nakhmen.

01/05/2022

I need to remember to give myself grace and not judge myself too much . I'm in good shape. I came to rehearse with Kate. We warmed up and ran lines, which allowed me to just play, even other characters, rather than immediately creating characters rationally. Today I swam, did yoga and stretched first thing in the morning. If I keep a healthy lifestyle, I can implement this in my thesis. I started the day with my smoothie and granola, then meat, potatoes and green beans for lunch. Protein, carbs, and vegetables, a perfect lunch. Then I swam and did yoga, which was so nice. Does exercising give more energy and take away the censor? The playfulness with Kate helped a lot. I did little personally, but at least I got good feedback from Kate for Harry, who is starting to not hurt my voice as much. Maybe I have found a way to send it to my soft palate, instead of relying on my vocal folds. I played a little with Bailie but figured out that I don't want him to be big because it's a little useless. I just need to think of the vice squad and big chest and shoulder. Accent is coming out nice with a good mix between Irish and the NY. Basically a NY accent with Irish rhythm and musicality.

01/06/2022

Tonight I mainly went through the script and went through the blocking. Auditioning for Texas Shakespeare Festival provided the right warm up, and I ended up spending two hours doing that. Today I had two meals: avocado, egg and bacon toast for brunch, providing me with calories, protein, fibers and carbs! For dinner, I had pasta with broccoli and sausage. No workout today but lots of sleep. I am playing with Harry's physicality, making the stomach the focus, but also switched his voice with Nakhmen's, to provide a

more blunt and raspy presence and Harry a more docile one, which would go well with his arc in the scene. Bailie is looking ok, tomorrow I have a meeting with Vivian and can work with her on that. Rabbi is looking good, very nasalized. I have to start reading those articles again on LeCoq and his theory. Hopefully I can do that tomorrow and play more this weekend.

01/09/2022

Met up with the rest of the cast to run the show and work moments. I'm so grateful I've been practicing. Played with Harry having a big belly tonight. And lower voices due to not projecting. It was just to run lines.

01/10/2022

First day of rehearsal, officially back on the grind. Tonight's Nakhmen, as of now, has a free flowing and up neck, un-nasalized voice resonating in the chest. Very slow inner tempo rhythm, Julia told us to pick it up, so the lines came quicker but with the same inner tempo rhythm. There's an interesting quality with his aggression standing up to Asch and his seemingly tranquil behavior. Julia and Sage loved me standing up from the chair after reading the lesbian scene. It was a good moment. The Hassid has a slouched posture, age is well seen. Breathing into the back, I still have difficulties finding enough air to hold notes, so I keep tightening up in the vocal folds. Overall, I can hit them and my physicality is working. Now I won't be backing up too much because of my age, and because I've tripped on that chair too many times.

01/11/2022

Tonight's rehearsal started late for me because there were many scenes without me that needed to be worked. I am now very confident after last night's compliments on Nakhmen. I opted for the raspy voice for Harry but in a high register so that I don't risk hurting the vocal folds. However, Vivian mentioned that I'm trailing off at the end of the lines and that I need to make more arguments with my rhetoric. Harry is a lawyer, he argues for a living, that must come through with the right choice of words and good diction, regardless of his register. His energy center is in the belly, representing the American Dream. This makes his walk a little more open than Nakhmen, who is very vertical. However, the coat on his shoulders forces me to be taller than I actually wanted to be. Which is fine, I just still need to cement that more. The Rabbi is my war horse now. Such a powerful monologue and such a good rhetoric. His voice is nasalized and forward placed, his consonants are exceptionally pronounced, and his energy center is his shoulders, to signify and play with the weight of the tallit. I get Rosalind to nod with me even though she doesn't want to. Jonathan would walk out if it was real. Hannah continues to say it's so real. Julia said I've done amazing work. Bailie still needs to be found. I need to go against the music, which is a good note. I was playing with it. The pace needs to be picked up. Vivian said I should embody the Alpha Male for this character, as a way of being a fish out of water. Never been in the theatre. Let's see that. Loud.

01/14/2022

This was an understudy rehearsal, which I participated in until Vat Kan You Makh, in order to give Jonathan the chance to play both characters. I really tried a new quality to Nakhmen, new energy center which felt in the shoulders, which gave him an airy

quality, and almost gay vibe. He's shaping up to be a very interesting character. Vivian mentioned, from the night before, that a policeman never lets people close to him, which goes against new choices I had made to appear more macho and big in that scene. Mendel's characters need to be big. The Rabbi can be the smallest, most real, in order to get the audience on my side.

01/16/2022

I want to make Nakhmen question his sexuality.

GLIDE will be the choice.

Direct because he's a rational man.

Sustained because he is confident.

Light because he doesn't care much about what people think (?)

It will immediately provide an interesting character to the audience. His directness will help him with the chest voice and being still during the reading. It'd be interesting to have a flutter on stage because of the staging of a lesbian kiss. Throughout the two decades following that, he could have serious doubts on his sexuality and possibly fall in love with a man. This would make his second scene so much more like an emergency, because now, not only is he a Jew, he's also considered gay or queer. This will up the stakes. Tonight I'll try using Laban's GLIDE for the first scene, interjected with small bursts of DAB, and just DAB in the second scene. By implementing quickness, the stakes will seemingly go up.

"Il n'y a plus de visas?"

DIRECT

QUICK } DAB

LIGHT

02/03/2022

I didn't sleep much last night, somehow got out of bed, and had a somewhat long day of classes.

I ate a ham and cheese sandwich with potato chips for lunch and got to relax my body for most of the day. Going to the pool I had a lot of energy; I was ready to work out. I did 16 laps: 4 breaststroke, 4 freestyle, and 4 back stroke, the last two alternated, and ended with 4 more breast stroke, for a total of almost 17 minutes. Total of 640ft, or 195m.

I felt really strong coming out and showering.

I ate a tuna fish sandwich accompanied by plantain chips and veggie whole wheat thins. That's when I got tired. Got to the theatre pretty early, did an unsatisfying warmup. The show started off really well connecting with Kate but once the first moment of the salon doesn't land, my performance gets muddled by my doubts from actioning. Tonight's audience was particularly dead. Vivian says it's us, not them. I believe her. I don't know. My body was tired tonight, some lower back pain, and difficulty staying on alignment all the time. I get swept up by the actions, what's happening on stage, and my perception of the audience. I can't help but get the feeling that because this is my thesis show, I can't really have fun. Something is blocking me.

Benefits of swimming:

- Total body workout

- Cardiovascular fitness - better for joints!
- Lifelong fitness from cradle to grave
- Injuries low impact & zero gravity
- Disabilities
- Pregnancy
- Burns massive amounts of calories
- Improves sleep
- Boosts mood releases endorphins, improves confidence
- Manages stress meditative!

Water is 800x more dense than air and improves strength, tones muscles, and speeds up metabolism.

02/04/2022

Today's performance was probably the best so far, fueled by a loud and present audience. I woke up at 10 today, skipping MT because of bowel issues I had throughout the night. Exactly a month ago, I started rehearsing from 6:30 to 10:30 every night of the last week of break to get into rhythm of the work, and boy am I so grateful I'm that driven! The actor IS an athlete! Today, after sleeping in, I had my usual smoothie for breakfast with granola, a ham and cheese sandwich for lunch, and very salty rice with brussels sprouts and asparagus for dinner. Today's physical exercise was not swimming, however, it was yoga. I did a core based 25 minute yoga flow in the scene

shop that felt really good. Definitely engaged my transversus with some rocking too, and higher abs as well. Then took a lukewarm shower, had dinner, got dressed and warmed up. I think waiting until the last 20 minutes to do the warmup was the best idea. I had already engaged my body muscularly, and honestly put more tension in my body during the show. I should look up the benefits of cold shower. My performance was great.

Nakhmen was on his alignment, Harry found new actions to play, the old hassid has a splendid voice, Bailie had his energy center in his shoulders and chest, and the Rabbi connected more with the audience. Nakhmen's last scene was pretty emotional, but not Wigala. I'm happy I tried the yoga today, I definitely need to do that more often. I feel like I was more aware of my body tonight, and my voice flowed out better.

Table 3: Cold shower vs warm shower

Cold shower	Warm shower
Awakens body (fresh and alert)	Release oxytocin which eases anxiety and stress
Jolt of electrical bolts to brains improve mood	Clears nasal passage
Weight loss	Releases tension & stiffness
Calms itch skin	Activates parasympathetic nervous system
Increases circulation	Relief from respiratory symptoms
Reduces muscle soreness post work-out	Loosens up phlegm
Glowing hair & skin	

02/09/2022

A meeting with Chris.

Specificity of characters

Tried risky things

“Pinned down” – what does that mean?

Energy centers – where?

Why was it hard to understand who Baillie is?

Pressure affecting what I did

How has my experience in individualistic and team sports affect my perception of being an actor?

Read books from sports people
people

Read books from theatre

02/10/2022

A meeting with Julia and Sage

Julia. I helped her achieve an ensemble.

Positive attitude, openness.

Moment I talked to her personally.

I don't shut down in confusion or figuring out moments.

I did a lot of work on my own.

Sage. Made clear choices.

Would've been nice to spend more time on Nakhmen and Rabbi.

Very apparent I did work on my own.

Feel free to play more with vocal variations and physicality before the break.

Harry had a good balance. Bailie got clearer in tech.

02/14/2022

A meeting with Vivian

Constantly working on specificity and outside-in work.

Marrying the outside-in with the vulnerability.

Every character has a “toxic leak”: moment where the inside leaks out uncontrollably and then puts up a wall.

Look more into subtext for complexity and contradictions.

Gotta get out of the intellect and put into body.

Études – Moscow Art Thea

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