

MINDFUL ACTING

by

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ABSTRACT

As we transition into a more goal-oriented society, our ability to nurture and cultivate individual growth in emotional, spiritual, and mental awareness in the performing arts has been stifled by the desire to get ahead in our modern-day race for success. This fierce struggle brings with it a risk of subconscious deterioration in mental, spiritual and emotional health. As actors in an aggressive industry, we are often faced with the monumental task of preserving our artistry while competing in the industry, and we often find ourselves overwhelmed by the inescapable pressures in the business of acting. In “**Mindful Acting**”, I will synthesize a metaphysical approach to actor-training centered around the concept of mindfulness, meditation and the self. The goal of my thesis is to refine and integrate pre-existing actor training methods with practices in mindfulness and meditation to reclaim the actor’s artistry in life and in performance.

To

My mom and dad for your relentless belief and support in me and my passion.

My sister for always being in my corner, supporting me in all my choices and for always being an inspiration to me.

Johann Robert Wood for your passion, contribution and inspiration. Love you, brother.

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INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF HISTORY OF ACTOR TRAINING IN AMERICA

Although any judgment of an actor's craft is largely subjective, the actor's craft requires considerable physical, emotional and mental commitments that are supported by sufficient technical training and in some cases, talent. However, in order to achieve consistency, the actor must undergo rigorous training that has the potential to propel her craft to the next level, beyond the capabilities of talent alone. With this thesis, I aim to synthesize a metaphysical approach to actor training that will potentially facilitate a lifetime of work for actors. In order to effectively execute my thesis, I have to first delve into the history of actor training in America, beginning in the late nineteenth century with Steele MacKaye and the establishment of the Lyceum Theatre School for Acting in 1884. MacKaye attempted to adopt techniques that he had learned from his time at the Paris Conservatoire with French theatre practitioner, François Delsarte. Delsarte searched for an external pathway to access the actor's inner life, which MacKaye synthesized with his own ideas of gymnastics. Unfortunately, Delsarte's technique did not resonate with American actors during the nineteenth century and failed to achieve the necessary attention needed for it to be established as a prominent method for actor training in America, resulting in the school's untimely demise. The downfall of the school led to its eventual resurgence as the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, adopting Konstantin Stanislavski's system for actor training. Stanislavski's system was inspired by Delsarte's teachings, teachings that were initially rejected by American actors of the late 19th century. Presently, Stanislavski is widely acknowledged as the father of modern acting because of his theoretical and practical advancements in the development of actor training methods. His system for actor training

inspired the development of several actor training methods in America, including those developed by Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, Uta Hagen, and Michael Chekhov, whose techniques were distilled and synthesized from Konstantin Stanislavski's System for actor training.

There is no doubt that Stanislavski's teachings have remained relevant up to the present and the techniques that were distilled from his teachings have established themselves as prominent methods of actor training in America by producing some of the world's best actors. However, the practice of these techniques has remained unaltered since their adoption, while the industry that facilitates the craft of acting has constantly been evolving. Since these techniques yielded the same results in the way that they are able to lead actors into truthful and genuine portrayal of characters, I can confidently ascertain that the difference in methods does not affect the outcome, but instead leads me to examine the fundamental similarity in each technique – which is to distract the actors from their own consciousness by focusing their attention onto other aspects of their performance. This fundamental similarity will serve as the foundation of my investigation, where I will synthesize a form of actor training that contradicts the need to distract the actor from her own consciousness, but instead utilizes the actor's consciousness as a part of the actor training process through practices in mindfulness, meditation and the self. By investigating each existing actor training method that has served American actors in the past and present, I aim to identify the common strain that underlies each pedagogy that led to me to my hypothesis. Following this identification, I will synthesize a new method of actor training by merging pre-existing techniques with theoretical and practical aspects of mindfulness and meditation that are centered around the self.

We begin this investigation with Konstantin Stanislavski, whose teachings became the source of inspiration for Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, Uta Hagen, and Michael Chekhov. In his theories for actor training, Stanislavski believed that “the pathway to the command of truthful portrayals lay through the subconscious” (Bartow xxi). He imparted his teachings onto Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, both of whom founded the American Theatre Lab where they established the roots of American Actor Training. There, Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya shared Stanislavski’s teachings with the American Theatre Lab’s first students, Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler.

Lee Strasberg remained as a student of the American Theatre Lab long enough to be familiarized with Stanislavski’s teachings and left the American Theatre Lab soon after to develop his own method for actor training, a method that later became known as *Method Acting*. In his introduction to *Training of The American Actor*, Arthur Bartow affirmed that Strasberg “was the first and, therefore, perhaps the most important person to popularize an American acting method” (Bartow xxvii). In *Strasberg and The Ascendancy of American Acting*, Louis Scheeder wrote that "Strasberg believed that the training of internal skills was ‘the fundamental work of the actor’" (Scheeder 3). Strasberg left the American Theatre Lab as soon as he had absorbed the significance of Stanislavski’s method because “he felt that he could better apply these principles to American realism through his own experimentation than through classes with the Russian Boleslavsky” (Bartow xxviii). Strasberg’s curiosity and desire to learn and teach fueled his passion and led him to appropriate Stanislavski’s teachings into the development of *Method Acting*. In his teachings, Strasberg emphasized a 3-part training which includes *relaxation, concentration, and Affective Memory*. Strasberg claimed that "The process of

relaxation deals with habits that interfere with and confine expression. We must encourage you to find new ways of expression that are held back by habits" (Strasberg 18). With *concentration*, Strasberg believed that our impulses had to be released and focused through exercises that required the actor to concentrate on minute details of an external object or being. Both *relaxation* and *concentration* became the foundation for Strasberg's method and led actors to *Affective Memory*, whereby actors utilized sense memory to recreate emotional memories in an attempt to unlock their creativity. Strasberg instructed actors to imagine actual events that they had previously experienced and were asked to focus their attention onto every detail that surrounded the event in the hopes of evoking emotions that aligned with that of their characters. Essentially, Strasberg became the first person to interpret Stanislavski's teachings through his own pedagogy that he employed as a co-founder and director of The Group Theatre. However, Strasberg's commitment to emotions and *Affective Memory* received some opposition from his colleagues including Stella Adler.

In her time at the Group Theatre with Strasberg, Adler, along with several other actors, felt that although they "recognized Strasberg's brilliance and uncompromising pursuit of truth, some[they] began to feel limited by it" (Oppenheim 44) In 1934, Upon returning from a trip abroad where she spent five weeks training with Konstantin Stanislavski, she synthesized her own method based on Stanislavski's new theories that differed from what Strasberg had initially adopted from the American Theatre Lab in 1924. While Strasberg insisted on utilizing one's own life and personal history as a means to connect with a character, thus evoking real emotions, Adler merely de-emphasized Strasberg's teachings by prioritizing the actor's pursuit of an objective in a scene as a means of achieving true emotions. Adler emphasized the relationship

between the actors' imagination and the *Given Circumstances* in the script by prioritizing three elements: *Foundation*, *Character*, and *Script Interpretation*. *Foundation* emphasized the use of the actor's imagination as an actor's primary source that contains anything from art to ideas of humanity's collective consciousness to personal memories and present moments. She believed that truth can only be found in a play's *Given Circumstances*, and a character's behavior is a direct response to her given circumstances. In the element *Character*, Adler believed that "the deeper you delve into *Character*, into other identities, the closer you get to yourself" (Oppenheim 35). Adler used multiple exercises that worked outside-in, inside-out, and even archetype explorations with the belief that actors needed to embrace "self-transcendence and transformation as a necessary element in their development" (Oppenheim 36). Adler advocated for a poetic study of life and nature with the belief that nature connected humans to the eternal, which is greater than all of humanity. She believed that "we must constantly spy on people, studying their character element... Acting is hard because it requires not just the study of books, though that can be important too, but the constant study of human behavior." (Oppenheim 45) Adler firmly believed that "the more self-realized the actor, the stronger, richer and fuller the choice." (Oppenheim 29).

While Adler expanded upon Stanislavski's newer teachings, Michael Chekhov who studied directly under Konstantin Stanislavski as well, diverged from Stanislavski's teachings. Prior to the development of Stanislavski's newer theories which later became the basis of Adler's method, Stanislavski had a student that he deemed to be the most brilliant student that he had ever taught, Michael Chekhov. Although Stanislavski acknowledged Chekhov's aptitude, he became dissatisfied with Chekhov when he discovered that Chekhov had been implementing his

own techniques, instead of adhering to Stanislavski's. Chekhov believed that, "the body is guided or stimulated by a series of gestures" (Brahe 114). This belief led to the development of Chekhov's trademark technique, *Psychological Gesture*. Chekhov described *Psychological Gesture* as "effective and simple, and the inspiration and creative outcome produced by the actor who uses it are fabulous. The best way to approach psychological gesture is to be brave enough to think simply" (Brahe 112). *Psychological Gesture* can be defined as an intentional movement that expresses the psychology of the character including the character's thoughts, feelings and desires with the aim of aligning the character's essence within the actor's. Prior to a scene, the gesture is intended to trigger that alignment and if that alignment weakens during a scene, all the actor has to do is to execute the gesture in her imagination, thus revitalizing the actor. Chekhov achieved success through an external to internal pathway, a pathway very similar to the one employed by Sanford Meisner's *Reality of Doing*, which I will expound upon in the next paragraph.

Like Strasberg and Adler, Meisner developed his own method from Stanislavski's teachings as well. While Strasberg achieved emotional truth through the recollection of actual memories, and Adler achieved emotional truth through the pursuit of objectives, Meisner achieved emotional truth through the "process of daydreaming to induce the emotional life [of] the character" (Hart 64). Sanford Meisner began his lessons by removing the script from the actor to eliminate the actor's need to achieve any kind of predetermined results. The *Repetition Exercise* became the basis for Meisner's approach to acting. By having the actors repeat specific phrases back and forth, he hoped for the actors to achieve a state where they would "stop paying attention to themselves, lose their self-consciousness, give up feeling awkward and begin to

play" (Hart 54). Meisner also believed that acting was doing, which led to his *Reality of Doing*, where the actor is introduced to a concrete problem or task that is substantial enough to engage her full attention while dealing with the problem or task under simple, personal, specific and *Imaginary Circumstances* in the hopes of evoking a specific and personal response from the actor. Meisner's pedagogy forced actors into the present moment of their performance by having them place their focus on external elements through the *Reality of Doing* and the *Repetition Exercise*, thus eliminating self-consciousness and focusing on the direct development of emotions.

Conversely, Uta Hagen prioritized the development of an actor's imagination and spontaneity. Similar to Strasberg, Adler, Chekhov, and Meisner, Hagen was also influenced by Stanislavski's teachings. In 1947, Hagen performed in a production of *The Whole World Over*, directed by Harold Clurman, an associate of the Group Theatre alongside Strasberg and Adler. Clurman was Hagen's route to Stanislavski's teachings, teachings that later became the basis of her own method. Much like Meisner, Hagen also recognized the importance of eliminating the actor's self-consciousness as a means to bring about more specificity in her performance. In her method, Hagen expanded upon Stella Adler's *Given Circumstances* into what we presently recognize as *Hagen's 9 Questions* and *Ten Exercises* where the actor specifically plans each component of her circumstances prior to her performance. Hagen hoped that the answers from her *9 Questions* would eventually "become part of your being and the basis of your craft" (Rosenfeld 129) and that her *Ten Exercises* would "address common, recurring problems you[the actor] encounter when developing a role or in performance" (Rosenfeld 136). Uta Hagen's philosophy was that "the basic components of the characters we play are somewhere within

ourselves" (Rosenfeld 127). Her philosophy was one that was echoed by Stanislavski, Strasberg, Adler, Chekhov, and Meisner's techniques which aimed to uncover an actor's self through various exercises that focused not on the self, but on something else in the hopes that the actor's truthful self would surface as result.

These predominant methods in American actor training are similar in the way that they aim to bring about truthful portrayals of characters, stemming from an actor's self, through principles and exercises that are not focused or centered on the self, but instead on something else in the hopes of uncovering the actor's self. I argue that by not establishing the self as a the basis of a their techniques through a thorough comprehension of the actor's self, they are essentially silencing the Intellect, defined by Niki Flacks in her text *Acting With Passion* as "the part of your conscious mind [that is] assigned to understanding...and protecting you [the actor]...and seems to grow a separate identity" (Flacks 49). The Intellect fuels the moments of self-consciousness that gradually magnify thus contradicting everything these techniques were meant to accomplish.

To this end, I began crafting a thesis that would address the common quality of distracting the Intellect from the actor's craft. The Intellect is an integral part of the actor's consciousness, and by distracting it, the actor is essentially negating the role of her consciousness. In *Acting Power*, Robert Cohen addresses the actor's consciousness as an integral part of an actor's instrument that many pre-existing actor training methods do not address. He states that

Goal, situation, character, style, and performance must therefore be aligned at the moment of performance. The actor cannot be expected to think in a rotating alternation of

each of these five *consciousnesses*, nor can she divide her overall consciousness, like a pie, into five separate slices. She must, on the contrary, coalesce these multiple consciousnesses into a single, highly focused, concentration. (Cohen 2)

There is no doubt that these aforementioned actor training methods have produced some of the most outstanding actors of the 20th century and will continue to do so. My goal in introducing a new form of actor training is not to disprove existing methods, but to synthesize a method that would serve actors in the 21st century in order to preserve and potentially bolster the actor's craft. I aim to grow and improve upon the process of actor training to better serve actors in the present and future by incorporating the Intellect into the actor's process through mindfulness and meditation. The following chapter focuses on my research and pedagogical approach leading up to the synthesis of "**Mindful Acting**". Chapter 3 will outline the practical aspects of "**Mindful Acting**" through detailed accounts of the undergraduate course and the rehearsal process leading up to the closing performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The fourth chapter will focus on reflections from both the ensemble and myself in order to gauge the effectiveness of my synthesized pedagogy. Throughout this document, I aim to argue the necessity for a metaphysical approach for actor training that is centered around the self while synthesizing practices in mindfulness and meditation with pre-existing acting techniques from established professionals in order to preserve an actor's artistry within an aggressive industry.

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY

In the last chapter, I identified a commonality that exists among predominant American actor training methods. These methods have effectively been responsible for training several prominent actors in the 19th, 20th and 21st century. However, as Larry Moss states in his book *Intent to Live*, “Actors are citizens of the world and can bring different cultures to people who have never experienced them before. Actors are also time travelers who can bring to today’s audiences plays from centuries before and make them come to new life... To realize your potential as an actor, you cannot limit yourself by making yourself or your world small” (Moss 217). As citizens of the world, the actor’s portrayal of humanity has to reflect societies from the past, present, and future, while serving present-day audiences. Society’s perception of truth is parallel with their social progression through time and, as such, the actor’s definition of truthful portrayals should mirror that as well. The question then arises – How do actors consistently convey a sense of truth in alignment with society’s ever-changing perception of truth? In *The Lucid Body*, Fay Simpson states that “The art of acting has to do with the ability to transform oneself into another character that walks, thinks, and feels differently while still working from the self” (Simpson 3). The concept of the self became the basis of my research.

My Research

I began my research by examining actor training texts that uses the actor’s self as an element in their techniques which led me to Fay Simpson’s *The Lucid Body*, where I was introduced to the *nonjudgmental mind* and *chakra* centers. The *nonjudgmental mind* is an actor’s

ability to observe themselves and the environment around them without any form of judgment, and *chakra*, according to professor Robin Powell of New York University, “is a spinning sphere of bio-energy emanating from the major nerve ganglia branching from the spinal column.” (Powell, “Human Energy Systems,” NYU Tutorial). Simpson identifies seven *chakras* in her text: the crown, the brow, the throat, the heart, the solar plexus, the sacral, and the root (Fig. 1). For Simpson, “Each chakra has a specific role in human behavior and is therefore useful to an actor in his or her research of character” (Simpson 33). In her pedagogy, Simpson uses the *nonjudgmental mind* and various *chakra*-centered explorations to analyze the human condition, identify habitual and restrictive patterns, and dissect different parts of the self into layers of consciousness.

Fay Simpson’s Seven Chakra Energies

- The Root – Located at the floor of the pelvis and deals with an individual’s survival instincts.
- The Sacral – Located a few inches below the belly button and has to do with an individual’s capacity for deep, sensual and intimate feelings.
- The Solar Plexus – Located below the ribs and relates to an individual’s self-esteem.
- The Heart – Regulates an individual’s capacity for unconditional child-like love.
- The Throat – Governs an individual’s capacity for communication.
- The Brow – Located between the eyebrows and governs perception and intuition.
- The Crown – Governs an individual’s capacity to be mindful of her actions and their effects on others.

Figure 1: Fay Simpson’s Seven Chakra Energies (Fay Simpson 2008)

In my thorough analysis of Simpson's text, I became fascinated with the idea of dissecting the self into layers, which led me to Moni Yakim's text, *Creating a Character*. In his text, he stated that "an actor must study the aspects of his or her nature ... by exploring the self" (Yakim 11). He separated his investigation of the many layers of an individual's personality into six different selves: *the vulnerable self*, *the social self*, *the instinctive self*, *the unresolved self*, and *the decisive self* (Fig. 2).

Moni Yakim's Six Selves

- The Vulnerable Self – The self that is fragile and is often concealed.
- The Instinctive Self – The self that responds to stimulus, without any form of judgement.
- The Social Self – The self that is socially conditioned to control The Instinctive Self.
- The Trusting Self – The self that contains a child-like innocence and naivete devoid of self-consciousness.
- The Unresolved Self – The self that grapples with indecision.
- The Decisive Self – The self that is definite and resolute, contradicting the unresolved self.

Figure 2: Moni Yakim's Six Selves (Moni Yakim 1990)

Yakim believes that "Feelings are universal. Everyone has them. By understanding your own feelings and identifying them, you can recognize the feelings of your assigned character" (Yakim 11). Yakim states that it is imperative for the actor to first be familiarized with her own vulnerability through the vulnerable self because "experiencing your own vulnerability will let you identify and experience the vulnerability of a character" (Yakim 15). In experiencing her

own vulnerability, the actor will gradually begin to replicate that similar sense of vulnerability in the characters that she portrays. Yakim also states that “The instinctive self is that part of you which is the alert, unconscious energy that reacts to a stimulus, without the mind’s interference”, whereas the social self is “the part of you that controls your instincts and emotions. It is as if you are two persons at the same time, the repressed instinctive self and the social self who watches the outside world and behaves according to its rules” (Yakim 36 49). With the trusting self, Yakim states that it serves to “reinforce your ability to overcome self-consciousness and inhibitions” (Yakim 57).

In furthering my research regarding self-consciousness, I discovered *Acting With Passion* by Niki Flacks. In her text, Flack identifies the *Intellect* as the block between the actor and truthful emotions. She defines the *Intellect* as “the part of your conscious mind [that is] assigned to understanding...and protecting you [the actor]...and seems to grow a separate identity” (Flacks 49). She continues to note that as human beings age, their “*Intellect* constructs logic...and begins advising you [the actor]” (Flacks 50). This process of “advising” is what actors today acknowledge, in colloquial terms, as *the voice in your head*. I argue that Flack’s theories regarding the relationship between the *Intellect* and truthful emotions could be merged with Yakim’s teachings regarding *the trusting self* and that Yakim’s exercises regarding the *six selves* can potentially address the actor’s *Intellect*.

As I continued my reaserch, I learned that the majority of the techniques that I had adapted thus far were geared towards investigating and exercising the actor’s internal responses as she delved deeper into the many layers of their personalities. As effective as these internal investigations are, they are only useful if audiences are able to visually comprehend and

potentially empathize with what the actor is experiencing in her performance. This meant that the actor had to be willing and able to share her vulnerability with the audience as well as her scene partners. As I progressed with my research, I began looking into existing pedagogies and research that addresses the actor's connection with her audience. In her text *Presence*, Patsy Rodenburg defines presence as “the energy that comes from you and connects you to the outside world” (Rodenburg 11). She explains that *presence* is not an inherent state of being that human beings are born with but is instead a state of being that is achievable through a series of exercises and theories that she has outlined in her text. She claims that human beings exist within *Three Circles of Energy* (Fig. 3).

Patsy Rodenburg's Three Circles of Energy

- First Circle – A circle of energy that is self-centered and only draws energy inward.
- Second Circle – A circle of energy that is focused and is constantly in a state of giving and receiving.
- Third Circle – A circle of energy that completely outward oriented without any specificity.

Figure 3: Patsy Rodenburg's Three Circles of Energy (Patsy Rodenburg 2007)

The *First Circle* is a circle of “introspection and reflection” whereby the actor is “not very observant or perceptive about people or objects outside yourself” (Rodenburg 17). The *Third Circle* is where “Your attention is outside yourself, yet unfocused, lacking precision and detail. You get a loose connection to any situation, but miss the nuances” (Rodenburg 19) and the *Second Circle*, which is the circle where, “you reach out and touch an energy outside your own, then receive energy back from it. You are giving to and responsive with that energy, You

react and communicate freely and spontaneously within the energy you are giving and receiving. You are in the moment – the zone – and moment to moment you give and take” (Rodenburg 21). As Rodenburg defines each circle in her text, she concludes that the *Second Circle* is what individuals should strive for because when actors are in *Second Circle*, “you are noticed, heard, remembered and powerful” (Rodenburg 23).

Throughout her career as one of the leading voice, speech, and acting teachers in the world, Rodenburg collaborated with several seasoned practitioners such as Ken Rea, who adopted Rodenburg’s theories and pedagogy on presence into his own pedagogy as outlined in his text, *The Outstanding Actor*. Rea claims that there are five qualities that define an outstanding actor: *warmth*, *generosity*, *enthusiasm*, *danger*, and *presence* (Fig. 4).

Ken Rea’s Five Qualities of Outstanding Actors

- Warmth – A child-like affection and openness that engages audiences.
- Generosity – A sense of humility and love that fosters strong connections between scene partners.
- Enthusiasm – The driving force behind an actor’s love for the craft.
- Danger – The actor’s capacity to surprise audiences.
- Presence – A magnetic energy that draws audiences’ attention toward a specific actor.

Figure 4: Ken Rea’s Five Qualities of Outstanding Actors (Ken Rea 2015)

Rea defines *warmth* as the quality that “connect[s] you with other people. When you act with *warmth*, you project affection, goodwill and kindness – all powerful qualities to be on the receiving end of” (Rea 3). He defines the second quality, *generosity* as a quality that “creates an exhilarating camaraderie on stage and palpably reaches out to the hearts of the audience...It also

embraces other values, such as humility, openness, love and humanity” (Rea 29). The third quality, *enthusiasm*, as the quality that “provides the energy to keep you going... It creates joy in the work” (Rea 71). The fourth quality, *danger*, is the actor’s “capacity to surprise us. It’s the tension you set up between yourself and your audience” (Rea 91) and finally, *presence*, which Rea describes as “an energy that travels through your body and outwards, connecting with those you are speaking to” (Rea 143). *Presence*, for Rea, mirrors Rodenburg’s definition of *Presence*.

As I began to examine both Rodenburg and Rea’s texts, I noticed that the first four qualities in Rea’s theories had the potential to develop presence in the actor. However, I realized that I needed a theoretical and practical approach that could weave *warmth*, *generosity*, *joy*, and *danger* as complementary prerequisites that resulted in *presence*. As I progressed through my research, I stumbled upon theories relating to mindfulness in Dr. Ellen J. Langer’s text *Counterclockwise*, where she noted that *mindfulness* is “the need to free ourselves from *constricting mindsets* and the limits they place on our health and well-being, and to appreciate the importance of becoming the guardians of our health” (Langer 11). A *constricted mindset* as it relates to acting is a mindset that prevents the actor from mentally, physically, and emotionally empathizing with a character’s point of view. This theoretical approach to *mindfulness* positions the actor’s consciousness as an integral tool in developing the self as the central focus of my pedagogy. However, it needed a practical approach that I adapted through the act of meditation.

Presently, meditation is equated with the physical act of sitting still with eyes closed while concentrating on an affirmation. This assumption unfortunately mis-positions meditation as a passive process. In *Active Meditation*, Dr. Robert R. Leichtman and Carl Japikse state that *active meditation* should “assist us as we confront the challenges and problems of daily living. It

will complement our attempts to interact with life in intelligent, constructive, and helpful ways” (Leichtman and Japikse 23). This definition of *active meditation* allowed me to position it as a practical technique in my pedagogy that is capable of utilizing the actor’s consciousness to overcome a *constricted mindset*. The practical application of *active meditation* and the theoretical approach for *mindfulness* will serve as the catalyst that weaves *warmth*, *generosity*, *enthusiasm*, and *danger* together to result in *presence*. Beyond its purpose as a catalyst, *active meditation* will facilitate a safe method for the actor to delve into the many layers of her personality in Yakim’s investigation of the many layers of the self and Simpson’s examination of the *nonjudgmental mind*.

In concluding my research, I have divided my pedagogy into two sections. The first section is an undergraduate course where I will be teaching my pedagogy in three sequential phases: **Awareness of The Self, Expression Within A Performance**, and **Sharing The Experience With The Audience**. The second section is a devised production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*¹. The goal of devising a production as opposed to adhering to a linear structure of a production is to allow the actors an opportunity to take ownership of their own artistry, while gauging the effectiveness of my pedagogy. In the next section, I will outline my pedagogy and the rationale behind the three sequential phases of the course.

¹ In *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, Alison Oddey states that Devised Theatre is “defined by a group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes, or specific stimuli that might include music, text, objects, paintings, or movement.” (Oddey 1)

My Pedagogy

As mentioned previously, my pedagogy consists of two sections, whereby the first section is a course that has been divided into three sequential phases (Fig. 5) and the second section is a devised production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The Three Phases of My Pedagogy

- 1) Awareness of the Self
 - a) Active Meditation with the nonjudgemental mind
 - b) Moni Yakim's Exploration of The Selves
 - c) Addressing The Intellect
- 2) Expression Within a Performance
 - a) Fay Simpson's Seven Chakra Energies
- 3) Sharing The Experience With The Audience
 - a) Ken Rea's Five Qualities of Outstanding Actors
 - b) Patsy Rodenburg's Presence

Figure 5: The Three Phases of My Pedagogy

Within the first phase of the first section, **Awareness of The Self**, the actor is introduced to the theoretical and practical applications of *active meditation*. As she begins to practice *active meditation*, she will gradually be introduced to Simpson's technique of the nonjudgmental mind. By merging practices in *active meditation* with the *nonjudgmental mind*, she will begin to experience moments of mindfulness that will be vital as she transitions into the second phase of my pedagogy. For the purposes of this thesis, I define mindfulness as a state of positive presence that is attentive to the present moment through a free flow of energy with the environment,

which includes the setting, the other actors within a performance, and the audience. Once the actor has achieved a thorough comprehension of *active meditation* and *the nonjudgmental mind*, she will be introduced to Yakim's exploration of the selves as detailed in his text, *Creating A Chracter*. I have adapted four out of Yakim's six selves into my pedagogy: *the vulnerable self*, *the social self*, *the instinctive self*, and *the trusting self*. I omitted *the unresolved self* and *the decisive self* because I am confident that the aspects of an individual's personality that exists within *the unresolved self* and *the decisive self* will inherently be investigated through exercises with *the trusting self* and the devisive nature of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Within this investigation, the actor will first undergo exercises in exploring *the vulnerable self*. By examining *the vulnerable self* through imaginative exercises, she will begin to uncover the many layers of her *constricted mindset* that prevent her from embracing her own vulnerability, thus priming her for her investigation of *the social self*, *the instinctive self*, and *the trusting self*. Following a thorough examination of *the vulnerable self*, the actor will transition into exercises pertaining to *the social self* and *the instinctive self*. Because of the complementary nature between *the social self* and *the instinctive self*, I have merged the examination of both these selves to further explore the relationship between them and the actor. Finally, the actor will be introduced to *the trusting self*. I have employed *the trusting self* as the conclusion of the first phase of my pedagogy because *the trusting self* addresses matters of self consciousness that stem from a lack of understanding and awareness of *the vunerable self*, *the social self*, and *the instinctive self*. To address self conciousness, the actor must first confront and embrace the *Intellect*, a term that I had defined in the previous section by adapting Niki Flack's definition. Because the work of the actor requires that she reveal her emotional, mental, and physical life to

audiences, it is paramount that she not only address the *Intellect*, but invite it to be a part of her process as an actor. The actor must acknowledge that her *Intellect* is an integral part of her consciousness and can be beneficial to her process through Yakim's exercises with *the trusting self* and *active meditation*.

Due to the nature of Yakim's exercises, actors will continue to experience moments of *mindfulness* throughout the exercises, preparing them for the second phase of this first section, **Expression Within a Performance**. Within this phase, the actor will undergo a comprehensive investigation of *chakra* energies as outlined in Simpson's text, *The Lucid Body*. The actor will explore the relationship between the newly discovered layers of her personality and her physical body to uncover the intricacies of physical expression as it relates to her personality. Because the actor has been subconsciously employing *mindfulness* throughout the first phase, she will begin to merge *mindfulness* with her *chakra* explorations, allowing a free flow of energy between her and her scene partner, echoing my definition of mindfulness.

Once the actor has achieved a firm understanding of all seven *chakra* energies and the intricacies of her physical expressions, she will be ready for the third and final phase of the first section, **Sharing The Experience With The Audience**. All the work leading up to this point would only serve its purpose if the audience is allowed to become a part of the actor's experience. I use the word "allowed" because throughout the actor's performance, it is the actor's duty to magnify her mindful state to include the audience as well. By merging Rea's theories regarding the *five qualities of outstanding actors*, as mentioned in *The Outstanding Actor*, with Rodenburg's theoretical and practical exercises regarding *presence* as outlined in her text, *Presence*, I have synthesized a technique that employs the many facets of the actor's personality

that were uncovered in the first phase of my pedagogy and the intricacies of the actor's physical expressions, as explored in the second phase, to act as a source of energy for the actor as she begins to utilize Rea's theories and Rodenburg's exercises.

By this point, the actor has completed the training within the first section of my pedagogy. However, before she transitions into a production setting in the second section, she must first employ these techniques that she has learned thus far through monologues and scenes that she and her fellow actors will select from Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs*. The rationale behind my selection is due to the spare nature of the play in terms of its technical elements, thus allowing actors to focus solely on the playwright's words and the connection between scene partners.

Once the actor is familiarized with the application of these techniques, she will graduate on to the second section of my pedagogy which is a devised production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that is aimed to emulate an environment where the actor and the ensemble would have the opportunity to exercise their own artistry, while applying the techniques that they had learned through the first section of my pedagogy.

In contemplation of this pedagogy, I realized that an audition was necessary in order to form an ensemble of actors who either possessed *Rea's five qualities of outstanding actors* or the capacity to adopt those qualities as they progressed through my pedagogy. In order to identify such qualities, I reflected on my own experience as an actor throughout various audition and callback processes for graduate acting programs and summer acting programs, reached out to peers and mentors, and supplemented those reflections and conversations with the texts that were used in the synthesis of my pedagogy. Because this pedagogy was synthesized from the

aforementioned texts on actor training, it was imperative that the actors possessed a willingness to embrace and experiment with a form of actor training that may have varied from what they had experienced in the past, regardless of their levels of experience. With that in mind, the aim of the audition was not to find the best actors but to form an ensemble of actors whose personalities reflected the aforementioned qualities as detailed by Rea in this text, *The Outstanding Actor*, and a willingness to embrace and experiment with a new and synthesized pedagogy for actor training.

In order to support the aim of the audition, I crafted a two-step audition process that would assess each actor's level and capacity for the aforementioned qualities. The first step was a series of group improvisation exercises that required the actors to collaborate with one another while remaining open to the ever-changing circumstances and environment. The second step was a short interview with each individual to gauge their level of interest in the project and how this pedagogy would complement their existing training. In the following chapter, I will provide a detailed bi-weekly account of the course, a detailed weekly account of the production, and a thorough account of the actual audition process.

CHAPTER TWO: ACCOUNT OF EVENTS

The Audition

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I crafted a 2-step audition process to assess each auditionee's level or capacity for *Rea's five qualitates of outstanding actors* as detailed in his text, *The Outstanding Actor*, and to gauge their willingness to embrace and experiment with a new and synthesized pedagogy for actor training. The first step was a group improvisation exercise that required the actors to collaborate with one another while remaining open to the ever-changing circumstances and environment. Auditionees were brought into the room in groups of four, given a summary of the project, then asked to participate in an improvised scene where the entire group had a universal objective. The obstacles were determined by the ever-changing circumstances that included an array of sound cues and props. The props that were provided were a stick and a bottle. Both of which had to be used in the scene where the actors were required to endow each prop with qualities other than that of a stick and a bottle. My scale for assessment was based on the auditionee's ability to creatively use the props, respond to sudden changes in their environment and their capacity to collaborate with their scene partners to creatively pursue a universal objective. The improvised scene proved to be a challenge for the auditionees because they were asked to procure a scene with only two props and a universal objective. As they were performing the scene they had to determine the location and time through their improvised lines and had to react to sound cues that were triggered based solely on my discretion. Out of the twenty-four auditionees, sixteen auditionees were able to display moments of *warmth* and *generosity* as they were collaborating with their scene partners, and

danger as they reacted to the sound cues. All twenty-three auditionees were interviewed in the second step to ensure a fair audition process. Several auditionees who were not as competent in the first step excelled in the interview portion of the audition. Eight auditionees displayed higher levels of genuine interest and a willingness to experiment with a new and synthesized method of actor training compared to the rest of the auditionees. Out of the twenty-four auditionees, fourteen were selected to be a part of the ensemble. These fourteen young actors were selected based on a combined scale that gauged their level of competence in the first and second step to ensure that the actors were able to complement one another as a part of an ensemble. These fourteen undergraduate actors included eight BFA Acting majors, four BFA Musical Theatre majors, and two BA Theatre majors.

The Course

The overarching goal of the course was for the actors to experience a method of actor training centered around the self while employing practices in mindfulness and meditation that dealt with the relationship between the actor's consciousness and her physical body. The course lasted eight weeks with two sessions a week, and an hour allocated for each session. The first three weeks were dedicated to the first phase, **Awareness of The Self**. The next two weeks were dedicated to the second phase, **Expression Within A Performance**, and the sixth week was dedicated to the third phase, **Sharing The Experience With The Audience**, and the last two weeks were dedicated to the application of this pedagogy through monologues and scenes from Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs*. Below is a bi-weekly account with periodic goals, and the outcomes from each class session.

Week 1 and 2
(8th of January 2018 – 19th of January 2018)

The goal for the first two weeks was to introduce the ensemble to one another, to the first phase of my pedagogy, **Awareness of The Self**, and the act of *active meditation* and its potential benefits in an actors work. The week began with an introduction to Simpson's concept of the *nonjudgmental mind*. The *nonjudgmental mind* provided the actors with the opportunity to grapple with the idea of exploration and intrigue without any form of judgement. In order to progress through the course, the ensemble had to be primed to approach the coming weeks with a sense of openness and curiosity devoid of any judgement. This inherently grew into a strong support system for the ensemble as they gradually began exploring the intricacies their personalities.

The first session served as an introduction to *active meditation* and an opportunity to express any questions or concerns regarding the course. The second session was a continuation of the first with *active meditation* exercises and an introduction to the *nonjudgmental mind* and its relationship with *active meditation*. The intent of the first two sessions was to familiarize the ensemble with the act of *active meditation* and how it could be used as a primer for the *nonjudgmental mind*. During these sessions, I led the actors through a guided *active meditation* that then transitioned into a state of observation and intrigue the moment I instructed them to open their eyes. I then asked the actors to move around the room with the intent of observing with curiosity. The intended outcome of this exercise was for them to experience what it felt like to observe the world around them without any judgement. Immediately following this exploration, I led the actors into another guided *active meditation* where they were asked to take a mental note of how it felt observing the world around them without any judgement in order to

specifically articulate that feeling in our post-exercise discussion. The actors expressed that they felt a larger sense of empathy toward the rest of the ensemble and they were able to notice intricate details about the room that they were in. Some even expressed that the increased sense of empathy and awareness further fueled the curiosity that they had started the exercise with. Their responses meant that they were ready to move on to Moni Yakim's identification process that was outlined in *Creating a Character*. I started the third session with an exploration of *the vulnerable self* to begin the process of uncovering the many layers of each actor's personality and to allow the ensemble the opportunity to embrace their own vulnerability through narrated fictional events within a meditative state. The session concluded with a discussion that allowed each actor to specifically examine and embrace their individual responses in relation to the narrated fictional experiences. Each actor was able to use active meditation to transition safely into and out of the exploration. They were able to assess and articulate their individual responses to the exercise in our post-exploration dialogue where they noted that they experienced an internal feeling of nakedness, as if they were being seen for the first time. Conversely, as they were observing others, they noted that they felt a larger sense of empathy and curiosity toward those they were observing.

Week 3 and 4
(22nd of January 2018 – 2nd of February 2018)

The intent for the 3rd and 4th weeks was to continue our examination of the many facets of our personalities with *the social self*, *the instinctive self*, and finally *the trusting self*. By first examining the vulnerable self, the actors were more susceptible to emotional vulnerability which made each subsequent examination more effective. As I noted in the previous chapter, I merged explorations of *the social self* with *the instinctive self* in order to better understand the

relationship between both selves. In *the instinctive self*, the actors were asked to respond instinctively to changes and stimuli in the environment, which served as a segue to the *the social self*, where they were asked to embrace conflicting emotions to experience a sense of tension that exists between *the instinctive self* and *the social self* when internal conflicting emotions and individual impulses are faced with external stimuli that include other individuals with conflicting emotions of their own. Since it was imperative that the ensemble observe the effects of this exercise as well as practice it, the ensemble was split into two groups whereby the first half of the group served as audience members while the second half served as actors and vice versa. Each exercise concluded with a thorough dialogue to further assess and identify each individual experience. The ensemble expressed that they felt a sense of unease when asked to embrace conflicting emotions and experienced a gradual increase in frustration when they had to interact with another individual undergoing the same struggle. As audience members, the ensemble stated that character dynamics and relationships were more prominent and they progressively became more curious of each characters background. Following this investigation was an examination of *the trusting self*. This examination required the ensemble to confront and finally embrace their *Intellect*, which I had defined in the previous chapter by adapting Niki Flack's definition from her text *Acting With Passion*. This investigation led to a visceral and emotional dialogue within the ensemble that promoted self-empathy and self-trust. By vocalizing their own personal experiences, they were able to bolster their sense of comfort and confidence in themselves and their work. The investigation transitioned outward with the intention of assessing and identifying the relationship between emotions and the physical body as a preface to second phase of the course, **Expression Within a Performance**. I led the class through a physical

exercise that served to alleviate unnecessary physical tension from their bodies through exercises that were outlined by Niki Flacks in *Acting With Passion*. In this next exercise, the actors were instructed to stand four feet across from a partner. They were then asked to gently caress their own faces as if to encourage the muscles in the face to relax. The actors were given the labels of partner A and partner B. Partner A was asked to articulate their phrases while partner B remained vocally silent in receiving these phrases. These phrases ranged between four to six words and the process was repeated with partner B delivering their own phrases and partner A receiving them. The goal of this exercise was for them to experience the act of expressing. Throughout the exercise, I provided some side-coaching whereby I asked the actors who were delivering the phrases what they were trying to express to their partners with the phrases. Similarly, with the partners who were receiving the phrases, I asked them to be aware of how their partner's expressions affected them and what it felt like for them when they were unable to express themselves in response to their partners. Following the exercise, apart from being able to articulate feelings with ease and relaxation in their faces and their bodies, the actors were able to identify physical strains that they never knew existed. According to the actors' responses, the second part of the exercise was one that greatly impacted them. In delivering the phrases, the actors felt that they were able to easily express emotions that were rooted in some form of reality that was truthful to them. For the actors who were receiving, they felt as if they were greatly impacted by what their partners were communicating to them. This exercise was an ideal preface to segue the ensemble into the second phase of the course.

The final session from this period was an introduction to the second phase of my pedagogy, **Expression Within a Performance**. The actors were introduced to *chakra* energies

with the intention of bridging the gap between emotions and the physical body through the use of these energies. An awareness of all seven *chakras* is essential for success in this course because “Each *chakra* has a specific role in human behavior and is therefore useful to an actor in his or her rehearsal of character” (Simpson 33). I introduced the actors to the seven *chakra* energies: *the root, the sacral, the solar plexus, the heart, the throat, the brow, and the crown*. The second half of this session served as a continuation of *chakra* energies.

While exploring each individual *chakra*, the actors were instructed to walk around the studio with one *chakra* center leading the physical movement. By allowing the body to move in a way in which they were not accustomed to, the actors were asked to embrace the emotions that they might encounter as a part of the explorations. The actors were then asked to embrace conflicting emotions that they had previously uncovered through Yakim’s exploration of the selves while investigating a specific *chakra* energy to allow them the opportunity to understand the relationship between their emotions and their physical body. The expectation that I had heading into the exploration was for the actors to have an understanding and awareness of each of the seven *chakras* and how each *chakra* bridged the gap between their emotions and their physical body. In our post-investigation dialogue, the actors articulated that by having already established a safe and efficient pathway for emotional exploration in the previous sessions, they felt that there was a sense of ease when it came time for them to embrace emotional and instinctual responses to the *chakra* work. The actors expressed that they had hoped for more time with the *chakra* explorations because they felt that the time that they had spent on it allowed them to briefly experience the connection between their emotions and physical body but was not sufficient for them to truly bridge the gap between their emotions and physical body.

Week 5 and 6
(5th of February 2018 – 16th of February 2018)

Due to conflicting schedules, I was only able to schedule two sessions within this time period. The first session became a continuation of *chakra* explorations in order to respond to the actors' request for more time with *chakra* explorations. Following this exploration, the actors articulated that they felt a clearer connection between their emotions and physical body and had a better grasp on the symbiotic relationship between the two in creating richer and fuller characters. The awareness and understanding of their *chakra* energies was a segue for the second session within this time frame where I introduced the actors to Patsy Rodenburg's *Three Circles of Energy*. *The Three Circles of Energy* was prefaced with the exploration of *chakra* energies because an awareness of energy centers is a prerequisite to understanding how these energy centers can be used to segue into the third phase of the pedagogy, **Sharing The Experience With The Audience**. Thus far, the actors' explorations had stayed within their emotional and physical lives. The work of the actor requires that we remain open and available not only to our scene partners but to the audience as well, which created a dichotomy between intimate moments in performance and the necessity for the audience to be a part of those intimate moments. Rodenburg's concept of the *Three Circles of Energy* preserves the intimacy of the scene while allowing the actors to remain open to the audience. Initially, the actors were split into two groups: actors and audience. Actors were instructed to explore the *First Circle*, the *Third Circle* and the *Second Circle*, all of which were defined in the previous chapter. Following the exploration, the roles of actors and audience were swapped to ensure that every actor had the opportunity to both explore and observe. Within this exercise, the actors were instructed to replicate what they had done in the exercises regarding *chakra* energies. The actors were then

instructed to remain in a meditative state while embracing the idea of joy and what joy meant to them. Through a guided active meditation, the actors were asked to imagine the idea of joy as a seed that was planted within their *Heart chakra* and that it was a form of energy that gradually magnified and expanded outward beyond their physical body and into the world around them, thus transitioning them into *The Second Circle*. This exercise was repeated for all seven *chakra* energies. The goal for this session was for the actors to apply Rodenburg's *Three Circles of Energy* to their *chakra* explorations in order to discover a sense of openness and availability while acting. Beyond bridging the gap between their emotions and physical body, actors should be able to remain open and available not only to their scene partners but the audience as well. The session concluded with a discussion where the actors expressed that by imagining a source of energy expanding beyond their physical body, they felt a stronger sense of availability and attentiveness to the world around them. As audience members, they expressed that they felt more drawn to the actors who were moving and operating in *Second Circle*. By being available to the audience, actors are able to bring audience members with them on their character's journey throughout the story.

Week 7 and 8
(19th of February 2018 – 2nd of March 2018)

In order to apply the techniques that the actors had learned thus far, the final four sessions in the course were dedicated to monologue/scene work where the actors were instructed to prepare short scenes/monologues from the contemporary play *Lungs* written by Duncan Macmillan. The actors were asked to come into class with their selected sections memorized. While in class, they were asked to discover a spontaneous start to their scenes while in casual conversation. In order to maintain the spontaneity and reality of the scene, actors who were not a

part of the scene were asked to be bystanders and not audience members so they could examine how the presence of bystanders would affect those within the scene to allow the actors within the scene the opportunity to grapple with vulnerability and openness within the actor-audience and actor-environment relationship. Actors who opted to work with a monologue as opposed to a scene were instructed to deliver their monologues to the entire class and were challenged with the task of establishing individual intimate connections with their ensemble. The exploration within the scene work concluded our class sessions prior to spring break. Following every scene and monologue was a period of discussion and reflection where the actors in the scene or monologue were asked to describe how this experience was different from what they had previously experienced with scene work prior to the course. Initially, from my perspective the scenes and monologues seemed to live between the *First Circle* and *Third Circle* and lacked a sense of humanity and *presence*. I attribute this to the actors' lack of faith in *the trusting self*. This was quickly remedied with a guided meditation that reminded the actors about what they experienced in their examination of *the trusting self*. This led to a deep sense of relaxation that transitioned them into *The Second Circle*. Their scene and monologue presentations following the guided meditation had a greater sense of humanity and spontaneity. The actors were connecting with their scene partners, and the rest of the ensemble expressed that they felt as if they were a part of the actors' journeys throughout the scenes and monologues.

The Rehearsal Process

Following spring break, the class sessions were replaced by a four-week rehearsal process for our production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that was set to

perform on the 19th, 20th, and 21st of April 2018. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the purpose of the production was to assess the validity of these techniques within a production setting. Throughout this chapter, I will use four terms that will require elucidation before I continue (Fig. 6).

Theatre Terms

Blocking – An actor’s movement patterns during a performance.

Tech Rehearsal – Rehearsal where technical elements such as lights and sound are incorporated into the performance.

Dress Rehearsal – Rehearsal that is meant to emulate an actual performance.

Opening Night – The opening performance of a production.

Figure 6: Theatre Terms

Week 1

(19th of March 2018 – 23rd of March 2018)

I introduced the idea of devised theatre in relation to our production and encouraged a free flow of input from the ensemble throughout the rehearsal process. I reminded the ensemble that this rehearsal process was an opportunity for them to exercise the techniques that they had learned throughout the course and encouraged them to maintain their sense of curiosity and openness. They were initially skeptical about devising a production with limited time and resources, but as they began to immerse themselves in the text and the work, ideas began to flow and devising the production became a by-product of the continual play and exploration in this first week. Having spent the last eight weeks in class together, the ensemble had developed a strong sense of camaraderie with one another that translated onto the stage. No fixed blocking was introduced in the first week in order to bolster the sense of play that had been established,

and I encouraged the ensemble to move around the space as we were rehearsing the scenes in order to facilitate line memorization. At the end of the week, the ensemble expressed that they were concerned with the lack of structure in terms of blocking and they felt as if they did not know what to do or where to move. In response to their concerns, I reminded them of the scenes and monologues that they had presented in the course, whereby no blocking or sense of structure was given to them but they were somehow able to move spontaneously and ultimately live in the scene.

Week 2
(26th of March 2018 – 30th of March 2018)

The second week functioned as an extension of play. To further respond to the ensemble's concern regarding the lack of structure, I introduced some fight choreography and a variety of music of varying beats and tempo into the rehearsal process to provide a sense of perceived structure and to further examine the actor-environment relationship while in *The Second Circle*. The rhythm in the music served as a supplemental element for the actors to discover and examine their individual responses to the rhythm that exists in Shakespeare's texts. As the actors began to become more comfortable with their lines, I reminded them of the work that was done in the classes leading up to the rehearsal process and how that could be applied to this rehearsal process. The more comfortable they were with their lines, the more open they were to the idea of play while rehearsing a scene. This comfort gradually led to natural discoveries in terms of blocking patterns and moments within the play. By this point, structure became a by-product of play, an important element that the ensemble was beginning to comprehend.

Week 3
(2nd of April 2018 – 6th of April 2018)

I began solidifying blocking patterns that would serve the story. While working on a specific scene with a group of actors, other actors that were not involved in the scene were instructed to further devise their scenes among themselves. I began looking into the specifics of each scene by challenging each actor to answer the question of “What are you trying to express?” As human beings, we often speak, sing, and move to express a thought or emotion. The same should apply in a fictional play. The circumstances surrounding a scene can only do so much for an actor if that actor is unable to identify what he or she is expressing in the moment. I took this opportunity to further expand on what was taught in the course. Human beings are naturally programmed to visualize potential outcomes of social interactions whereby we go into these interactions with a goal in mind and will express a multitude of thoughts and emotions in order to achieve that goal. Whether or not a character in a performance achieves that goal is irrelevant because the dramatic action of the performance stems from that character’s pursuit of that goal. The same should be applied for the characters that we portray as actors. To this end, I had the actors meditate on and visualize the scene that they were about to rehearse and to have desired outcomes in relation to the character. After a few minutes of this meditation, I immediately brought them into the scene with a sharp and sudden “Go!”. Following this was a discussion on what the actors’ experience was with this exercise. The actors stated that emotions began to surface throughout the scene because the interactions that their characters had with one another were deviating from what they had initially visualized and the scenes felt like a constant and effortless flow of energy between them. From my perspective, their character’s intentions

became much clearer and there was a continuous back and forth exchange of energy at every moment in the scene.

Week 4
(9th of April 2018 – 13th of April 2018)

This week was the final week of rehearsals before tech rehearsals and dress rehearsals, which meant that the actors had to find ways to maintain a sense of play within the specified structure that they had developed over the course of the rehearsal process. I focused primarily on the specifics of each scene and the decisions that each actor made in order to refine their existing work and to widen their spectrum of acting choices that could serve the story. At this stage, I reminded the actors about the fundamentals that were explored in the class sessions and encouraged them to utilize them to bring about more truthful and spontaneous responses while they were performing. The fact that opening night was only a few days away began to stifle the sense of play that the ensemble had been developing throughout the course and the rehearsal process. Because this was something that I foresaw going into the rehearsal process, I had planned for this week to be a week filled with devising through play. I challenged the ensemble to devise the live music that was used in the production and the dance sequences that were used in place of certain scenes. Even though frustrations began to surface, this challenge further enforced the sense of play that they had developed and the sense of individual artistry that they had learned to trust in throughout the course and rehearsal. The ensemble persevered through their frustrations to devise exceptional dance sequences and technical elements for this production.

Week 5
(16th of April 2018 – 20th of April 2018)

By this point, my hope was that actors would have taken complete ownership of their characters and scenes and that my role in shaping and developing the acting elements would diminish. To test this theory, I focused primarily on the technicalities in an actor's performance such as volume, diction and sightlines. In order to remain within the realm of devised theatre and to further challenge ensemble's creativity, the majority of the music and sound effects that were devised in the previous week was performed live by the actors. The 15th and 16th of April served as our tech rehearsals, while the 17th and 18th of April served as our dress rehearsals. Each dress rehearsal was different and exciting because I felt that the time the ensemble had spent with one another led to a sense of trust within the ensemble, and the effort that they had put into this production led to a strong sense of camaraderie and artistic ownership. Every dress rehearsal concluded with notes that dealt with issues relating to fundamental performance techniques such as volume, diction, tempo and sightlines. I believed that I no longer needed to provide the ensemble with acting notes and that they were very capable of telling the story with the production they had devised. The production opened on the 19th of April 2018 and closed on the 21st of April 2018.

Following the closing of the production, I circulated a survey via Google forms where each actor was asked to specifically articulate their experience with the course and the production. As I had mentioned previously, the goal of the course is for the actors to experience a method of actor training centered around the self while employing practices in mindfulness and meditation that dealt with the relationship between an actor's consciousness and their physical body, and the goal of the production is to provide the actors with an opportunity to take

ownership of their own artistry, thus strengthening their trusting self, while applying what they had learned in the course in a production setting. With that in mind, in the next chapter, I will specifically compare the actual outcome and the surveys against my expected outcome, with copies of each actor's survey attached in Appendix B.

CHAPTER THREE: REFLECTIONS

Following the conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I realized that my reflections alone as the administrator would not sufficiently assess the effectiveness of my pedagogy and it was necessary for me to obtain feedback from my ensemble as well. I circulated a private Google Form to each actor and asked the ensemble to reflect on their experiences with this project throughout the semester. The survey contained 6 short answer questions followed by a statement that the interviewee was asked to rank on a scale of one to ten in relation to their confidence in their acting ability whereby one represented “negative growth since the start of the course”, and ten represented “significant growth since the start of the course”. Due to a technical error, I was only able to obtain thirteen surveys from the fourteen actors. Below is a narrative with selected responses that I have compiled to measure the degree of success and to identify the flaws of this project.

Reflections From The Ensemble

The first question that I posed to the ensemble was a general question asking them what they thought this project was about. Kassidy Pierce, noted that,

This course helps the actor see that acting isn't about hiding yourself by playing a character but about exposing the truths of who you are through a character. This course is about trusting yourself. It's about being present in the moment and following all of your instincts. This course is about listening to your scene partners, not just those who

are speaking but everyone in the room, every sound, every movement should impact you.

Her observation reflected the observations made by the rest of the ensemble including Alexa Comeau, who joined the ensemble halfway through the course as a replacement for a cast member who had to drop out of the project. Alexa stated that “From the brief period I was there, to me the course was about finding truth in every scenario and every scene and using your energy to find that truth.” Similarly, Sebastian Gonzalez acknowledged that “The class was about accessing the self and integrating mindfulness teachings into acting training.”

As the administrator, I was aware of how and when elements of mindfulness and meditation were incorporated into the pedagogy but was curious if the techniques were evident to the ensemble. Rachel Larchar noted that “We focused our breath before each class, rehearsal and show, then breathed as an ensemble. We found energy in different places in our bodies and how to use that effectively. It allowed us to take a moment out of reality and then come back in together to accomplish our tasks.” Her response was echoed by Benjamin Walton who noted that,

Every class we started off with an observation of the breath and then Terence led the meditation which was different each day. This variety was important because, as an actor, I could not control how I felt on each day. This meditation would then lead itself into our acting exercises which differed on the days. This always felt seamless and was a perfect way to transition into the work.

With this being a two part project, whereby the second part of the project included a devised production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I was concerned with the integration of the pedagogy within the setting of the production. Through the production, I challenged the ensemble as actors and artists with the hope of providing them with an opportunity to take ownership of their own artistry through devising a production. This challenge was evident to the ensemble in their closing survey as noted by Alexandra Pica , who noted that “this production required a lot of creativity and courage to try new things. To trust my instincts and be fearless of the results.” Her response was echoed by the rest of the ensemble, including Gisella Hernandez who concluded that “ It was a very collaborative process in which we made each other better by listening to each other and sharing our breath as a unit. Connection as an ensemble was very important for our show. The creation of soundscapes was a very collaborative learning process. We all shared our creativity and skills to create something from scratch as an ensemble”

Since much of the feedback that I had received thus far was positive, I was eager for the ensemble to express their thoughts on how the course could be improved to better serve future practitioners. As a whole, the ensemble expressed that although the course was integrated into the production, they would have preferred a more prominent integration. Chanel Gomaa expressed that

I just wish we had maybe gone back to more of the course work conversations while we were developing Midsummer[*A Midsummer Night's Dream*]. We seemed to drop the conversation once rehearsals started, and I think it would have been nice and beneficial to have the work we did in class follow-through more in our dialogue at rehearsals and during notes.

Her response mirrored the rest of the ensemble who, beyond noting that they would have benefited from a more prominent integration, would have appreciated more specificity in regards to the goal of the production as expressed by Faith Knapp who said that, “I would maybe have started the rehearsal process by giving the performers a little more information regarding the goal of the end product. For example, for a while none of us really knew if we were going to be continuously *playing* or if the *playing* was a way to reach choices that we would solidify later on.”

While obtaining the ensemble’s responses regarding changes and improvements that could be implemented for future practitioners, it was imperative for me to ascertain the validity of this course and my pedagogy through the individual experiences of the ensemble. When asked “How necessary is this course?” Ms Gooma concluded that

I think giving actors a space that is specifically designed to offer them a place to explore themselves as artists and human beings is actually the most efficient way to get them to understand what it really means to be taking on the nature and qualities of another individual. I think this class offers an incredible range of ways to physically and mentally check in with oneself, and that opens doors for an actor to physically and mentally check into what about themselves they need to emphasize or tweak in order to portray a character. This class is about living honestly, and so is acting. I think its the most necessary course in acting I’ve come across.

However, Mr. Gonzalez stated that “Necessary feels like the wrong question. I think it’s a great new way think about acting. It’s only as necessary as any other new acting training.” I

acknowledge this as an accurate statement in assessing the necessity of any method of actor training. A method's necessity is based on its degree of usefulness to the actors who practice them. A prominent and well established method for actor training could be deemed unnecessary if the pedagogy does not resonate with the actor practicing it, which is why I concluded the survey with a scale rated from one to ten whereby one represented "significant decrease", and ten represented "significant increase" and five meant that the individual did not experience any changes. As I was formulating this portion of the survey, it was important that the scale reflected their confidence in their acting abilities, rather than their perception of whether or not their acting abilities improved. This is because the effectiveness of my pedagogy is subjective in the way that it is only as effective as its usefulness to the actor practicing the pedagogy. Twelve actors recorded scores of eight or higher while one actor recorded a score of seven or lower.

The ensemble's individual responses greatly illuminated the pros and cons of my pedagogy in its current state. They affirmed the effectiveness of the pedagogy by highlighting the aspects that served them well and provided potential solutions for obstacles that they encountered as they progressed through the pedagogy. Their responses served as the inspiration for a new and improved synthesis and syllabus that will hopefully improve upon what has already been established in this thesis project.

Personal Reflections

Following the closing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, my general response to the thesis project was that of success and accomplishment. Upon further consideration, I realized that audience responses to the production did not sufficiently assess the success of my thesis project

in its entirety. The degree of success had to be measured based on the individual experiences of the ensemble. Based off of the surveys that were circulated among the ensemble, I can confidently conclude that the thesis project was a success.

I read through their responses and measured them against my goals with each portion of the thesis project and learned that all of my goals were met to some degree. As mentioned in The Synthesis portion of Chapter 2, my goal for the actors was for them to experience significant growth in their confidence as it relates to their acting abilities. Based on their responses in the final section of the survey, I can assert that that goal was met.

As the administrator of the course, I was able to witness the ensemble's growth throughout the course of the semester and I can confidently state that each actor experienced tremendous growth in terms of their ability to confidently exercise their acting prowess. I believe that their willingness to experiment with the pedagogy as presented was the main factor for their success in the course and the production. My goal for our production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was to provide the actors with an opportunity to take ownership of their own artistry while applying what they had learned in the course in a production setting. Based on the actors' responses in the survey, I can say that the goal was met to some degree. By devising a production as opposed to adhering to a linear structure of the production, the actors took ownership of their own artistry by making creative choices beyond that of an actor in a traditional production setting where their creative choices are limited solely to their role as actors within the production.

A Midsummer Night's Dream represented "the industry", echoing a phrase that I established in my abstract whereby I stated that as actors in an aggressive industry, we are often

faced with the monumental task of preserving our artistry while competing in the industry, and I had hoped that by devising the production, the ensemble would be forced to exercise their artistry. In my role as the director for the production, I limited my notes to issues that dealt with the more technical elements of their performance such as volume, diction, and sightlines. When I was presented with artistic questions, I would respond with another question along the lines of “What do you think?” which then prompted the actors to a choice or opinion that they were not completely confident in to which I responded by having the actor either execute their choice or to have them further specify their thoughts. This led to the discovery of bolder acting choices that affirmed their creative confidence and process.

Because I cast an ensemble with varying levels of experience, I learned that my pedagogy could be utilized as both a foundation for actor training and a supplemental instruction for more experienced actors. In teaching the pedagogy, I discovered that I needed to find more ways to clarify every aspect of my pedagogy to cater to the varying levels of experience. The theories and techniques that I was teaching them were clear to me, but were at times unclear to the ensemble. I learned that I needed to ground my theories and techniques by finding ways to better relate my pedagogy to the ensemble.

Now that I have verified “**Mindful Acting**” as a valid technique within a production setting, I acknowledge that it would be unnecessary for future practitioners to adopt this step of my pedagogy in future practice. As much as it has been beneficial in the execution of my thesis project, I have since realized that the production merely served as a gauge to measure the effectiveness of my method within a production setting. Based on the surveys that I had obtained from the ensemble, I gathered that the entire process felt a little rushed and that they would have

benefited from more time and clarity with every aspect of the pedagogy that was investigated throughout the course. As the production grew to accommodate five out of the twelve weeks I had allocated for this pedagogy, I was driven to revamp the syllabus and structure of my pedagogy to hopefully maximize its potential effectiveness within a twelve week timeframe in hopes of addressing the issues and concerns brought up by the ensemble.

A Syllabus For Future Practitioners

Ideally, assuming that the ensemble includes fourteen actors within a traditional undergraduate academic calendar, the class sessions should last two hours per session and occur twice a week. The first week should be dedicated to the *nonjudgmental mind* and *active meditation*. By allocating four hours for the *nonjudgmental mind* and *active meditation*, the actors will be introduced to the theoretical concepts prior to practicing both techniques and will have sufficient time to experiment and obtain a clarification on both techniques before progressing further into the pedagogy.

With a firm theoretical and practical understanding of the *nonjudgmental mind* and *active meditation*, the actors should be able to practice and explain the principals and uses of both techniques. They can then be introduced to the many facets of their personalities *through the vulnerable self, the social self, the instinctive self* and *the trusting self*, with one week dedicated to each self. With four hours allocated to the examination of each self, the actors will be able to comprehend the theoretical and practical reasons behind this aspect of the pedagogy and have the opportunity play and experiment with multiple exercises that are designed to create the circumstances necessary for each actor to investigate that specific facet of their personality

sufficiently before reflecting on their experience. As they articulate their reflections, the actors should be encouraged to be as specific as possible

By this point, the actors would have spent five weeks getting familiarized with the many colors of their personality through the *nonjudgmental mind* and the exploration of the selves. Following a detailed reflection and discussion of the ensemble's exploration of the selves, the actors should then be introduced to the theoretical concepts of *chakra* energies before undergoing a thorough exploration of them. Three weeks' worth of these exercises will provide the ensemble with twelve hours to sufficiently experiment with all seven *chakra* energies. Each class session should be dedicated to one *chakra* energy with a post-exercise discussion where the actors should ideally display a firm and detailed understanding of each *chakra* energy theoretically and practically.

In furthering my research following the completion of my thesis project, I continued to further improve upon my pedagogy by implementing exercises and teachings from Robert Cohen's *Acting Power The 21st Century Edition* and Niki Flacks' *Acting With Passion*. By this time, the actors should have arrived at week nine with the understanding and facility to access the many facets of their personalities and their *chakra* energies, thus priming them for more emotionally challenging exercises. The ensemble will begin with exercises that have been adapted from Niki Flacks' text *Acting With Passion*. They will be asked to be completely familiarized with short phrases that are meant to connect them to their *Dungeon*, defined by Niki Flacks as a place where "emotions are an 'oppressed people', guarded by the *intellect*." (Flacks 5). The ensemble should spend a week with these exercises to sufficiently identify their relationship with their *Dungeon* and to be able to consistently access it, priming them for week

ten, Cohen's *Contentless Scene*, whereby the ensemble will be given short scenes that are meant to invoke *Relacom*, which is an abbreviation of *Relationship Communication*, defined by Cohen in his text, *Acting Power The 21st Century Edition*, as "the foundation of all communication – all conversation and all human interaction – because while relationship messages may be exchanged without a content counterpart ... content is utterly meaningless without establishing a relationship" (Cohen 62). Experimentation with these scenes should ideally take up an entire week to accommodate both the theoretical explanation and practical application of Cohen's *Contentless Scene*, thus preparing the ensemble for the final two weeks of the course, weeks eleven and twelve. During these final two weeks, the actors should be assigned three to five minute scenes from contemporary plays. In the initial implementation of my thesis, I selected Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* because of the spare nature of the play in terms of its technical elements, thus allowing actors to focus solely on the playwright's words and the connection between scene partners. Future practitioners should consider *Lungs* as a viable option but should not feel constricted in their choice of scenes or plays. The scenes should however emphasize the connections between the characters in the scene. If there is a need to individually assess the ensemble's performance in the course, the assessment should be based off of their growth since the beginning of the course through the final work session of their assigned scenes. Note that I labelled the final showing of their scenes as a work session in order to encourage continual growth beyond the twelve-week session of the course.

This structure should serve a traditional sixteen-week undergraduate semester taking into consideration public holidays and semester breaks. I also acknowledge that teachers have the

freedom to modify time allocations for each segment of my pedagogy to adhere to their institutions academic schedule.

Conclusion

As we transition into a society that is becoming increasingly more self-aware mentally, physically and emotionally, as actors, it is our responsibility to evolve and adapt our craft to mirror society's current state. Although my pedagogy has been crafted to cater to present day actors, there is no doubt that as society and its perception of truth evolves, "**Mindful Acting**" will have to continuously evolve and adapt to serve future generation of actors and audience's ever-changing perception of truth. Although the pedagogy may change, the constant variable that remains the same is the need for actors to be self-confident and self-aware. The idea of the self inspired my research and pedagogy. As an actor myself, I have found that during my training, I was often stumped by moments of confusion whenever a technique or exercise had little to no effect on me whatsoever. Moments like that led me to either question my ability as an actor or the techniques themselves, when in reality, I should have been questioning my relationship with the technique. That sparked my desire to formulate a method of actor training that would serve me as I was approaching a production of *An Octoroon* as an actor, a method that would hopefully serve others as well. That desire led me to synthesize a method of actor training that stems from the actors themselves and aims to preserve their artistry as they venture into the aggressive business of acting.

There is no doubt that the pressures of this aggressive industry can sometimes overcome an actor's confidence in their craft. Unfortunately, a large part of the business of acting is defined

by the producers who are financing the projects, which means that it is our responsibility to preserve our artistry while constantly adapting to the ever-changing business of acting. “**Mindful Acting**” is not meant to redefine the business of acting, but to reclaim an actor’s agency and artistry in this aggressive business, thus preserving it in an ever-changing business.

It is my hope that my work, research and success with “**Mindful Acting**” will inspire current and future actors to improve upon what they themselves have experienced in their training to devise more methods for actor training to serve a future demographic of actors and to continue to find ways to preserve an actor’s artistry in the business. Now that 14 young actors have experienced the potential benefits of “**Mindful Acting**”, they can begin to expand and grow upon what they’ve experienced to serve future actors, thus continuing to preserve the actor’s artistry in this aggressive industry.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL FORM



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board

FWA00000351
IRB00001138
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

March 14, 2019

Dear Terence Lee:

On 3/14/2019, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	A Metaphysical Approach To Actor Training
Investigator:	Terence Lee
IRB ID:	STUDY00000306
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Gillian Morien
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B: ENSEMBLE SURVEYS

**Post Completion Survey with
Whitney Abraham**

1. Name

Whitney Abraham

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

This course was about centering and clearing the Actor's mind which was then exercised in a variety of experimental performance techniques.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

The course applied itself very well to the production. By looking beyond the challenges of the text we were able to find the humanity and comedy of the piece through improvisation based off the foundation of our classroom studies.

4. What would you change about this course?

I think the class was conducted to the best of its ability.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

This class allowed the actor to create freely which is not something that is really practiced in most curriculums. We were each personally challenged and questioned and then allowed the opportunity to explore those challenges and questions by confronting them in our work.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

Mindfulness and meditation were practiced at the beginning of most class periods as well as rehearsals. Allowing the ensemble to center itself and really listen to one another free of judgement and assumptions of what was "supposed" to happen in the creation of our show.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing "significant decrease" and 10 representing "significant increase"]

Eight

**Post Completion Survey with
Shannon Burke**

1. Name

Shannon Burke

1. In your opinion, what was this course about?

Learning to train your mind just as much as your voice/body when approaching a scene/roll.

2. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Yes, breathing with the ensemble in the exercises allowed a immaculate sense of play that was needed for the production.

3. What would you change about this course?

I suppose more review of the material it was based on.

4. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

It's crucial to an actor's growth. When entering a scene, many actors (myself included) are too much in their head and have a feeling of self-consciousness that does not belong on stage. This course allows you to really take in what the other person is giving you, causing you to not focus on yourself as much.

5. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

The key to good meditation is good breath. The same goes with acting. So meditation is just one of the many tools actors can use to be in control of their breath at all times.

6. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing "significant decrease" and 10 representing "significant increase"]

Seven

**Post Completion Survey with
Alexa Comeau**

1. Name

Alexa Comeau

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

From the brief period I was there, to me the course was about finding truth in every scenario and every scene, and using your energy to find that truth.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Yes, the exercises that we would do at the beginning of the rehearsal helped find that too. It created an ensemble that trusted each other and were comfortable enough to play with choices and have fun.

4. What would you change about this course?

I would only have asked for the class time to be longer!

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

I think that it is necessary for every actor to take classes in every aspect of acting, all training is useful. Whether or not they use the techniques taught doesn't matter, it is still always valuable to learn!

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

I was not a part of the course for very long so I probably missed a good amount, but I feel that Mindfulness and meditation were incorporated through finding and focusing on our breath and using/manipulating it.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing "significant decrease" and 10 representing "significant increase"]

Eight

**Post Completion Survey with
Chanel Goma**

1. Name

Chanel Goma

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

The ability to create a character that is well developed, through having a deep understanding of my own inner/spiritual self.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

YES. For example, I found myself trying to lead my character with different chakras instead of just different body parts. The ensemble work we did also helped me feel more comfortable with exploring a range of things that I would have been shy to explore without the trust I developed in the group, and in myself.

4. What would you change about this course?

Nothing. I just wish we had maybe gone back to more of the course work conversations while we were developing "Midsummer". We seemed to drop the conversation once rehearsals started, and I think it would have been nice and beneficial to have the work we did in class follow-through more in our dialogue at rehearsals and during notes.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

Super. I think giving actors a space that is specifically designed to offer them a place to explore themselves as artists and human beings is actually the most efficient way to get them to understand what it really means to be taking on the nature and qualities of another individual. I think this class offers an incredible range of ways to physically and mentally check in with oneself, and that opens doors for an actor to physically and mentally check into what about themselves they need to emphasize or tweak in order to portray a character. This class is about living honestly, and so is acting. I think it's the most necessary course in acting I've come across.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

Before "Midsummer" started we did a plethora of different meditation and breathing exercises, incorporating chakras and trust exercises as well. We were also encouraged to keep mindful and meditate outside of class, and asked how it helped in our day to day lives as we were doing so.

- 7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing “significant decrease” and 10 representing “significant increase”]**

Eight

**Post Completion Survey with
Sebastian Gonzalez**

1. Name

Sebastian Gonzalez

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

The class was about accessing the self and integrating Mindfulness teachings into acting training.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Yes, we would talk about accessing certain chakras or what they represent to inform new choices.

4. What would you change about this course?

I would like more integration of the material into the rehearsal process. There were many days in which we would not start with a meditative warm up or something of the like. To be clear, I don't just want mindfulness warm ups. The rehearsal process could have also used more of the lessons from the course.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

Necessary feels like the wrong question. I think it's a great new way to think about acting. It's only as necessary as any other new acting training.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

It was sometimes part of the warm up. Sometimes we talked about it in rehearsal. Other than that, it was missed in the second half of the course.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing "significant decrease" and 10 representing "significant increase"]

Nine

**Post Completion Survey with
Gisella Hernandez**

1. Name

Gisella Hernandez

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

This course was about discovering and improving ones acting abilities through meditation and scene workshops. To later on put on a show as a final project with the material learned in the previous sessions.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Yes. With the classes previous to the show, we grew as individuals and shared our strengths which united us as an ensemble. It was a very collaborative process in which we made each other better by listening to each other and sharing our breath as a unit. Connection as an ensemble was very important for our show. The creation of soundscapes was a very collaborative learning process. We all shared our creativity and skills to create something from scratch as an ensemble.

What would you change about this course?

4.

The length of the course. The course could have been longer for more improvement and growth to have happened. But thanks to the final production we kept growing with the material previously learned in the classes.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

It is very necessary because actors need to discover and connect to their mind and breath in a more spiritual level. Through meditation we access emotions which sometimes are hard to let flourish naturally.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

Through warm ups at the begging of class. Also through ensemble breathing exercises.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing “significant decrease” and 10 representing “significant increase”]

Eight

**Post Completion Survey with
Faith Knapp**

1. Name

Faith Knapp

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

This course was about letting go of the pressure of "acting correctly" and allowing oneself to play and explore the different facets that can be employed.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

The idea of "play" definitely translated over to the production. I really enjoyed being able to try and play with so many different ideas before we solidified anything. I didn't feel like I was going to be trapped in a choice at any moment and therefore was more willing to make strong and different choices.

4. What would you change about this course?

I would maybe have started the rehearsal process by giving the performers a little more information regarding the goal of the end product. For example, for a while none of us really knew if we were going to be continuously playing or if the "playing" was a way to reach choices that we would solidify later on.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

I felt as if this course was extremely necessary. It really allowed me to make some huge mistakes and realize that isn't the end of the world. I really felt like I could explore as an artist without the fear of being judged by my professors or ensemble.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

Mindfulness and meditation was incorporated in all of our warmups and a lot of the connection exercises we did in order to create a greater sense of trust within the ensemble.

**How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course?
[On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing "significant decrease" and 10 representing
"significant increase"]**

Nine

**Post Completion Survey with
Rachel Larchar**

1. Name

Rachel Larchar

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

Taking risks and acting off impulse. We were forced to get out of our heads and just be in the moment and work with everything in our environment.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Yes! Because we were given so much freedom to express and try new things in rehearsal, the show was audience inclusive and all the actors were so comfortable with one another. We created a beautiful ensemble piece onstage.

4. What would you change about this course?

If we had more time, I would've liked to get into the text more before starting the show.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

It got me to step out of my comfort zone and be stupid and fun and serious with the other ensemble members. It was the perfect environment for risks because every had each other's backs. I never felt judgement in that safe environment.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

We focused our breath before each class, rehearsal and show, then breathed as an ensemble. We found energy in different places in our bodies and how to use that effectively. It allowed us to take a moment out of reality and then come back in together to accomplish our tasks.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing “significant decrease” and 10 representing “significant increase”]

Eight

**Post Completion Survey with
Annelise Molinari**

1. Name

Annelise Molinari

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

Centering oneself before acting

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Definitely. We learned to approach our acting from different ways such as meditation and connecting with the ensemble.

4. What would you change about this course?

Nothing

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

Very necessary! Learning how to calm the mind is very essential to a consistency in an actor, Äôs performances.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

We meditated before rehearsals to ensure we were grounded before creating.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing “significant decrease” and 10 representing “significant increase”]

Nine

**Post Completion Survey with
Kaley Pharr**

1. Name

Kaley Pharr

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

Discovering what you have in yourself to help develop your character.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Yes. We all had to play in rehearsal and discover what we had to offer to the production.

4. What would you change about this course?

It would be nice to apply the techniques to text more during the course.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

It allows an actor to free up their own creativity so it would be beneficial for everyone to take this course.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

We actors focused on our breath and being in the moment, not letting our minds wander to other thoughts. It was a good centering exercise before we started using different techniques.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing “significant decrease” and 10 representing “significant increase”]

Ten

**Post Completion Survey with
Alexandra Pica**

1. Name

Alexandra Pica

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

Trusting yourself

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Yes, this production required a lot of creativity and courage to try new things. To trust my instincts and be fearless of the results.

4. What would you change about this course?

I would have started working with the text earlier in the class, have discussions about the text together. More table work, I feel, would have made the play more cohesive.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

Very necessary, everyone needs time to connect with themselves and trust the impulses they cultivate.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

Recognized the different Chakra's within ourselves and found peace and stability in our breathing and a relaxed body and mind.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing “significant decrease” and 10 representing “significant increase”]

Nine

Post Completion Survey with Kassidy Pierce

1. Name

Kassidy Pierce

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

This course is about bringing yourself into the work of acting. The focus is on what you as an individual, through the richness of who you are, can bring to a role. This course helps the actor see that acting isn't about hiding yourself by playing a character but about exposing the truths of who you are through a character. This course is about trusting yourself. It is about being present in the moment and following all of your instincts. This course is about listening to your scene partners, not just those who are speaking but everyone in the room, every sound, every movement should impact you. This course is about ensemble work, about creating a space where we don't just catch people when they fall but we tell them to do it again and try something new this time

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Yes. The course was inherently part of the production. Before we ever sat down for a read through, we spent months crafting an ensemble. We spent months working together on listening to our instincts, supporting each other when we followed those instincts and did weird stuff. There was no fear in that group. The production was directed in a very unique way, in a way completely different than anything I'd ever experienced. For weeks we were asked to try something new with every single run of the scene. Blocking didn't exist so movement was dynamic and fluid. I could never predict what my fellow scene partners would do, where they would go, so I lived right in the moment of the scene. This would normally make me nervous but I spent months with these people creating an ensemble; I trusted them and there was an added level of care as actors approached each other before scenes asking permission to touch. This type of rehearsal wouldn't have worked with a group of people who hadn't spent time doing the same kind of work.

4. What would you change about this course?

If I could change anything in this course I would incorporate the course into the production more. Either by continuing to have the class twice a week during the production period or doing a group warm up (like those we did in the course) before every rehearsal. Though the work we did in the class translated well into the production I missed the class in the transition.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

This course has deeply impacted me as an actor. I would recommend this course to everyone who wants to study acting. It is truly a course designed to not only help the actor improve their craft but also to understand and take ownership of it.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

Mindfulness and meditation was mostly used to center ourselves. At the beginning of almost every class we did a group warm up that started with us focusing on our breath. This brought our attention to our bodies, the actor's instrument, and we slowly expanded our awareness to the group, to the room. Then the warm up would transition to a variety of things depending on the day's goal. This process really helped craft the trust in the ensemble. Every time we worked together we took the time to breathe together. It was a simple process that reminded us that while we individuals, we were also part of a larger whole.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing "significant decrease" and 10 representing "significant increase"]

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Post Completion Survey with Benjamin Walton

1. Name

Benjamin Walton

2. In your opinion, what was this course about?

Acting/devising in a healthy and natural way, through meditation.

3. Did the course translate over to the production? If so, please elaborate.

Completely. I think that the sense of play and the ability to try anything without fear of failure was consistent in the class, which made it easy to bring to the production. The idea of chakras also was incredibly useful especially when trying to establish the difference between two characters.

4. What would you change about this course?

I wanted more of it. For the first half of the semester, two hours a week was not enough. This was a course I looked forward to every week, and found that it was one of my favorite acting courses I've ever taken at UCF.

In addition to wanting more time in the class, I wanted to focus more on the chakras and spend more time with each chakra.

5. How necessary is this course? Please elaborate.

Extremely. This class did a handful of things that have definitely made me a stronger actor and artist, and have made my passion for my work grow exponentially. Some of these things include: establishing an ensemble and strengthening the ensemble; collaborating with a wide variety of students not exclusively from my major; learning how to work as an ensemble to devise and create something new.

As a Musical Theatre major, I do not think we are given many opportunities to work on the idea of an ensemble. There have been some acting classes in which the warm ups lend themselves to this, but then we are separated into our individual scenes and partners. While I think it is told to us from early acting classes, we are never given the opportunity to fully dive into the idea of the ensemble. I think by focusing first and foremost on the ensemble and then layering that work with individual scenes, the actors are provided with a safe work environment and the end product will be stronger overall because of the support of the class.

Along with the ensemble, I think it is important that this ensemble contains a mixed group of students. While I think it could be beneficial for the same class of a BFA or BA program, I loved that there were people in the course that I would not regularly get to take classes with. Whether that is because we are in different years in the same program, or we are in separate degree tracks. We were also allowed to create so much in this course as an ensemble. Because we got to play so

much in the class, we found natural moments that turned out to be beautiful. I think by achieving these moments, we became encouraged to play even more the next time and the motivation continued throughout the class and the production.

This course, however, would be nothing without Terence Lee. He was the starting point for this whole course, because he came in with such a positive energy every class. He was incredibly patient and caring throughout the course and did an excellent job explaining concepts to us in a variety of ways. I am incredibly thankful to have had the opportunity to have been led by Terence in this process.

6. How was Mindfulness and meditation incorporated in this course?

The observation of breath associated with meditation was essential for all the work involved in this production and this course. It helped me to ground myself and to be present in the space no matter what was going on. Every class we started off with an observation of the breath and then Terence led the meditation which was different each day. This variety was important because, as an actor, I could not control how I felt on each day. This meditation would then lead itself into our acting exercises which differed on the days. This always felt seamless and was a perfect way to transition into the work. For a few weeks we spent time focusing on Chakras and did a lot of exercises playing with each chakra and seeing how it affected us. We did this with memorized lines and with improv exercises. Both were incredibly beneficial. This course has motivated me to look more into mindfulness and meditation and to find out how I can use these to better my work. Terence did a great job at not being prescriptive with these concepts, but I have found them extremely useful.

7. How confident are you in your acting abilities now that you have completed this course? [On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing “significant decrease” and 10 representing “significant increase”]

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APPENDIX C: COURSE PHOTOS



Figure 7: Course Photos

APPENDIX D: PRODUCTION PHOTOS



Figure 8: Production Photos

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