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WALKING TO MY DEATH: AN ACTOR'S JOURNEY

By

David Elliot Galloway
B.A., Presbyterian College, 2009

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Department of Theatre Arts
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2014

WALKING TO MY DEATH: AN ACTOR'S JOURNEY

By

David Elliot Galloway
B.A. Presbyterian College, 2009
A Thesis Approved on

April 15, 2014

by the following Thesis Committee:

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother Johnnie Galloway,

who passed away while I was writing. Grandma, I love you.

I know you are smiling down on us all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would thank Dr. Rinda Frye for her continued support and guidance during this process, and for helping me find my voice—on the stage and in these pages. I would also like to thank Daniel Hill for teaching me to make bold choices and trust in the work. Also thank you to Dr. Cooper for being my third reader, and for introducing me to Cuthulu. Dr. Russell Vandenbroucke, thank you for entrusting me with such an incredible role. Thank you Professor Thompkins for getting me out of my head and into my whole body. Thank you to Valerie Jones for casting me in my first official play, and setting me on a lifelong-journey of discovery. Thanks to Miriam Ragland and Lesley Preston, for encouraging me to continue my training. Of course, I cannot thank my family enough for their continued support through thick and thin. Mom, Dad, I finished!

ABSTRACT

WALKING TO MY DEATH: AN ACTOR'S JOURNEY

David E. Galloway

April 15, 2014

In the fall of 2011, I began a course of graduate theatrical training at the University of Louisville. Over my three years of study, I have developed a process for the creation of a well-rounded and emotionally interesting character. I call my process three-dimensional acting. This process is composed of: a keen and in-depth study of and adherence to the text, careful and thorough voice work, and well-rehearsed and executed physicality. This study shows, through its application to the character of Matthew Poncelet, in *Dead Man Walking*, that my process succeeds in creating a character of emotional complexity that an audience will empathize with, even if that character is of an unsavory nature.

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INTRODUCTION

Some people go through their lives searching for what they really want to do. Some find it, and others settle for what is comfortable and safe. There is a third sort of person however—those who are fortunate enough to find what they love early in life. I am one such person. I fell in love with the theatre at an early age. I have wanted to be an actor for as long as I can remember. Someone once told me “if you can see yourself being happy doing anything else, then you should do that.” I quite simply cannot see myself doing anything else professionally. I considered (very briefly) going to law school to become a trial lawyer, and most of my non-theatrical work to date has been in the culinary industry. Both of these things involve creative expression and performance, so I have always been a performer, and I have never considered doing anything that did not have a creative outlet.

My earliest memory of theatre is of playing a role in my church’s Thanksgiving play. Basically, it was a play about taking time to enjoy and be thankful for life, and not rushing through it. All of the girls played flowers of one sort or another and the guys were supposed to be snails. The only problem was there were only two parts for snails, and we were one girl short for the flowers. So I ended up playing the dandelion. We made the dandelion “butch” by painting whiskers on my cheeks; turning me into a “dandy-lion.” This began my journey in theatre, and for much of it, I have played the roles that others did not want to play, or that audiences found unsavory. The rest—as

they say—is history. I had been bitten by the theatre bug, and I continued to act in church plays, and then at Thornwell High School.

Upon graduation from high school I made the decision to pursue a degree in theatre. I decided to attend Presbyterian College, a small liberal arts school with an even smaller Theatre Department. The Theatre department at Presbyterian, while small, was a good one. There were only two full-time professors, and they taught a little bit of everything. Miriam Ragland, the acting professor, was also the dance professor, and the movement professor. Lesley Preston, the resident designer, was also the professor of all the design courses, as well as theatre history. She also served as department chair. There was a technical director on payroll, and he doubled as shop foreman. The reason that I outlined all of this is because it is indicative of what my experience was like while there. I was exposed to many areas of theatre—from performance, to lighting and set design, to actual construction of set, and light hang. This gave me a greater appreciation for the work that non-actors put into every single production. It also served to reinforce my love for the performance side of theatre above all others.

As far as my technical training at Presbyterian College is concerned, I received a sampling of many different techniques. Like most theatre performance training in this country it was predominantly based in Stanislavsky's system, and thus it prepared me for acting in realistic or naturalistic plays in the future. What Presbyterian College's program really lacked was a movement regimen. We were required to take only one movement class, which was really a dance class combined with yoga, and as a result, when I entered graduate school in the fall of 2011, I was still a bit awkward in moments that required anything above just basic stage movement.

Upon graduation, I faced the challenge that all actors face; what was my next step? I knew that I could not find anything other than community theatre in Laurens County, so after working one show in Greenville, I moved to Columbia, SC to work with Workshop Theatre there. They were also a community theatre, but they occasionally had an Equity actor or two in their productions, and they were certainly a cut above what I was used to in Laurens County. I became a member of the South Carolina Shakespeare Company, and I was happy to have the work, but something was missing. I still was not satisfied with my training. I was relying primarily on talent and instinct, which are fine things. However, fine is not good enough for professional work and I noticed at auditions and over the course of rehearsals that, while I was getting cast, I was not moving as well, on stage, as some of the other actors. I was better than some, but I wanted to be better than all of them. I have a tendency to get stuck in my head as an actor, and I wanted to be free on the stage. This reaffirmed my desire to continue my training. The difference between my process then and now is an identifiable set of tools, a clear technique for bringing a character to life. So, with the goal of gaining this technique in mind, I began auditioning for Master of Fine Arts in Theatrical Performance programs.

I went to the Unified Regional Theatre Association's Chicago audition, where I received some interest from a few programs, but the callbacks I received were mostly for conservatory programs. I knew that I wanted an MFA because it would give me a much more well-rounded experience and would afford me the most options after graduation. I remembered that the University of Louisville had shown interest in me when I auditioned at the Southeastern Theatre Conference two years prior, and so I reached out to them. I

was informed that they were having on-site auditions, and I was invited to participate. My audition was successful and I was invited to apply.

A few weeks later I was offered an assistantship, which I accepted, and I began my training in the fall of 2011. One of the key factors of my decision to come to the University of Louisville was that they had specific training in the areas of voice and movement. I had significant vocal training, but this was musical in nature and not geared toward the actor's speaking voice. As I noted earlier, I had next to no movement training and this was my greatest weakness as an actor. The Linklater voice work and the Lecoq movement training were major influences in my choosing this program. If I am being completely truthful, I had no idea what I was in for my first semester of graduate school, but I was truly excited to finally get some specific techniques that I could employ in the creation of a role, rather than relying on the smattering of different bits and pieces that I had used in the past. I am truly grateful for the foundation I received at Presbyterian College. I would not be where I am today without the guidance of my professors there, but a small department at a small college can teach only so much in four years.

During my three years at the University of Louisville, many factors have shaped and changed my acting process. Where I used to get a script, learn my lines, and sort of stumble into my character, now I have a system in place for creating a character. I now pay more attention to the voice of my character. Where does the voice live in his body? Is it nasal, or does it live in the mouth box, or the chest? Does the character have a dialect, and how thick or heavy is it? How does he move? Does he lead with his nose, his shoulders, or his chest? Is his posture erect or does he slump? Does he have a limp? These and many, many other questions are things that I now ask myself early in the

process. I now ask these questions of myself, and do not wait for the director to suggest them. Of course the director may suggest things, but now I come to the rehearsal process with ideas and choices, rather than waiting to be drawn on like a blank canvass. By doing this, I give the director something to work from, and I give him or her choices, so that he or she can fine tune, rather than have to create everything for me. In doing this I am able to reach new heights in character work that would not have been possible before.

I have learned a great deal about myself as an actor during my time at UofL. It is always a challenge to analyze oneself objectively and truthfully. We all like to imagine ourselves better than we are. That being said, I do have many things acting in my favor. My strengths as an actor are: my mind, my command of language, my ear, my voice, and my ability to listen and respond. While it is important to be able to recognize what one is good at, it is equally, perhaps even more, important to be able to look at oneself and honestly identify one's weaknesses as an actor. While no one likes doing this, it is important to identify weaknesses so that one can attempt to fix them, and grow as an actor.

Some of my weaknesses as an actor are: movement, my posture on stage, and my voice (yes I know I listed this as a strength as well). Of these, movement has always been my biggest weakness as an actor. Now, let us be clear, when I say movement I do not mean walking across the stage or pointing at something, nothing as trivial as that. What I am talking about is incorporating the entire body in the movement of the character. How does the character move: Do they lead with their chest, or their hips? Do they have a limp? Do they use their arms a lot, or very selectively? These and many

more things must be considered by the actor and then incorporated into his or her own body.

My training and performance experience at the University of Louisville has enabled me to create and be able to identify and explain my personal process for the creation of a character for the stage. The formation of this process has occurred in fits and starts throughout my career at UofL. It has not been an easy journey, but nothing really worth doing is ever entirely easy. My program of graduate study culminated with a thesis performance, of a role of my choosing, in which I employed everything I have learned over the last three years. The process of selecting a role for my thesis was a challenging one. I was offered two roles, the first being Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the second was Matthew Poncelet in *Dead Man Walking*, by Tim Robbins.

Both of these roles appealed to me for different reasons. Caliban is not entirely human, and as such, his movement, speech, and mannerisms are foreign to the realm of normal human interaction. This role would challenge me to take the character physically to a place that I have never gone as an actor. Matthew Poncelet, on the other hand is imprisoned on death row, and he is in shackles for much of the play. This would force me to find ways of physicalizing the character without a lot of arm and hand gestures, which is what many actors rely on. I chose Matthew Poncelet, in the end, because the role gave me the opportunity to showcase a wide array of human emotion, and to show the humanity of a character that many would dismiss as someone who was just a bad man, something evil, perhaps even less than human on some level.

The role of Matthew Poncelet required me to use all of my strengths as an actor. I had to create an in depth character analysis to discover what makes a man like him tick.

What does a death row inmate want? What can he get? Also the language of the play is very challenging. While Matt does not use a lot of complex language, he does use words that most people hesitate to say. This challenged me as an actor to say them as though they were second nature to me. His speaking pattern is also very specific to Cajun Louisiana. This required my ear for dialects. A southern accent is not as easy to do as many people might think. It is very easy to overdo it and make a farce of the dialect. Cajun is even more difficult. The Cajun dialect combines Southern United States with a little French, and even a little Brooklyn. Therefore this role afforded me the chance to learn a new dialect and even to help others learn it.

Much of the play's action is between Matt and Sister Helen, and many of the scenes are incredibly personal and painful. This role required me to allow my voice to go to places I have never allowed it to go before. I also had to really listen to what Sister Helen was saying, and to how Megg Ward, the actress playing Sister Helen, was delivering those lines, and allow that to affect me. Finally, the role presented a major physical challenge. For almost the entire first act, my character was shackled. I had to find ways of moving my body and keeping it energized and engaged without the use of my arms. Even once the shackles are removed, Matt is still limited by the boundaries of his cell.

As this role presents problems with movement, I employed some of the training I received in England when I was studying Japanese Noh theatre. Everything about movement in Noh theatre is very controlled and internal. The energy is extremely high, but what you see is smaller and takes up little space. This was perfect for this role. It also addresses posture. I revisited my old texts and the practice of this control of energy.

I also reviewed and employed the Linklater work on allowing the breath to be free, thereby allowing the emotion of a moment to take my voice where it will. While much of the time Matthew is very much in control, there are moments when he loses control, and I had to be open to those moments and not shut off the raw emotion.

This role presented a few acting challenges. First and foremost, how do you find the humanity of a man like Matthew Poncelet? How do you play him as an honest human being and not some caricature of a death row inmate? How do you make an audience identify with someone they pre-label as a monster? The second problem is closely linked to the first. How do you play someone like this without judging him yourself? How do you tell the character's story without slanting it with your own personal code of morality? The third major problem I foresaw is dealt with the restrictive nature of the play on my character. Matthew is restricted physically for much of the play. His space is always restricted, and perhaps most importantly of all, he has placed emotional restrictions upon himself in order to cope with the dehumanization that he goes through on a daily basis as a death row inmate, as well as the unfortunate events of his childhood—such as his father's untimely death. He has a front that he puts up. To show weakness in prison marks one as a target. How much more-so is this true for a death row inmate? The part of himself that he shows is the tough guy facade. Essentially all of these problems boil down to: "how do you find the humanity of a 'villain' or an unsavory character and give him his due as a human being?" In the following chapters I will take you through my theory, training, research, rehearsal, and performance. This is my personal journey of identifying and creating a three-dimensional process for bringing a

character to life from the pages of a play script and giving him a multifaceted emotional life onstage, and how I applied it to the role of Matthew Poncelet in *Dead Man Walking*.

DEFINING THREE DIMENSIONAL ACTING

Create your own method. Don't depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you! But keep breaking traditions, I beg you.

--Konstantin Stanislavsky (Moore)

What Is Three Dimensional Acting and Why Use It?

Basically, all humans want to be liked. No one thinks, "Man I sure hope those people over there hate my breathing guts," or "I hope that every person I meet today judges me and thinks himself better than me." This desire quite often transfers to the performance of a theatrical character. Many actors, especially young ones, or those just starting out in their careers, want to be liked by the audience. They crave affection that they equate with having given a good performance. Unfortunately, the actor is attaching him or herself to the character, and buying in to the fallacy that if the character is liked, then the actor did a good job. This in turn leads many actors to prefer playing the role of the hero, or the lover, or the comic relief instead of the villain. Wanting to play the good guy is not a bad thing, and is simply human nature. Playing the hero does not automatically result in a strong performance, nor does playing an unsavory character result in a poor, flat, one-dimensional performance.

No matter what type of character an actor is portraying, a well-rounded character capable of all human emotion, good and bad, is far more truthful and seemingly real than a one-dimensional character. The actor must be able to look objectively at any character. Even those characters that are labeled as villains, or just unpleasant people, do not go around wanting people to hate them, or at the very least they did not begin their lives that way. Every character has humanity, or is at least capable of human emotion. A villainous or unsavory character, whose spark of humanity we glimpse, is much more interesting to watch and much more compelling on stage than one that is evil to the core. In other words, if the actor can make the audience feel sorry for, or attracted to, or empathy towards a “villain,” rather than feel simple disgust or anger, then he or she will have been much more truthful to the humanity of the character. The problem is how to find the humanity of a character that that seems to be nothing but a bad apple.

One finds the humanity of villains, anti-heroes, or other unsavory characters through a process that I call three-dimensional acting. This process is composed of: a keen and in-depth study of and adherence to the text, careful and thorough voice work, and well-rehearsed and executed physicality. In their book, *Acting & Stage Movement*, Edwin White and Marguerite Battye state:

Technique depends upon power of vocalization and ability to move. Control of both speech and body conveys the picture of the character as it is seen in our mind. The studies of the actor are first the material, which is in the play, and then speech and movement by which he will interpret. (White and Battye, 18)

Text, voice, and physicality are the triumvirate that makes up a three dimensional approach to acting. I may not be breaking any new ground with this assertion, but I am suggesting that a thorough exploration of this will lead to finding the humanity in any character, even unsavory ones, if the actor allows it to.

The Text (or the Script)

This exploration process begins and ends with the script. This is the foundation of the textual dimension of the process, and it is the first tool of three-dimensional acting. “*Speaking and doing are the ingredients of acting*. What is spoken and done must be found from the play itself” (White and Battye, 18). It is important to note the use of the word “from” rather than “in.” Much of what you need to know about the character, you can get from the script itself, or support with research informed by the script.

One of the earliest endorsements for the primacy of the text can be found in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Aristotle establishes early in his famous work the guidelines for what makes up a tragedy. Most theatrical scholars simply apply this to all plays, probably due to the following statement: “tragic imitation implies persons acting” (Aristotle, 17). He writes:

...every play contains Spectacular elements as well as Character, Plot, Diction, Song, and Thought...But most important of all is the structure of the incidents...the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. (Aristotle, 19)

When Aristotle says “the structure of the incidents” he means plot, as we see in the passage, “by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents” (Aristotle, 17). Of all the elements Aristotle outlines, the one he chooses as the most important is the script. The physical script is a “written arrangement of the incidents” in a play. All of the other elements are gleaned from the script, and or supplied by the theatre practitioners.

Of Aristotle’s six elements, three are linked directly to the script itself: Plot, Character, and Thought. The other three: Diction, Song, and Spectacle, are closely linked to the script, but for the moment, let us concern ourselves with the first three. Aristotle

ranked the elements in order of their importance to a play. Plot is first and Character is of the second most import. What exactly is character? Aristotle says, “Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids” (Aristotle, 21). In other words, what is the character of the character? What kind of choices does he or she make, and why? A huge part of creating a role comes in knowing what type of person you are portraying. Today we might consider this to be the character’s psyche. From the quote above one might think that Aristotle is saying that the choices or types of choices a person makes are his or her character, but on closer inspection of the text, we see that he is speaking of the motivation behind the choices:

Now character determines men’s qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. (Aristotle, 19)

So what the actor is concerned with, in discussing the character of a role, is the why of the choices that they make.

The third most important element of a play is the element of thought. At first, the word “thought” seems to imply a number of different things but Aristotle’s definition clarifies:

Thought, that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in the given circumstances...Thought...is found where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated. (Aristotle, 21)

Aristotle is treating the word thought, here, as a noun and not a verb. He is referring to the thought of the playwright that is placed onto the pages of the script, that is: what is “possible and pertinent,” or what is real within the reality or the “given circumstances” of the play.

The element of thought is the last one that Aristotle devotes much time to in the beginning of *Poetics*, essentially stating that the others, in particular song and spectacle, are self-explanatory. Perhaps they once were, but to a modern theatre patron they are probably not. While they are important to the theatre artist, they do not concern me here because they do not affect my process of three dimensional acting; and the only thing I will say about diction is what Aristotle himself said: “Fourth among the elements enumerated comes Diction; by which I mean...the expression of the meaning in words” (Aristotle, 21). Here Aristotle is not speaking of Diction in the sense of Demosthenes, who spoke with a mouth full of pebbles to improve his diction, but rather in the sense of how an actor interprets the meaning of the words, and conveys it.

Returning to the element of thought: the term, “given circumstances,” is a very important one in the theatre, and one that is essential to an actor’s work in creating a role. In his book *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, James Thomas gives a good working definition for the term: “Given circumstances are the specific conditions in which the action of the play occurs” (Thomas, 39). So what is considered a given circumstance, and what is not considered given? Thomas breaks it down as follows:

Under this heading [given circumstances], we will be concerned with eight subtopics: time, place, society, economics, learning and the arts, politics and law, spirituality...and the world of the play. (Thomas, 40)

Many of these “subtopics” have further sub-subtopics. However, these eight can all usually be discovered by a careful examination of the script. They are important to directors, designers, and actors, but I will concern myself only with their import to the actor here.

The actor must approach the given circumstances by asking the following questions. First, what can I glean about the play at large, and about my character specifically, from the information that is actually provided in the script? Second, what other information is implied by the given circumstances that I need to get for myself by doing outside research? The first question can be answered by combing the script for any details that fit into the subtopics listed in the previous paragraph. This will give the actor all of the information relevant to the play, as it unfolds before an audience. The answer to the second question is informed by the answers gleaned from the first. What relevant information to seek out and employ is up to each actor, but he or she is given a starting point and “suggestions,” as it were, in the text. An example of outside research an actor might do would be dialect work. The play might be set in London, and the character might be lower class, but it does not say specifically that he or she has a cockney dialect. So, using the clues of location and class, the play suggests research into how the character would speak.

There are details about every character that are not given in the script, however, that straddle the line between what an actor can get directly from the script and what must be researched. This is the character’s background story. The reason it straddles the line is that some of the background story is given through the exposition of the play, and some of it the actor must create through a combination of research and the use of his or her own imagination. James Thomas essentially uses the terms exposition and background story interchangeably, but this is not really the case. The exposition of a play only contains a portion of the whole of a character’s background. The actor must create the rest. This is both good and bad: it makes the character more real to both actor and

audience so the actor can play more intimately and truthfully. But, if the actor veers from the details of the script, he can create a short work of fiction that is separate from the text of the play.

Thomas writes, “Background story involves everything that happened before the beginning of the play, before the curtain goes up” (Thomas, 71). One should not get bogged down in every single moment of the character’s life before the events of the play. So how does an actor choose which past events are important? Thomas says, “Background story takes on several forms: events, character descriptions, and feelings” (Thomas, 77). Creating a background story can be tedious work, and some actors tend to skip this part, or spend too little time here. It is tempting to just wing it, or to try and piece it together during the rehearsal process without much thought beforehand. In her book, *Shadows of Realism, Dramaturgy and the Theories and Practices of Modernism*, Nancy Kindelan addresses this problem. She writes, “One of the pitfalls for a novice actor...is the failure to spend enough time with the playscript prior to production” (Kindelan, 4). While novice actors often fail at this, veterans of the stage also make this mistake. The other problem of creating a background story is exactly the opposite: some spend too much time creating an entire life for the character. Finding a balance is necessary.

Why is a background story important? The actor must remember that:

...for the characters themselves...the past is not dull and unexciting, but rather their own lives – everything good and bad that has happened to them. Second, the past should be understood as an integral part of the play, not a clumsy encumbrance. It helps in understanding the characters that are talking about the past, it creates moods, generates conflicts, and strongly influences the environment and mise-en-scene. (Thomas, 71)

In other words, if the actor does not understand where a character is coming from, and what they have been through, then he or she is creating the character's reactions to people, places, and events that are seen in the play out of thin air. From Aristotle on, I have said that the script provides an actor with everything that he or she needs, either directly or indirectly. I have found that the script usually provides an actor with background story in both forms. It is important to fill in the gaps for your character, as long as this is in line with what is in the script. When an actor just writes a story out of thin air, with no textual basis, the background story has no value since it does not inform the character's actions. This is what I mean when I say that a back story is a good thing as long as it is supported by the text.

The Voice

The second tool of three-dimensional acting is the voice which has several elements: Breathing, Phonation, Pitch, Resonance, and Diction. This list was taken from the book *Acting One/Acting Two*, by Robert Cohen, but these elements are listed in almost any text that deals with the actor's voice. The foundation of all theatrical voice work is the breath. Without proper breath support the actor cannot reach his or her full vocal potential. In her book, *Freeing the Natural Voice*, Kristen Linklater says "Your breath is the source of your life as well as the source of your sound" (Linklater, 43). Breathing is something that we all do without thinking about it. Just like an athlete has different demands upon his breath than a non-athlete, so too an actor has specific demands upon his or her breath. Cohen writes:

The actor's goal is simply to breathe naturally while under the pressure of performance—and to provide sufficient lung power to support a voice that may be challenged in acting more than in almost any other activity. (Cohen, 113-114)

An actor must be heard in the back row of the theatre, and he or she must be able to do so without yelling. By unlearning the bad breathing habits developed over the course of one's life, an actor can support a strong speaking voice that can be heard clearly over great distances and fill almost any theatrical space.

The reason I say unlearning the bad breathing habits—rather than learning to breathe properly—is because “[t]here is no one way to breathe that is correct for all purposes” (Linklater, 43), but there is an incorrect way. The habit of using only a small portion of the lungs (for most people this is the upper portion, causing the shoulders to rise and fall) hinders the voice from reaching full expressive capability. It is much better for an actor to focus on developing good technique for taking in the amount of oxygen that is needed to get the job done. Shallow breathing may provide enough oxygen to support the voice for a small task, but “[d]eep body breathing, as deep as possible, gives the voice its fullest support and the body its fullest relaxation” (Cohen, 114). By breathing deeply I do not mean the amount of oxygen being taken in by the lungs but rather of the placement of the breath. Here Cohen describes, in the simplest of terms, the foundation of breath work in any voice curriculum, in any theatre program under the sun: breathe deeply and from the diaphragm, not just in the chest. If an actor can learn to do this, then he or she will be well prepared to take on other areas of voice work.

The purpose of supporting the voice with breath is of course so that the actor can be heard; therefore, what the character has to say is heard. One can breathe properly and make no sound. So the next element of voice work is of course phonation. Cohen writes that “making sounds with your voice (phonation) is a spontaneously learned phenomenon that the actor must cultivate beyond its everyday function” (Cohen, 114). Anyone can

make himself heard by shouting. A great stage actor must be able to make himself or herself heard by every patron, even if he or she is whispering. This projection is only possible when the actor has enough breath. An actor must not only be able to project these sounds but must also master them. Command of sounds in language is essential to voice work. Therefore, the element of phonation is closely tied to that of diction.

An actor must have verbal dexterity and be able to articulate the words that the character is using:

...*articulation*: [is] the shaping of vocal noise into independent and recognizable units of spoken language, or *phonemes*. There are about forty phonemes in spoken English, plus various phonemic combinations, and the fine actor can speak all of them clearly and distinctly. (Cohen, 121)

Essentially every word in the English language is comprised of some combination of these forty or so phonemes. The forty basic spoken sounds of the English language fall into nine sub-categories that are encompassed by the larger categories of vowels and consonants. Vowels are comprised of: “front vowels”, “back vowels”, “mid vowels”, and “diphthongs” (Cohen, 122-123). Consonants include: “plosives”, “fricatives”, “nasals”, “glides”, and “blended” (Cohen, 124-125). The sounds are categorized by where they are formed in the mouth, and by the release of breath; whether they are voiced or unvoiced. A vocally well-prepared actor must be able to pronounce all of them correctly, and without accent or with, as is required. (This is where the International Phonetic Alphabet comes in handy, but I will discuss this later).

The creation and mastery of the sounds that make up the language used by characters is all well and good, but there is more to the craft than that. People pay good money to watch and listen to actors performing in a way that they themselves cannot.

The actors must be articulate, and they must project. I have already stated that proper breathing is the foundation of voice work, and this is indeed a major part of projection.

The other, equally important, part is resonance.

Resonance is the re-sounding of vocal fold sounds...Vibration creates sound, but it also creates other (sympathetic) vibrations, which themselves create sound...Often these secondary sounds are louder and fuller than the original...sound itself. (Cohen, 115)

The initial sound of the breath passing over and vibrating the vocal chords is only a fraction of the entirety of sound the body makes in speech. “Most of the sound of the human voice is provided by the resonation of...the pharyngeal (throat), oral (mouth), and nasal (nose) cavities that lie above the vocal folds” (Cohen, 115).

An actor must train and exercise these resonating cavities in order to achieve maximum resonance. This is different for every person, but a well-trained voice provides much more resonance, and is therefore much fuller, and is capable of expressiveness that an untrained voice lacks. By exercising the resonators, an actor also increases his range in terms of pitch.

Pitch is a familiar term to musicians, but actors use it as well. Here we are referring to the musical quality of the speaking voice rather than the singing voice. The average voice contains more notes than most people think. Cohen notes:

Pitch is the highness or lowness of a musical tone...One of your goals in acting...[is] to allow yourself the uninhibited excitement that will naturally call into play a broader tonal scale—a larger pitch range. (Cohen, 118)

If an actor exercises the voice and allows the energy of proper breathing to take the voice where it wants to go naturally in various emotional states, the variety of pitch one can achieve can be astounding.

Physicality (or the Body and Movement)

Of the three tools for three-dimensional acting, physicality is perhaps the most difficult. It certainly is for me. However, physicality is crucial to creating a three-dimensional character, and the full embodiment of said character. Even Konstantin Stanislavsky, the great Russian actor and director, who was primarily concerned with the psychological motivations of a character recognized the importance of physicality. He wrote:

...there is no physical action which does not involve desires, aspirations, objectives, or feelings which justify the action; there is no act of imagination which does not contain some imagined action...all this bears witness to the intimate tie between physical action and all the inner "elements" of a creative state. (Stanislavski, 47)

Stanislavsky devoted his life to the study of theatre, and much of western theatrical practice is based on his teachings. If he thought that physicality was an integral part of the creative process of an actor, there is probably something to it.

What do I mean when I say physicality? I mean those things pertaining to the actor's body, and the movement of that body, by various means, in the theatrical space. This includes an actor's agility, alignment and posture, walking, sitting and standing, velocity, counterpoise, and specific movement skill sets (Cohen 136-144). It is not enough for an actor to simply walk from point A to point B onstage. A physically skilled actor must be familiar with and have command of each of these elements.

Much of an actor's work on physicality is work on what all human beings do naturally. While it may be natural, most people do not know what it is they are doing. An awareness of what makes up an actor's physicality is crucial to his or her craft. It is surprising how many beginning actors cannot walk and talk at the same time, once they set foot on stage. Somehow they forget how to do what they have been doing their entire lives, and either the walk becomes unnatural, or the speech does. Actors have to train their bodies to do things on stage, with an audience watching, that real people do in everyday life; walking for example. Actors must move naturally under circumstances that are anything but.

Agility is a term that includes many areas of an actor's physicality, including: strength, stamina, dexterity, coordination, physical dynamics, specific movement skills i.e. combat, mime, dance, and so on (Cohen, 136-137). Strength and stamina are closely linked but not the same thing. Strength has to do with the ability to perform a physical exertion and stamina is the ability to perform that exertion over an extended period of time. If one has never been in a production of a full-length play, it is hard to understand the physical exertion that takes place. Cohen writes:

...the sheer physical work of the actor is often grueling...several hours of onstage time, running up and down stairs, fighting, dueling, changing costume, *all with maximum physical control*. (Cohen, 136)

Of course not every play involves fight scenes or running up and down stairs, but each play is physically demanding in its own way. The part about maximum physical control is especially important. Unless the character is supposed to be winded or injured, he should not look or sound as if he is. Therefore, an actor must be strong enough to

perform all of the physical demands of the role, and must be able to continue, without flagging, for the duration of the play, and throughout the run of the performance.

Some actors, just like non-actors, are naturally dexterous and coordinated. Others are markedly not. However, the actor does not have the luxury of saying, “I’m just a clumsy person by nature.” An actor’s dexterity and coordination in his or her own life is not what is important; it is the dexterity and coordination of the character that he or she is portraying that matters. All actors, even those that are more naturally gifted in these areas, must constantly practice and improve upon these aspects of agility. One never knows when one may be called upon by either the playwright or the director to perform an act that requires great dexterity, such as balancing a load of dishes in one hand while holding open a door with the other, or some other thing requiring an equal or greater level of coordination.

The dynamics of an actor’s body are also crucial to agility. “Dynamics means physical force in action. The actor is always in action or potentially in action” (Cohen, 137). This means that the actor must always be in a state of readiness. He or she must be able to react to what happens on the stage. Even when still, the body of the actor is alive with dynamic energy. This is a major part of making a character alive. The ability to go from stillness to movement, without having to find the energy because it is already there is of the utmost importance. This is closely linked to the concept of counterpoise.

A counterpoised body is full of dynamic energy, and an actor employing this onstage has worked hard to accomplish this. In *Acting One/Acting Two*, Cohen provides us with a working definition of a counterpoised body:

Contrapasto is an Italian word...describing counterpoised physical positions in which the body is twisted so that the shoulders and the hips,

the arms and the legs, are in different planes...The counterpoised body...can be coiled for action even though it seems to be at rest. (Cohen, 144)

This does not mean that the actor is standing in some strange pose with arms and legs at odd angles, but rather that the actor allows his or her arms, legs, hips to be free and move while performing, rather than keeping them locked or rigid. Allowing the dynamic energy to flow through the counterpoised body, allows an actor to shift directions, speed, and alignment immediately and fluidly.

Alignment and posture go hand in hand. Unfortunately, this is an area in which many Americans, actors and non-actors alike, are woefully inept. The actor must have a firm grasp of how the skeleton and muscles work together naturally, with the skeleton supporting the body and the muscles moving it. F. Matthias Alexander developed a technique for aligning the skeleton and muscles in a “natural” or resting position. The following is a basic outline of how the major areas of the body should be in their relaxed state:

1. The head “floating” easily atop the spine
2. The neck free and relaxed
3. The shoulders spread out (not pulled back)
4. The torso lengthened and widened; the rib cage expanded; the vertebrae separated, not crunched together
5. The pelvis freely rotating, the hip joints free and rolling. (Cohen, 138)

This is what actors call a natural or neutral alignment. From here, an actor can create myriad variations based on character information and choices. It is much easier to create from neutral than from bad posture caused by poor alignment.

Walking, sitting, and standing are all closely tied to alignment. Everyone knows how to walk, but not everyone knows that there are many different kinds of walks.

Cohen lists sixteen different walks in his book, but one could add to that list without

much difficulty. Each walk requires the use of the skeleton and muscles in a unique way, and each walk says something different about the person using it; each one carries its own implications for what is going on with the character. An actor must understand what each walk implies, and which one is right for his character at any given moment. This takes training, just as surely as any other aspect of physicality. Likewise the manner in which a character sits or stands says something about the mental and social state of the character. An actor must be able to control the manner in which he or she sits at a table, or falls into a bed. An old character will rise from a nap in a way that is very different from that of a teenager.

Velocity of movement is key to creating a well-rounded character. In life we do not simply move at one speed all the time. We are constantly rushing, or taking our time with whatever we are doing.

Accelerating and decelerating movements make clear that you are thinking while moving and that your mind is generating the movements you make. Constant-velocity movements, in contrast indicate that you are simply executing movements generated by someone else—the director, for example. (Cohen, 143)

Here Cohen emphasizes that real people are constantly changing velocity because they are deciding what to do in the moment. This is what an actor must strive to portray in order for movement to look natural onstage. While in reality much of the actor's movement is carefully rehearsed, it must not appear that way.

The last part of a three dimensional actor's physicality is the necessity for specific movement and physical skill sets. General agility and other aspects of an actor's physicality must be mastered in order to apply them to a well-rounded, three-dimensional

approach. However, an actor who takes his or her craft seriously will also take physical training to the next level with special skill sets. Cohen tells us tells us that:

Advanced actor training normally involves learning specific physical patterns, such as ballet, ballroom dancing, period dancing, fencing, hand-to-hand combat, mime, gesture, martial arts, period movement, contact improvisation, and circus technique. (Cohen, 137)

This list is by no means exhaustive. There are literally hundreds of special skill sets that can be added to an actor's toolbox of physicality. This reinforces the adage that the craft of acting cannot be mastered, only improved upon, and this is a key goal for any actor worth his or her salt: to constantly be improving.

TRAINING

“Jersey Grotowski taught me to discourage actors, because then, only the best will stay and work and train.”

--Joseph Chaikin (Alterman)

From this point on I will share my personal experience with three-dimensional acting; how I developed my approach, through training and experience. This is my journey of implementing the theory I have developed in the classroom and on the stage. There are many training methods for text analysis, voice work, physical awareness and exercise that I have learned and implemented in my work. My training—and its use in the classroom, rehearsal, and performance—led me to what I am calling three dimensional acting, but these are by no means the only systems of actor training.

Little did I know it when I began, but my theatrical training during my three years at the University of Louisville has been creating my acting process. Most students cannot see the end goal of their classes while they are taking them, and I was no exception. I thought that my classes were interesting, and that I was learning some new things, but I had no clue that I was subconsciously creating a real process for taking a character from the pages of a script and giving them life on stage. I know this sounds ridiculous since most people would think that this is the whole point of getting an education in theatre performance. But if you were to ask one hundred young actors about their “process,” I would guess that you would receive one hundred blank stares, and one hundred fumbling

answers that have something to do with Stanislavsky, or some other major theatre practitioner. I would also guess that in their minds those actors would be thinking, “I don’t really have a process, I just do it.” That was certainly the case for me.

The difference between my process now and my process before graduate school is that I can now tell you what my process is. It is also more sophisticated than it was before. My technique has improved, and I have learned to identify what exercises improve which areas of my craft. In this chapter I will explore each of the three areas of three-dimensional acting with regard to where I was before graduate study, where I was before my thesis project, what problems I still needed to address—and how I hoped *Dead Man Walking* would help me with these.

When I arrived at the University of Louisville in the fall of 2011, I thought that I knew a fair amount about creating a role. After all, I had completed a bachelor’s degree in Theatre Arts, and I had been the golden boy of my undergraduate department. I was one of only three majors in my graduating class, and the only man. My work had led my professors to give me the outstanding senior theatre major award, given to only one student each year. My professors at Presbyterian College were very good, and I am only outlining all of this because it is important in order to understand the difference in depth of study between a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Fine Arts curriculum in Theatre. My first year of graduate work was as close to a “we’re not in Kansas anymore” moment as I think I have ever experienced.

I had never been completely focused on one field of study before, and the first year of study at the University of Louisville was about total immersion in theatre. I ate, slept, and breathed theatre. At first I thought that the faculty was trying to break me, to

test whether I was truly committed to the discipline of Theatre. The first year of my graduate work was actually about breaking bad habits and tricks that I had learned to get away with, and learning how to do the actual work of character development. The second year built upon the first; I was expected to make bold choices based on the training I had received. Finally, in the third year, I was expected to implement everything I had learned—making it my own—into a thesis role. This role was the culmination of my training, and I was expected to perform at a professional level. Throughout my three years of graduate study there were key moments in text analysis, vocal, and physical training that shaped my process into what it is now.

Text

In each of the areas of studio work there are multiple classes in the curriculum, spaced over the three-year period of study. I expected this when I decided to attend the University of Louisville. What I was unaware of at the time, is that there is only one script analysis course, and it is taught in the first semester. Before beginning my MFA, I had only a cursory knowledge of script analysis. All I knew to do was to create a character sheet, with the basic information about my character that I could glean from the script; moreover, I would do this only in my head. I rarely wrote anything down.

A character sheet should contain all of the pertinent details one can glean from the script regarding his or her character. This includes the character's demographic information, i.e. gender, race, age, etc. The actor should also scan the script for the given circumstances that have a direct effect on his or her character. A well trained actor will also include some sort of background story here. The main difference between this and an advanced character analysis is in the amount of detail. A basic sheet will give the

actor enough to go on to stumble into the role, and this is what I would do with my characters. Now, when I am cast in a role, I am able to give character analysis the attention it deserves. I spend hours with the script combing it for relevant details, and I am able to have a much clearer picture of who my character is, what his relationships are, what motivates him, and why he makes the choices he makes before I enter a rehearsal space with the rest of the cast.

This is partially due to experience and the patience that comes with maturity, but it is also due in large part to my careful study of the book *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*, by James Thomas. I must mention here that, while my training at the University of Louisville has been comprehensive, script analysis is the one area in which my curriculum has not prepared me for professional work. Even with my limited knowledge of the jargon and terminology of script analysis, I was able to determine very quickly that our script analysis professor was not prepared to teach the course. Many times, either I or one of my classmates would ask for clarification on a term or idea, and she could not give it. Or else we would challenge an assertion that she made as fact with evidence to the contrary from our book. She would argue with us, in the face of clear evidence that she was mistaken. Therefore, I was forced to teach myself about script analysis from careful study of our textbook.

My first real challenge for applying what I had taught myself came when I was cast in the role of Enrico Fermi, in *Atomic Bombers*. This play was written by one of my professors, Russell Vandenbroucke, and is based on real events and real people. An actor should treat every character as though he is a real person, however, there is something about playing a historical figure that makes you really want to get all of the details

correct. I poured over the script for relevant details about my character, in order to be as thorough as possible. I even read portions of a book, written by Fermi's wife, about what her husband was like. This was the first time I had devoted so much time to character analysis outside of the rehearsal process. As a result, I felt more connected to the character, and I finally realized the value of the extra work. This was the beginning of my new process, in a practical sense.

Ever since *Atomic Bombers*, I have been working on character analysis outside of the rehearsal process, both before and during the weeks leading up to the run of the shows. The work is still demanding and time consuming, but it gets easier and more natural with each role. What I still need to work on is gathering more outside research for a role—finding information that is suggested by the script, but is not provided directly in it. The character of Matthew Poncelet, in *Dead Man Walking*, provided me with a great opportunity to push myself in this area. Once again I would be playing a character based on a real person (although this time it was an amalgamation of two real people), portraying real events. In preparation for this role I spent months gleaning information from the script and the book *Dead Man Walking*. For this role I wanted to do more research than I ever had before in an effort to find the subtler details of this complicated character.

I had no way of knowing this at the time, but playing the role of Caliban—the semester prior to performing *Dead Man Walking*—prepared me for the role of Matthew Poncelet. It gave me an opportunity to find moments of compassion, joy, hilarity, anger, sensuality—and many others—with a character who is looked on unfavorably. Caliban attempted to rape Miranda, and he has been punished for it by Prospero (Miranda's

Father). By doing my script analysis work, I was able to find that Caliban had once been happy and free on the island where he lives. He was very young when he attacked Miranda, and did not know the customs of the western people, to whom Prospero and Miranda belong. Prospero essentially adopted Caliban after he lost his mother, and Caliban would have been playmates with Miranda. Caliban loved her in his own animalistic way—which was what he knew from observing nature—and when he was punished and beaten he became angry and confused. I found that there were so many emotions bubbling under the surface of this character that, at any moment, any of them could burst forth. This is also true of all human beings. We are capable of great love, great passion, and kindness, but we are also capable of those darker emotions of hatred, lust, envy, and so on. It was through finding the good in Caliban that I truly saw how all characters—like all real life persons—are capable of, and do experience all human emotions on some level.

The character of Matthew Poncelet is very easy to hate. He was convicted of rape and murder and has shown no outward signs of remorse when we meet him at the beginning of the play *Dead Man Walking*. It would have been very easy to play him as a heartless killer for the duration of the show—up until the moment he admits what he did. However, I knew that this would be unfair to the character; that there was much more to him than this. I had just proven, through my portrayal of Caliban, that finding those moments of goodness in a character that most people would write off as evil is much more interesting, and indeed exciting. When I returned—after a hiatus to work on Caliban—to the work of preparing the role of Matthew Poncelet, I searched for those moments where he could show weakness, love, regret, and many other emotions.

Voice

Over my three years of graduate study the majority of my vocal training has been based in Linklater approach. Kristen Linklater is a pioneer in the field of voice work. Originally from Scotland, she studied and taught with Iris Warren at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Linklater is best known for her book, *Freeing the Natural Voice*, which is a compilation of her voice teachings and the exercises she suggests to help the actor find his or her “natural” voice for the stage—and in everyday life. She began developing her approach—and brought it to the United States—out of the necessity to find a way to bridge the gap between the “psychological and emotional exploration” favored by American actors, and the “external skills” i.e. breath, posture, and so on, employed by their British counterparts (Linklater, 1). Exposure to and training in the Linklater approach opened vocal possibilities for me that I did not previously believe were possible. Before Linklater, I had only a smattering, bits and pieces, of vocal technique. The majority of the technique I had accumulated was rooted in the psychological life of a character, without allowing for the assistance of the physical body in the development of a full and lively voice.

Learning a full system (Linklater, augmented by some Suzuki physical exercises) for freeing my voice, and allowing it to give life to my characters, was a truly breathtaking experience. I could not have known how much this technique would completely shatter my preconceptions of my own voice, and open up new possibilities for emotional life and depth in a character. By applying what I have learned from this book and from my voice classes, I have been able to free myself from many of the restrictions that were holding my voice back when I began my graduate work. These restrictions

were both physical and psychological, and they were keeping my voice from reaching its full potential and expression.

Before beginning the voice training in my MFA coursework, I thought that I had a commanding and expressive voice. I had been in choir all four years of my undergraduate work, and I could project my singing voice to fill any concert hall I had ever come across. I had been mimicking sounds and other people's voices since I could talk and therefore considered my voice to be quite flexible. My voice is very deep, and people often comment on how rich it sounds, so I never really considered that it had limitations in terms of expressiveness. Since beginning the work with the Linklater approach I have come to understand that I was limiting my voice primarily to the chest resonator, one of the chief areas of resonance to which all human voices have access—but certainly not the only one. That is not to say that is all my voice could do, but I was subconsciously limiting my voice's capability to access the other areas of resonance because of some deep seated (and erroneous) idea that a bass voice is a “manly” voice.

Now that I have undergone three years of vocal training, I understand that all voices—“manly” ones included—are capable of much more when they are allowed to be free; when they are allowed to access all of the areas of resonance—supported by deep body breathing—which the human body uses to create diverse and rich sounds. This discovery did not come easily for me at first. In fact, looking back, now I realize that for a time I actively resisted the work that has allowed my voice to become one of the greatest tools at my disposal for creating a three-dimensional character. In my first semester of voice work, I found it hard to reconcile some of the Linklater approach with the training I had received as a singer. Whereas singers are concerned with sustaining

tone over a melodic line, an actor must be able to use the voice to support a thought or an idea. In *Freeing the Natural Voice*, Linklater says, “The result of the work [Linklater approach] will be to produce a voice that is in direct contact with emotional impulses, shaped by the intellect but not inhibited by it” (Linklater, 8). Wherever that emotional impulse or idea goes, the voice must follow.

The first semester of voice work at the University of Louisville, is about discovering your own individual voice. It was about breaking any preconceived notions that I had about my voice, and about others’ voices as well. I was clinging to the idea that my voice was already well trained, and almost an entire semester went by before I began to realize the difference between what well trained means for a singer and what it means for an actor. Once I was able to accept that the voice training I had received was not wrong, it just served a different purpose, I began to see my physical limitations, and hear the restrictions in my voice.

Dr. Rinda Frye, the primary voice professor for the MFA program, helped me see that—while I had made progress in expanding the range of my speaking voice—I was still limiting myself to my chest resonator. The concept of a free voice, one that is allowed to follow the impulse of a thought or an emotion, continued to elude me until we were performing our monologues in class, and Dr. Frye was there to help us break through the facades that we created to protect our own preconceptions about our voices. As I was performing a monologue from *King Lear*, as the character of Edmond, Dr. Frye asked me to drop down my spine so that I was hanging from the waist with my head by my knees and my hands touching the ground.

As I said the monologue, she would stop me, and ask me questions about my character—what he was feeling, was he jealous of his brother, did his father really love him (Edmond is a bastard son and therefore cannot inherit). I was in pain from hanging upside down for so long, and that was beginning to show in my voice, but I was instructed to use the pain; to allow it to affect my voice. Even so, my voice remained very much the same, and so Dr. Frye asked me to think about a time I felt betrayed or jealous. I responded that I was fortunate to have had a relatively comfortable and pain free childhood and upbringing. Then Dr. Frye did something that I was not expecting—she told me that I could never play this part; that I could not identify with him, and therefore I did not have what it took to play the role. Edmond is my favorite character in all of Shakespeare, and I had told her that it was one of my dream roles.

I cannot truly explain what happened next in these pages, but something snapped, and I thought to myself, “You are wrong! Who are you to tell me what I can and cannot do?” I began to cry out of a combination of physical discomfort and anger at being told I was not good enough. As I began the monologue again, Dr. Frye stood me up, and the flood gates opened. Tears streamed down my face, I took a deep shuddering breath, and out came a voice that I had never heard before. It was mine, but it was Edmond’s rage, fear, and frustration mixed with my own, sending my voice into my upper register. When I finished, my classmates were silent, and then they cheered for me. I had broken through my barriers in a profound way, and had found a raw and haunting voice.

Obviously an actor cannot hang upside down while the director stands behind them and coaches them in a performance. However, once I had experienced this, and I knew the feeling of letting my guard down, and allowing the emotion and the thought

impulse to take over, I was able to duplicate it. That day in class I had a huge breakthrough without which, I would not have been able to take full advantage of the rest of the voice training in my course of study. If an actor cannot allow his or her voice to be guided by the impulses of the character, then they will never be able to allow the character to have his or her own unique voice—the actor will only be able to say the words of the character in the actor’s own voice; a voice that is limited by his or her own physical and psychological blocks.

Throughout all four semesters of voice at UofL, I continued to train my voice to be free to follow thought impulses, and to be able to access all of my areas of resonance. This becomes easier over time firstly because an actor learns to recognize the blocks to a free voice, and secondly, an actor physically trains his or her body for proper vocal technique as much as they do for physical fitness. Through the Linklater progression, I learned how to create my own warm up in my first semester. Over the next three semesters of voice work I have added to and improved upon that original warm up. For an example of the progression—the most recent one that I led in voice class—see Appendix A.

The next major portion of my vocal training dealt with emulating another person’s voice. I say emulating and not imitating because imitation implies attempting to copy another exactly. This is a trick, and sometimes a useful one, but far more useful is the ability to emulate another’s speaking mannerisms, and adapt them into one’s own voice. I learned this skill in my second semester of voice work, during the voice donor project. This semester is devoted to acclimating students to the International Phonetic Alphabet, or IPA. “The IPA provides the academic community world-wide with a notational

standard for the phonetic representation of all languages” (“IPA”). Across the divide of language, the IPA is used to identify specific sounds, and within a language it is useful for notating differences in dialect. Over the course of the term I became more familiar with the various sounds of the IPA and the symbols used to denote them. This work culminated in my recording two of my classmates, transcribing their respective sounds into IPA symbols—substituting the peculiarities of their respective dialects—and then emulating them in my own voice.

In addition to the substitutions, emulating my classmates’ voices also entailed discovering where their voices lived in their bodies. Since I was the only male in that voice class, I had to adjust for the differences between female and male voices. Most women use their mouth box, teeth, nasal, and head resonators more than their chest resonator. This exercise then also became another chance for me to practice accessing my upper register through my upper resonators. Of course I could not imitate their voices exactly, but that was not the point of the assignment—rather it was to find the equivalent of their voices in my own voice.

Over the course of the final two semesters of voice work, I continued to familiarize myself with the IPA. These two semesters were focused on specific dialects and how to find voice samples in those dialects. I am now able to effectively use seven different dialects: Received Pronunciation British (or RP), Cockney, German, Russian, Scottish, Welsh, and Louisiana Cajun. All of the MFA students learn the first two of these, but the next four I chose because they are all dialects that can be used for roles that I could be cast in. The Cajun I learned for the role of Matthew Poncelet. My work in voice class, with the IPA and emulating a dialect, gave me the ability to create and

maintain the dialect for my thesis role. I also now have the ability to find credible samples and create an analysis of a dialect. I can teach myself a dialect from scratch and also coach other actors. During *Dead Man Walking* I employed these skills and was actually listed as an assistant dialect coach in the program.

The Linklater approach is about freeing the voice and allowing the emotional truth of a moment to transform the actor's voice in order to support the needs of the character. The IPA allows the actor create an accurate dialect. The last piece of the puzzle for an exciting and grounded vocal life in a character is control. Sometimes it is necessary to lose control and let the voice be wild, exciting, or haunting. For example, when Matthew Poncelet admits that he killed Walter Delacroix and raped Hope Percy, I had to let the intensity of that revelation take my voice to a raw, primal, and fearful place. However, while an actor wants the audience to believe that he or she is the character he or she is portraying, the actor cannot forget that he or she must still be in command of his or her own faculties. The lines must still be delivered; the plot must advance. An actor must be able to control his voice. He or she must also be able to get through long lines of text in a single breath, which can be very difficult under the best of circumstances—and the most emotionally charged scene of the play is not the best of circumstances.

In my third semester of voice we spent time studying the work of Tadashi Suzuki, primarily through practical exercises. In *Culture Is The Body*, Suzuki says, “The purpose of this training is to develop concentration on the body through controlling breathing” (Suzuki, 157). What Suzuki is talking about here is the integration of physicality and breath. He writes:

...My method consists of training to learn to speak powerfully and with clear articulation, and also to learn to make the whole body *speak*, even when one keeps silent. (Suzuki, 155)

Suzuki technique is a combination of vocal and physical work that endeavors to create a commanding stage presence and a powerful, controlled speaking voice. I found this work very useful in preparing for the work on my thesis role.

Vocally, there was one exercise in particular that helped me. The actor begins in a Suzuki style squat—balanced on the balls of his or her feet, arms on the outside of the legs—and slowly and at a constant speed rises while reciting a line of text. The entirety of the text should be spoken on a single breath and should be finished at precisely the moment the actor is standing erect, with his or her feet flat on the ground—not a moment before or after. This level of precision is difficult to achieve, but in focusing on this task I found that I did not even think about my breath. I had more than enough to speak the line clearly and with power. I found the knowledge that I could get through that strenuous task with enough air to be very useful in rehearsal and performance for *Dead Man Walking*, where there were intense emotional speeches that had to be delivered through tears and still be heard. I knew that I had enough breath control to get through those moments.

The idea of “making the whole body *speak*, even when one keeps silent,” (Suzuki, 1) I found to be very useful in preparing for my thesis role, as Matt is confined throughout the entirety of the play. He is shackled, locked in a cell, strapped to a gurney, etc. There are extreme physical limitations to the character. So how would I keep the energy high through those moments? The combination of Linklater and Suzuki breath

work helped immensely, and the internal power that Suzuki emphasizes in his physical work was crucial to the character of Matthew Poncelet.

Physicality

It takes an extremely fit and flexible body to give physical life to a character. Before beginning at the University of Louisville, I was in decent physical shape, but my flexibility and dexterity left much to be desired. I was rather stiff in my movements on stage and consequently my characters were not fully embodied. I could not touch my toes much less isolate muscle groups or body parts to perform multiple physical actions at the same time. The physical demands on an actor are beyond what most people would ever imagine them to be. It is very difficult to explain unless you have experienced it.

Think about patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time. Now think about saying the Pledge of Allegiance while doing this. Now, add to all of that standing on one foot. Finally, continue these actions for an hour, then take a ten minute break, come back and do it for another hour. An actor must be able to do all of these things except that instead of the Pledge of Allegiance, the actor must deliver memorized lines of text, not nearly as ingrained in the memory. Instead of patting the head and rubbing the stomach, an actor must be able to perform multiple physical actions, which are codified through the rehearsal process, and yet be flexible enough to change them if something goes sideways in a performance. While they may not have to stand on one foot the whole time, actors are often called upon to perform tasks that demand physical strength and coordination of the same level, and two hours is a good average for the length of a full two act play—ten minutes being standard for intermission.

Through my movement training at the University of Louisville I have become much more flexible, strong, and alive in my body. I am now capable of dynamic, even explosive movement on stage, and I have the energy and coordination to sustain it throughout the duration of the play. This is in large part due to three things: the strength and dexterity demanded by Lecoq mime technique, the control and specificity demanded by mask work, and the sustained energy required for element work. These aspects of my movement training were instrumental in helping me to create a body that is capable of exciting unpredictability and focused energy working together to create a well-rounded physicality that is crucial to three-dimensional acting.

My first two semesters of movement training were focused around Lecoq mime technique. This is a very specific set of mime gestures developed by the French movement teacher, Jacques Lecoq. Simon Murray, in his book *Jacques Lecoq*, says of this influential movement luminary: "...he was a central figure...who proposed that it is the actor's body—rather than simply the spoken text—which is the crucial generator of meaning(s) in theatre" (Murray, 3). Lecoq took from several different movement training systems, most notably from his work with Jacques Copeau (Murray, 8) and in commedia dell'arte, (Murray, 11) in the creation of his movement technique. Unfortunately for actors currently studying, the only way to learn Lecoq technique is by studying with a teacher who in turn studied with Lecoq himself, as there is not very much of his teaching that has been codified in text (Murray, 1). My graduate movement professor, James Tompkins, studied with Lecoq in Paris, so I was taught the mimes in a manner close to their original form—though they have evolved over time.

I must admit that when I decided to attend the university of Louisville for my graduate training, I had no idea who Jacques Lecoq was, nor had I experienced anything close to his training. What I longed for was a set of tools with which I could increase my flexibility and control of my own body. I found that and more in the Lecoq technique. Up to this point, I had been relying almost exclusively on my natural vocal abilities to create and convey meaning on the stage. What I received from this training was the physical dimension, of fully embodying a character, that I had been missing since I began acting at the age of five.

The individual mimes are based on the isolation of muscle groups and body parts. The course was designed so that we were strengthening key muscle groups while increasing flexibility and dexterity at the same time. For example we would do a yoga warm up which focused on core strength, and then move on to do shoulder stands—an acrobatic move wherein the actor must lie on his or her side with the top of the shoulder and the side of the head flat against the ground, then walk the feet around in front of the body and lift them straight over the body using the abdominal muscles to bring them up and keep them straight in the air. Without core strength, either the feet would never leave the ground, or the body could collapse in a dangerous way, potentially leading to injury.

The acrobatics did not start until we had built up strength and coordination. As I said this was accomplished through the warm ups and through the mime work. When I began this work I could not isolate motion very well, but through an increased awareness of the spine—developed by repetitive forward and backward undulation—I began to be able to isolate my core. This was difficult for me, as I suffer from some lower back pain, but as I continued to practice the undulations, I noticed that the pain lessened and my

awareness of my body expanded outward. The rest of the body follows the spine, so once you have control of the movement of the spine, you quickly learn how to isolate and control the rest of the body. I am not saying that everyone is the same; some people are naturally coordinated, and I am not one of those people. However, I must be able to play a coordinated character, and through practice, I have become much more limber and dexterous over time.

Each of the individual mimes dealt with a different muscle set and/or body part(s). For example, the mime of pulling a rope requires lateral movement of the hips and shoulders, traversing in opposite directions at the same time, while the fingers must open and close upon an invisible rope. Anyone can fake pulling a rope, but to actually get all of the physical actions to happen in the same manner that they would if one were pulling on a real rope is quite difficult. This specificity of motion is crucial for an actor. Sometimes on stage the slightest gesture can telegraph an enormous amount of information to the audience. It is also paramount to developing the physicality of a character. Every character sits, stands, moves differently on stage. Sometimes this information is given in the script, and sometimes the actor must create it based on clues. An intellectual person often leads with the head, while a blue collar worker would lead with the chest or stomach. The actor portraying the character must be able to adopt his or her movement patterns and portray them as if they were the actor's own.

Over the course of the first year of my movement training my strength and dexterity increased dramatically. By the end of the year, I was able to do all of the specific mimes, and acrobatic stunts that we were taught—many of which I failed when I first attempted them. This foundation of strength and dexterity was crucial to my training

in mask work, where every meaning must be conveyed with the body. One cannot begin working in masks without first having command of one's own body. Wearing a mask does two things for an actor physically. First, it takes away the use of the face as a primary means of expression, and second, it focuses an actor's energy into the rest of the body—forcing the actor to communicate in ways they may not have considered when they could simply raise an eyebrow or smirk.

My work with masks over the final two semesters of my movement training was crucial to increasing my physical awareness. As I stated earlier, before my graduate movement training, my physicality and movement on stage tended to be somewhat stiff—certainly not as organic as it could have been. I relied heavily on facial expressions and basic arm gestures to communicate meaning physically. This greatly limited my capacity to fully bring a character to life. During my first semester of mask work I quickly realized how true this was. The first mask we trained with was a neutral or basic mask. The only defining characteristic of the mask was that one was male and the other was female. The female mask had a more slender shape, and the nose was smaller—otherwise they were identical brown masks. The neutral mask is a silent mask, meaning that there is no opening for the mouth and the wearer is not supposed to speak while in mask. This left only the body to communicate.

My most vivid memory of performing in mask, and the one that was a true breakthrough for me, was when we had to perform what I will call the Adam, or the Eve, scene. We were to begin by sleeping on the ground, wake up, the sun is up, there is water, and there is a tree. We were also told that we were seeing everything for the first time. Those were the only instructions given. The idea was that we had to explore each

sensation and sight, and communicate our experience of it without the use of sound or facial expression. It took multiple tries for me to do this without taking something for granted—i.e. that a tree can't hurt you—but once I accepted that everything was new, and truly gave myself over to the masked character, a remarkable thing happened. I began to use all of my senses to experience the imaginary world. I felt the sun on my face, allowing the sensation to wake me. I saw the tree and its shadow, felt the texture of the bark with my fingertips, heard the wind rustling through its leaves, etc. I felt limited without the use of my face and voice, like I was somehow naked, but my classmates saw an expressive performance. I did not believe them until I saw each of them perform. Their bodies were more alive on stage than I had ever seen them before. This revelation—that the face possesses only a fraction of human expressive capability—more than any other gave me the confidence to allow my body to be more alive, even without wearing a mask.

While working in neutral mask in the third semester of graduate movement, then later in the fourth semester without mask, I learned how to physically express the elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Doing these exercises using the mask first gave me the confidence to be completely uninhibited with my interpretations. The second time around, I threw myself at the work with abandon, and this led to another key movement breakthrough for me. I can never know how far I can take a physical challenge unless I push my own physical limitations. Elements work tested me in two key ways. The first was: could I identify how each element felt to me, internally? The second was: how long could I sustain that feeling, at a high and sustained energy level?

I answered those questions during my final semester of movement training. It is impossible to describe exactly how each element felt to me because they are internal sensations, deeply personal to the individual. The important thing is that I now have those feelings ingrained in my body, and if I decide that a character is driven by his passions I can call upon the energy and feel of fire, or perhaps wind. If they are very logical and slow to act, earth is a better choice, and a character that is always “going with the flow” is water. These energies are very useful as building blocks for characters, however they are extremes—very difficult to maintain for a long period of time. In one day of class work we went through all four elements, taking them from one to ten in terms of energy levels in our own bodies. I have never been more exhausted from any workout, and the room was spinning when we were finished, but I learned that I could maintain a high level of energy, shifting from fire to water to earth and then to wind. If I could maintain those extremes in a class where that was the only focus, then I most certainly could call upon reserves of energy to create dynamic, exciting, even explosive moments on stage.

I can say with confidence that I became more alive in my own body with each role I performed at the University of Louisville. This culminated in my third year with my portrayal of Caliban. Dr. Frye and I discussed at some length Caliban’s capacity for the full range of human emotion. He is not entirely human, but is capable of every one of our passions, fears, and needs. What separates him is his animalistic pursuit of these. He changes from one to the next with lightning speed, and consequently he is both exciting and terrifying at the same time. All of my movement training came into play in this character.

Caliban's energy was mostly fire and wind, but he had a little of earth and water in him as well. Since he was not entirely human, I made the choice to keep him on his hands and feet throughout the entire play. This required the contortion of my body in unusual ways when he would change direction suddenly. It also required great strength to hold this posture throughout the show. The awareness of how my body moves and the strength I had built up through the Lecoq technique and acrobatic work was crucial here—not to mention that many of the falls and rolls Caliban executed were inspired by that training. I was in heavy makeup and had on an enormous wig—not quite the same thing as a mask, but it encouraged me to pursue other means of expression than just my face. Finally, my portrayal of Caliban was physically exhausting, and while *The Tempest* is one of Shakespeare's shorter plays, it is by no means short. I had to dig deep to keep the energy level high enough, especially in the last two performances. I knew that I could because of the elements work.

My thesis role demanded the same level of energy as Caliban; however it did not take the same form. High energy makes it easy to make bold physical choices that are interesting to watch when the role calls for those things, but what happens when the role calls for physical restraint, like the role of Matthew Poncelet. I hoped that through the process of creating this role I would find a way to be alive in my body, when I could not always outwardly show it. This was one of the main challenges that the role posed for me. I have never had a problem engaging a character intellectually, but without the external physical freedom to balance out the psyche of a character, they can become quite stiff. During the rehearsal and performance of this role I challenged myself not to fall into that trap.

Acting

In my studio acting classes I was given the opportunity to hone my textual, vocal, and physical training. In these classes I began to forge the disparate parts of my technique into a formal process for bringing a character to life. I was encouraged by all of my professors to make bold choices early in the process and not to worry about making mistakes in the pursuit of what Robert Cohen calls a character's GOTE. This is an acronym for a character's goals, other (or obstacles), tactics, and expectations. The most basic definition of a goal is what the character wants. An other, or obstacle, is what stands in the way of the character achieving that goal. Tactics are the means by which a character goes about achieving his or her goal, and the character has an expectation for the outcome of the pursuit of said goal.

I was familiar with the concept of a character's GOTE before I began graduate work, though I was not familiar with the acronym. In theory I knew how to pursue this line of character work. What I did not do was make bold choices and actively pursue them. I thought that I was doing this; however it was made very clear to me in my second year of study at UofL that I was, in fact, being lazy in my work. I have a sharp mind and acting instincts, and I was relying on these to get me through the work—rather than doing the script analysis and vigorously pursuing informed choices. I received a comment from one of my professors in the end of semester review, fall 2012 that shocked me and threw into focus just how lazy I had truly been with the work:

[He] seems to lose focus easy [STET]. Generally comes the least prepared and is far behind the rest of the class. Seems to lack passion and vitality in his work. Very lackadaisical. Doesn't make any choices. Lots of amateurish pointing and hand gestures. Very stale, dry, and de-energizing on stage. Seems to do just enough work, but never enough to thrive. Tries to take direction, but struggles with applying time and time again. I'm not

sure if he suffers from a lack of drive or a lack of understanding or both. But there clearly seems to be a major distance between him [STET] and the others. Has improved some, but should have improved more through use of the work. (Graduate Review, Fall, 2012)

After receiving this comment, I sat down with the professor for a conversation on what I could do to improve. There was a lot going on in my personal life at the time, but this should not have affected my work. This was a difficult lesson to learn, but a crucial one.

After my discussion with my professor, I realized that I had been lazy and could absolutely do better. I resolved to recommit to the vigorous pursuit of my passion, which has always been theatre. By my next review the same professor told me that I had made a complete turnaround and was now on the right path. In my penultimate review I received the following comment:

David continues to grow into a mature and responsible actor. He is doing an excellent job of improving from semester to semester. His work has evolved into that of a hands on actor who gives directors lots of options that are connected. (Graduate Review, Fall, 2013)

Without that “go big or go home” moment—quite literally—I would not have progressed as much as I have in my acting. Every actor faces doubts, and every actor faces a moment in his or her career when he or she must make a choice; give up or take the hit and make it better. I chose the latter, and I came out on the other side a better actor. I made bold, and exciting choices with the character of Caliban, and in the role of Matthew Poncelet I found my final test at the University of Louisville.

RESEARCHING THE ROLE

Researching a role is the practical application of the textual portion of three-dimensional acting. This is my application of my process to my thesis role. I started researching well before the rehearsal process began and continued right up until opening night. Researching a role is an ongoing process, and just as the research informs the rehearsal of a role, the rehearsal inspires new research. My research for the role of Matthew Poncelet falls into three categories: what is provided in the source materials (the play script *Dead Man Walking* and the book by the same name), what is suggested and inferred but not expressly detailed in the source materials (the background story), and, most importantly, the motivation of the character, or the why of his actions. The information in the script provides the framework for the character. The background story gives insight into where the character came from, and how he got to where he is when the audience meets him. Once these things were established, it was my job to fill in the gaps for my character. This is where my portrayal differs from that of any other actor playing the role. It was my job to complete the character by answering the questions that the playwright does not. Every actor will give his or her own unique take on the motivation of a character. Many of these gaps are found in the rehearsal process, and it is the job of the actor to find the answers to fill them in.

Source Materials

The first step in researching any role is to become familiar with the character and the play at-large. I received the script roughly a year in advance—this is not standard for professional work—since I was precast, as this was my thesis role. Over the summer between my second and third year of study, I spent as much time with the script as I could. I also devoted my time to reading the book *Dead Man Walking*, by Sister Helen Prejean, which is her firsthand account of the events leading up to and surrounding the execution of R. Lee Willie, and Elmo Patrick Sonnier—the two death row inmates on whom the composite character of Matthew Poncelet is based. (See Appendix B) The third thing I did to help me prepare for the role was to watch the movie *Dead Man Walking*, which starred Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn as Sister Helen Prejean and Matthew Poncelet respectively. Ordinarily, I am against watching a film version of a play as it can influence my performance, and I might unconsciously imitate what the film actors have done, rather than creating my own performance. I made an exception this time because the play *Dead Man Walking* was adapted from the screenplay by the same man, Tim Robbins, who adapted the screenplay from the book. That sort of continuity is rare, and usually a play predates a movie version of a story, so I thought it would be useful to see the story's progression throughout its three incarnations.

Once I became intimate with the source materials, I wrote out a character analysis sheet. I began by recording all of Matthew's given circumstances: how old is he, where is he from, does he have any biological family, is he married, is he religious, was he employed before being incarcerated, etc.? Often a play will list basic information about the characters on a character page in the beginning of the script. This is not the case for

Dead Man Walking. I had to gather the information about Matt through exposition given by the character Sister Helen Prejean, and from the dialogue of various characters throughout the play. Montoya, the social worker who puts Sister Helen in touch with Matt says, “His name is Matthew Poncelet,” and “He’s in for murder.” He also tells her that Matt is “from Slidell, Louisiana.” All of these given circumstances are contained in Montoya’s dialogue on page three of the script.

Of course Matt himself provides much of this information through his own dialogue. An example of this is in his letter to Sister Helen—delivered through as a spoken line in the show:

I’m writing from my home, my 6 by 8 foot cell. I’m in here 23 hours a day. We don’t work on death row. We’re special here. They keep us away from the general population of the prison. We’re the elite because we’re going to fry. It’s hard not to get soft in this cell. I press my footlocker, lift it, try to get my muscles in shape...your mind does funny things when you’re locked up and surrounded by people that want to kill you...I don’t get many letters. Visitors either. No one in my family seems able to make the trip out here. I understand. It’s a long drive from Slidell. (Robbins, 5-6)

From this one monologue, I learned much about Matt’s given circumstances. He describes the size of his living space. I knew that he was only allowed out of his cell for one hour a day, and even when he was let out the only human contact he had, other than his guards, was with other death row inmates. He has a footlocker, so he has some meager belongings. The people surrounding him are all there as part of a system of sanctioned state killing. He does not have much contact with the outside world, and he does not see his family. He is isolated and a long way from home. This is how I had to gather my character’s information together: piecemeal and by carefully reading

everything said by every character. This detective work was time consuming but necessary, as it laid the ground work for the rest of my research.

In the book, Chava Colon, the real-life man on whom Montoya is based, says that Sonnier is “a Cajun from St. Martinville, Louisiana” (Prejean, 4). The script tells us Matt is from Slidell, Louisiana. Both of these cities are in the heart of Cajun Louisiana. That, coupled with Colon’s words, led me say that Matthew Poncelet is Cajun, as a given circumstance. This led me to do research on the Cajun Dialect. Dr. Rinda Frye gave the entire cast a list of basic Louisiana sounds written in IPA, but I wanted Matt’s dialect to be specifically Cajun because it is his heritage, and I found it appropriate for his background. So I recorded my own samples of Cajun dialect, from my cousin’s wife. Her entire family is Cajun, and she grew up within a short drive of St. Martinville. I took these samples and others that I found on the Internet and transcribed the key sounds into IPA symbols. The second part of my research into the dialect was to teach it to the actress playing my mother in the show. While this helped her some, it helped me tremendously, as it reinforced the sounds in my mind, and I had to be very specific in order to teach the dialect.

Background Story

Once this initial research was done, I began to create my background story. My background story was all given through exposition, character revelations, or information gleaned from clues in the text. Wherever I was not satisfied with the amount of information, I bolstered it with Sister Helen’s firsthand account of her dealings with Elmo Patrick Sonnier and Robert Lee Willie. Since the character of Matthew Poncelet is a composite of these two men, I was able to apply information from the book about either

of them as though it were about Matt. An example of background story from clues in the text is: Matt had a kid when he was a teenager, so he had to drop out of high school in order to do construction and road work to help support his family and the child.

Nowhere in the script does it say anything about dropping out of high school, or anything about construction work. However, Matt is twenty-seven (Prejean, 15) years old and he says that his daughter is eleven or twelve (Robbins, 12). Simple math puts him at fifteen or sixteen when she was born. We know from the script that Matt's father died when he was fourteen (Robbins, 27) and that he is the oldest child, so it stands to reason that he was already helping out monetarily. He says, "Daddy was a good man, a sharecropper, worked hard. That's one thing I got from him. Working hands" (Robbins, 27). That coupled with the fact that he did not finish high school, leads to the assumption that he did construction work or some other sort of manual labor. Matt has been on death row for six years, so he went in when he was twenty-one, and his daughter was "born when [he] was in prison the first time" (Robbins, 12). Matt tells Sister Helen that his daughter was three when he got out of prison, which means that he was in prison from the age of fifteen or sixteen until he was eighteen or nineteen. Therefore we can reasonably assume he did not finish high school.

All of the above can be supported by the play script, but I also corroborated it with information from the book *Dead Man Walking* as well. Sister Helen recorded information that Elmo Patrick Sonnier shared with her about his life before she met him:

...his mother and father used to fight a lot and they separated when he was six...His mother went on welfare because his daddy never did come through with child support and the welfare check would run out and they'd be hungry and he and Eddie [his younger brother] would hunt deer and rabbit. (Prejean, 29)

With this passage I confirmed my assumption that Matt had to become the man of the house at an early age—as young as six, based on Sister Helen’s account of Sonnier’s experience. It also confirms that they did not have much money, and Sonnier told Sister Helen how he started working:

He got only as far as eighth grade, dropped out when he was fifteen, forged his mother’s signature on an application form, and went to work as a roustabout on the oil rigs. Later, he got his license and drove eighteen-wheelers. (Prejean, 30)

This passage supports my assertion that Matt did not finish high school and that he dropped out in order to contribute monetarily. I changed the form of manual labor because I know nothing about oil rigs, and by making it construction I had a better frame of reference. This minor change did not affect the character in any major way. The timing of Sonnier’s dropping out of high school also fits with the timing of his daughter’s birth which fit my analysis of why Matt dropped out when he did.

Why

In researching the role of Matthew Poncelet, I had the incredibly good fortune of meeting Sister Helen. She came to the Louisville public library on one of her speaking tours. Sister Helen’s fight against the death penalty in this country is still her life’s passion, and she had just released a new edition of the book *Dead Man Walking*. She spoke about her life as a nun and how she became involved with counseling death row inmates, reliving her first encounter with Elmo Patrick Sonnier. She spoke about current issues with the death penalty and reminded the audience that Kentucky is still a pro-death penalty state. When she finished and the floor was opened for questions, I was the first one to stand. I told her that we were producing *Dead Man Walking* at the University of Louisville and that I was playing Matthew Poncelet—to which she responded that she

was glad that the play was still being produced. Then I asked her, “Throughout all of the versions of this story—the book, the movie, and the play—is there anything that you feel was left out? Or more specifically, what is the one thing that you want people to understand about those men (Sonnie and Willie)?” She responded by saying that she wanted people to remember that we are all human.

This is exactly what I wanted to convey with my performance: the humanity of Matthew Poncelet. He was not always a convicted murderer. He had a life before death row. Even behind the bars of Angola Prison, there is still more to Matt than his rap sheet. Once I had done my homework and collected all of the factual information in the script, I asked myself, “What makes this man do what he does?” This goes back to Aristotle’s writings on character. Earlier it was established that by character Aristotle means “the character of the character,” not only the choices they make and the actions they take, but more importantly, the why.

I wanted Matthew’s humanity to come across—not to make light of his crimes, but to show that he is more than just a rapist and a murderer. I made the assertion before that a character is much more interesting and dynamic when they make an audience feel a multitude of emotions. As I continued my research in preparation for rehearsal, a thought began to form in my mind. Emotions were the key to it all. All human beings are driven by the full range of human emotions, and Matt is no different, though I found three to be more prevalent than the others. Fear, love, and anger are among the most primal of emotions, and they are capable of driving a person to do almost anything if left unchecked. With this discovery I found myself addressing six “why questions” for the character of Matthew Poncelet: why did Matt turn to a life of crime, why did he harass

the couples, why did he kill this particular couple, why does he open up to Sister Helen, why does Matt insist on trying to prove his innocence to his mother, why does Matt continue to say things that make his situation worse and drive people from him? I found the answer in three letter F's: family, fear of being alone or left behind, and fear of losing control. Love, fear, and anger drive the three F's, and shed light on the why's of Matt's actions.

Family

I knew from my background story for Matt that he cared about his family greatly. As I continued my analysis of the script and the book, I came across several examples of how love of his family motivated Matt. These examples occur throughout the play beginning the first time Matt and Sister Helen meet face to face. "*MATT takes out an old tattered photograph. He holds it up to the grate. It is a photo of a two year old*" (Robbins, 12). I do not usually put much stock in stage directions for character analysis, but this one is different. Matt is carrying around a photo of his daughter when she was two. I saw this as a powerful reminder of his humanity. Here he is on death row, and he still cares about the daughter that he has barely ever seen.

Talking to Sister Helen about his only encounter with his daughter, Matt says "I see this beautiful girl playing in the front yard, grab her up into arms and say, 'I'm your daddy'" (Robbins, 12). This man, who has spent the majority of his adult life in prison, is so excited to see his daughter that he cannot help himself. I got a mental image of my father tossing me up into the air and catching me when I was a child. It is the first example I found of how important family is to him and how much he loves them. This was important to my research because as the play progresses, Matt does not want his

family to be a part of his proceedings. At first glance, I thought this was selfish, but on closer inspection I saw the pattern of selflessness in all of his actions regarding his family.

Matt is concerned for his mother more than anyone else. The moments in which I saw his love and the selfless side of him most clearly were those in which he is speaking with or about her. When Hilton Barber, Matt's attorney, and Sister Helen tell him that his mother should be at his pardon board hearing, Matt quickly responds, "I don't want her there. She's just going to bust out cryin' and won't be able to say nothin' 'cause she's gonna be so tore up" (Robbins, 23). He is insistent that his mother not be subjected to everything that will be said about him. It is only after Sister Helen points out that his mother would always regret not being able to speak for him that Matt relents, and even then it is with great reluctance.

Robert Lee Willie told Sister Helen that his mother went to prison for helping him. He confessed in an effort to keep her from spending any more time in jail:

They double-dealed me. I gave them the statement without a lawyer there, which my better judgment told me not to because I couldn't see my mother going to jail. She's not strong anyways. (Prejean, 161-162)

Reading this account reinforced for me that Matt is willing to do anything for his mother, even give up his rights. I began to see that while his love of family is one of his best traits, it is also his weakness. The way in which the government used his mother to get a speedy confession out of Willie, fueled my anger as the character Matthew Poncelet. I decided that the same thing happened with him.

As his execution draws nearer, Matt is still more focused on his mother. Speaking to Sister Helen he says:

I don't want to be buried here. They said they was gonna call my momma and talk to her about the funeral and all the arrangements. You've gotta help me. Can you take care of it? I just don't want my mamma mixed up in this. She wouldn't be able to stand it. (Robbins, 39)

Even when talking about his own funeral, Matt's only concern for himself is that he not be buried in the prison cemetery. He is still determined to protect his mother. Much of what he asks Sister Helen to do for him is centered on helping his mother. Even his request for a lie detector test is for the benefit of his mother. He says, "It ain't gonna change any of these guys' minds, but I would like my mamma to know the truth. I want her to know I didn't kill those kids" (Robbins, 50).

Elmo Patrick Sonnier shared a glimpse of his early family life with Sister Helen, and she recounts it in her book:

He chuckles remembering how his mother would help them with the rabbit hunt... "And we'd be stalking along and behind us we'd hear *whack, whack, whack*—Mama beating the hell out of those rabbits. (Prejean, 29)

They were so impoverished that they had to hunt small game just to get by. This was not just hunting, however. It was a family bonding moment. He and his brother would catch the game, and their mother would finish it off. When a family works together to survive, to be able to feed itself, the bond of family takes a different form than that of a middle class suburban family. This was crucial to my understanding of the ties Matt has to his mother and his brothers.

Shortly before he was executed, Sonnier wrote a letter to his younger brother Eddie saying:

Dear Brother...don't worry about me, I'll be okay. You keep your cool, it's the only way you'll make it in this place. When you get out someday, take care of Mama. Remember the promise you made to me. I love you. Your big brother. (Prejean, 88-89)

Sonnier's brother was also in Angola Prison. They had committed the crimes together, but Eddie did not receive the death penalty. The essence of this letter is captured in the family visitation scene of the play—though in the play none of Matt's siblings are incarcerated. The scene begins with Matt's younger brother, Mitch, telling a story involving his girlfriend, to which Matt responds by saying, "You take care of her, Mitch. Don't do nothing stupid" (Robbins, 75). Here Matt shows his love for his family by once again playing the role of the man of the house. He is clearly admonishing Mitch not to make the same mistakes that he has made. Since his father died when he was fourteen Matt feels that protecting his siblings is his responsibility. Matt then turns his attention to his youngest brother, Troy, asking him, "You got a 'lil girlfriend?" (Robbins, 75). Troy proceeds to tell Matt that he is too busy for girls, which gets one of the rare moments of laughter in the show. He then tells Matt all about camping in his new tent (Robbins, 76), and Matt listens and coaxes him to get through the parts he is embarrassed by. This is one of the most humanizing moments of the show. What the audience sees is a big brother teasing and giving advice to his younger brothers.

Immediately following this heartwarming family moment is one in which the terrible price exacted on Matt's family is thrown into focus. He is led back to his cell in cuffs, and when his mother tries to give him one last hug, she is stopped for security reasons. He is not allowed to embrace his family just hours before his death, and when he is out of sight his mother collapses in tears. Matt calls out to Sister Helen, "Is my mamma doin' ok?" (Robbins, 78-79). So close to his own death, Matt's love for his family is so strong that he is still trying to make sure that they are alright.

Matt's love of his family and his desire to protect them stands in sharp contrast to the lack of love in his life from anyone outside his immediate family. His ex-wife called the police on him when he visited his daughter, his so-called friend, Carl Vitello, testified against him in exchange for a lighter sentence, and the prison chaplain is only concerned with saving Matt's soul, not with his emotional wellbeing (Robbins). This is why he is, at first, resistant to opening up to Sister Helen. He does not believe that anyone, outside his family, cares about him. In the end he allows himself to trust her, and this is also motivated by love. I cannot explain this better than Matt himself, who says:

You know I've never known real love, never loved women or anybody all that well myself. Figures I'd have to go to my death to find love... Thank you for loving me. (Robbins, 87)

Matt sees Sister Helen as a part of his family now. She has done more for him by showing him simple kindness than anyone else he has encountered in his life—aside from his immediate family. This is made clear by the fact that, as he is walking to his death, Matt asks Sister Helen if she is okay (Robbins, 90), a shift of his concern from himself to another, previously reserved only for his mother and brothers. Her effect on him is so great that his last conscious words are a simple “I love you” spoken to her (Robbins, 92).

Fear of Being Alone

Equally influential in motivating Matt is his fear of being alone or being left behind. In his correspondence with Sister Helen, Elmo Patrick Sonnier writes about, “how glad he is to have someone to communicate with because he has been so lonely” (Prejean, 22). This happened early in their exchange of letters. It takes much longer for Matt to open up to Sister Helen. I reminded myself that he is a representative of both the more open Sonnier and the more reserved and gruff Robert Lee Willie. Matt does not

show many of his fears to the outside world. What he shows is a tough guy facade. He hides behind a barrier that he has constructed in order to survive his past as well as his present on death row. It was in my exploration of this hidden fear that I found the answers to why he harassed teenage couples with Carl Vitello, and why he participated in the killing of Walter Delacroix and Hope Percy.

My intent with this portion of my research is not to excuse the actions of the character. There is no excuse for rape and murder. As I stated earlier, one of the challenges of playing this character was to not judge him myself, but rather to show all of him, not just his crimes. In my study of the script and the book I discovered that, though Matt made his own choices—he was not forced—he was motivated by a fear of being left behind by his friend, Carl Vitello. He turned to a life of crime—illegal hunting—and had gotten in a few scrapes with the law. I know from the script that he began drinking early, at the age of fourteen (Robbins, 27). I concluded that he and Vitello had similar backgrounds and continued going to bars as young men. They would most likely have started hitting on women, and in their drunken state they followed a couple one night. This began their streak of harassing couples. I am filling in some gaps in the story for myself with this assessment, but it fits with Matt's need for a father figure and his desire for companionship. In his first meeting with Sister Helen, Matt tells why he participated in the murder of Hope Percy and Walter Delacroix, saying, "I was scared. I just did what he said, held the boy back, but he killed them" (Robbins, 11). Matt was afraid of Vitello, afraid of what he would think of and do to Matt if he did not do as Vitello said. Having found through my earlier research that Matt's home life was not good, it made perfect sense to me that he would look to an older male friend as a father figure. Having lost his

father at the age of fourteen, Matt was afraid of losing anyone close to him, afraid of being left alone. He was afraid that Vitello would leave him alone in those woods or worse—afraid he would lose his closest friend forever.

This fear of being left behind shapes the arc of Matthew's character over the course of the play, just as much as it shaped who he was before he committed the crimes that landed him on death row. When the audience meets him for the first time he has learned to control the outward signs of this fear, but it still hovers just beneath the surface. I found it in his line to Sister Helen after he asks her to file a petition for him: "You ain't coming back are you?" (Robbins, 13). This one little line may not say much to an audience watching the calm and collected death row inmate on stage, but to me, as the actor, it was his old fear beginning to surface. I made the choice—as the actor—to acknowledge the fear, but not to let it show too much, too early in the play. This was also at the suggestion of my director, Russ Vandenbroucke. Matt is cautious about letting anyone see the fears that he has shoved behind a wall.

Another manifestation of Matt's fear of being alone is his constant racism throughout the play. In my research I found no reason to believe that he was always a racist. What I found was that during his time in Marion Prison, Matt got an identification number tattooed on his body (Robbins, 83). He also has a number of other tattoos, including a swastika. Matt gives an interview to a reporter in which he says, "I had two families, both of them I love and would die for...The family of man, of men in jail. My white family, the Aryan Brotherhood" (Robbins, 48). This portion of Matt's character is taken from Robert Lee Willie who said:

A dude I had met in Terre Haute [prison] had sent a letter of recommendation for me to the brotherhood before I got to Marion...as

soon as I arrived they took me in...Everything they had they was willing to share...It was one for all and all for one. Once you're in the brotherhood, it's for life—you can't get out until death. (Prejean, 188)

For Willie, the brotherhood was about much more than racism; it was about belonging.

This led me to believe Matt joined the Aryan Brotherhood in the prison system. In light of his fear of being alone, I deduced that he joined so as not to be singled out in prison as a loner and an easy target. While racism was deep seated in the south at the time, I think that Matt's racism was, if not born, at least exacerbated by the time he spent with the gang. He formed a bond out of necessity, and with that bond came new baggage.

The first glimpse of a crack in the wall that Matt had erected to hide his feelings comes after Matt receives a phone call letting him know that a date has been set for his execution. After explaining the situation to Sister Helen he says:

Sister, come through for me. You all I got. They got me on a greased rail to the death house. I ain't heard from you. You ain't fadin out on me are you, Sis? (Robbins, 20)

Here Matt explicitly says that he has no one else. He is afraid that no one will help him, and that he will go through this all alone. This fear is echoed in the second act on a much larger scale. Sister Helen is visiting with Matt in the death house, and she leaves to have a meeting with Chaplain Farley, where she faints from exhaustion. When she returns to visit Matt the next day he says:

Where'd you go yesterday...I kept asking them here what happened but they wouldn't tell me nothing. I thought you had a heart attack. I thought I was gonna have to go through this by myself. (Robbins, 65)

This is the moment when Matt really begins to open up to Sister Helen. He all but says outright that he is afraid of going through his last days and his execution alone. Matt even goes so far as to ask Sister Helen if she gets lonely (Robbins, 65). This fear is part

of what makes him human. It was allowing that fear to rule him that led to the actions that landed him on Death Row.

Fear of Losing Control

Being left behind or left alone is not the only fear that drives the character of Matthew Poncelet. Fear of losing control is one of his most defining characteristics throughout the show. I found this to be the case because it was a lack of control—control of his fear of being alone and control of his passions—that led him to commit his crimes. He therefore has a deep and abiding fear of losing control again, and he does everything he can to avoid it, including not allowing people to get close to him. The last person outside his family that Matt got close to was Vitello. He does not want to make the mistake—in his mind—of getting close to anyone again. In this he is in direct conflict with his desire to not be alone.

Death row is very restrictive, as I learned from Matt's account of his living space. I needed to see what his surroundings were like, but a trip to Angola Prison was not possible. However, I found a striking image of the death row there, as well as an image of the gurney that they use for the lethal injections. (See Appendix C) These images helped me to understand just how little is in Matt's control. I believe that this lack of control is what has led to his being closed off. He exercises control in the only way he can, through controlling his conversations with Sister Helen. The earliest example of this that I found is when Sister Helen asks him about his daughter. Matt says "You have a lot of questions." To which Sister Helen responds, "I don't know you." He then cuts off her line of questioning with a curt, "Well, never mind" (Robbins, 10). Matt cares deeply about his family and is not about to let a stranger dig into that part of his life. Later in the

conversation he shows her a picture of his daughter and talks about her, but he does so on his terms.

It takes losing some of the little control that he has left for Matt to really begin opening up. Matt's phone call to Sister Helen after his execution date is set is the first time the audience sees him lose control, and they can see and hear his fear. Matt says:

I didn't know who to call...I didn't know this was coming. They set a date. They're gonna kill me. I gotta do something. I didn't know you need a lawyer to get a pardon board hearing. Hell, I'd do it myself if they'd let me but they say "No lawyer, no hearing." (Robbins, 20)

The surprise of the state setting a date, rattles Matt. He doesn't like things being taken out of his hands, and so he does the one thing he can do—he reaches out to Sister Helen who he believes will help him. He believes that she will do what he wants her to do. At first she does, and so he begins to trust her.

I found that once Matt began to trust Sister Helen, the manifestations of his fear of losing control came in the form of small confessions to her. A prime example of this comes on the day before he is to be executed:

They're not going to break me. I just pray God holds up my legs tomorrow to make that last walk. It's the waiting, it's the countdown that gets you. (Robbins, 67)

With these words Matt admits his fear and is beginning to show signs of relinquishing control of his own volition. This does not come easily for him, and it was a sign to me of just how much Sister Helen means to him. Old habits die hard however, and in the scene after Matt's visitation with his family—where his guard was let down—he tells Sister Helen that with his last words he has "a thing or two to say to the Percys and the Delacroixs" (Robbins, 80) for coming to view his execution. He goes on to make excuses for himself when Sister Helen presses him about what happened the night of the

murders, culminating in her calling him a victim, which he denies vehemently (Robbins, 81). I saw this as his final act of defiance, his last attempt at retaining control over his version of what happened. It is ironic that in doing so, he loses his control over his temper.

In the end, I found that Matt comes full circle and faces his fear of losing control. He does this by completely confessing what he did the night of the murders. He admits that he was afraid, saying:

I could have walked away. But I didn't. I was a victim, a fuckin' chicken. He was older, tough as hell. I was all boozed up, trying to be as tough as him. I didn't have the guts to stand up to him. I told my mother I was yellow goin' along with him. I didn't stand up to him. (Robbins, 86).

This speech really sums up what I had deduced from all of my research into why Matt did what he did, and why he acts the way he acts. For him it is the major turning point of his fear. As he is led to his execution, he is no longer ruled by his fear, he accepts it. It is not gone, but he is no longer trying to cover it up. This is why the audience identified with Matt in his final moments, in spite of everything he said and did. His final act of control is choosing to apologize, forgive, and love with his last breaths.

Writing and Art from Death Row

The fact that Matt carries around a picture of his daughter was very significant to me, and it made me think about other things he kept—that the audience does not see—of a personal nature. In her book, Sister Helen writes of her correspondence with Elmo Patrick Sonnier that “He begins drawing pictures on his envelopes: alligators, ducks, squirrels” (Prejean, 13). In my research I came across numerous drawings, poems, letters, etc. written by death row inmates. These I used to fuel my portrayal of Matt as a human being and not just a monster. Artistic expression seemed to be a common theme

among many of the death row inmates whose stories I encountered. I believe Matt was the same, but this was a private part of himself.

My primary source for first-hand accounts of death row (writings by inmates) is a book called, *Upon this chessboard of nights and days...Voices from Texas Death Row*. It is full of testimonials and musings from men on death row, most of whom had no more than a high school education (many did not even get that far). It is a raw and bare look into how the inmates feel about their trials and treatment after sentencing, and for some, how they found peace. I could fill these pages with many of their stories, but I will focus on one that really stood out to me. David Lewis, death row inmate number 000866, wrote a short piece about the view from his cell, entitled Window of Death. In it he describes seeing men come and go, on a daily basis, some to be freed, some to be incarcerated, and some to go to their deaths. What must that be like? In the last three sentences of this brief but profound look at what this man sees every day, he sums up his thoughts and feelings on the matter:

Please set my soul free so I don't have to see another man step into that damn van! Window of death I paint you black, now it's time I turn my back. I look my friend in the eye and say, let me take your place because now I want to die. (Allen, 97)

This account was instrumental in creating the inner life of Matthew Poncelet. As a free man, it was difficult to imagine what it would be like to be around death on a daily basis, knowing that my own could be coming any day.

REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

Rehearsal is a “dance of creation,” a mountain-climbing expedition, a birth process (with director as midwife), a “deep investigation,” and an “exploration.” (Baker-White, 23).

Just as research is the practical manifestation of the textual dimension, rehearsal is where the vocal and physical dimensions are applied by the actor. An actor who has done his or her research well is prepared to go into the rehearsal process ready to make character choices right away. As the epigraph suggests, it is a fluid process of exploring what might work for a character. Nothing is set in stone until the performance—even then an actor must allow for the possibility of having to adapt to a line gaff or some similar issue. In this chapter I will share my rehearsal process—the trials, errors, and successes I found in that most sacred of spaces to an actor, the rehearsal room—beginning with the auditions and culminating in my performance of the role of Matthew Poncelet in the University of Louisville’s Thrust Theater on January 29-February 2, 2014.

My rehearsal process for *Dead Man Walking* began before the rest of the show was even cast. I was pre-cast, because this was my thesis role, and Russell Vandenbroucke, the director of the show, offered to let me sit in on auditions, and offer my opinions. I thought this was a very good plan, as I would be able to read my part with the various persons auditioning for other key roles in the show. Russ is a man of the theatre, but he is not an actor (as he himself will be the first to tell you), and he welcomed

my opinions. I sat behind the table with him and watched every audition, then got up to do a scene with some of the auditionees. This happened for one of two reasons; either Russ wanted to see them in a different scene, and we did not have a male auditioner ready to do that scene, or they were being considered for a character that had significant interaction with Matt.

Not every director would allow an actor to be so involved, and this experience proved extremely useful in three ways. First it helped establish the collaborative nature of this rehearsal process from the start. Second, I was able to start thinking about Matt Poncelet in new ways immediately, because each actor who auditioned did something different with the audition sides (short scenes used for cold reading in auditions) that caused me to react differently. Third, I truly feel that we were able to find an actress to play Sister Helen Prejean that I had great stage chemistry with. This is something for which there is just no substitute. Much of the action of *Dead Man Walking* occurs between Sister Helen and Matt. It was imperative that we found an actress capable of moving the show through all of Sister Helen's narration, and who could be emotionally open with the character of Matt. We found that actress in Megg Ward.

Read-Through

Read-through is a term for the first reading of a play by the cast as a whole. It is the first time that all of the actors get to hear the words of all of the characters spoken by the actors who will be playing them. Some directors do this and others prefer to simply begin with scene work immediately. I find both approaches useful, the former allowing for a clearer picture of the whole play early in the process, and the latter getting the actors on their feet and working sooner—thus the play begins to take shape sooner. Russ

Vandenbroucke likes to do read-throughs, usually followed by a week of table work; sitting with the cast discussing major themes of the play and asking the actors for their initial thoughts. The problem with this process is that it takes time, and time was not a luxury we had with *Dead Man Walking*. Auditions were held in the fall semester of 2013 because of a short rehearsal period in the spring. Normally they would be held in the first week of classes the semester the show is to be performed. With opening night being January 29, we only had twenty-two days from the start of classes until our first performance (and we did not rehearse as a cast on weekends).

It was therefore decided that we would rehearse for the last two weeks of class before fall exams. Here we encountered our first problem; our full cast was not available for the first week of rehearsal. The African American Theatre Program was in the middle of their production of *Monsieur Baptiste the Con Man*, and all but one of our African-American cast members was participating in that production. Of course we had to move ahead with rehearsal as best we could until we could have the full cast. This resulted in doing two full read-throughs—the first with other members of the cast reading the parts of our missing members. Not having our entire cast at the first read-through was like trying to play chess without all of your key pieces. You can fill a role with a pawn, but it does not perform in the same way as a bishop.

However, there was a silver lining to having two read-throughs: those of us who could be at the first one were able to hear a second round of first impressions at the second read-through. I found it very instructive that the first read-through by a group composed almost entirely of white actors was extremely focused on the issues of race in the play. When we were joined by our African-American colleagues, they were focused

on the story of the nun and the inmate. I knew from my preparatory work that I did not want this story to become all about race, and some of my white cast mates seemed to be fixated on these issues more than anything else. Once we had the entire cast together, the entirety of the story was discussed more fully. The bishop was back on the board, and it was time to move ahead with the game.

Before the Break

After the initial discussions about the play, we began rehearsals in earnest. Because the play is told, retroactively, through the eyes of Sister Helen, the plot follows her as she interacts with Matt and the other characters. This leads to many scene changes. Often a scene begins as the actors for the previous scene are exiting the stage. This rapid flow from one event to the next—often marked in the script only by a stage direction calling for a light cue—required very specific blocking in order to allow the show to progress smoothly. Essentially, a director has three choices regarding blocking: organic blocking found by the actors through trial and error, assigned blocking given to the actor by the director, or a combination of the two. In my experience the most common is the last of these. With *Caliban*, the previous semester, I was given almost exclusively free reign to find my own blocking which led to some very exciting moments both physically and vocally. I much prefer being able to create my blocking to being told what to do. Unfortunately the sheer number of transitions and the cues necessary to make them happen did not allow this with *Dead Man Walking*. However, Russ Vandenbroucke is very good about letting the actors find as much as possible on their own. When a specific blocking note was required, he gave it. I and the other actors were encouraged to explore everything in between.

Aside from lighting cues, the most common marker of a scene transition was the relocation of one of the several stools that we used throughout the show. This became the bane of my existence throughout the rehearsal process. At no point was it more frustrating than in the first two weeks of rehearsal. As I said before, we did not have several of our cast members for the first week of rehearsal, and due to scheduling conflicts we did not have the full cast at a rehearsal until the week before dress rehearsals. Since cast members were doing most of the actual movement of the stools, the blocking for their relocation was very specific. We spent more time going over who moved what stool where than we did on anything else in the first two weeks. I wrote down, in my script, when and where I was supposed to move a stool. Unfortunately, some of my cast mates did not, and we frequently stopped rehearsal to spend ten minutes re-blocking. I quickly realized that this show was becoming about the stools, and I took it upon myself to learn much of this blocking, even if it did not affect my character directly.

The stools did however present me with a unique physical challenge early in the process. Since Matt is on death row, whenever he visits with Sister Helen, his lawyer, or anyone else, he is shackled. We did not have a rehearsal prop for his shackles until the spring semester, so I was forced to develop a physicality that simulated the restrictions that the shackles would place on Matt. This was my first challenge in developing the physicality of my character. I knew from my script analysis that Matt was working class, and proud of that fact. I wanted him to lead with his shoulders and chest, holding his head high, conveying strength. This presented a problem however because the shackles he is forced to wear are connected to a belt around his waist. This limited my range of

motion for my entire upper body. I began to experiment with keeping my hands close to my waist and holding my shoulders in various ways. What I found was that by rounding my shoulders forward, I could reach farther with my hands. However, this caused me to lower my head somewhat.

The strength that I wanted to portray by holding my head up was suddenly gone—not to mention the fact that an actor must remember to keep his or her face up most of the time so that an audience can see his or her expressions, and hear the lines more easily. I had to discover a way to be able to pick up the stool, take a picture out of my shirt pocket, and smoke a cigarette without looking down all the time. This is where my Lecoq training was very useful. I was able to isolate the movement of my shoulders from that of my neck, allowing me to keep my head up. When I needed to smoke, I bent at the waist and sank through my chest, allowing myself enough range of motion to get the cigarette to my lips. As the physicality developed, I realized that I would have to employ what I had learned through both Linklater and Suzuki work to my breathing.

I found that the constant shift in my physical shape made it harder to get through Matt's longer lines. In my Suzuki work I was able to get through a Shakespeare monologue while slowly standing, from a squat, on my toes. I reminded myself that I had the breath I needed. I was confident that even in the moments when my chest was collapsed that I was taking in enough breath, thanks to the Linklater work on letting the thought inspire the breath. I needed to speak with Sister Helen, and I needed her to really hear me. When I reminded myself of all of this, I found that I was not only capable of getting through the lines and being heard, but that it was actually quite easy, once I got out of my head and into my body. I spent time every day—outside of the rehearsal

room—practicing this physicality and breath combination, until it became second nature to me.

In those first two weeks much of the rehearsal most beneficial to me was the rehearsal I did on my own. The exceptions to this were the rehearsals in which Russ, Megg and I sat down and went through all of Matt and Sister Helen’s scenes in order, without all of the other scenes in between. These rehearsals focused on the through line of their story within the context of the play as a whole. Through these rehearsals I discovered—for Matt—what Stanislavsky calls the super-objective. The super-objective is “the thing the character wants for the entire play; a desire that underlies and explains everything the character does in the play” (“Key terms for analyzing[sic] a play as a performance text”). Though Matt has many goals which I, the actor pursued, all of them support the super-objective. Through these smaller rehearsals I discovered that Matt has two super-objectives: “I must protect my family,” and “I must maintain my dignity.” Both of these were in keeping with my research, and once I codified them for myself, all of my goals began to fall into place. When we left school for Christmas break, Russ made two requests of the cast. Return with your lines as memorized as possible, and please don’t forget what we have done with the stools.

After the Break

Upon returning from the break, I discovered that, overall, the cast had done a good job with memorization, but the saga of the stools continued. The stools were the least of my worries however. I was off-book (working without a script in my hand) within a week of returning to rehearsals. Usually at this point if an actor can’t remember a line, he or she simply calls for line and the stage manager reads it to them until the actor

can pick the action back up again. I say usually because in this case we no longer had a stage manager. Our stage manager had to stop working on the show due to personal reasons, and so once again our rehearsals were halting, as our director had to do this job as well. Fortunately this stage of the rehearsal process did not last long. Russell Willoughby agreed to take on the stage manager position, and we were able to refocus our energy. I cannot overstress how much Russell helped focus the rehearsal process.

With the arrival of Russell Willoughby came the regular use of rehearsal props. I was finally able to rehearse in shackles. This was extremely helpful, as I now had a better idea of the limitations they would impose upon me physically and vocally. Fortunately, my approximations without the shackles were not far off, and it did not take me long to make the necessary adjustments. I kept the posture caused by the rounding of my shoulders through all of the scenes in which I was shackled, as it afforded me the most control over my body, which is what Matt would have done. I, as the character, was not about to sit up straight like a “good inmate.” In making this decision, I made myself find other ways of expressing myself through movement; leaning from the waist, the position of a leg, a tilt of the head, and so on. (See Appendix D) When we rehearsed the scenes in which Matt is unshackled, I made an interesting discovery. My hands were trained to stay in position where they would be held by the shackles. I had to remind myself to test my freedom of motion. I thought this appropriate for Matt, who has had the same routine for six years, and then found that, all of a sudden, everything in his world was changing. I found that he was more comfortable in the shackles, or behind the bars of his cell than not.

Having a stage manager and rehearsal props allowed me to concentrate on fully embodying my character, including applying a consistent dialect to his lines. Over the break I had recorded dialect samples for my character and for my character's mother. I taught the dialect to the actress who was playing my mother, and as I did so I found a connection to Matt's mother that I had not realized was there. In my research I learned about how important Matt's family is to him, and I found that the dialect was a way in which he connected with them. Matt is surrounded by southern dialect but the only people who truly speak like him are his family members. I was surprised by how much this affected my performance. I found my dialect got just a little bit thicker in the family visitation scene, and I felt a bit more guarded around the people who did not sound like me.

Now that I had found and incorporated Matt's physicality, his breathing and his dialect, into my own body, my focus in rehearsal shifted to what I saw as my greatest challenge. How was I going to get the level of emotion required by the confession scene, and do so consistently? I had no idea how to do this in performance. I have never had to show that level of raw emotion before. Deciding to let the words of the script do the work got me started. Matt's line about his last phone call with his mother is heartbreaking, and the confession of his part in raping Hope Percy and then killing her and Walter Delacroix is a very powerful moment. Allowing the gravity of the words to affect me worked at first. I had tears streaming down my face, and my voice took on that same raw quality it had in my first year voice class.

The problem with this was it was in no way consistent. I was at the mercy of my mood in rehearsal. If something funny happened to me that day, I was less likely to get

back to the level I had achieved before. Once—when I had a very bad day—I became so lost in the emotion that all of my training went right out the window, and I was unable to articulate the words. Of course there was also the constant stop and start of the rehearsal to contend with as well. Even if I were in the right place mentally, there was no guarantee that I could pick it back up, once I stopped for notes. At this point we were just under two weeks away from opening night, and I still had no consistent way of achieving Matt’s catharsis and sustaining the energy. I began to wonder if the additional pressure of having an audience would force me to fake this important moment: the moment in which we see behind the barrier Matt has constructed between himself and the world.

Honestly, I did not know if I could do it. I was afraid of being that vulnerable onstage, and I was afraid that I would not be able to build up to and sustain the level of energy required to carry me from the confession all the way through the execution scene. It was then that I remembered my mask and elements training. If I could give that level of energy in the classroom I knew that I could do so for a performance on stage. In thinking about the mask work, I reminded myself of the class I took on Japanese Noh Theatre, at Royal Holloway, University of London. I learned a great deal about energy and control in that class. Zeami, the most prominent theorist of Noh Theatre said, “What Is Felt in the Heart Is Ten; What Appears in Movement is Seven” (Zeami, 75). By this he meant that an actor who controls his movement should have great emotion behind it, even though he is only showing a fraction of it. I recalled watching Noh actors in performance, and marveling at their capacity for explosive movement and vocalization when, for the majority of the performance, everything is carefully measured. I knew that

I had the same amount of energy in me, and that the release of it would carry me to the catharsis I needed, and do so every time.

Now that I knew I had the energy the whole time, I had to find a way to channel it into the emotion of the scene. I knew that the emotion had to come from me and not from the words, and I knew that I had been trying to force it. An actor cannot control his mood on any given day any more than a non-actor. I found the solution in Michael Chekhov's *On the Technique of Acting*. He writes:

The secret lies in arousing Feelings without forcing them immediately. If we want to lift and lower our arm, we are able to do it without difficulty. We can also do the same movement, let us say, cautiously. Of course this will not seem any more difficult to us than our previous movement, but a certain psychological tint will come into our movement, namely caution...Did we force it? No, it slipped into our movement just because we did not force ourselves to feel caution. (Chekhov, 36-37)

Chekhov is suggesting here that an actor can, by simply doing a thing in the way that he or she would in real-life, achieve the feeling of that action every time it is performed. It will just happen because the thought inspires the action, and the action inspires the feeling.

I combined this idea with the emotional or thought impulse work from Linklater. I recalled what my facial muscles do when I cry, what the rest of my body does, and contorted my body in that way with the ideas of sadness and repentance in my mind. I sank to my knees and doubled over, avoiding eye contact with Megg. I fed into this the thought of "I need to speak now or I will explode from my guilt." My arms began to shake, and I held one with the other, fighting for control. I had to get the confession off of my chest. What came out was: Matt's guilt, his sorrow, and his pain. The integration of the physicality and the thought impulse forced me to take in much more oxygen than I

normally would with a single breath. I found myself breathing, not at the end of each line, or in any other artificially constructed manner. Rather, I was taking in just enough air to fuel each thought, and with it the raw emotion. Tears rolled down my face, as I delivered my lines from my very soul. I noticed that Megg Ward was responding not to me, but to Matt. I had completely integrated myself with the character much as the voice and body were integrated to produce this raw emotional state. She began to cry, and that just fueled my catharsis. From this point on, I was able to get the emotion consistently. It was not the same every night, but the truth of the moment was the same, and I never had a problem finding that truth again. (See Appendix D) I had truly found my character. Now all that was left was to perform the role for an audience

Performance and Audience Response

As I said before my goal was for the audience to see Matthew Poncelet as a human being; not to simply judge him for his crimes, and disregard him out of principle. Every audience is different and so is every live performance. The reaction of the audience was not my concern. Rather, it was my goal to get their attention and to make them think about the character and the story. I did not wish to preach my thoughts about the death penalty or this man who I was playing; only to make them consider the whole person.

I had done all of my work. All that was left to do was to trust in it. This was crucial to the success of the play, and I was presented with a new challenge on a nightly basis. Every night of the performance something went wrong. Opening night I forgot a line. The panic an actor feels when this happens is very real. Not only does the actor not want to look stupid, but the other actors in the scene are all counting on him or her to do

his or her part. Matt's physicality and habits were so ingrained in me at this point that I was able to use the pause to increase the tension between Sister Helen and Matt in this moment. I simply tilted my head to the side and looked at her for a moment. Then I took a long drag on my cigarette and exhaled. I was able to recover my line and proceed with the scene, and no one (except our esteemed director) was the wiser.

Another night, a lighting cue did not happen the way it was supposed to. I maintained my character, stayed in the moment and began the scene anyway. The lights came up, and unless a person had seen the show before, they would have no way of knowing that this was not supposed to happen. There was not a single performance that went perfectly, and this was very stressful for me because I am by nature a perfectionist. I was able to get through it without ever breaking character, however, because I knew that I and my cast mates had put in the necessary work, and that we could trust one another.

I also did something during the run of this performance that I have never done before. After getting into costume and makeup, I would leave the dressing room, and not return except during intermission, or perhaps to get a drink of water. I wanted to feel isolated, as Matt would have, locked in his six by eight foot cell. I would go behind the wall of the set, and sit or lie on the gurney that was hidden there. This kept me right next to the location of my entrances and exits, and I could hear everything, so I never missed a cue. More importantly, it kept me isolated and in the dark. There was nothing to pull me away from my character—no sounds of muffled laughter in the dressing room, no other world but the one in which Matt lived.

I found this very useful for staying in character as I was not barraged by the comments that inevitably came from other cast members during the rehearsal process. In particular they would comment on the scene in which Matt discusses his dislike of African Americans and “lazy people,” and the of course after his confession and execution. I felt more in character for the duration of this show than I have ever felt before. That being said, I am not Matthew Poncelet and I was aware of the audience response during and after my scenes.

The two scenes listed above got the strongest reactions from the audience of any of my scenes. During the scene in which Matt is discussing his disposition toward people of color, without exception, every night I would hear hisses of disapproval and hatred from the audience. I knew that this would be the case, and it provided me with even more motivation to show them all of Matt; not just his prejudice, and not just his crimes. I believe that I succeeded in this due to the absolute silence that filled the theatre during his confession and execution.

I have never experienced anything quite like it. Megg and I were the only two people onstage for the majority of the confession scene, so there really was nowhere else for the audience to look. Even so, the tension in the room was palpable, and I could feel every eye on us. Something truly remarkable happened during the confession. The world outside of my character’s confession to Sister Helen ceased to exist. I know that the audience was experiencing it with us, due to conversations with some of them after the show, but in that moment the only other person in my world was Sister Helen.

During the walk to the execution, I always sank to my knees in front of Megg for Matt’s last conversation with Sister Helen, and without fail, every night I could hear

members of the audience crying. One evening, an audience member was actually wailing. What was going on? Did the audience cease to dislike Matt, or had they finally seen him as a human being? I think the latter is more accurate. During these final moments, including the execution, the house lights were up, and I could see audience members. This was by the design of Russ Vandenbroucke and Michael Hottis, our lighting designer. The idea was that it would force the audience to recognize their complicity in the death of not just this man, but also everyone who is executed in this country that allows capital punishment. This was not to “force” anyone to change their position on the death penalty, but rather, as was my goal, to make them think.

During the execution scene, after apologizing to the families of his victims, Matt says, “I just want to say that I think killing is wrong, no matter who does it. Whether it’s me or y’all or your government” (Robbins, 92). Every night I found myself delivering this line to the audience because I saw them as being present for the execution. With his dying breath Matt tells Sister Helen “I love you” (Robbins, 92). I never had to say this line very loud. It is my belief that this was because the audience was hanging on every word, of this murderer and rapist whom they now saw as a human being.

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

As I mentioned before, upon the completion of each performance, several audience members found me in the lobby of the theater, and each of them had something to say about their experience of the play. I am not talking about congratulations here, but rather about serious thoughts about the death penalty, and my character. One of my graduate professors, Dr. Nefertiti Burton, spoke with me a few days later. She was happy with my performance, but the comment she made that really made me feel my portrayal of Matt was successful was, “I really wanted to hate you, but I just couldn’t.” Overall, I believe that I accomplished what I set out to do with this character, which was to make him complex, and interesting, and to make an audience feel conflicting emotions towards him. In other words, I managed to show his humanity.

While I feel that I accomplished the goal that I began this work with, it is crucial for an actor to be able to objectively critique his or her own performance. Complete objectivity is impossible, but looking back over the rehearsal and performance I was able to ask of myself, and answer, some important questions about my experience. The answers to these questions show me that, while I was successful in many ways with the application of my three-dimensional acting process, that there are areas in which I was not as successful and still have much room for improvement.

While I spent a great deal of time with the source material for *Dead Man Walking*, I was compelled, after the production closed, to ask myself if I had used all of the source

materials to their greatest effect. To my surprise the answer was no, in fact I did not. I relied very heavily on the play script for my textual analysis, supporting the given circumstances and my character's objectives with the book. However, I realize now that I used much more of Elmo Patrick Sonnier's story than that of Robert Lee Willie. This play is unusual in that Matt is based on not one, but two real people. While I believe that I was able to tell the story of Matthew Poncelet, I cannot help but feel that I could have given a more complete performance, had I incorporated the stories of both Sonnier and Willie more evenly. I also believe that, while Matt is an amalgamation of the two men, I could have allowed their individual traits to influence the moments of the play more specific to each of them. For example, in the interview scene, I could have allowed more of Willie's traits to be present.

I believe that I achieved a vocal quality that was alive and that helped convey the humanity of my character. Of course everyone hears his or her own voice differently than it sounds to other people. I was fortunate, with this production, to receive a DVD of the performance, and so I was able to objectively analyze my work. The first thing my ear was drawn to was my dialect. As I stated earlier, I discovered new importance in the connections Matt has through his Cajun dialect. On viewing, and listening, to the performance, I found that while I successfully maintained my dialect for the duration of the show, it was not Cajun enough for me. It is not important for an actor to sound completely native, especially when the dialect is one that can be difficult for an audience to understand—then it can get in the way. However, since I placed so much stock in my character's identification with the dialect, and through it his family, I should have spent

more time recording myself and listening, to see how I could make myself sound more specifically Cajun—instead of Southern American with a Cajun flavoring.

The second vocal aspect I noticed was volume, with breath being the driving force. On the video, I could be heard at all times, but how much of that is the quality of the microphones and how much is the projection of my voice? I found my answer in my midterm review. Another of my professors, Erin Crites, said that while she felt that this performance was some of my best work:

The only criticism I [Erin Crites] have is that his cavalier attitude and relaxed energy at the beginning of the play made it difficult for me to see/hear him. I understand that this was probably a deliberate choice but it was filmic rather than theatrical. (Graduate Review, Spring 2014)

I believe that this was largely due to inadequate breath support in the beginning prison visitation scenes. As discussed earlier, I found it difficult to support all of Matt's dialogue in the posture I was forced to adopt in the shackles. As the play progressed, and I adapted to the posture, I was able to achieve the level of breath and thereby projection necessary to be heard and tell Matt's story.

The lack of breath support early in the play ties directly to questions about the successfulness of my physical adaptation of Matt. One of my main goals for this production was to find ways of being alive in my body when full range of motion is not an option. I believe that I was successful in this endeavor, but at the cost of volume and vocal clarity early in the performance. Watching the video showed me that I was also successful in creating a physicality for Matt that was different from my own. I was able to convey his working class roots through my posture, and even found a different walk for him. It was heavier, and each step held purpose—I tend to wander a bit. That being said, I found that my ever-present habit of leading with my head did not go away with

this production. Part of this was due to the fact that in most of my scenes I was on the raised level of the stage. This forced me to look down at the characters with whom Matt interacted, particularly Sister Helen. I would like to have done more with my eyes, instead of allowing my head to drop forward and down. This is something that I continue to struggle with as an actor, and in daily life.

Of course the purpose of my three-dimensional acting process is to create well-rounded characters that are driven by real and clear objectives, giving them emotional depth and complexity. I feel that I did achieve this with Matthew Poncelet—though in my focus to portray him as more than just evil I may have made him a bit too soft. I vigorously pursued his super-objectives of protecting his family and maintaining his dignity. I feel that his love of family, his fear of being alone, and his fear of losing control fueled them and made them vibrant and ever-present in his mind. Everything that I did as an actor vocally, physically, and mentally was geared toward supporting each of Matt’s objectives in each scene, and these in turn supported his super-objectives. I feel that my pursuit of objectives with this character was as strong as with any other that I have ever played.

The most important question that I asked of myself is this: “Did the creation and portrayal of the character, Matthew Poncelet, help me grow as an actor? The answer is a resounding yes. While I did not accomplish all of my textual, vocal, and physical goals as fully as I might have wished, I can say with confidence that Matt is one of the two most complete characters that I have ever brought to life—the other being Caliban, in the production of *The Tempest* the previous semester. While Caliban was much more visibly alive physically, and he had more vocal variety, I had to create Matt with extreme

restraints placed upon me, by the play and by the physical limitations of the set and props. Also, with Matt I had to go to a place emotionally that I am not comfortable going: total vulnerability. Baring soul (even though it was Matt's and not really mine) was the most frightening thing that I have ever had to do on stage. I was not certain that I could do it, and I had to fight through those doubts and push myself farther than ever before. It was worth every moment of the work because now I know that I am capable of doing so. Without that discovery, and the unpredictability that I discovered with Caliban, and continued with Matt, I would not be able to throw myself into future roles with the reckless abandon that will allow me to go to new and exciting places with each new character.

If I could do it all over again, there are a few things that I might have done differently. Given the chance, and a willing inmate, I would absolutely have gone to a prison and spoken with him about what his daily life was like. I don't think that I would have been allowed to visit a death row inmate, but perhaps I could have corresponded with someone. This would also have had the benefit of helping someone cope with the horrible circumstances of his day to day existence. I also would likely have spent more time with the peculiarities of the Cajun dialect. It is a fascinating dialect, and one that is difficult to master. Given what I know now about the connection to Matt's family that was strengthened by the dialect, I wish I had spent more time with it. A third thing that I wish I could play around with now is the moment when Matt finally confesses. I was already breaking down when I confessed these lines as a character. What would have happened if I had fought against the catharsis for just a bit longer? Would the struggle of trying to maintain my defenses, and losing the battle piece by piece have been more

compelling? I am not saying that I wish I had done it this way, but rather that I wish I had spent more time experimenting with this moment. Perhaps I might have found an even more profound moment and perhaps not. Essentially, I would want to try more things if given the chance and more time.

I believe that my process of three-dimensional acting served me well in the development and performance of the character of Matthew Poncelet. I will be able to use this technique to help me create other equally complex and interesting characters. However, it is important to note that the tools I employ in this process are by no means a complete set. Other roles may demand the addition of extra tools to my process. Shakespeare, for example requires an intimate familiarity with iambic pentameter. This work demands that an actor have a command of the subtleties of verse work. It would require me to mark scansion—the stressed and unstressed syllables of writing in verse—and to choose operative words, and so on.

Performing a Shakespearean character demands a more specific breathing pattern than performing a character not written in verse. Shakespeare's characters do not speak as we do today. Consequently, the breath needed to sustain the text and convey its meaning is different as well. There are three primary schools of thought for knowing where to breathe when delivering Shakespearean verse—in prose an actor may breathe as he or she would with the delivery of any contemporary dialogue. The first is that the actor should breathe at the end of each line of verse, using the pause for breath as a moment to think (in character) about what he or she will say next. The second is to breathe with the punctuation of the text. In my opinion this creates a choppy delivery, and it cuts off the thought of the character. Also, there are many editions of

Shakespeare's plays, and in each of them the editor has placed various punctuation marks where he or she believes they should be—not where Shakespeare placed them. The third method is to breathe at the beginning of each new thought. The thought may be conveyed in a single line of dialogue, or it may take three or four lines. The important thing is to get the entire thought out with a single breath.

Another type of role that would require me to alter my process can be found in the “Epic Theatre” of Bertolt Brecht:

Brecht believed that theatre should appeal not to the spectator's feelings but to his reason...capable of provoking social change. In the Realistic theatre of illusion, he argued, the spectator tended to identify with the characters on stage and become emotionally involved with them rather than being stirred to think about his own life...Brecht developed his *Verfremdungs-effekt* (“alienation effect”)--i.e., the use of anti-illusive techniques to remind the spectators that they are in a theatre watching an enactment of reality instead of reality itself. (Feinberg)

If I were to perform a role in such a play, I would have to break with my three-dimensional process—though the technical tools of the actor remain the same—which is rooted in using each dimension to pursue the goals of the character and create an alternate reality in which an audience may lose themselves for the span of two or so hours. I would have to constantly change from the world of the play to the one in which I, the actor live—as would the audience. It would be my job to deliberately remind the audience that they are watching a play. With “Epic Theatre,” I would no longer be encouraging an audience to think. Rather, I would be demanding it of them and compelling them to act. “Epic Theatre” takes a stance on the issues upon which the practitioners have agreed.

There are many forms and styles of theatre that an actor must be able to perform, each of them with their own specific demands upon the craft of acting. Shakespeare and

“Epic Theatre” are only two examples. This is a chronicle of my journey of defining and creating a process—for the creation and performance of one type of role—from what I knew before beginning graduate school, through my training, and culminating in its practical application in the rehearsal and performance of my thesis role. From start to finish this has been one of the most rewarding undertakings of my life. I hope that any young actor who may come across this paper will find it useful in aiding him or her in the creation of his or her own process. In theatre we learn by doing. I have learned much in my graduate career, and as I take what I have learned, I look forward to the work yet to be done.

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APPENDIX A

Linklater Progression Warm-Up (This is My Own Adapted Version)

1. Start out standing with your feet shoulder width apart, and allow the breath to drop in and fall out, be aware of how your breathing is at this moment, don't force it just let it happen.
2. Begin to walk around the room and as you are walking, acknowledge the other people in the room—with a smile, or a nod, or possibly ignore them.
 - a. Notice a sound in the room.
 - b. Notice a smell in the room.
 - c. Notice a sight in the room.
 - d. Notice a taste in the room.
 - e. Notice a feeling in the room.
3. Begin game of TAG.
 - a. Alternate between regular speed and slow motion.
4. Come to stillness (at your yoga mat).
5. Notice your breath, let it drop in and fall out.
 - a. How has it changed? Are you breathing fast and shallow, slow and deep?
6. Find your way to the floor and lie on your back, with the soles of your feet on the floor and your knees raised if that is more comfortable for you.
7. Allow the breath to drop in and fall out, making a gentle fff sound as it passes your lips.
8. Imagine you are lying on a grassy hill with the gentle warmth of the late spring sun on your face. A light breeze moves your hair.
9. Imagine a string is attached to your knees, and that string gently lifts your knees up into the air, so that your feet come up off the ground, and your knees come up toward your chest.
10. Your right knee gets heavy and begins to drift to your right side and your left follows it over.
11. Allow gravity to gently take them to the floor, and allow your head to turn to your left so you get that nice diagonal stretch.
12. Feel that stretch and release the breath on a fff sound, and imagine a pebble dropped into the pool of sound in your pelvis, and the ripples create a touch of sound on a “huh” (Repeat the pebble exercise two more times).

13. Then drop a larger pebble into the pool of sound, causing larger ripples, and these create a skipping touch of sound on a “huh-huh.”
14. Describe an arch with your left hand up and over your head, (allowing your head to follow to the right side) and across so that your left hand meets your right. Then allow it to drift back across your chest. (The head follows back to the left)
15. Describe a second arch and go farther so that your fingertips go a little past those of the right hand.
16. Describe a third, even larger, arch so that the left hand goes one whole palm’s length past the right hand.
17. Allow the string to attach to the left knee and bring it up over your body and the right knee follows. They cross your center and allow gravity to carry them over to the ground on your left side (with the head turned to the right).
18. Repeat steps twelve through seventeen, with on the opposite side, and stop the knees when they are over your center.
19. Let your left foot come down on the ground and slide out so the leg is nice and long, and clasp your right knee gently with your hands.
20. Hug your right knee toward your chest and then release it just a bit.
21. Remember to keep allowing the breath to drop in and fall out.
22. Breathe in and jutter the breath out with a gentle shake of the knee, just on breath (repeat).
23. Breathe in and jutter the knee with sound (repeat).
24. Take your right hand and clasp the inside of your right knee, and allow the weight of it and gravity to gently guide your knee over towards the floor on the right side.
25. Jutter on breath twice, followed by sound twice.
26. Let the right hand fall away and our friend, the string, guides the right knee back up over the body.
27. Allow you left hand to come up and clasp the outside of the knee, and gently guide it across your body to the left.
28. Jutter one breath twice and then on sound twice.
29. Allow the left hand to fall away and the right knee comes back over your body.
30. Imagine a large crayon is attached to your knee and describe huge circles with your knee as if you are drawing on the ceiling with the crayon.
31. Reverse the direction of the circle.
32. Describe medium circles and reverse directions
33. Then small circles and reverse directions.
34. Finally, describe a tiny figure-eight.
35. Allow your foot to come down on the mat and slide out—feel how nice and long your leg is.
36. Allow that string to attach to your left knee and bring it up.
37. Repeat steps twenty-seven to thirty-five with your left knee.

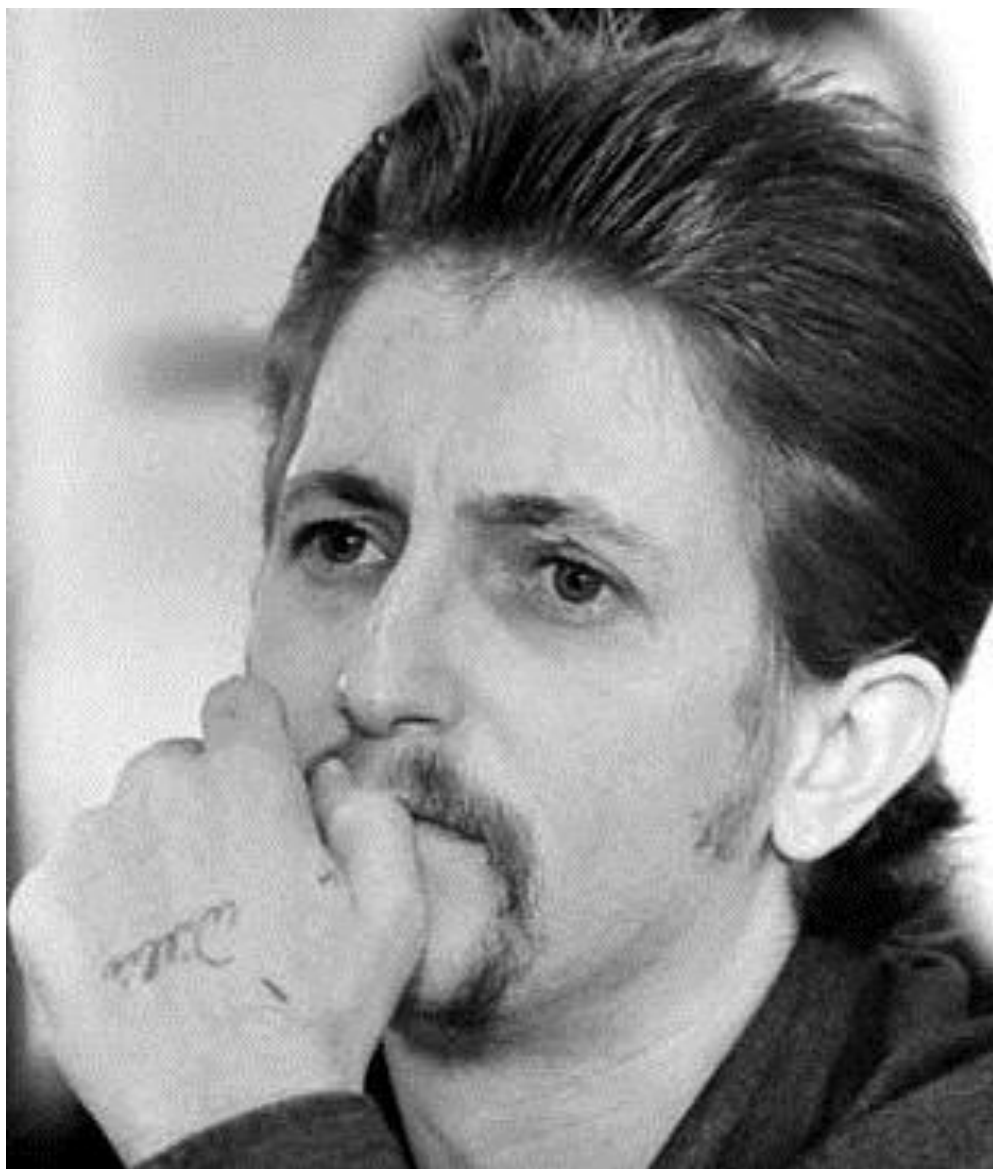
38. Find your way into a fetal position on your left side.
39. Extend into a banana stretch, rolling out of it onto your stomach.
40. Imagine a tiny lady bug in front of you, crawling out towards the wall, and follow it with your eyes, allowing your head to follow it up the wall, guiding you into Cobra.
41. Hold Cobra stretch, and then rock back into Child's Pose.
42. Relax for a moment and observe the breath.
43. Come up onto your hands and knees into Table Top—begin happy puppy/sad puppy spine undulation, remembering to lead with your tailbone.
44. After two of these, add a triple tongue stretch.
45. Repeat two to three times.
46. Rock back into a squat, observe the breath.
47. Allow the breath to drop all the way to the tailbone.
48. Allow your tailbone to lift and your head to drop so that you are hanging from the hips.
49. Lift your head from the neck then drop your head, releasing the tension in your neck (repeat).
50. Roll up the spine, one vertebra at a time, remembering to energize through the heel and the tailbone (The head should be the last thing to come up).
51. Drop back down the spine one vertebra at a time, but this time, release sound on incremental tones on a half-step, going up the scale.
52. Repeat step fifty, toning down the scale in half steps.
53. (Here the leader will demonstrate a series of dropping down and rolling up the spine rapidly, while toning, with each culminating in a variation of juttering sound from the body) The class should emulate the leader in a call and response fashion.
54. Massage the face and the jaw with fingertips.
55. Gently guide the lower jaw down and back.
56. Gently jutter the jaw on breath, and then on sound (use color imagery here).
57. Oxygenate (Six huge, four medium, series of anticipatory breaths).
58. Warm up chest resonator.
59. Warm up mouth-box.
60. Describe the passage of air to the teeth resonator, by drawing a path from your soft palate to your teeth.
61. Warm up teeth resonator.
62. Tone through these three resonators (on a heeeeeee-ahhhhhhhh going from high (teeth) to low (chest), then reverse.
63. Test whith "Hey!" "Hey you over there!" "You look good, but not as good as me!"
64. Gently massage the sinus valleys on either side of your nose. Tone while doing this, and then test with a "hee hee hee."

65. Repeat step sixty-four (four to seven times), going up one half step each time.
66. Place right hand on right side of rib cage and cover left nostril. Breath in with six short sharp sniffs. (Repeat several times, alternating between right side of rib cage breathing through left nostril and the reverse).
67. Where you feel the cold air just above the bridge of the nose, pinch with thumb and fore finger, and tone with a high note on “Mee.”
68. Tone from the same place but allow the voice to drop from “Mee” through “Meh” all the way to “My” (i.e. Mee, Mee, Mee, Meh, Meh, Meh, My, My, My, My, My).
69. Test head resonator with “Why?” “Why fly?” “Why fly so high in the sky?” etc.
70. Key off the dome going up the resonating ladder. (Starting with lowest pitch and then when at highest pitch, drop quickly down the spine and hang there).
71. Think one note higher and key the sound on breath, then add sound.
72. Reverse step seventy, going down the ladder, as you roll up the spine.
73. Finish the warm up with a series of tongue-twisters.

APPENDIX B



("Elmo Patrick Sonnier")



("Robert Lee Willie")

APPENDIX C



Angola Prison Death Row (Fryer)



Execution Gurney at Angola Prison (Pearson)

APPENDIX D



Photos of Courtesy of Jennifer Siow (Siow)

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