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Smart enough to be stupid

William Goblirsch
University of Iowa

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SMART ENOUGH TO BE STUPID

by

William Goblirsch

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Theatre Arts in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Paul Kalina

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

William Joseph Goblirsch Jr.

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
in Theatre Arts at the May 2018 graduation.

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To Martha Turner, for opening the door to performance.
To Devon Allen, for opening the door to truth.
And to my parents, for opening every door.

When you're onstage, you have license to do what everyone in the audience has wanted to do 5,000 times, whether it's kill, love, hate, fuck or fly. You get to do it with no consequences. Do it all the way.

Amy Morton
Steppenwolf Theatre Ensemble Member

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This thesis essay explores the journey that I have taken as an actor, highlighting the moments that have influenced my process. I will elaborate on specific experiences in the years leading to my matriculation at the University of Iowa, focusing on broader concepts and lessons that have impacted my beliefs.

Through the use of storytelling, I will convey moments and lessons that have resonated with me throughout my time as an academic and professional actor. Furthermore, this essay will provide a broad scope of my beliefs as an artist and actor, while allowing room for the possibility of adaptation and expansion in the future.

Finally, I will articulate my specific process as it stands now. Everything that I do from the day that I am cast to the end of performances will be outlined, and what I intend to work on as I move forward in my acting career.

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SHOULD

The class is Grotowski. It's first semester of my second year. We're outside on a warm, summer day rummaging in the greenery. I'm looking for something that grabs my attention, that I can bring back and show the class. I spot a solitary red leaf on an otherwise green tree. I pluck the leaf, discard the less interesting objects I've collected (pen cap and helicopter seed), and walk back to join my classmates. We're asked to explain the connection to our found object; to articulate the magnetism that drew us to our item.

"I chose this leaf because it didn't belong. It was the only red leaf on the tree. It was solitary. Alone. Without a pair. I think I feel like this most of the time. I don't like to belong to groups. I don't know why that is. I wish I wanted to belong. I think I should want to belong, but I'm always pulling away. I'm not sure why that is. I'd like to belong to groups. I think I should do that. I think I should change that."

"Hmm. Ok. Who would like to share next?" responded Eric, the professor of the class. I knew what I should do. I was going to stop autonomizing and embrace a life of belonging.

I'm sitting on a worn loveseat in a small, warm room, deep in thought as soft sunlight streams in through an east-facing window. My therapist sits across from me, a puzzled look on her face. I have just shared with her my leaf-inspired discovery from the previous week. This, I think, is a crucial turning point in my life. I am about to embark on a journey to a better, more connected life.

“I don’t think there’s anything wrong with desiring solitude or autonomy. I don’t think you need to change. I think that’s a perfectly fine way to live. Why do you think you should change?” she said, explaining the quizzical look I had noted on her face.

“Well, I *should* want to belong. Why would I want to run away from belonging? As soon as I start to feel like I’m going to be cemented in something, a group, I run. Isn’t that bad? *Shouldn’t* I want the reliability and support that’s offered by belonging to a group? What do you mean...” I stammered on for a few more minutes before my brain short-circuited. How long have I been living my life *doing* what I *should*? Trying to *be* what I *should*? How long have I been dictating my behavior to satisfy a long list of *should’s*; wriggling in unrest because what I *was* wasn’t what I thought I *should be*? I brought this conundrum into class the following week.

“That’s exactly what I thought when you talked about your leaf. I had that same thought. I don’t see why you need to change,” replied Eric, as I daydreamed about whacking him over the head with my notebook. Why hadn’t he told me this earlier? Why didn’t he save me from a week long identity crisis? Because, I suspect, like any great teacher, he knew that I wouldn’t learn the lesson unless I discovered the answer for myself (or with a little help from my therapist).

The question, as it relates to acting, is how long have I been bringing the *should* version of myself to a role, and not my authentic self? How long have I been leashed by the expectation to play a role how it *should* be played? How long have I rehearsed how an actor *should* rehearse? How long have I believed and felt the things my directors and professors want me to believe and feel because that’s what I think I *should* do?

Answer: most of my life.

I can count on one hand the number of times I've felt successful and fulfilled as an actor. I can count on one hand the same number of times that I've kicked 'should' to the curb and done what I wanted to do regardless of external expectations and pressures. When I reflect on my successes, they are often accompanied by a montage of many odd looks, and a lot of 'are you sure?'s. If I'm on the path to success, the best thing I can probably hear is 'I don't know if that will work...'. That someone, anyone knows how something 'should' be done or how it *has* to be done is a falsehood. Certainty in the arts and acting is as real as the news is to Donald Trump. But I get it. I am easily intoxicated by the aroma of the unquestionable; by the chaos of the world ordered and tetris'd in a brand new, perfectly square cardboard box. It's what draws me to carpentry and design. It's something that many humans desire (see: God). But there is no guaranteed and certifiable way to make me a great actor. There is no method, technique, belief, or ponzi scheme that is absolute in its effectiveness to make me a great actor. The more I get caught up in what I *should* believe, or what method I *should* use, or how I *should* create, the further I am from doing anything truthful and/or substantial and authentic.

SEEKING APPROVAL

The University of Iowa has afforded me the incredible opportunity to sit down with and hearing from many highly successful theatre artists. From KJ Sanchez, Michael Rohd, Mary-Louise Parker, Taylor Mac, members of Circus OZ, and Steven Dietz (to name a few) I have heard stories about their artistic journeys, the journey that brought them to today. It's evident, when listening to these stories, that there is no standard recipe for success. Each of these artists had moments when they went against conventional wisdom (what they 'should' do) and chose an alternate way. When these artists discovered their true passion, whether it be civically engaged theatre or provocative gender-bending performance, they thrived. It is as if we are plants, forever stuck in mid-winter hibernation, a stasis that leaves us alive but neither growing nor inspiring, until we find our spring, the heat that melts the snow, and start bending toward the sun, finally growing up and out and brilliant and green. When these artists tapped into their true desires, and pursued them unencumbered by expectation, their work came alive.

Knowing all of this, and even hearing it said literally word for word by KJ Sanchez ("There is no recipe for success."), I still struggled and struggle to find my own path. I still find myself doing the things that I *should* do. I find myself trying to impress my teachers, my friends, my classmates, my girlfriend, and my parents.

I have many daydreams throughout my day, and there's one that is of particular interest regarding my seeking of approval.

Lights up. I'm on the red carpet for the Academy Awards. I'm jovial and charming (of course) as I chat up the Entertainment Tonight host stationed at her celebrity outpost. Cut to a shot of my parents sitting at home, hunkered down with

popcorn and electric with anticipation. Obviously, I'm nominated for Best Actor in a Motion Picture. Transition music. Cut to the inside of the Kodak Theatre. I'm seated now, heart pounding in my chest as the presenter starts to read the names of the nominees. "William Goblirsch in...", is read, followed by a short clip of my rain soaked self in the middle of the street, crying as I desperately chase after my long lost love (so Oscar worthy). The crowd applauds. The presenter reads the name of the winner. "And the Oscar goes to... William Goblirsch..." More cheers. I choke up as I receive an enthusiastic hug from my date. I walk down the aisle and up onstage to receive my award. Cut to my dad sitting in his La-Z-Boy, saying, "Huh. Wow. That's pretty cool," and wanting to cry but containing his emotion like a good, stoic Minnesotan. Cut to my mother pacing around her living room, tears streaming down her face, breathing heavy after just leaping off the couch. For the longest time, I thought this fantasy was all about me and my dreams of success. The truth is that it has very little to do with me, and mostly to do with validating my parents support and making them proud. The reason this discovery is important is because it speaks to the motivation behind why I do the things I do. Sure, a small part of this fantasy has to do with validating myself, and the feeling of relief that washes over me when I imagine the financial security that comes with winning such a prestigious award. Largely, though, it has to do with the seeking of my parents' approval. Proving all the people right who said, "When you're famous, remember me!" When I think about winning such an award, it feels less like an incredible and validating achievement, and more like getting a monkey off my back. It's as if I could say to the world, "There. I did it. I fulfilled the faith of my supporters. I have not let you down, and I have proved my doubters wrong. Now can I go and do what I really want to do?"

LIKE ME

My desire to be ‘liked’ has had an adverse impact on my work, and is connected to my desire for approval. Much like how the majority of my satisfying theatrical endeavors were ‘should’ free, these same endeavors were largely free from my desire to be liked.

Since enrolling at the University of Iowa, I have done almost everything that I *should* do and haven’t done anything to drastically reduce my likability. However, there are two moments that stand out to me as examples of myself choosing truth over likability and what I *should* do (concerning approval). The first is when I expressed my frustration with a castmate during the UIowa production of *Lady from the Sea*.

During the table work process for ‘Lady from the Sea’, I became frustrated with two castmates talking during the reading of a scene. I expressed my frustration, without regard for my reputation, and subsequently followed my outburst with another anger-fueled expression of my frustration to one of my castmates. While it felt satisfying to express my true feelings, it’s my belief that these outbursts had little impact on the show, and certainly did not improve my performance.

The second time I put ‘should’ aside and put likability on the line, was when I elected to enroll in Sound Design over Acting for the Camera. This was a hard fought, knock-down-drag-out battle with the ‘should guy’ inside of me. On the acting checklist of ‘shoulds’, the Acting for the Camera class checks every single box. It’s helpful for commercials, agent auditions, film, television, industrials, and taped auditions. How could I defend not enrolling in this class? I could hear my old acting teacher Devon Allen saying, “If you want to be an actor, why aren’t you taking the acting class?”

I feared how my choosing a different class than my classmates would be viewed. Would they think I didn't like them? That I was better than them? Would they feel like I betrayed them? Everything that was pulling me toward Acting for the Camera was external pressure connected to what I felt I *should* do to avoid potential discomfort. I knew what my gut was telling me; what my heart wanted. My gut was telling me that the Sound Design class was going to fill me up, and that Camera was going to take from me, and I felt that I was in desperate need of a recharge.

My desire to be liked seeps into everything that I do, and in certain instances has had a positive impact on my life. I have been cast in many shows not just because I was right for that part but because I'm amiable. Who wants to work with someone who will be a constant headache? But being truthful must take precedence when it concerns the work. If I think there's a more dynamic way to do something, and I squelch my idea for fear of hurting someone else's feelings, I'm trapping myself through politeness and ultimately hurting the show. If a character requires me to attack with abandon, then that's what I must do regardless of whether or not I think my castmates will dislike me for my aggression. My duty is to serve the show, and to tell the story. Though I must always be professional, it is my life's work to monitor my desire to be liked, so as to make it a conscious choice and not a subconscious habit.

CHAOS AND ORDER

I have always hated ‘avant-garde’ theatre, or what one may call ‘weird’ theatre; theatre that might be labeled as non-linear, surrealist, performance art; theatre that makes you think ‘I have no idea what the hell is going on or what this is about or what it’s trying to say’. I’ve heard this type of theatre referred to as VIP theatre, meaning you need to belong to an elite intellectual club to fully understand or grasp what is happening. It’s theatre that is often labeled as pretentious, and can make you feel stupid or beneath it. “If only I were more evolved, progressive, intelligent, open-minded, then I might find access to the undeniable treasure trove of discoveries and awakenings that lie beneath this advanced piece of work,” I would tell myself, sarcastically. It’s what many of my classmates are experiencing in Post-modern Theatre History right now. My suspicion is that many students, modeled by their primary involvement with their phones and tablets during class, think the Postmodern works we’ve viewed are either ‘stupid’ or a waste of time. In a world where theatre can happen anywhere, where ‘all the world’s a stage’, one could pose that the active disregard for the videos shown in class is itself a Post-modern silent performance of protest. I admit, I anticipated being one of these Post-modern protestors. I was wrong.

I have been captivated and intrigued by all of the work we’ve seen in class. From The Living Theatre, to The Open Theatre, to the Performance Group’s production of *Dionysus in ‘69*, I have been enthralled by the possibility and unpredictability of the performances. It feels as if anything can happen. The boundaries have been split, massacred, blurred, stretched, obliterated and reversed. I’m not saying that I’m able to decipher their intention, or that I’m able to ‘follow’ the narrative. I largely have no idea

‘what’ is going on, but that is of less interest to me than the effect that the risk-taking and vitality have on me as a viewer. The work we’ve viewed in Postmodern Theatre history has brought about a conflict concerning the digestibility and accessibility of theatre.

When I would rail against ‘VIP’ theatre, it was because I saw the avant-garde techniques that they used as alienating. It would feel as if the disjointed and unfamiliar nature of the production was done to setup a force field between myself and the understanding of the show. I would feel angry, frustrated, or would disengage completely, or internally mock the production, wondering why you would invite people (or even ask them to pay) for something that was seemingly set up to baffle them.

In contrast, traditional or modern theatre invites me in, takes me on a journey, and hopefully moves me. I understand the plot, empathize with the characters (that resemble the human beings I see walking down the street), I laugh, cry, applaud and leave with a sense of satisfaction. Then, largely, never think about the show again.

In my training here at UIowa, and in my production work, I have strived to pursue truth onstage. I have tried, as I was trained, to be present and to respond to what my partner is giving me. I have worked on increasing my emotional availability, so that when I’m ‘played upon’ onstage, I express freely and fully what is happening inside of me. Through script analysis, I determine my characters pertinent history, wants/goals/action, and super-objective; decipher what makes them tick. My blood pumps and my enthusiasm spikes when I see a student drop-in during a Meisner repetition exercise and speak the truth about what they’re feeling or observing. But for all of this training or performance experience, I can’t help but feel that it doesn’t matter to me. The thing with knowing what matters to you, much like truth onstage, is that you know it when you feel

it. The cause that lights your lamp, and the self-awareness that locates that heat inside of you ought to dictate the way, not the flames that bombard you from the outside.

This is not to say that truth doesn't matter to me. That being present, alive, and responsive aren't crucial ingredients in the recipe. They are. But they aren't enough on their own. My ideal theatrical production is athletic, visceral and full of passion. I desire not only a sense of intellectual possibility, but physical possibility. This type of theatre requires reaching past the tips of your fingers and sweat, lots of sweat.

WHY

“Working hard for something we do not care about is called stress, working hard for something we love is called passion.”

“Charisma has nothing to do with energy; it comes from a clarity of WHY. It comes from absolute conviction in an ideal bigger than oneself. Energy, in contrast, comes from a good night’s sleep or lots of caffeine. Energy can excite. But only charisma can inspire. Charisma commands loyalty. Energy does not.”

*Simon Sinek
Start With Why*

I started on the theatrical path when I was sixteen years old. In Junior High School, I was an often bullied loner (surprise), with recently divorced parents, who spent the majority of my time honing the skill of hiding in plain sight. I could shrink the space like my life depended on it, because it often felt like it did. Roll your shoulders forward, concave the chest, keep your head down, and move with purpose. Lingering will get you shoved. Looking around as if you’re lost will get your books knocked to the ground. From the age of thirteen, I was training for the Wallflower Olympics. By the time I was a pimply faced fifteen year old, I had two silver medals in the Invisible Freestyle and a gold in the 1500m Run Home. Then things started to change. It happened in my high school Spanish class. Senor Hoffman gave us the assignment to write and perform a skit. It had to be spoken entirely in Spanish, but we had complete control over the content. I am not entirely sure where I got the courage to go for laughs. Maybe it was the utterly baffling attention I was getting from the girls in the class (which I was convinced had entirely to do with there remedying boredom and nothing to do with me in particular), or the fact that I was a year older than everyone else because I had decided to wait to fulfill my language requirement (a year might as well be five in high school), or it was the

playful and inviting atmosphere that was created by Senor Hoffman. In any case, I went for laughs. And succeeded.

I performed the skit half in drag (no points in high school for being high brow), half in English (so they would understand the jokes), and received a deserved C- for my efforts. But my classmates loved it. Then the craziest thing happened, they all liked me. Like, loved me. A lot. All of a sudden, I was the center of attention. The others boys in the class wanted to be my friend, or at least be seen associating with me, and some of the girls vied for my attention (admittedly, all of the attention from the opposite sex was lost on me at the time). It felt like I had discovered a super power. I didn't care that my grades began to slip as my desire to entertain increased. I was gaining friends and confidence and a passion I hadn't felt since... well... ever. This passion increased during my second semester of High School Spanish, grew even more during Mrs. Turner's class on Drama, and culminated with my first play, a one-act cut of A Midsummer Night's Dream. My intoxication with performance inspired me to major in theatre at Bemidji State University, and there began the slow and nearly undetectable death of my passion.

The plummet from the mountaintop of my passion was not a straight drop. It more accurately resembles that of a spikey line graph cascading down from left to right. It was a slow disappearing act covering fifteen years, with intermittent moments of inspiration and enthusiasm, blinding me to the loss and yet pushing me to move forward.

When I was fifteen, I just wanted to be liked. There was no introspection needed to discern why I enjoyed performing. This WHY was enough to sustain me back when I was an invincible teenager. However, the older I got, and the more experience I gained, the less this WHY satisfied me. In fact, that WHY was getting in my way. I had moved

on from the adulation-driven skits of drag and genital humor, and into the realm of pursuing the truth on stage. If I was to pursue the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help me god, needing to be liked was going to lead me to lies. So I dropped my old WHY, and replaced it with... nothing. Which was fine while I took the time to strengthen my skills and hone my craft as an actor. But as soon as I was done with all my tasks and assignments, getting better at listening, getting better at analyzing a text, getting better at being present and expressing my inner life, I was left with the nagging question, but WHY? Why was I trying to be more present? Why was I pursuing the truth? Why was I doing all of these exercises? To get better, yes, but once I was better, then what for? Why did I want to act? 'Because' could not fill the void; I could feel it rattle around inside of me like I was a tin can, reminding me I was hollow. Neither 'because I like it' nor 'because it's fun' could fill the void, and not because those are inadequate answers, because they're not. If someone asks a baseball player why he plays the game, and he says, "Because I love the game of baseball," that's a completely acceptable answer. The reason 'because I love it' or 'because it's fun' was unacceptable for me, is because it wasn't true. I didn't love acting or find it fun. It felt like work. It was stressful. I did it as a default, because I didn't have a WHY for anything else.

And here's the truth of where I'm at right now:

I still don't have a WHY.

It still feels like a default at times. But I'm closer. Closer than I've ever been to deciphering a WHY that transforms the work and inspires passion, not stress.

I have one more role obligation at the University of Iowa and then my degree requirements will be complete. Once that is complete, it is my responsibility to push

should to the side, say to hell with being liked, and do what I feel passionate about: education and civic engagement.

I want to help young adults and teens find their way to acceptance, vulnerability and authenticity. Why? Because I've been and have seen too many young people walk in their skin ashamed, afraid and disconnected. I have always been an introspective person, but the arts have guided me further down that path of self-reflection and have shown me that an uninhibited and expressive life is possible with the right guidance. Every time I teach, I ask my students to write down why they took an acting class. The vast majority of the students will say some version of "... because I want to break out of my shell," or "I want to be more outgoing," or "I want to be more me". This is achievable. I'm living proof that this is achievable. I want to do everything that I can do to help people gain access to their authenticity.

Before I enrolled in the class Orientation to Graduate Studies, I could not have given you a definition for civic engagement. I had no idea what it was. But since that class, I have been awarded a fellowship in civic engagement by the Obermann Center here at UIowa. The fellowship was a weeklong intensive comprised of lectures, exercises, group projects and field trips intended to educate us on the nuances of civically engaged work, while also challenging us to refine our goals. It was one of the most illuminating and inspiring experiences I have had while a student at UIowa. The interdisciplinary aspect of the program challenged me to look at civic engagement through multiple lenses, while also demonstrating the exciting potential of interdisciplinary work.

In addition to the Obermann fellowship, I participated in a documentary theatre project entitled *Muslims in Iowa*. With *Muslims in Iowa*, the work felt exciting and fresh,

but most of all it felt *fun*. The work of interviewing, transcribing and brainstorming reawakened a passion in me. Admittedly, my interest and passion for civically engaged theatre is in its infantile stages. Who knows if it is my passion or not. All I know, is that right now, I love doing it like a baseball player loves the game.

The common response to casting from fellow theatre artists is, “You’re playing (*character name*)! How fun! Are you excited?” To which you politely reply, “Yeah! Super excited. I can’t wait!” or at the very least you express some stock nervousness, “Yes, but wow. It’s gonna be a lot of work! Are you memorized? Blah blah blah...”

I’ve been talked into a lot of excitement. I’ve been coached up by some very enthusiastic directors. I’ve felt residual waves of passion absorbed from those who are truly passionate. But with all of these, the passion I feel is eventually booted out or rejected like a donated liver. And then I slowly slip into an artistic coma, staying alive by my technique/life support, before gingerly wheeling myself out of the hospital/theatre before beginning the cycle all over again. I know enough now to give the standard actor life a rest.

I’m not excited to play a role in a show that’s been done one hundred times before, no matter how great the play. I may be initially ecstatic to be cast as Hamlet, but after the validation injection wears off, I’ll be left with nothing but that same old tin can rattling around inside my ribcage (asking WHY?). I know that I’d rather be pushing boundaries and challenging models of thinking in young minds and hearts, or questioning communities for the stories they want to tell.

MY JOURNEY

“Technique is like medicine, you use it when you need it.”

Michael Shurtleff

Once I’m cast in a show, and my exuberance at getting cast has worn off, I begin the work. The work has changed drastically over the years. As an undergraduate at Bemidji State University, I memorized lines and... yep, that’s it. In the spring of 2003, I was cast in my first principal role as Creon in Jean Anouilh’s *Antigone*. I remember walking the tunnels underneath Bemidji State (it’s cold so we have tunnels that connect every building on campus), whispering lines to myself amidst the rattle and bangs of noisy water pipes. At nineteen years old, my two goals in the show were to not screw up any of my lines and to be a good actor. I knew how to memorize lines. You read them to yourself over and over again. Simple enough. How do I achieve ‘being a good actor’? I had no idea. My best guess was to shout some lines, and make sure the audience knew how serious I was. Judging by the number of snoozers I spotted in the audience, I did not shout loud enough. But I didn’t screw up any lines, so I made the noisy water pipes proud.

The desire to know how to be a ‘good actor’ drove me to pursue further training. Soon after graduating from Bemidji State, I applied and was accepted to Portland State University under the guise of a becoming a set designer, but quickly fell back into the acting track. While at Portland State, I met Devon Allen who introduced me to the training I’d sought. Devon introduced me to the acting concepts of being present, listening and responding, needs/wants/objectives, emotional preparation and the pursuit of truth onstage. She put a halt to my notion that great acting was the skill for funny

voices and the adding of a limp. She was the first person to ask me to bring myself to a role, to think less about ‘putting on’ and more about ‘stripping away’. I learned what it meant to be simple. I worked with some incredible actors, who challenged me to elevate my work and ‘bring it’ every single time I stepped onto the stage.

The first time I faced my need to control was in Devon’s classroom. The first time I broke free and let go of control was in Devon’s classroom. The first time I was told that I was interesting as I was in Devon’s classroom. The first time I dropped all of the bullshit and showed vulnerability onstage was in Devon’s classroom. The first time I encountered the majority of the acting principles I know and believe was in Devon’s classroom.

However, encountering is one thing, mastering is another. I discovered a great deal at Portland State, but continued to battle a need to control, among other harmful habits. I worked professionally as an actor soon after graduating from Portland State, and much like when I left Bemidji, felt the sting of dissatisfaction with my work. My acting wasn’t as alive or as visceral as I wanted to be. I was also getting consistent notes on the lack of musicality in my voice. My work in an outdoor production of *Romeo & Juliet* exposed my lack of breath support. I had more work to do.

I discovered the Meisner technique at the Black Box Acting Studio in Chicago, Illinois. While it didn’t address my issues of breath support or vocal variety (at least not directly), it did bring to light my issues with self-consciousness. I hadn’t realized how self-conscious I was as an actor. The Meisner technique both brought this to light, and gave me a solution to my problem: focus on your partner. Through the Meisner repetition exercise (a revolutionary tool), I was able to more fully understand what it means to be

present and to work off of your partner. Devon used to say, “The answer lies in the other person,” which was just a more poetic way of saying, “put your focus on your partner.” For the exercise to flourish, you must allow yourself to be affected by your partner; to not censor what you see or what you feel. When the partners in the exercise are honest and vulnerable and connected, the work is electric. I witnessed/engaged with this first hand when I enrolled in a Meisner weekend intensive through Black Box.

It was to be an eight hour Saturday and a six hour Sunday. I was intimidated by the concentration of time, but not as intimidated as I was about to be by the other students in the class. When I walked into the studio that Saturday morning, I was greeted with the intimidating knowledge that I would be practicing and working alongside teachers from Black Box (including my own teacher and both of the owners). I had three months of experience with Meisner, having completed just one of five levels of classes, and was going to be repeating with people who had been ‘repeating’ for years and now taught it. I did not belong. I was the red leaf on the green tree.

To begin the session, Audrey Francis, one of the owners and leader of the weekend intensive, asked everyone to share how they were feeling that morning. When it came to me, I said, “I’m nervous. Really nervous. I see my teacher is here, and other teachers from the studio, and it seems everyone else has way more experience than I do. I feel like I’m out of my league.”

Audrey Francis, the leader of the workshop and co-owner of Black Box, responded, “Thanks for sharing, Will. Question for the group: does anyone in here think Will is out of his league?” Everyone shook their head no. “You asked for permission to

enroll in this intensive even though you haven't completed your second level class, am I right?"

"Yes," I replied.

"And you were vouched for by your level one teacher. So she believes you belong here, and as I can tell from everyone's response to my previous question, so do they. You're the only one who feels like you don't belong. It seems the only person who doubts your worthiness to be here is you."

Self-doubt had been with me all along, from Bemidji to Portland to Chicago, but it wasn't until that weeklong intensive that I started to wonder how often it had impacted my life and my work. Did I feel I belonged on the stage? The discovery of my self-doubt brought about questions of worthiness. Did I think myself worthy of success? Did I think I was worthy of the audience's attention? Did I think I was worthy of being seen? If I was already and unknowingly under the belief that I wasn't, I was crippling myself before I started. I was back to hiding in plain sight.

I left Chicago knowing that self-doubt was holding me back, and that until I could find a sense of worthiness, my work would be diminished and translucent, as if viewed through a dirty window. When I am fully present, expressing what I am feeling and allowing myself to be changed, anything can happen. Every single moment is overflowing with life and possibility, and moments change at the drop of a dime.

IOWA

*I see my reflection in the window
This window clean inside, dirty on the out
I'm looking different than me
Am I who I think I am?*

*James Hetfield
Metallica*

I was accepted into the MFA acting program at the University of Iowa because someone dropped out. While it wouldn't have been surprising to think that being a 'bridesmaid' and not the 'bride' would have only inflated my self-doubt, being a backup did little to quell my enthusiasm. I hesitated accepting only because my life in Minneapolis was incredible and I did not desire to ruin a good thing, but getting my MFA in Acting was something I had been pursuing for quite a few years, and I felt like I was running out of time. I happily accepted, and began preparations for my move south.

When I arrived in Iowa City, I was joined by two old friends: Ms. Crippling Self-Doubt and Mr. I Don't Belong. They took a brief vacation while I was preparing my move, but were gracious enough to help me unpack in my new home.

The day before I started orientation at the University of Iowa was one of the most anxiety ridden, depressing days of my life. I was on a pendulum swinging from ulcer to aneurysm. I was one more 'Are you ready for auditions?' email away from driving back to Minnesota. "I don't belong here. I don't have what it takes. I'm going to embarrass myself," played in my head on repeat like a new track from Philip Glass.

Then I woke up the next day, went to the orientation, and everything was fine. I worked my monologues with Paul, John, George and Ringo. Sorry, I mean Paul, John and Anne Marie. I auditioned and it went well. The world did not implode.

One of the most important lessons I've learned at Iowa, that is exemplified in the story of my arrival, is to '*just do it*'. As John Cameron likes to say, it's the Nike school of acting... *just do it*. Stop thinking about it, ruminating on it, talking about it and *just do it*. Once I am in the arena, working with my classmates, being coached by my teachers, I am fine. Once I started repeating in the Meisner weekend intensive, I was fine. Get your brain out of the way, and *just do it*.

In addition to the 'just do it' principle, I have learned a number of different techniques and strategies to help both increase my proprioceptive awareness and expand my approach to the work at UIowa. For example, what I did as a teenager to survive, to roll my shoulders forward and cave my chest was taught to me as 'shrinking the space'. This is something I learned to do out of survival, but have continued to do out of habit; what once was a conscious choice had become an unconscious habit. You can see how I shrink the space in this photo from my High School graduation. (INSERT PHOTO) With the recognition that I would shrink space in life and thus carry my shrunken self onstage came the realization that extra attention needed to be placed on my filling the space. I have had many roles at Iowa that have allowed me to work on this aspect of my work, but I felt it was especially necessary for the role of Theseus in *Welcome to Thebes*. Theseus was a man who thought of himself at the center of the universe, an irresistible demi-god both capable of changing the world and rocking yours. He was a shaken Coke bottle of Trump, Clinton and Obama exploding all over the stage (i.e. he fills the space). I'm still unsure as to when I am achieving 'filling the space'. While I felt rather successful expanding out and not imploding in, my feedback suggested otherwise.

Another example of getting the brain out of the way was when we would walk blindly around room 172 in search of a specific person. As a class, we would run around the room, pushing our sensory awareness out to feel for the unoccupied space. At the sound of a clap, we would all stop, freeze, and close our eyes. Paul would then call out the name of the person who was to walk blindly, and then name the person they were to seek out. The rest of us would then open our eyes. The majority of the time the person walking blindly would make their way toward the person who was named. In the process of that, they would narrowly avoid others in the room. Now, of course there were times when people would careen into someone, or walk in the complete opposite direction. But this, I think, was the exception and not the rule. What I learned from this, and many other exercises in Paul Kalina's class, is to trust your body. Your body knows more and knows it truthfully. Our brains are nothing but degenerative lying machines compared to our bodies. With our minds, the truth hits fast and in a millisecond, faster than we can often comprehend, before we cover it in lies. In acting we use a myriad of psychological self-reflection exercises to unmask ourselves and break down our walls. We do this in service of getting ourselves to be more honest and expressive. I have spent many of last ten years doing this work, but it wasn't until I came to Iowa that I started to work on my physical blocks.

As I am about to graduate, and as I write this thesis paper, I am taking stock of what I've learned and where I'm at in my learning process. While at Iowa, I have been reminded of many principles I already believed in and practiced, but I've also been exposed to brand new concepts and principles that I am still unpacking. It wasn't until a few years after my work in Meisner that I started to see a difference in my work. I

learned what it means to be ‘simple’ and to trust that I am interesting and that I don’t have to put anything on all the way back in 2007 at Portland State, but I still have to remind myself of that every time I rehearse, perform or teach. The work is never done.

John and Paul have both said on countless occasions that many of lessons we’ve been taught won’t sink in until four or five years from now. I believe this to be true. That being said, I still want it sink in immediately, and I think that possibly stems from thinking of any of these lessons as keys. Keys to some locked door that once opened will provide the immediate answer to grab your own greatness; thinking you’re one undulation or Meisner repetition away from being Marlon Brando. But I think it’s more the locked door that you’re given with these lessons. You’re presented with a locked door you didn’t even know was there, or that it was locked, and it’s up to you to do the work to get the key to figure out what’s behind it (hint: it’s another door).

My hope with sharing my journey and my struggles from teenager to now will help provide added context to why I do what I do to prepare for a role. What I do now is born out of lessons I’ve learned all over the map, and will continue to adapt and change with new lessons I learn from likely newer places on the map.

MY PROCESS

Pre-Rehearsal

When I've been cast in a show, my process begins the same way it has since I started acting back in Bemidji, with memorization. I read the play to understand the narrative, but in an effort to get off-book as soon as possible, I begin memorization soon after I'm cast. Depending on the prep time I have before rehearsals start, I may focus entirely on memorization, or I may intersperse research in between memorizing.

When I memorize my lines for a play, I start by simply reading through the scene a few times. I don't put any stress on myself to remember the lines, but I read them for sense, dipping my toe in the water of why I say what I say. Understanding why I say what I say, and connecting it to a hook in my cue line helps me to memorize my lines quicker, and transforms my lines to responses. After a few simple reads, I'll begin memorizing my lines with the intention of being able to repeat the line without looking at the page. At this point, I only move forward with new lines once I've got the previous line solidly in my bones. When I am comfortable with my lines (with book in hand), I start the process of dropping the script. I'll record my cue lines on my phone, and respond to a recording or audio of my cues, not the written word. I find this part of the process crucial, as a script can become a pseudo child's blanket if held for too long. This is as far as I will go with my pre-rehearsal memorization process.

While working on *The Crucible* at UIowa, I was instructed (as were the other actors) to not stress about getting off-book. But rather, to trust that through the repetition of scene work we would inevitably learn our lines. The philosophy behind this approach, as articulated by the director Doug Scholz-Carlson was that 'whatever you put your

attention and focus on will be what the audience see and gets out of the show', or in my words, whatever you water will grow; that if you put all of your attention on memorizing your lines, the work that we will see in rehearsal and in performance is a bunch of actors who are *really off-book*. And while my Mom would be incredibly impressed with all of those memorized lines, that's not what I'm hoping the audience gets from the show. I'm suspicious of my own stressing on memorization, and found Doug's approach refreshing and I felt it gave me permission to put more of my energy toward other goals (research or character development/analysis). I also understand that being completely off-book allows an actor to play and respond in a way they cannot with a book in hand. This is something I will explore as I continue on in my journey.

The other essential part of my pre-rehearsal process is the research. Research can include reading books (both directly related and abstractly related to the play and part), journal writing, active daydreaming, playing, travelling, and experiencing. It's a bit of large nutshell to crack into all that is possible in researching a role, but I will say that the most common research for myself involves reading books, journaling, watching film, and investigating previous productions.

I will read any book that might give me insight into a role. For the role of Bernard in *Arcadia*, I read about Lord Byron, because Bernard is obsessed and infatuated with the famous poet. For the role of Theseus in *Welcome to Thebes*, I tried to read as much autobiographical material as I could on former Presidents and leaders, as well as books written on the psyche's and behavior of powerful men. I have read a great deal for some roles and very little for others. When I have consumed a fair bit of literature in preparation for a role, I find it's effective about half of the time. This is a difficult thing to

adjudicate. How do I know if it's really worthwhile? In some ways, I can't know. The research and preparation part of the role straddles both the tangible and intangible spheres of acting. Reading two hundred Lord Byron poems may or may not have an affect on me and the work. When it comes to reading, I've found that some of the most helpful literature is not that which is research based or non-fiction, but rather reading a novel with a protagonist who is similar to the character I'm playing. Novels, written by great insightful writers, allow you into the minds of their protagonists. I'm always struck by the way Holden Caulfield falls in and out love with everything in *Catcher in the Rye*, and how he experiences the world with such skepticism and distance and longing. He's a human being, and I believe it would be entirely more fruitful for me to read a book like *Catcher in the Rye* were I to play a character full of rebellion and angst, than to read a psychologists journal on the behavior of teenage angst.

Suffice it to say, the amount and quality of research varies. The reason for the research is in service of quieting the 'pops', as I call them. 'Pops' are those moments that happen onstage where you don't believe what you're saying, or what you're doing, or meaning/truth/believability drops out. The preparation before a show is all in service of diminishing the number of 'pops' that may occur in rehearsal and performance. A simplification of this process is to say that as an actor you must seek to know WHY. Why do I say that? What do I say that *right then*? Why do I do that? Why do I do that *in that moment*? Why do I love that? Why do I react that way? The more possible answers I have to these questions the better. There are a plethora of things you can only experience and know when you are on your feet, off-book, standing across from your scene partner.

Those things I tackle in the moment. But to give me a leg up in the process, I do the intellectual research to set me up for success.

In addition to the mental and emotional work, I work on my vocal and physical self before rehearsal begins. This is a relatively new part of my preparation. I have recently added tumbling and ‘extreme monologues’ to my memorization process in an effort to remind myself that I am not a talking head, and that the entire body is an instrument through which to communicate. I use yoga and undulations to help loosen and increase articulation in my spine. If the role I am playing requires something particular in it’s physicality, I will explore that in my preparation. This is admittedly one of the weaker parts of my work and preparation. I am still very much ‘in my head’ when it comes to changing my physicality onstage. Leading with a different part of my body has always been difficult for me. Is it because I use to do this as a very young actor, as a way to hide? Do I have some archaic association of extreme changes in physicality to amateurism? I’m unsure. If Mask and Clown taught me anything (particularly Mask), it’s that when I give myself permission to be what I think I’m not, I can do it. In the case of those two classes, the nose and mask were talismans of permission.

I’m still refining my preparation process, with the intention of working smarter, not harder. The more I continue to the work that actually bears fruit, and not the work that I feel like I ‘should’ do so that I get the silent approval from the actors and teachers in my head, the more the passion will override the stress.

Rehearsal

Creativity and Spontaneity

Everything that I do during preparation carries over into rehearsal. The research and memorization continue, though they tend to slow down. My goal for rehearsals, and this is something that started with *Welcome to Thebes* (then reversed on *The Crucible*), is to come in with at least two or three of my own ideas every rehearsal. It helps me to conjure up ideas outside of rehearsal. I am not an extrovert who thinks out loud. Brainstorming sessions stress me out. The way that I operate best (beautifully articulated in Susan Cain's immensely influential book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*) is to go away to a quiet place and cultivate ideas. One unintentional (I think) byproduct of training that's focused on increasing spontaneity and responsiveness is that creativity often gets dismissed as nothing more than 'pre-planning'. Pre-planning is tantamount to being Judas at The Last Supper, you really don't want to be that guy. I don't disagree with focusing on responsiveness in training because that's what actors need to work on most. Anyone who has taught a Basic Acting class will understand this sentiment. Most new actors tend to pre-plan everything they do out of need to control and not look stupid. An unintentional byproduct, however, is that actors can (and I have) subconsciously start associating pre-planning with creativity. Once I unknowingly conflated pre-planning and creativity, I began the unfortunate process of disassociating the crucial element of creativity from the work.

Carol MacVey, an acting lecturer at UIowa, brought this subconscious belief to light during a discussion we had on teaching beginning actors. She described an exercise where a student would improvise with a partner onstage, creating a short scene, before

sitting down to watch the rest of the class take their turn. When everyone had participated, she would ask the class, “When you were sitting in your chairs watching the others improvise, did any of you think to yourself ‘Man! I wish I would’ve said that!’ or ‘Oh! I wish I would’ve done this!’” Everyone’s hands go up. “That is creativity. What you’re doing onstage, that is spontaneity. In theatre, we need both.” It’s a simple exercise and a simple anecdote, but it had been a long time since the view that creativity was an essential part of the acting process had been expressed. It was simultaneously the first time I realized how much I had dismissed my own creativity and ideas, chalking them up to nothing but a need to control, and the first time I realized I needed to bring my creativity back into the fold.

I brought it back in *Thebes*, and I felt an immediate sense of ownership and agency creep back into the work. Why it faded away again with *The Crucible* is unclear. It may be that I was feeling out an unfamiliar director, not feeling that there was space for my ideas in the room, or maybe it was the case of one step forward and two steps back (remember my description of progress?). In any case, there is no doubt in my mind that my creativity is necessary for every production I’m a part of, and necessary for gaining a sense of agency within a production. When I lose that sense of agency and ownership, I start to recede into the land of the puppets, and my work is neither passionate or enjoyable.

‘Pops’

Just like in my pre-rehearsal process, I keep my senses open for ‘pops’. I’ve done a fair bit of research, so the moments that ‘pop’ will be less frequent, but still occurring.

Typically, I will make a note in my journal about specific moments that ‘popped’ (or when the bottom falls out). ‘Pops’ are often accompanied by a sudden increase in self-awareness. These moments remind me of the Viola Spolin exercise ‘Exposure’, where actors are split into two equal groups, one group being the viewers, the other the viewed. Both groups take turns watching each other, before the second round of viewing when each group of the observed are given a task. As you may anticipate, whenever a group is observed with nothing to do they experience a great deal of self-consciousness. However, as soon as you give them a task, their awareness of themselves and the audience dissipates drastically. The whole of the exercise then points up an important lesson: having something to do, or action, can free you from self-awareness.

When I encounter self-awareness, I attack the moment with a series of questions. Do I understand *what* I’m saying? If I do, then do I understand *why* I’m saying it? Do I hate the line I’m saying? Do I have an action? Is my action serving me in that moment? Is there a different tactic that would open that moment up? If the answer to these questions fail to solve the problem, I turn to my body. What am I doing in space? Is my body engaged in my action? Or am I talking head? Is there an instinct that I’m stifling? One common way for me to solve one of these moments is to simply try as many different alternatives as I can. I’ve found, through experience, that I am most successful when I have failed a lot and I have cycled through many awful ideas.

When I performed as Pale in *Burn This* at Portland State, I was a part of the most enjoyable and successful process. In hindsight, I remember the production and the rehearsal process being full of deep insights, laughter and joy. But, when I read my journal from that process, it was evidently more full of frustration, despair, and doubt.

My Pale journal is full of ‘I don’t get this guy’ or ‘I can’t do this, I’m going to be awful’ or ‘What the hell is going on. I suck.’ When I slip off those rose colored glasses that often accoutre hindsight, I see that I actually struggled and failed a great deal. I remember many moments where I tried over a dozen different interpretations. The reasons I was afforded this opportunity is two-fold. First, I was the co-director of the production and essentially in charge of the entire process as it was my thesis project. This meant that there was no director pushing us forward out of fear of running out of time. This also meant that there was no director who was starting to panic when we didn’t have something ‘set’. Secondly, this meant that I decided, along with my co-director who also performed in *Burn This* as part of her thesis project, when we would start rehearsing. We rehearsed *Burn This* for close to two months. This extra time took the burden off of having a product sooner than we were ready. The point being is that I was able to try everything, without fear of getting told to move on, and through the incredible dumpster fire of failure, I made some fantastic discoveries, and had very few ‘pops’ in my performance.

Costumes and Props

During rehearsal, I make an effort to wear something similar to what I will be wearing during performance. I have worn a suit in every production at UIowa. This means that I bring, at the very least, a suit jacket with a bottom down shirt to rehearsal. I am fortunate in that I enjoy wearing suits and wear them any chance I get, so my comfort level with them is high. That being said, they can still have an effect of stiffening me up and cloaking me in thin layer of seriousness. If I’m clowning around in rehearsal, it’s important that I feel the truth of that clowning in a suit. The nature and feel of that

joviality or goofiness is going to be different if I'm in pajama pants and a v-neck t-shirt. It may be easier, and if that is the case, then as soon as I put on the suit for performance I have to find that freedom of expression in a much stiffer and tailored piece of clothing.

I have always been told that it is important to wear your costume shoes as early as possible. I don't think this is a bad idea, but it doesn't matter to me as much as wearing something close to the costume itself. Yes, shoes will certainly change the way I carry myself onstage. But I've found it's easier to adapt to that on the fly than it is to a drastically different wardrobe. In any case, I make an effort of wearing my costume shoes as early as possible in the rehearsal process.

I make an effort to have all of my props or performance quality rehearsal props as soon as possible in rehearsal. I was without quality prop books for my role in *Arcadia*, and this got in the way of my work. If I were to do it again, I would've brought in books and journals for rehearsal. I believe in Meisner's principle 'The Reality of Doing', which means if you're going to do something onstage, really do it. If I'm supposed to read something onstage, then really read something onstage. If I'm sweeping the floor, then it is my best interest to set a standard for how clean the floor needs to be, and then I really sweep the floor. This is something I reiterate to my students constantly, repeating the phrase to them, "The more you experience, the less you have to pretend." The more I believe what I'm doing, or where I am, the easier it will be for me to act. Pretending takes too much of an actor's energy, and it's a lie that the audience will notice (whether or not they know what they're noticing is another thing). So there's really no reason not to *really do it*.

Moment Before and Emotional Preparation

During the rehearsal process is also when I determine my ‘moment before’ and emotional preparation for every scene. I will come up with a short, concise ‘moment before’ that brings to light my emotional preparation. Devon Allen, the head of acting at Portland State, used to say it was an actor’s job to “bring an event into the room.” If an actor can bring in an event, it can act as a spark to kindle the fire of the audience’s imagination, and create a sense that they are watching a slice of life and not a scene in a play.

Emotional preparations will inevitably change and mutate throughout the rehearsal and performance of a play. When the effectiveness of an emotional preparation wears off, I will change it in search of something that will turn up the heat.

Wants

During my pre-rehearsal preparation, I begin finding my ‘wants’ or what I’m fighting for. This includes both overall (super-objective) and in each individual scene. The way that I phrase it, because it has the most visceral effect on me is to say, “I want to get (character) to (verb/action) so that I (what it will get me).” I will often add a lot of curse words to increase the visceral effect, and because that’s the way I talk and think. For example, I might have the ‘want’ of ‘I want you (or character name) to leave this fucking room so that I can have some peace and fucking quiet.’ It’s important that I use phrasing that feels real to me.

What I’ve learned, and was reiterated to me in my Grotowski class, is that the words we use matter, they matter a lot. Whether I call it a want, need, objective, action or

‘what I’m fighting for’ matters. I’ve made the mistake of thinking they’re interchangeable and diminishing the individual impact of each word. Someone may use ‘need’ over ‘want’ because of its increased severity. Another actor may prefer ‘objective’, or another ‘action’, because ‘acting is action’ (for the record, at UIowa I have been taught that objective and action are different things, which I understand, but am using them here as examples of the same thing). I don’t use objective because it feels robotic and academic. I don’t use ‘need’ because that’s rarely how I think; it doesn’t move me. I will use the label ‘action’ because it’s part of the vocabulary we’ve been taught at Iowa and so every understands what I mean when I use the word ‘action’, but what I use onstage is the word ‘want’.

I want things all day long, and that’s the word I use in my own mind. When I say ‘I want you to...’ I can already feel an engagement in my body. This is the work of the actor, personalizing the lesson we’re taught. John, in both Acting Foundations and Meisner, would bombard my classmates and I with the question, “what have you learned?” After attempting to regurgitate what I’d been taught or trying to give him an answer to make him go away, I’d get slapped with, “But what does that mean to you?” I’m going to make an assumption here that John teaches what worked for him. What I believe he was doing when he accosted me with these questions, is to instill in me the desire to know how his lessons can work for me. If I don’t know why, and I don’t spend the time to investigate how or if something works for me, I’m liable to fall flat when I leave academia, because there will be no more teachers to tell me what to do. This is something I experienced when I graduated from Portland State with M.S. in Theatre. I believed what Devon told me and nodded with great enthusiasm, and challenged myself

to utilize everything that she taught us and make her proud. I was her blind disciple. So when I graduated and no longer had that mentor to impress, I was faced with the reality that I didn't know what my technique actually did for me or what I believed in. While it can be trying be asked to explain and re-explain and re-re-explain what you believe, I'll be forever thankful and grateful for John's insistence that we think for ourselves.

Play

Properties of Play

- *Apparently purposeless*
- *voluntary*
- *inherent attraction*
- *freedom from time*
- *diminished consciousness of self*
- *improvisational potential*
- *continuation desire*

-Stuart Brown
Play

Life isn't as serious as the mind makes it out to be.

-Eckhart Tolle

This is the crux of it. It's what I did as a child. It's what I did when I performed skits in Senor Hoffman's Spanish class. It's what I did when I performed in the high school one-act version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It's one of the first things you do in most acting classes. It's a state you're either trying to get back to or be in. It's even the name given to the thing you're producing, directing, designing or acting in: the play. When all of the work is done, or not done, and you're about to enter the scene in either rehearsal or performance, your left with one thing, to go play.

Prior to coming to Iowa, I was an actor who was incredibly sensitive and precious about his ideas. My ideas were not offered up easily, and if they were, the fear of rejection loomed large. To try something bold, and to fail, was fairly mortifying. Something Paul told me early on in my training helped to change my mentality when it came to risk onstage. He told my classmates and I how being in a state of play can free you from the possible deflation of a rejected idea. The ability to ‘go with the flow’ or adapt was connected to being in state of play. If you’re in a state of play, you simply make the bold choice, the director says “no”, so you say “ok”, and say “what about this?” If I’m able to play, and let go of the notion that my ideas are precious, the entire process becomes much more enjoyable.

When I enter any production, I have to be vigilant about reminding myself to lighten up. I am, from habit and socialization, a more serious man and sensitive man. Sensitivity can be an asset to an actor if he knows how to use it. It’s great when I allow myself to be vulnerable and sensitive onstage, but if I allow that sensitivity to creep into how I receive notes or how I perceive my castmates behavior, it negatively affects my work because I take things personally. The easiest and simplest way I’ve found to free myself from this is to act ridiculous. The simple act of sticking my tongue out while wiggling my butt can remind me to loosen up.

This is another thing I’ve learned during my time at UIowa, and it’s that the solution to my problem is not as complicated as I think it is. Sticking my tongue out loosens me up at least ninety percent of the time, and that’s all there is to it. I have the habit of exhausting myself trying to outthink my dilemma, which requires a week long retreat into the Iowan wilderness accompanied by an Ayahuascan Shaman, when all I

might have to do is go for a run. Wow! My bloods flowing and now I feel better. Or maybe I get some sleep. Drink some water. Walk stage left instead of stage right. The other lesson embedded in this example is to do first, edit later.

BELIEF

"Tell me one last thing," said Harry. "Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?" "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?"

*J.K. Rowling
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

Belief is everything. Belief begets confidence. Belief begets trust. Belief begets security. Belief begets growth. Belief is the mass of white blood cells that come to your rescue when you've caught the common cold of doubt.

Whether it's instilling belief in my students, believing what I'm taught, or believing in myself, I believe that belief is the skeleton that holds the soul and the flesh upright. I have seen lesser actors find success because they believed in themselves. You can call it delusion, but it does not change the fact that more often than not, believing something makes it true. Highly successful athletes talk often about imagining success: the ball clearing the outfield fence, the ball going in the hoop, the pass being completed.

A mentor from the Obermann Institute shared some information she'd found in a study on correcting speech impediments. It was about a technique speech pathologists use in correcting speech impediments. First, the speech pathologist films the patient reading sentences that may spark the impediment. Patients try to speak without the impediment. Then the video is edited to only examples of the patient speaking without the impediment. The patient then watches the video of themselves speaking without the impediment. Incredibly, research has shown that this viewing of the patient succeeding substantially increases future progress.

Whenever I go through training, it is my philosophy to take what I'm given and believe in it. When I am given a note in rehearsal, I take it. This may seem counter-

intuitive to the belief that one should question and move through education with a healthy amount of skepticism, in an effort to engage actively with lessons and not consume blindly. I think we need skepticism as well, but I find skepticism is better applied once a lesson has been given the chance to be believed. If I let resistance and doubt jump into my body like a spirit seeking a host, I will engage with one foot out of the proverbial door. In order to adequately adjudicate a lesson or technique, I have to fall into it with no net. Once I have participated with full belief and engagement, then I filter the information I've received through a mental sieve to help discern how true or useful I find that particular lesson to be.

Further proof of the power of belief came to me in my University yoga class. "I would like you to figure out what you want to be true one year from now," said Fannie Hungerford, instructor of said yoga class. "Then write out a few sentences stating what you would like to be true, in the affirmative, as if it's already true." My affirmation was *I want to be in a loving and healthy relationship, feeling hopeful about love again, with a day job that isn't soul sucking but enjoyable*. This may seem general and easily achievable, but at the time both were far-fetched ideas. I hadn't been romantically excited about another person in over ten years, and soul-sucking jobs seemed inevitable. But, as I repeated that phrase, over and over in my daily life, lo and behold, one year later, both of those affirmations came true. I don't think it's coincidence. I think it's belief.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

I have a lot of work left as an actor. I will have much to work on for the rest of my career. I desire further vocal training. I've discovered areas of habitual tension that plague both my movement and my voice, and have exercises to help reduce this unnecessary tension. However, I would like to continue to research and experience different approaches to vocal work. When I discovered Meisner, something inside me screamed, "Yes! This is it. This is the training. This feels right." This is something I'm still searching for in my vocal work. I have been given thorough instruction in Fitzmaurice voice work, and snippets of Linklater, Knight and Berry voice work. Roy Hart's technique is something I intend to look into. My hope in the next few years is to find a vocal technique that excites me as much as the Meisner technique.

In my movement training at UIowa, I connected strongly with both mask and clown work. I hope to continue to take classes in both, and if not classes, to perform or experiment with both. One of the aspects of clown that I enjoy is the practical application. My experience as a clown in the ped mall is something I will never forget. David Shiner went out and did it, got his hands dirty, and learned. Jango went out and (lied) did it, experienced it, and learned about clown. There's something about clown that seems anti-academic that it almost screams for practice. My hope is to be brave enough to get out in the world as a clown and fall on my face and fail/learn.

Lastly, I look forward to discovering what I truly believe. I've been instructed in a lot of techniques, been told a lot of things, and now is the time when I go out into the world and find out what I believe to be true. It's most evident when I teach that I am in a state of flux and confusion as far as what I believe as an actor. Every class that I teach, in the middle of a lesson I hear myself teaching and I think, "Do I really believe that?"

Actually?" The answer is that I don't know. This is the part of my journey where skepticism and experience and practical application come into play.

During our Acting Foundations class during our first semester, John told us to 'be an idiot'. The idea behind it is that if you can be open, be humble, you can learn and grow. When you walk into a rehearsal or audition as the know-it-all you it stops you from learning. I hope to go into the world a fully-fledged MFA Acting graduate idiot.

ANNOTATED PERFORMANCE HISTORY

A Midsummer Night's Dream

By William Shakespeare

University of Iowa Main Stage

Directed by David Lee-Painter

Asst. Director – Hunter Menken

Dramaturg – Morgan Grambo

Scenic Designer - Nic Wilson

Lighting Designer – Ted Brown

Costume Designer – Kathy Parrot

Stage Manager - Ellen Kane

Asst. Stage Manager - Brilliant Qi-Bell

Cast: Randryck Lewis (Theseus/Oberon), Leela Bassuk (Hermia), Maya

Bassuk (Helena), Marda Rude (Puck's Fairy), Catie Councill

(Hippolyta/Titania), Will Callen (Quince/Egeus), Greg Delany Walker

(Demetrius), Miles Gatrell (Lysander), Nicole Gabrione

(Puck/Philostrate), Vinnie Doud (Snug), Ben Sulzberger (Flute), Marquise

Jackson (Snout), Rob Petrie (Starveling), Emmy Palmersheim (Blythe).

Location - E.C. Mabie Theatre

Dates - April 20-28, 2018

Role: Bottom - Principal

The Crucible

By Arthur Miller

University of Iowa Main Stage

Directed by Doug Scholz-Carlson

Music Director - Eric Doucette

Scenic Designer - R. Eric Stone

Lighting Designer - Jess Fialko

Asst. Lighting Designer - Will Borich

Costume Designer - Hayley Ryan

Asst. Costume Designer - Chelsea Regan

Sound Designer - Jacob Sikorski

Stage Manager - Katy McGlaughlin

Asst. Stage Manager - Adam Norrish

Dramaturg - Clare Moore

Cast: Zach Twardowski (John Proctor), Emelia Asiedu (Elizabeth Proctor), Eli Jolley (Reverend John Hale), Olivia Williams (Betty Parris), Alexi Bolden (Tituba), Cora Lassen (Abigail Williams), Mackenzie Elsbecker (Susanna Walcott), Marda Rude (Mrs. Ann Putnam), Yannik Encarnacao (Thomas Putnam), Jivani Rodriguez (Mercy Lewis), Sydney Kuhel (Mary Warren), Madeline Ascherl (Rebecca Nurse), David Priebe (Giles Corey), Marquise Jackson (Francis Nurse), Greg Delany Walker (Ezekial Cheever), Jacob Glass (Willard), Hunter Menken (Hathorne), Elijah Jones (Danforth), Crimson Wood (Sarah Good), Anthony Davis/Shakira Del Toro/Kaylen Luttenegger/Aiden Page/Kyle Schindler/Shelby Tippling/Ethan Walleser (Ensemble).

Location - E.C. Mabie Theatre

Dates - October 6-14, 2017

Role: Reverend Parris - Supporting

Welcome to Thebes

By Moira Buffini

University of Iowa Main Stage

Directed by Paul Kalina

Scenic Designer - Skyler Matthias

Lighting Designer - Hoejeong J. Yoo

Costume Designer - Loyce Arthur

Asst. Costume Designer - Akeem Celestine

Stage Manager - Samantha Paradis

Asst. Stage Manager - Ellen Kane

Fight Director - Lukas Brasherfons

Cast: JaMaya Austin (Megaera), Zach Twardowski (Miletus), Sydney Speltz (Scud), Emelia Asiedu (Eurydice), Eli Jolley (Tydeus), Cristina Goyeneche (Pargeia), Damitri Taylor (Haemon), Miriam Randolph (Antigone), Maya Bassuk (Ismene), Ash Pierce (Tiresias), Daly Tighe (Harmonia), Randryck Lewis (Polykleitos), Elyse Fisher (Aglaea), Taylor Edelle Stuart (Thalia), Tempestt Farrar (Euphrosyne), Madeline Ascherl (Eunomia), Alyssa Boland (Bia), Hannah Adamson (Helia), Cristina Ranslem (Eris), Hunter Menken (Xenophanes), Rob Siegrist (Phaeax), Weiyi Zhang (Talthybia), Marc Saladino (Enyalios), Sterling Isler (Plautus), Rob Petrie (Ichnaea).

Location - Thayer Theatre

Dates - March 2-11, 2017

Role: Theseus - Principal

Ghost Limb

By Marisela Trevino Orta

University of Iowa Gallery Series

Directed by John Cameron

Scenic Designer - Kenton Jones

Lighting Designer - Forrest Tallbull

Costume Designer - Lindsey Kuhn

Sound Designer - Wade Hampton

Stage Manager - Ash Pierce

Cast: Cristina Goyeneche (Consuelo), Damitri Taylor (Javier), Brian Canchola (General), Vince Doud (Soldier 1), Claire Saskowski (Soldier 2), Lindsey Francisco (Madre), Johnathan Goldstein (Soldier 3).

Location - Theatre B

Dates - November 3-6, 2016

Role: Eugenio - Supporting

Lady from the Sea

By Henrik Ibsen; translated by Rolf Fjelde

University of Iowa Main Stage

Directed by Nina Morrison

Dramaturg - Sam Collier

Scenic Designer - Kevin Dudley

Lighting/Video Designer - Lucas P. Ingram

Asst. Lighting/Video Designer - Ted Brown

Costume Designer - Catherine Parrott

Asst. Costume Designer - Hiram Alexander Orozco

Sound Designer - Kassia Lisinski

Props Master - Nic Wilson

Stage Manager - Melissa L.F. Turner

Asst. Stage Manager - Erin Durian

Cast: Emelia Asiedu (Ellida Wangel), Niki-Charisse Franco (Bolette), Miriam Randolph (Hilda), Arnholm (Miles Gatrell), Lyngstrand (Will Callan), Ballested (Greg Delaney Walker), Eli Jolley (The Stranger), Erica

Eiben/Aurora Green/Jason Grobstich/Lily Larsen/Anna
Tonsfeldt/Nicholas Wang (Ensemble).

Location - E.C. Mabie Theatre

Dates - April 15-24, 2016

Role: Dr. Wangel - Principal

Arcadia

By Tom Stoppard

University of Iowa Main Stage

Directed by Ariel Francoeur

Dramaturg - Lukas Brasherfons

Scenic Designer - Nic Wilson

Lighting Designer - Josh Hinden

Costume Designer - Angie Esposito

Vocal/Dialect Coach - Kris Danford

Asst. Vocal/Dialect Coach - Emelia Asiedu

Sound Designer - Kassia Lisinski

Stage Manager - Samantha Paradis

Asst. Stage Manager - Lindsey Warnick

Cast: Caitlin Rose Edwards (Thomasina), Miles Gatrell (Septimus),
Connett Croghan (Jellaby), Greg Walker (Ezra Chater), Hunter Menken
(Richard Noakes), Elyse Fisher (Lady Croom), Matt Smith (Captain
Brice), Catie Councill (Hannah Jarvis), Taylor Edelle Stuart (Chloe
Coverly), Eli Jolley (Valentine Coverly), Ari Craven (Augustus/Gus
Coverly).

Location - E.C. Mabie Theatre

Dates - November 13-21, 2015

Role: Bernard Nightingale - Principal

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