

# *'Pretending' to do Research*

**a transformational actor-researcher's heuristic  
collaboration with character via costume and makeup**

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## Abstract

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This PhD questions what transformational acting *is* and how it might be situated within a practice-as-research context. This thesis also asks how emphasizing costume and makeup, in ways very much similar to a sophisticated version of playing pretend, provides the actor material tools which they may manipulate to alter their means of perception. A combined reading of modern neuroscientific theory and feminist theory asserts that such perceptual alterations afforded by costume and makeup may result in a fundamental shift in the performer's identity, facilitating a lived experience of the character's identity. These theories are placed in dialogue with notable practitioners, such as Stanislavski, Chekhov, Demidov and even Brecht, to recognize an established canon of transformational techniques. Costume and makeup, examined both individually and then together, enhance the perceptual changes necessary in stimulating transformation. The subsequent shift in identity between actor and character places the actor-researcher in active collaboration with a character outside of themselves. This relationship has the potential to lead to new-found insight within a research setting. Using a group of characters of particular interest to me as a case study to test my hypothesis, complex and intricate discoveries and further questions arise from the actor using costume and makeup to *become* an other.

# Table of Contents

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<u>Acknowledgments</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Abstract</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Table of Contents</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>List of Figures</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>List of Video Links</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Preface</u>	<u>11</u>
1. <b>Portrait of a Failed Alligator Biologist</b>	11
<u>Introduction</u>	<u>16</u>
1. <b>Introduction</b>	16
2. <b>A Stanislavskian Context</b>	18
3. <b>'Persona' vs 'Transformation'</b>	20
4. <b>'Pretend Play' and its Place Alongside Transformation-as-Research</b>	22
5. <b>Imagination and Perception as Action</b>	25
6. <b>Cognitive Approaches to Acting</b>	29
6.1 <b>The Actor's Score</b>	30
6.2 <b>An Independent Character</b>	33
7. <b>From Enaction to Performativity</b>	35
7.1 <b>Conceptual Performativity</b>	36
7.2 <b>Corporeal Performativity</b>	38
7.3 <b>The Inscriptive Power of the Gaze</b>	41
7.4 <b>Independent Character as Research Collaborator</b>	44
8. <b>Methodology</b>	45
9. <b>Gap in Knowledge</b>	50
10. <b>Chapter Breakdown</b>	55

<b>Chapter 1- Historicizing Transformational Acting</b>	<b>57</b>
1. Introduction	57
2. Stanislavski's Magic 'If'	60
3. Chekhov's Imaginary Body	65
4. Demidov's <i>Fantasy</i>	68
5. Brecht's Behavioral Score	72
6. Method of Physical Actions	73
6.1 Active Analysis in Action	76
7. Actor's Dramaturgy	79
8. Conclusion	82
<b>Chapter 2- Naked Villainy: Costume and Character</b>	<b>84</b>
1. Introduction	84
2. Costume as Enactive	85
3. <i>Brouček</i> with Barbieri: A Practical Exploration	92
4. A <i>Costumatic</i> Approach	98
5. Studio-Based Practice	103
5.2 Richard III Studio Experiment 2	107
6. Conclusion	110
<b>Chapter 3- Put on a Happy Face: Makeup and the Mirror</b>	<b>113</b>
1. Introduction	113
2. Conceptualizations of the Mirror	115
3. Partial Mirror Self-Recognition	117
4. The Face as Site for Transformation	122
5. <i>The Alchemy of Archetypes</i> with Lily: A Workshop	125
6. Partnered Makeup Experiment	129
6.1 Shaving the Face	130
6.2 Applying the Makeup	133
6.3 Reflecting on the Partnered Makeup Experiment	135

7.	Returning to the Mirror	136
8.	Returning to the Mirror, Again	141
9.	Reflection on the Aware-Applying Experiments	144
<b>Chapter 4- A Pirate's Life: Refining the Costumatic</b>		<b>149</b>
<hr/>		
1.	Introduction	149
2.	Pandemic Adjustments	150
3.	Creating My <i>Fiskedam</i>	151
4.	A Prolonged Period of Practice (October 2020-February 2021)	153
4.1	Angel	153
4.2	Baseball Dad	156
4.3	Bobby-Ray	159
4.4	Reflecting on the Process	165
5.	Changing Direction	168
6.	Captain Hook	169
6.1	Assembling the Pieces	169
6.2	Applying the Mustache	171
6.3	Building the Hook Look	172
6.4	Finding Myself Lost at Sea	174
6.5	Finding Freedom in Aggression	176
6.6	Finding Freedom in Stillness	177
6.7	Finding Freedom in Movement	180
6.8	Conclusion	181
7.	Acting with Character (AWC) Workshop	183
7.1	Workshop Design & Participant Recruitment	183
7.2	The Magic 'If'	186
7.3	The Imaginary Body	187
7.4	Fantasy/Active Analysis	191
7.5	The Costumatic Approach	193

<b>8. Conclusion</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>2. The <i>Costumatic</i> Manifesto</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>3. Manifesto Reflections</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>4. Is the Costumatic Approach a Research Methodology?</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>Appendix A- Initial Performance Experiment</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Appendix B- Ethics Approval Form</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>Appendix C- Participant Information Sheet</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>Appendix D- Informed Consent Form</b>	<b>227</b>
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>229</b>

# List of Figures

---

Figure 1 A young Ben circa 1994, dressed in red and carrying his favorite toy; Captain Hook. ....	11
Figure 2 Clare, Ysabel. "The transformational step". ....	61
Figure 3 Costume, Movement and Performance Workshop 2017, MA Costume Design for Performance at LCF.....	96
Figure 4 Costume, Movement and Performance Workshop 2017, MA Costume Design for Performance at LCF.....	98
Figure 5 Screenshots from Studio Experiment 1 .....	105
Figure 6 The Devil, chimes and skull rattle (left). Death, excerpt from Gloriana, and Rodgers and Armstrong's book (right). ....	128
Figure 7 (Clockwise from top left) The Child, The Devil's reach, and the Devil's gaze. Photos by Nick Cowell Photography.....	128
Figure 8 Screenshot from the Joker in process .....	140
Figure 9 Screenshots from the Joker in process.....	144
Figure 10 Images of the costume and makeup for the angel character .....	154
Figure 11 Images of the costume and makeup for the baseball dad character.....	157
Figure 12 Images of the costume and makeup for the farmer character .....	160
Figure 13 Kryolan mustache front and back post-application .....	171
Figure 14 Screenshot of Captain Hook staring at the camera.....	173
Figure 15 Diagram of the Initial Performance Experiment layout within Studio 1 .....	212



## List of Video Links

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“Angel” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 17 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/E6pi9MRFOwk>.

“AWC (Part 1)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/jUcbVgEk1X4>.

“AWC (Part 2)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/F6E3hVpYKVQ>.

“AWC (Part 3)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/QN4jxndjPFw>.

“AWC (Part 4)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/NYIFrBmBvPM>.

“Bobby-Ray” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 17 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/h7HtThFvIWA>.

“Bobby-Ray (Pajamas)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 17 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/wrbCH4n6N9o>.

“Captain Hook (Part 1)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/8zxYdneiKrk>.

“Captain Hook (Part 2)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/ee2Fgr1uI3U>.

“Captain Hook (Part 3)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/3uBukvBGZNI>.

“Captain Hook (Part 4)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/Lc7I4e-ZrP4>.

“Captain Hook (Part 5)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
[https://youtu.be/ikG\\_ArXnuBA](https://youtu.be/ikG_ArXnuBA).

“Captain Hook (Part 6)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/bmA7491RYdc>.

“Captain Hook (Part 7)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/zUZZUPkUOsc>.

“Captain Hook (Part 8)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/T48rW-zPPdA>.

“Captain Hook (Part 9)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 17 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/oosc2eSckpE>.

“Crocodile” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 17 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/AJknHlv7av8>.

“Giles” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/cdwHFXjxoll>.

“Giles (Holiday)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/QBDhlz1lydo>.

“Initial Performance Experiment” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 17 Oct. 2016,  
<https://youtu.be/BhpPWWDWpeU>.

“Joker (Part 1)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 5 Dec. 2018,  
<https://youtu.be/sDnwlpLBx2s>.

“Joker (Part 2)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/KhcHqPsqLUg>.

“Joker (Part 3)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 15 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/RLLKbT9N9KQ>.

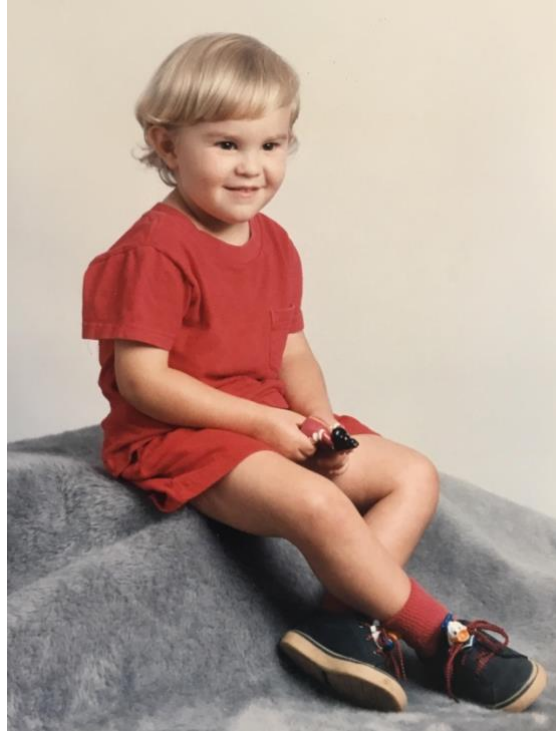
“Richard III (Part 1)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 22 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/5w88hIV2Eno>.

“Richard III (Part 2)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 22 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/apKTDMdA-3s>.

“Richard III (Part 3)” *YouTube*, uploaded by Ben LaMontagne-Schenck, 22 Feb. 2022,  
<https://youtu.be/yK-J-sDkST0>.

# Preface

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*Figure 1* A young Ben circa 1994, dressed in red and carrying his favorite toy; Captain Hook.

## **1. Portrait of a Failed Alligator Biologist**

I would like to begin by providing an autobiographical context for the heuristic research that constitutes this practice-based PhD. Writing this thesis, I often joked that I was writing ‘my life’s work’. Indeed, there are foundational elements that have shaped the trajectory of my life which are also fundamental to this PhD, such as playing dress up, creating characters externally and the figure of the villain. In this Preface, I will offer a brief account of my personal history in the hope to provide you, the reader, with a more intimate understanding of the research due to a greater understanding of the researcher.

I grew up in Redondo Beach, California, living what I would describe as a pretty privileged upbringing. My parents didn’t have a lot of money, but I never knew that until I was older. There was not a considerable amount of trauma that I had to endure. I was a happy, albeit shy and

unnecessarily anxious, child who was obsessed with three things: Captain Hook, alligators and crocodiles (crocodilians for the more zoologically inclined) and playing dress-up. Every day when I would come home from school, I would get straight into a costume. Whatever movie I was watching, I would always dress up as one of the characters; but it was not the hero—I always wanted to be the baddie. When deciding roles among friends, when selecting toys from the toybox, when aligning with characters from cartoons, I always wanted to be the villain. I loved playing dress up as the villain. Despite this love of costume, my parents were surprised when I decided to become an actor. They were probably fooled by my declarations that I wanted to become an “alligator biologist.”

My love of dressing up followed me into my adulthood, but evolved into ‘working with costume’ as I began my professional training in 2008, attending California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), and graduating in 2013 with a BA in Theatre Arts. As a young actor, I was particularly drawn to transformational actors and performances: those who could lose themselves in a role where they would become unrecognizable and would repeat this process from one role to the next.<sup>1</sup> I unknowingly shared Laurence Olivier’s love of disappearing within a role: “It has always been my great joy to surprise an audience. Catch them on the hop. ‘My God, is that him?’” (*On Acting* 30) Yet at CSUF, I was surrounded by an environment that put a great deal of emphasis on an ‘inside-out’ acting technique, using the creation of a character’s inner life as a starting point. I first encountered Boleslavsky’s *First Six Lessons* here and began to associate Stanislavski with a disembodied approach to acting, placing the psychologization of character over the physicalization. What was valued was a drastic departure from the transformative dress-up play that had drawn me to acting in the first place. Out of rebellion, I pursued *my* ideas about working from the ‘outside-in’ further. I discovered Michael Chekhov’s *To the Actor* and worked on creating characters from physical and external elements. I would cut and dye my hair regularly, put on or lose weight and always open a dialogue with the costume designer, which was far from the norm where I was.

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<sup>1</sup> *Transformational acting* will be discussed in detail within the Introduction, see pp. 20–21.

In 2013, I started an MFA on East 15 Acting School's Acting (International) course, which I later completed with a distinction in 2015. East 15 was founded in 1961, and its pedagogy grew out of the teachings of Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop. It was from her directorial practice that the school developed its trademark Stanislavskian style, particularly the use of long-form improvisation. This approach harkened back to my sense of pretend play as it was immersive and imaginative. An example of such improvisation could be taking my scene partner on a picnic 20 years prior to when the scene takes place. The work could later be integrated with more traditional scene study. Other improvisations were completely self-reliant, like requiring me to spend 45 minutes attempting to accomplish a task without waking my 'sleeping' scene partner. Through this work, I was first introduced to active analysis, which can briefly be described as the practice of playing unseen portions of character's lives and thus developing an experiential understanding of backstory. While my time at CSUF had been characterized by stagnant tablework, East 15 added a new dimension to my understanding of how one might begin to work on a play. However, the focus remained on the psychology of these experiences rather than a character's physicality. Furthermore, there also was a considerable disconnect between these improvisations, which often served as isolated acting exercises, and how they might be incorporated into a fully realized production. When entering the second year of training and working with outside directors, there wasn't any example of how this training might function within a professional setting.

In 2014, I spent a month in Moscow studying at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts (GITIS), Russia's oldest actor training institute, where both Stanislavski and Meyerhold served as faculty. It was this very same institution that became the first in Russia to incorporate theatrical biomechanics into their curriculum, and it was my time at GITIS and in Moscow that fostered a deeper and more accurate appreciation and understanding of Stanislavski and Meyerhold, and how their approaches might work in tandem. Monday through Friday, we would wake up at nine o'clock in the morning for a rigorous two-hour session of biomechanics, followed by a four-hour acting class. Even though the two were separated, this method of working meant that our body, mind, and imagination were

warm and prepared for whatever would be thrown our way. It was during this time that I discovered a functional model of active analysis, one that I could visualize feeding into a full production beyond the studio or classroom. We worked on Anton Chekhov's *Platonov*, his first full-length play about a man hopelessly lost amidst the love of four separate women in a society for which he holds nothing but contempt. We spent one day sat in a circle, listening to several directors discuss their ideas of the play. The next day we were on our feet, never to return to disembodied discussions again. Instead, we would improvise small scenes between the scenes, pieces of the play which were referred to but never seen onstage. While the practice was similar to what I had been learning at East 15, the context and use of the tools felt different. The process never felt dull or tedious and led to rich, complex and fascinating characters. Was it this intense focus on character that made such a difference?

At the end of my time in Moscow, I felt liberated and empowered as a creator. I felt that I had a rich, lived experience of the character's life, reaching far beyond the construct of the play. Despite experiencing active analysis at East 15, my time at GITIS allowed me to realize how the training could function holistically. The focus of active analysis on character rather than on the actor was essential for me in realizing the purpose of the improvisations. They existed as spaces for me to *play*—to allow my character to metaphorically, and maybe literally, spread their wings. In this context, what was being asked of me was, indeed, playing dress-up and the deeper I could buy into the game, the richer the material then contributed to the richness of the play as a whole. The character that I then presented to an audience at the end of our rehearsal period was no longer a Platonov imprisoned by the words of Anton Chekhov, but rather a living breathing Platonov, who superseded the play, full of other memories and experiences. I felt as if he was informing me, teaching me, leading me down a path that I could learn from without having to suffer any of the real-world consequences.

It is from this experience that I return to my childhood self, pretend-playing the villain. I wondered if I could find this connection again with another character. Could I delineate a space for

play with the express purpose of fostering this relationship with character? And on a bigger scale, I decided to ask if these seemingly ephemeral characters are being underutilized? What can they tell us? And can acting be a way of listening in?

# Introduction

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## 1. Introduction

According to Rick Kemp, transformational acting can be defined as when the actor “displays a variety of behavioral communicators according to the demands of the character” (Kemp 131). I will expand on this definition later, but what I would like to note first and foremost is the importance this type of acting places on character. According to this definition, without character there could be no transformational acting. Contrary to the view that character does not exist; here, it is a necessity. Secondly, I would like to draw attention to the phrase ‘the demands of the character’. It illustrates an image of a character writing out a ransom letter. But who are they holding hostage? This phrase conveys the idea that the character has desires of their own. While this may not be Kemp’s original intention it is my interpretation of his words that paves the way for the research that will be shared throughout this writing.

What is transformational acting? This is the driving question of the research. I carefully navigate and weave together multiple disciplines and make seemingly tangential digressions in search of answers to this very question. Briefly, transformational acting refers to an actor’s practice of transforming into, embodying and meeting characters that are separate from the actor and have independent existence. Stanislavskian dual consciousness, where the actor is present and conscious but also someone else, resonates with theatre anthropologist Richard Schechner’s formulation of “no longer ha[ving] a ‘me’ but a ‘not not me’” (Schechner 112). Schechner introduces his ideas via Laurence Olivier and the character of Hamlet: “Olivier is not Hamlet, but he is also not not Hamlet. The reverse is also true: in this production of the play, Hamlet is not Olivier, but he is also not not Olivier” (Schechner 110). This phenomenon marks transformational acting and invites me to ask if the character designated as the ‘not not me’ can become a research collaborator. I ask if the transformational actor-researcher can engage with the characters that emerge out of transformational acting processes as research partners and co-investigate issues of significance, such



as the lure of villainy, and subsequently, if they can disseminate that research in and as performance.

Looking back at my childhood pretend play, I ask if costume and makeup can be reintegrated into the actor's practice at the service of the above and call the emerging method *costumatic*. This word refers to the emphasis on the somatic experience of costume and makeup and helps me avoid problematic dichotomous descriptions such as *outside-in* or *inside-out*. Identifying a PhD as pretend play may seem an oversimplification. Yet there is evidence that children learn by engaging in these games, researching the world around them through the various characters they choose to embody. Their process is not unlike an enactive understanding of acting where the actor makes specific adjustments to their means of perception and their 'behavioral communicators.' Theories of gender performativity and constructivism reinforce the idea that identity can be altered and a new one formed. Can the actor garner this divided consciousness—their character—to experience things that are altogether different than what might normally be accessible to them?

There are precedents for actor-researchers using characters as collaborators, such as Steven Berkoff, Tim Crouch, and Roberta Carreri—to be discussed later in this Introduction. While these practitioners highlight the possibility for character to extend beyond the world of a play, this is not the express purpose of their practices and their methods of transformation are not necessarily focused on costume and makeup. A *costumatic* transformational approach to acting has yet to be explored, particularly in an academic context.

This PhD asks: what *is* 'costumatic' transformational acting? What is the relationship between the conventional tools of the transformational actor and costume and makeup? Can such a practice extend an actor's consciousness into a character? Would the character then be capable of serving as a research collaborator to investigate socio-cultural phenomena? And finally, can the actor simultaneously engage in transformation and do research?

In the following pages I will theorize about the intricacies of transformational acting and how we distinguish between the actor and the character, looking at the history of acting techniques

that work towards transformation. Costume and makeup are explored in relation to these, first separately and then together. Throughout, I recount, analyse and critically reflect on short-term and long-term practical experiments, both as performer and as a facilitator-observer of a workshop all the while keeping my collaborator the villain close as he comes in many shapes; Richard III, the Joker and Captain Hook.

## 2. A Stanislavskian Context

At the beginning of *Building a Character* (1968), Stanislavski uses the fictional Tortsov and Kostya to discuss the process of creating a character.<sup>2</sup> Kostya expresses his concern that “if you do not use your body, your voice, a manner of speaking, walking, moving, if you do not find a form of characterization which corresponds to the image, you probably cannot convey to others its inner, living spirit” (*Building a Character* 1). Tortsov wholeheartedly agrees with Kostya, assuring him that the “physical materialization of character” is a very important step in the actor’s process. But Kostya’s question is pressing, as the first year of training outlined in *An Actor Prepares* (1937) lacks any attention to creating a physical character.

Sometimes the physicality of the character emerges naturally, Tortsov continues to explain, but at other times an actor is required to begin with an “external distortion”, not only to the body but also to the pattern of speech (*Building a Character* 3). After illustrating how one may achieve these external “tricks” through a number of physical and vocal changes, Tortsov settles on the hypothetical role of an Englishman to demonstrate his point to his class.

Tortsov, pulling a handkerchief out of his pocket and rubbing his upper teeth and the inside of his upper lip until they were quite dry. Then under cover of his handkerchief he tucked his upper lip which remained stuck to his dry gums, so that when he took his hand from his face we were amazed at the shortness of his upper lip and sharpness of his teeth. The external artifice hid from us his ordinary, familiar personality; in front of us there stood the Englishman he had just mentioned. We were under the impression that everything about Tortsov was changed; his pronunciation, his voice were different, as well as his carriage, his walk, his hands and legs. Nor was that all. His whole psychology seemed transformed. And yet Tortsov had made no inner adjustment. In another second he had abandoned the trick with his upper lip

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<sup>2</sup> When referencing Stanislavski, the Benedetti translation was consulted first for meaning. However the Hapgood translation is chosen in instances where I preferred the wording.

and continued to speak in his own person, until he again put the handkerchief in his mouth, dried his lips and gums and, when he dropped his hand with the handkerchief, was at once changed again into his Englishman. (*Building a Character* 3–4)

A more complex analysis might indicate that what Tortsov presents is a stereotype of an Englishman, and possibly a xenophobic and prejudiced one at that. Yet in simpler terms, Tortsov merely sticks his upper lip to his gums. However, this basic alteration has quite significant effects on his audience. Not only does Kostya note changes to all aspects of his teacher's physicality, but he notes that his entire psychology "seemed *transformed*" (emphasis added). Could it be the case that something initially described as a mere "external distortion" possesses an impressive transformative power? Does Tortsov's handkerchief trick, as rudimentary as it is, illustrate how superficial changes to the body can affect the perception of our identity? An audience of students, who are unique in that they are not separated by distance or any degree of anonymity are struck by the illusion of a completely different being in front of them. Does the trick achieve such a transformation or is it just passionate Kostya wanting to believe that there is a fundamental change to Tortsov's person?

Stanislavski provides an interpretation of what happens to Tortsov:

After digging down into his own thoughts and taking account of what went on inside himself Tortsov remarked that even in his own psychology in spite of himself there had been an imperceptible impulse which he found difficult immediately to analyse. It was, however, an undoubted fact that his inner faculties responded to the external image he had created, and adjusted to it, since the words he pronounced were not his words, although the thoughts he expressed were his very own. (*Building a Character* 4)

Stanislavski uses the word 'psychology' to describe the shift that occurs in Tortsov's inner life. It is this very change that Tortsov is reluctant to admit that his external tricks would have any effect on. "Are you aware that inwardly I remain the same and speak in my own person regardless of whether my eye is squinted or open, whether my eyebrow is raised or lowered? Why should I change inwardly because of a slight squint in my eye? I am the same whether my eye is open or shut, whether my eyebrow is raised or lowered" (*Building a Character* 2–3). He avidly makes the point that the external changes that he demonstrates will have no real effect on his person. However after making these changes, Tortsov suddenly finds himself confronted with the beginnings of a 'dual

consciousness' (Mirodan 180).<sup>3</sup> Also referred to as 'divided consciousness' (M. Chekhov 155), this sense of two identities co-habiting resonates with Tortsov's description as well as theatre anthropologist Richard Schechner's theorizations. Tortsov feels that he is himself, and yet not himself at the same time, speaking words that feel as if they are not his own while thinking thoughts that felt as if they are. Schechner refers to this as the actor's experience of "no longer hav[ing] a 'me' but a 'not not me'" (Schechner 112). Stanislavski thus presents the reader with a confrontation between two differing schools of acting: persona acting and transformational acting (Kemp 130). Tortsov's initial objection to the idea of being inwardly transformed by external stimulus is emblematic of the tension present between these two approaches. And yet Tortsov admits a degree of transformation, allowing Stanislavski to make a nuanced intervention that recognizes the dialectical nature of the external and the internal.

### **3. 'Persona' vs 'Transformation'**

Theatre scholar Rick Kemp describes "persona acting" as when an "actor uses behavioral communicators that stay within a range that identifies his or her personality, which remains more or less constant from one role to the next" (Kemp 131). This definition brings to mind actors whose performances always maintain a relative degree of sameness. This does not carry with it any judgment on the actor's talent or efficacy within any given role, but is simply a reflection of a certain school of acting exemplified by Tortsov's mindset at the beginning of *Building a Character*. Tortsov assumes that regardless of any externality that he might adopt, his personality will remain the same. He views the changes that he makes as disembodied tricks designed to fool the audience. A similar viewpoint is asserted by critically acclaimed playwright, screenwriter and director, David Mamet, who writes in his text to actors, "There *is* no character. There are only lines on a page" (Mamet 9). Mamet dismisses character as a mere illusion, invented by the audience as the actor, having been

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<sup>3</sup> This concept will be recontextualized alongside pretend play, see p. 23.

stripped of their creative input, merely has to speak the words provided by the author. However, Stanislavski shows us a Tortsov who is not affected in the way he expected. Instead, “in spite of himself”, Tortsov’s physical alterations adjust what Tortsov is experiencing inside – what Kemp would describe as an adjustment to his usual behavioral communicators – those which would be recognizable to him and his students – to meet the demands of the character (Kemp 131). *This is transformational acting.*

Persona acting negates character, as implied by Mamet, requiring nothing more of the actor than their presence. The actor is a vessel for the words of an author and the character is an illusion in the minds of the spectators. But does this approach dismantle the concept of character entirely? Certainly not in the eyes of theatre critic and distinguished scholar, Elinor Fuchs, who attempts a universal definition of character within her book, *The Death of Character* (1996): “‘Character’ is a word that stands in for the entire human chain of representation and reception that theater links together” (E. Fuchs 8). When viewing character as simply a term used to describe the link between the audience and the actor, one could replace it with any other word, but its existence remains nonetheless. Fuchs situates her definition of character within the steady decline of character in modern and postmodern theater. Beginning with a sketch of what she refers to as a “theoretical ‘career’ of Character” (E. Fuchs 31), Fuchs traces the treatment of character in dramatic theory via Aristotle, Hegel and Nietzsche. As modernity begins to introduce questions of the self and identity, modern theatre, in turn, reflects the cultural shift through the questioning of character. It is this very questioning that highlights the centrality of character to theatre: “The very act of putting character into question still marks its place as central. This strikes me as a core dilemma of modernist drama, which repeatedly introduces *as a humanistic problem* its own very questioning of the human image on the stage” (E. Fuchs 35). Even if character is a function of the theatre between the actor and the audience, it is still central. This centrality is echoed by the practice of the transformational actor, whose focus is on developing and exacerbating the phenomenon of the dual consciousness to aid in the creation of a character separate from themselves.

#### 4. 'Pretend Play' and its Place Alongside Transformation-as-Research

Kemp's transformational acting embraces the centrality of character and connects it to an early impulse and a developmental stage. The transformational actor represents a return to the playing pretend that features in childhood—the child and the actor share an imaginative extension of consciousness into that of someone else. 'Pretend play' is a concept that is prevalent in developmental psychology: early childhood educator Greta G. Fein defines pretend play as a type of play where "one thing is playfully treated 'as if' it were something else" (Fein 282).<sup>4</sup> Catherine Garvey, who has been significantly contributing to the field since her book *Play* (1977), offers a definition to contextualize pretend play in more familiar terms: "Pretend play is the voluntary transformation of the here and now, the you and me, this or that, along with any potential action that these components of a situation might have" (Garvey 82). According to these definitions, transformational acting and pretend play are synonymous and there is little difference between the voluntary transformation of a child pretending to be a pirate and Johnny Depp volunteering to transform himself into Captain Jack Sparrow. Indeed acting legends such as Laurence Olivier link this common instinct for pretend play to performance and identify therein an intrinsic ability to act: "Surely, we have always acted; it is inherent in all of us. Some of us are better at it than others, but we all do it" (*On Acting* 21).

Although pioneering 20<sup>th</sup> Century developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky have observed the significance of pretend play for childhood development, within the field of childhood development, contemporary developmental psychologists continue to ask *why* children immerse themselves in this behavior. In an article titled "Why do the children (pretend) play?" (2017), Angeline Lillard argues that the purpose of human pretend play still is unknown (826). Lillard goes on to explain what we *do* know, firstly, is that pretend play is something that is culturally

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<sup>4</sup> Astute readers might recognize Stanislavski's 'magic if' lurking within Fein's definition, but that link will be reserved for the following chapter.

universal, occurring even in settings where it is discouraged (“Why do the children (pretend) play” 826). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, pretend play engages the imagination in order to “think about a representation in two different ways at the same time” (Carlson and White 168). Pretend play is not at the expense of reality as we know it, but rather able to sustain both registers at once. This type of *dual representation* is a crucial requirement for pretend play and can be exemplified by a child pretending to dry a doll that they know is actually already dry (Semeijn 113), or a child using a banana as a telephone knowing that if they were to truly need to make a call, the banana would be inappropriate (Lillard et al. 2).

Returning to Schechner’s formulation, for the child playing with the banana as if it is a phone, the object is ‘not a banana’ while simultaneously ‘not *not* a banana’, and indeed, ‘not a phone’ and ‘not not a phone’. For Stanislavski and the fictional Tortsov, Tortsov’s characterization of an Englishman provides yet another example of *dual representation*. Tortsov is aware that he himself is not English and is in fact Russian, and what he is presenting to his class is a representation of an Englishman. Despite this awareness, another part of Tortsov is affected by the representation of the Englishman, the extent being described to the reader as having affected “even his own psychology” (*Building a Character* 4). I interpreted this same passage earlier, using the idea of the ‘dual consciousness’ to explain Tortsov’s feelings of being himself, and yet not himself at the same time. The similarities observed between dual consciousness and dual representation reinforce the interchangeability between pretend play and representational acting.

In their article on the importance of cognitive science taking note of the actor’s practice, Thalia R. Goldstein and Paul Bloom insist that pretend play resembles a stylized form of acting yet differs fundamentally from a more “contemporary realistic acting” (Goldstein and Bloom 141). Adding that “the ability of a person to seemingly transform wholly into another person, physically and emotionally, is a mesmerizing and dazzling skill” (Goldstein and Bloom 142), they go on to suggest that the professional transformational actor’s task is too difficult or complex to remit such a comparison. Olivier, who asserts that we all can act might argue that Goldstein and Bloom place too

much reverence upon the practice of an actor. Both the child and the actor interact with multiple representations all at the same time. The major difference is that the transformational actor, at least a trained one, will be equipped with a variety of tools in order to specifically manipulate a predetermined representation. Without the tools and techniques systematized into contemporary approaches to actor training (which will be detailed in Chapter 1) pretend play and transformational acting are nearly one in the same, distinguishable mainly due to their different contexts. However, this difference is indeed significant and I will discuss further down the line that the environment in which something exists is an incredibly formative force, particularly with respect to acting.

A more speculative aspect of pretend play is its use. Scholars have linked pretend play with various elements of children's cognitive development, including emotional development (Jent et al.), language development (Orr and Geva), and the development of cognitive flexibility and the creative experience (Russ). According to the *Oxford Handbook of the Development of Imagination*, the specific act of pretending to be another person improves children's cognitive flexibility due to the simulation of others' "beliefs, desires, and emotional responses to situations" (Carlson and White 168). But do children really *learn* from pretend play? Are they able to translate what occurs within the pretend play context and apply their discoveries within the real world? The short answer is 'yes'. Lillard et al. address this question head on, presenting rigorous research which ultimately supports the claim that children can draw knowledge applicable to the real world from playing pretend, and that playing pretend may even be a useful tool for teaching children new information (Lillard et al. 17). The necessary step in reaching this conclusion is developed from Lillard's earlier research, which demonstrates that children view pretend play as action rather than a process of mental representation ("Young Children's Conceptualization" 381; "Pretend Play as Twin Earth" 523). The innate understanding of principles of embodiment presented by children complements models of experiential learning.

One such model can be found in the performance pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq, which Kemp frames in relation to a variety of neuroscientific principles. Lecoq's idea of mime aligns both with the



child-like methods of discovery associated with playing pretend and the type of epistemology put forth by proponents of embodied cognition.

Children gain their understanding of the world around them by miming it: they mimic what they see and what they hear. They replay with their whole body those aspects of life in which they will be called on to participate. In this way they learn about life and, little by little, take possession of it. (Lecoq 1)

Lecoq agrees with the idea that children can take information learned from pretend play and translate it into the real world. Using the terminology of ‘miming’ and ‘mimic[ry]’ rather than pretend play, Lecoq refers to the same activity and embraces the concept of embodied learning, indicating that the representation is created with the ‘whole body’. Such a model of holistic experiential learning is integral to this thesis. Optimizing the dual consciousness to experience separately and yet simultaneously, where the actor-researcher may be in collaboration with character, opens and extends possibilities for research. The child at play is immersed in a different reality while still aware of the contexts in which bananas are bananas or phones. Tortsov experiences a shift in ‘his psychology’ *despite* himself. Call it transformational acting or professional pretending, there is a case to be made for using the embodied imagination in this way as a robust component of research.

## 5. Imagination and Perception as Action

In Dick McCaw’s book, *Rethinking the Actor’s Body* (2020), he makes reference to the highly influential Robinson Report. In the late 1990s, Sir Ken Robinson led a national commission on creativity and education for the UK Government. The subsequent report offers real world examples of how integral ‘serious play’ is to any sort of learning.

Imaginative activity is a form of mental play – serious play directed towards some creative purpose. It is a mode of thought which is essentially *generative*; in which we attempt to expand the possibilities of a given situation: to look at it afresh or from a new perspective, envisaging alternatives to the routine or expected in any given task. (Robinson 31)

Robinson’s words could be used as a springboard into the importance of play. Although play is an important part of this research, it will be addressed later alongside practitioners and the

transformational actor's practice. Instead, I will use Robinson as a doorway into a "dialogue with neuroscience" to establish a supporting framework for my research (McCaw). I borrow the subtitle of McCaw's book as an acknowledgment of his contribution to the connecting of neuroscience to the actor's practice. I also appreciate the reasoning McCaw offers for choosing the term 'neuroscientific' as opposed to 'cognitive science'. He cites the criticism argued by neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux: "First of all, by its very definition, cognitive science is a science of only a part of the mind – the cognitive part – and not a science of the whole mind" (LeDoux 24). McCaw's writing highlights the neurophysiological processes at work within the actor's body in an attempt to reach wider fields of interest and application. I use McCaw's work, along with the work of other neuroscientists, to explain the relationship between imagination and perception while maintaining the context of the transformational actor's process.

Physical representation is a notable element of both pretend play and transformational acting. The primacy of any form of representation to our learning and being in the world is discussed by cognitive philosopher Mark Johnson and cognitive linguist George Lakoff through their analysis of an interchangeable term: metaphor. In *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), Lakoff and Johnson review a number of topics of philosophical inquiry from the perspective of cognitive science, including the physicalization of metaphor. They argue that a metaphor, or a "conceptual inference," is as much a neural structure as it is a sensorimotor structure, meaning that it is simultaneously a "sensorimotor inference" (Lakoff and Johnson 20). In simpler terms, the argument is that all conceptual forms have a physical counterpart; anything that we are conceptualizing is simultaneously physicalized. As McCaw summarizes, "our sense-making should be understood as being both conceptual and sensory" (McCaw 64). Lakoff and Johnson then apply this principle to mimesis: "Imitating makes use of an ability to project, to conceptualize oneself as inhabiting the body of another. Empathy is the extension of this ability to the realm of emotions—not just to move as someone moves, but to feel as someone else feels" (Lakoff and Johnson 281). Their approach echoes the writings of both Lecoq and the developmental psychologists cited earlier, conjuring familiar images of children learning

about themselves and others through pretend play. Lakoff and Johnson provide cognitive evidence that imitation serves to facilitate empathy. This evidencing supports the assertion that pretend play develops children's cognitive flexibility by allowing them to adopt other points of view.

Inherent to metaphor, mimicry, playing pretend, and the actor's practice is the involvement of the imagination. In a more recent collaboration George Lakoff and neurophysiologist Vittorio Gallese propose that the imagination "is *embodied*, that is, structured by our constant encounter and interaction with the world via our bodies and brains" (Gallese and Lakoff 2). This work continues what Lakoff and Johnson started and evidences that imagination and action share the same neural pathways. The cognitive value of pretend play is recognized as it uses the imagination in an active, embodied way. Developmental psychologist Merel Semeijn argues that narrative, whether fiction or nonfiction, is processed in the same way (Semeijn 129), suggesting that stories and, indeed new knowledge of any form, are also registered through the body and the imagination. Echoes of this can be found in Ken Robinson's claim that serious imaginative activity is generative. McCaw adds to this by citing a powerful passage written by Niamh Dowling in which imagination is defined as the "mental construction of a possibility": "Imagination is linked to discovery, invention and originality because it is a thought of the possibility rather than of the actual reality of what might or could be" (Dowling 127). I would add that in the context of pretend play or performance, imagination is not only the thought but also the *physicalization* of a possibility, just as Tortsov's imagined concept and physicalized possibility of what it may be like to be from England.

By repositioning imagination as a primary and physicalized component of meaning-making and experiential learning, theories of embodiment and enaction provide a theoretical framework in support of the interrelatedness of action and perception. First introduced by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch in *The Embodied Mind* (1991), the theory of enaction can be understood as an experiential framework which recognizes that the body is constantly processing and producing knowledge. This idea resonates with the process of transformation I have been discussing, particularly through perception.

The point of departure for the enactive approach is the study of how the perceiver can guide his actions in his local situation. Since these local situations constantly change as a result of the perceiver's activity, the reference point for understanding perception is no longer a pregiven, perceiver-independent world but rather the sensorimotor structure of the perceiver (the way in which the nervous system links sensory and motor surfaces). (Varela et al. 173)

Rather than existing as a fixed entity, perception is guided by the perceiver's actions within their environment. The environment affects the perceiver's actions and their actions affect their environment. And both the environment and the perceiver's actions are affecting and being affected by the act of perception itself. This circuitous process of simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the world within which one exists is the basis for enactive cognition.

The focus on perceptual change and relocating the act of perception inspired the work of cognitive philosopher Alva Noë and his notion of *enactive perception*. Noë defines this in *Action in Perception* (2004), as he writes: "What we perceive is determined by what we do," and adds, "we enact our perceptual experience; we act it out" (*Action in Perception* 1). This active model of perception also provokes active modalities of thought and feeling: "the world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction" (*Out of Our Heads* 1). Such a reexamination of perception leads toward a revelation concerning the active nature of the gaze. Noë writes of vision that it has a "touch-like character" (*Action in Perception* 96). What this means is that vision, similarly to imagination, is an extension of our sensorimotor or embodied understanding and is intrinsically active – we do not passively observe the sights around us but actively choose where we place our eyes. Furthermore, the figures within our visual worlds, our visions, are not merely disembodied representations, but exist as a direct result of our sensorimotor knowledge. Noë goes on to clarify:

Through attention, probing, and movements of the eyes, visual experience acquires content in much the same way that touch does. Vision, and touch, gain content through our skillful movements. We bring content to experience, by enaction. We enact content. (*Out of Our Heads* 100)

This "touch-like", enactive process of vision will therefore, like touch, yield material results upon the environment within which it is the perceiver. Following this logic, the act of seeing, looking, visually

perceiving, is as active as walking or running. In congruence with the work of Gallese and Lakoff, (“visual and motor-imagery *are embodied*” (Gallese and Lakoff 463)), we know that our gaze on others, and the gaze of others on us, will therefore also have an impact on our perceptual experience, whether the gaze may be imagined or not. In that case, my question as to whether Tortsov’s transformation was just passionate Kostya wanting to believe that there was such a fundamental change is moot. It doesn’t matter whether Tortsov’s transformation was imagined or not. According to the neuroscientific principles outlined, the effects would still have been recognized by the performer, either consciously or subconsciously, and reflected in an altered sense of perception.

Imagination, vision and perception itself are all interrelated processes drawn together by their active nature. Each of these actions effects the perceiver’s environment and subsequently the perceiver themselves. This enactive relationship reinforces the claim that the transformational actor-researcher’s practice is a capable research methodology by demonstrating that such a use of imagination is a legitimate form of meaning-making and discovery. By turning to additional notable practitioner-researchers such as Rick Kemp, Rhonda Blair, and John Lutterbie—all of whom McCaw writes as having been foundational in the conception and writing of his own book (McCaw 31)—the process of integrating and contextualizing the actor’s practice alongside neuroscientific concepts of cognition.

## **6. Cognitive Approaches to Acting**

In a co-authored introduction to the ‘*Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism’s* Special Section on Cognitive Studies, Theatre and Performance’, John Lutterbie and Rhonda Blair write that, “Because the cognitive sciences deal with fundamental aspects of human existence and experience, we believe they can be a useful, even necessary part of the foundation for work in theatre and performance studies” (Lutterbie and Blair 64). Could a component of the necessity that these two may be referring to could perhaps lie in the linguistic specificity offered by scientific methods?

McCaw's writing indicates that he aligns with this theory (McCaw 28-29). For Lutterbie as well, the power and precision of language are key. In *Toward a General Theory of Acting* (2011), Lutterbie proposes a 'general theory of acting' based on Dynamics Systems Theory (DST), a theory of development resulting from the interactions of various systems and processes, due to its "explanatory power commensurate with the complexity and creativity of the acting process" (Lutterbie 9). Throughout, Lutterbie explains that the 'systems' are working in conjunction with each other to form a whole. Therefore the 'dynamic system' is one that is constantly shifting and changing, in constant response to disturbances that could "further destabilize the whole" (Lutterbie 25). Lutterbie's application of DST highlights new terminological possibilities afforded to the theatre-researcher who embraces neuroscience. Albeit complex, this model resonates with enaction and its circuitous and everchanging definition of perception and is relevant to the actor's transformational practice. Lutterbie elaborates on the actor's work within rehearsal to develop the *actor's score*, which as a system in itself fits within the dynamic system of the performance as a whole. Lutterbie's definition of the actor's score helps to quantify what the actor's practice actually *is*.

## 6.1 The Actor's Score

Regardless of the dramaturgy or type of theatre that the actor might be engaged in, John Lutterbie defines the actor's score as,

...a series of intentional acts that interweaves creative associations discovered through analysis and improvisation with the dynamics of technique. These acts are performed through movement, language and gesture. They combine memories – those retrieved from the past as well as those derived from working on the current production – with data from all external perceptions and internal proprioceptions...When all works, the result is a thoughtful, precise, intelligent, and effective series of actions that sustains the performer throughout the performance. (Lutterbie 194)

Throughout the rehearsal process, in combination with the text, the director's vision, the work of the other performers, as well as the technical elements of light, sound, costume, etc., an actor creates an integrated score that they can begin to repeat. The tools that the actor has at their disposal include personal memories (past and present), "movement, language and gesture", as well

as the stimuli they receive externally and internally at the time. The external stimuli are consciously perceived by the actor's active senses; the actor stands on stage and sees the set, hears the soundscape created around them, feels the heat of the lights and the texture of the stage floor. While these externalities are being processed, the internal stimulation is simultaneously sensed via proprioceptors, the sensory receptors within the body; the change of breath within the body, the shifting heartrate, tension or relaxation of specific muscles, and the location of the body within the space. In combining the actor's tools with the externalities unique to the production, the actor's score is created. This circuitous practice in which actors engage in the creation of a score is an embodied process thusly resulting in the generation of embodied knowledge. In relation to pretend play, perhaps the actor's development of a score is more intricate than the child's as the tools and techniques are more complex than the banana-phone; nevertheless, the embodied cognitive processes of learning about the world while making it are shared. Just as the actor learns a series of interconnected actions which create and build on a real and imaginary world, the child too learns about taking turns in conversation while mimicking adults talking and pausing on the phone.

Ysabel Clare's proposed Spatial Adpositional Model of Experience (SAME) provides a visual mapping of the actor's score. Clare, who uses the model in relation to the practices of Stanislavski and Sanford Meisner (Meisner for comparative purposes), writes that this model is "predicated on our subjective experience of ourselves as human bodies physically manifest in space and time" ('Stanislavsky's system as an enactive guide' 47) and it details the embodied nature of the actor's score using an illustrative three-dimensional map.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, prolific theatre practitioner and scholar Phillip Zarrilli reinforces Lutterbie's argument, writing "whenever we construct an acting score during rehearsals...the score constitutes a form of embodied, sensorimotor knowledge for the actor" (Zarrilli 646). As an actor creates a score, they draw on the narrative, the text, and the direction – all of which have an element of the conceptual and contribute towards the conscious form of

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<sup>5</sup> Because Clare's focus is primarily the score invoked by a Stanislavski-based acting technique, I will refrain from exploring it further until the later section dedicated specifically to Stanislavski.

representation. However, in the actor's embodiment, it is much more complex and lived: the conceptual is embodied (like riding a bicycle) and the result is embodied knowledge.

A key claim of this research is that this knowledge, and indeed the score, can be attached to these beings called characters, and that it is possible to understand the actor's embodied knowledge as inherently linked to the experience of an independent character. The score becomes the experiential process that provides a direct relation, a seam between the different systems. Again using Tortsov's Englishman as an example, an actor portraying this character, scoring this character, is simultaneously doing and presenting a type of embodied research on this particular Englishman. With every rehearsal, actions and reactions are tested, informing the actor's perceptions and proprioceptions. The next rehearsal yields new information, while simultaneously testing what was gathered from the previous rehearsal. This process continues from rehearsal to rehearsal, and later, from performance to performance. However, the construction of the acting score is not the sole objective result of the actor's knowledge production. The score's actualization itself is equally, if not more significant:

We bring the sensorimotor knowledge accumulated in training and rehearsal to bear on the actual experience of enacting the score. In the moment of enactment, we are utilizing our perceptual and sensory experience and cumulative embodied knowledge as skilled exploration in the moment of the specific theatrical "world" or environment created during the rehearsal process. (Zarrilli 647)

Essentially, the actor-researcher navigates and synthesizes an incredibly complex maze of perceptual information. The actor then is the sole individual capable of combining the experiential knowledge developed in rehearsal along with those experiences developed from their training, and indeed, from the rest of their lives. This process of building and enacting a score results in a continuous form of research being undertaken by our bodily perception, or proprioception.

The engagement of proprioceptors returns our discussion to the specificities of a transformational process. Rick Kemp writes, "Given that proprioception is linked to conceptual thought and emotional attitudes, it follows that *using postures and gestures that are different from those we employ in everyday life is likely to create and alter the sense of self*" (Kemp 137, italics in



original). The physicalization of a character fosters an embodied (or sensorimotor) knowledge while a conceptual understanding is simultaneously developed. As Kemp highlights, the alterations to the physical form have such a profound impact on the psychology of the actor that it is likely to create a completely separate sense of self. These claims will be further investigated through feminist philosophy and the concept of gender performativity. But before shifting registers, I want to finish the course of thought on the idea of an independent character and how it relates to the transformational actor.

## 6.2 An Independent Character

Influenced by Kemp, Vladomir Mirodan's *The Actor and the Character* (2019) provides a detailed treatise on the inner workings of the transformational actor, emphasizing the importance of the actor stepping outside of themselves: "Posture, gait, gestural range, vocal qualities (pitch, timbre, tone, resonance), accent/dialect, breathing rhythms, etc., are translated into a psychophysical presence which is perceptively different from that of the daily-life [persona] actor" (Mirodan 19). In addition to these tools that Mirodan lists, the actor is also engaging a variety of cognitive paradigms: elements listed by Mirodan activate the imagination, which stimulates similar neural pathways as if the actions were our own. As the actor finds themselves in the dynamic system of creating a score, they are also shaping and being shaped by their environment, which is continuously responding to the changes made to their posture, gait, gestural range, etc. The compounding effect becomes an altered sense of self.

Mirodan continues with an overview of character type, highlighting its various usages throughout theatre history, from the ancient Greeks through commedia dell'arte to Elizabethan drama including Shakespeare. He historicizes character through notable physical theatre practitioners, Jacques Copeau and Jacques Lecoq,<sup>6</sup> eventually moving beyond the evolution of

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<sup>6</sup> This thesis will feature a similar historicization of transformational acting and its notable practitioners.

character and entering into the “complex psychological mechanisms” that are taking place behind the transformative process (Mirodan 70). This includes a detailed exploration of personality traits, conflict and, most importantly for our purposes, the introduction to what Mirodan identifies as an *independent character*. Mirodan’s chosen terminology recalls the rehearsal process I experienced in Russia while working on Chekhov’s *Platonov* where I was struck by the presence of a Platonov that existed beyond and outside the play.

Independence here means that a character transitions from a literary function to having a life of its own, raising the seemingly ironic question, “Do characters have human rights?” (Mirodan 11) The implication of such a question is no longer visualizing character as words on a page but as family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, etc. American theatre critic Charles Marowitz writes about this phenomenon, “as a result of being around for almost four hundred years, [characters] have now detached themselves from their original context, so they’re in a sense roaming free in a kind of cultural terrain...” (Marowitz 186). Though Marowitz is specifically referring to the characters of *Othello*, the idea of an independent character is certainly not limited to Shakespeare. Mirodan provides an example from the 2016 EU Referendum, where members of the public were asked which way they thought fictional characters such as Sherlock Holmes, Marry Poppins and Falstaff might have voted (Mirodan 11). The popular imagination is inhabited by figures that have transgressed their original narrative contexts, venturing forth into the vast cultural terrain. So why not learn from them? Could a day spent as Sherlock Holmes reveal unknowns about the power of observation? Perhaps Mary Poppins might share how to find the fun in any situation? Surely Falstaff might lend a teetotaler an appreciation for a good pint.

Although Mirodan’s example of the independent character is conceptual, his inquiry concerns the practice of a transformational actor as the vehicle for an embodied understanding. Engaging with transformation triggers a dual consciousness and yields a character that exists separate from the actor, at least in part, but also separate from the world of the play. This character exists as an embodied being, living and breathing within the real world, which implies a

constructivist understanding of the person and aligns with modern conceptions of identity. As Kemp suggested, by altering the given circumstances of the body so too is the sense of self altered. As indicated, the modelling of an independent character discussed so far has been a conceptual one, and one rooted in performance and neuroscientific scholarship. I would like to introduce another set of voices into the conversational exchange between enaction and transformational acting. The theory of gender performativity provides a helpful framework to support the notion of actors creating characters that exist independently of texts. I am particularly interested in the idea of the body as an inscriptive surface which appears in the writing of Elizabeth Grosz. This embodied image adds a distinct corporeality to Butler's performativity. Grosz provides the necessary framework to further the idea of an independent character, but also to include and feature costume and makeup as integral tools in building that character.

## **7. From Enaction to Performativity**

This writing has been interweaving a modern understanding of playing pretend with modern neuroscientific principles in order to better understand the practice of the transformational actor and legitimize the practice of a transformational actor-researcher. By introducing feminist theory, specifically gender performativity, into the conversation, the intention is to support the claim that the practice of a transformational actor produces an independent character, deepening the dual consciousness occurring in the actor who is representing them. The greater implication of this is a shift in mindset and terminology from talking about transforming into a *character*, and instead transforming the *self*.

From a performance perspective, the self and character are inextricably linked. Rhonda Blair, whose work was briefly mentioned in relation to her efforts situating acting within theories of embodied cognition, writes about the relationship between character and the self:

*Self* is resonant with *character*. For Stanislavsky, an actor successfully embodies character when she creates "the life of a human spirit" expressed in "a beautiful, artistic form" (*An Actor Prepares* 14). In more clinical terms, *self* and *character* both refer to an entity that

has an awareness of herself, whether in terms of her sense of existing in the world proper or in the world of the play. (Blair 60-61)

Blair thusly highlights the commonalities between existing within the fictional world of a play and the real world, or 'the world proper'. Principles of enaction serve to expose the cognitive similarities between the two: "Character and its relationship to the given circumstances (the 'facts' of a play and its situation) mirror the idea of a self or organism in relation to an environment" (Blair 79). Enaction, as elaborated by Varela et al. and Noë, dictates that perception is the result of a circuitous process of being shaped by the environment while the self is simultaneously shaping that environment. A character being shaped by the given circumstances, is therefore simultaneously shaping those given circumstances. However, by making alterations to "the 'facts' of a play" (Blair 79), a character begins to step outside of these finite boundaries, venturing into their own independence.

Although I have discussed the construction of a character's identity through the actor's transformation and enactive engagement with the world of the play and the performance, the construction of the self that inhabits the real world has yet to be addressed. Accepting the interchangeability between self and character may be difficult for some. Doing so would mean that our essence, our identity, is nothing more than a fiction. Or on the contrary, it could also mean that character, the dual identity that the transformational actor forms, is as concrete as the actor. This is why it becomes necessary to extend the discussion to Butler and Grosz and their theories of performativity and inscription; to incorporate a discipline better equipped at addressing the relationship between identity, performance and socially constructed 'given circumstances'.

### **7.1 Conceptual Performativity**

Gender theorist and feminist philosopher Judith Butler's assertion that gender is performative is exemplary of the connection between identity and performance. First published in the essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988), Butler asserts that gender, and subsequently the self-concept itself, is an effect of publicly regulated performances. Political

scientist and philosopher Peter Digeiser illustrates Butler's argument through the metaphor of a promise: "Just as a promise does not exist before individuals invoke social practices and words, gender, sexuality, and the self do not exist before they are performed in a social context" (Digeiser 656). The assertion that these individual, arguably fundamental, components of identity are not pre-given but rather constructed is the premise of *performativity*. Performativity embraces the body, integrating physicality as a vital component to identity and rebelling against the displacement of the body and experience with regards to the constitution of gender, and in turn, identity as a whole. The lived experiences of the self are also socially constructed and in turn become the fundamental building blocks of identity.

Butler's experiential conception of identity is in direct opposition to essentialism, which dictates that there is an inner essence (some might say 'soul') to every being that precedes and excludes their existence and experience. Butler argues that the implicit separation of inner and outer associated with essentialism is a dangerous means of suppression and control:

If the 'cause' of desire, gesture, and act can be localized within the 'self' of the actor, then the political regulations and disciplinary practices which produce that ostensibly coherent gender are effectively displaced from view. (*Gender Trouble* 337)

In rejecting political control of the self and the isolation of identity stemming solely from the 'self', Butler returns social interaction its power, inherently recognizing that identity is a construct. There are obvious similarities between this approach to identity and dramatic character. Characters exist within worlds with their own rules and ideologies, dictated by the given circumstances of the play. In this sense, they serve a function and their identities do not come from an inherent, isolated sense of self, but rather from the actions they are made to perform in order for the dramatic conflict to unfold. However, Rhonda Blair's comparison of the "facts of [the] play" to the environment within which each of us exist within "the world proper" can be seen as a way of rejecting the suppressive essentialist paradigm (Blair 79). Instead, it can be replaced by a performative, or enactive, model of constructed identity, which empowers the actor and acknowledges the potential for a character's independence from these initial constraints.

'Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics' (2009) was published 20 years after the original concept of performativity was introduced. Throughout its pages, Butler reflects on the evolution of her theory of gender performativity, conclusively reminding the reader that it "establishes a complex convergence of social norms on the somatic psyche, and a process of repetition that is structured by a complicated interplay of obligation and desire, and a desire that is and is not one's own" ("Performativity, Precarity" xi). In conversation with character, the interplay between obligation and desire that is and is not one's own might be recognizable as an extension of the dual consciousness. An actor immersed in their role may find themselves navigating what they want versus what the character might want. According to Butler, the actor might be navigating societal demands represented by the character, alongside their various humanistic elements, including the physical characterization.

## **7.2 Corporeal Performativity**

While *Gender Trouble* (1990) remains fairly conceptual, Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1996) shifts attention towards the corporeal nature of subjectivity. Written with a distinct focus on sexuality, the text provides an interrogation of the body, developing ideas of performativity and asserting that the body itself is a social/historical/cultural construct (*Bodies that Matter* x-xi). This contention requires a deeper questioning of construction itself; "why is it that what is constructed is understood as an artificial and dispensable character?" (*Bodies that Matter* xi) Although Butler uses the word "character" in a context different to that of the transformational actor, the question is certainly a valid one given the context of this research. Why is the constructed character, the byproduct of the practice of the transformational actor, understood as artificial or dispensable? Butler's question also serves as a reminder of the similarities between "the world proper" and the world of the performance, both existing as constructs. Furthering this point, Ysabel Clare writes in response to Rhonda Blair,

“What happens when we act” is tied irrevocably to what happens when we *are*: the process of acting offers a rich context from which to explore human experience because the actor has to appear to replicate a human being on stage, and must therefore both know what a human being might be and be able to be one – similar to but different from themselves – despite the distractions of being on stage observed by others. (“Stanislavsky’s system as an enactive guide” 43)

The notion of an independent character, a constructed identity sharing space with the actor who has constructed it, is one that can contribute towards research. Such a research collaborator may contribute their own questions, critiques, and insights therefore acknowledging the authenticity of constructed identity. The identity of character that the actor enacts onstage is just as material—or immaterial—as the identity that the actor enacts socially.

But what about a material approach to transformation? This writing has teased the inclusion of costume and makeup in the actor’s process, so how might that effect the discussion? Carrying on in the tradition of Butler, Elizabeth Grosz offers an extension of performativity that emphasizes the role that costume and makeup could have in facilitating transformation, strengthening the position of what will later be referred to as the *costumatic* approach. Elizabeth Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies* (1994) contributes towards demonstrating that the body is socially constructed just as much as the self-concept. Like Butler, Grosz implicitly embraces enaction by recognizing the role of the body as a producer rather than an inert passenger (Grosz xi). She writes about the holistic relationship between the body’s “psychic interiority” and the social inscription that it undergoes. This psychic interiority is both contained and signified by the body as a social surface. The body, described by Grosz as “inscriptive surface”, is not only inscribed by various ‘external’ means including the social performances that we engage in, but as a result of its own psychic interiority, the thoughts, feelings, memories, fantasies and experiences it withholds (Grosz 27). This approach to the body as a connecting surface mirrors the enactive process undergone by the transformational actor. A character is shaped, or inscribed, by the qualities of the character that are different to their own (ie. posture, gait, vocal changes, etc.) which in turn has an effect on the character/actor’s psychic interiority. At the same time, the ever-changing psychic interiority of the character/actor is also inscribing their own set of qualities.

Grosz goes on to elaborate her meaning behind referring to the body as “inscriptive surface”.

Every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence. It is possible to construct a biography, a history of the body, for each individual and social body. This history would include not only all the contingencies that befall a body, impinging on it from the outside – a history of all the accidents, illnesses, misadventures that mark the body and its functioning; such a history would also have to include the “raw ingredients” out of which the body is produced – its movements, habits, postures, gait, and comportment. (Grosz 142)

Grosz’s definition reads as a manifesto for the physicalization of character. Makeup becomes an integral tool to construct the history of the body. Every scar, birthmark, sunspot, or lack thereof is an opportunity to tell the body’s story. The actor’s adjustment of posture and gait to match that of the imagined character is not a trick to fool the audience so much as a detailed memoir of how the specific body was produced. In this way, the body as inscriptive surface is the page for a multitude of social narratives to be written, “creat[ing] characters and plots through the textualization of the body’s contours” (Grosz 119). Bearing this in mind, perhaps Tortsov’s stereotype of an Englishman is not crude and prejudiced, but an attempt to understand the cultural containment of emotions presumably leading to the construct of the stiff upper lip. Every moment of every life is continuously absorbed by the body, and subsequently constructed, moment by moment, exemplifying the principles of enaction. If I am the actor, as my body is inscribed by various means, my psychic interiority responds, affecting and being affected by my bodily biography, imagined or otherwise. As I perceive, I change the world, which then changes me in return. Grosz’s work clarifies that the body is a driving force behind the perceiver’s actions, emphasizing the enactive nature of identity by illustrating that perception and cognition are primary forces in the construction of the self-concept. As our body shapes our actions and shifts our perception, it is changed and the self-concept is similarly altered.

Grosz continues to address the enactive shaping of identity through an exploration of various instruments of inscription.

The body is involuntarily marked, but it is also incised through “voluntary” procedures, life-styles, habits, and behaviors. Makeup, stilettos, bras, hair sprays, clothing, underclothing mark women’s bodies, whether black or white, in ways in which hair styles, professional



training, personal grooming, gait, posture, body building and sports may mark men's...It is crucial to note that these different procedures do not simply adorn or add to a body that is basically given through biology; they help constitute the very biological organization of the subject – the subject's height, weight, coloring, eye color, are constituted by a constitutive interweaving of genetic and environmental factors. (Grosz 142)

These voluntary methods of inscription clearly include costume and makeup, however in relation to performance their function becomes two-fold. Not only do costume and makeup serve as methods of replicating involuntary bodily inscriptions of character (ie. scars, sunspots, pregnant bellies, hunchbacks etc.), they also represent voluntary methods of inscription. Grosz recognizes the impact of these inscriptive forces, taking note that they extend far beyond the superficial and help constitute *our very biology*. Bed head compared to splashing some water in the hair and combing it to the side compared to 30 minutes of blow-drying and styling. A t-shirt with a hole in it compared to an ironed jumper. Boxers compared to briefs compared to a thong. These choices that we make on a daily basis affect the way we perceive while also affecting the way others perceive us which then is reflected in further continuous perceptual changes. As those around us volunteer to inscribe themselves as we do ourselves, we are continuously and involuntarily inscribed by the shifting self-concepts and self-expressions of those around us. In terms of the transformational actor, the adoption of the physical form of another, to any degree however superficial it may appear, will have a profound effect in altering their sense of self. This altered sense of self facilitates the cognitive flexibility ascribed to pretend play, and brings with it the possibility to extend that flexibility towards research.

### **7.3 The Inscriptive Power of the Gaze**

While costume and makeup—and the *costumatic* approach characterized by their robust inclusion in the actor's character-building process—will be explored in-depth later in Chapter 2 and 3, it is important to address an additional material force which is foundational to their efficacy as transformational tools. The external gaze shapes our enactive identity in the very same social and biological capacity. Alva Noë's assertion that vision has a "touch-like character" has been discussed

in relation to the neuroscientific intricacies of perception (*Action in Perception* 96), leading to the conclusion that, whether imagined or not, the perceived gaze of another will impact our perceptual experience, and therefore 'the self'. This conclusion is supported by Grosz, first addressed through her dedication of a portion of her book to the following quote from feminist philosopher, Sandra Lee Bartky:

The woman who checks her makeup half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara has run, who worries that the wind or the rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of the Panopticon, a self policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance. (Bartky 80)

Bartky goes on to make the leap that this "self-surveillance" that she has described is, in fact, a form of obedience to patriarchy. Grosz refutes this, writing that both men and women engage in the same levels of self-observation, going on to acknowledge that both men and women can be equally shaped by the surveillance of others (Grosz 144). The surveillance of others is then adopted and regurgitated towards oneself. Surveillance in this form, the internalized external gaze of both self and other, possesses the same inscriptive force as how we choose to dress ourselves.

The individual who finds themselves adjusting their clothes, monitoring their eating, or checking their hair may be doing so as a direct result of how they perceive the gaze of an other. Their behavior continuing from one moment to the next may be in response to what they perceive in the mirror. By viewing their reflection as the manifestation of the gaze of others, filtered through the self, an actor then has access to a complicit scene partner at their disposal. The external gaze, whether deriving from society, a paying audience, or the self, serves to shape our identity. However, these various methods of inscription are not out of our control. With every choice, as actor and as human, the identity presented to the world is built with others who look upon us, whether character or self. What is presented governs the perceptual experience, though it is continuously changed by the environment within which it exists. By purposely making choices that are different from those one might naturally be inclined towards, the experience of an other can be unlocked. Imagining the actor self-surveying in the mirror evokes images of a moment of transformation described by

Laurence Olivier when playing Richard III: “Nose on, wig on, makeup complete. There, staring back at me from the mirror, was my Richard, exactly as I wanted him...The monster stared back at me and smiled” (Olivier 125). In this way, does the mirror not become a vital tool for the transformational actor? A way to amplify one’s own self-surveillance and replicate the gaze of an other?<sup>7</sup>

With Olivier’s ‘monster’ fresh in the mind, what might an interpretation of Grosz and Butler’s work look like when applied to the context of a theatrical performance? To begin with character is born within specific and finite boundaries, existing first as disembodied words on a page. The playwright’s work will determine certain elements which will ultimately prove foundational to said role. The process of analyzing the script will yield various involuntary inscriptions which the playwright has made to the character. The director then adds another set of involuntary inscriptions within which the character must grow up and form its identity; within what style will this character exist? What is the director’s view of how this individual exists within the world that they have envisioned? Within the world of the play, the director’s vision and playwright’s script are as linked to character identity as race, religion and gender are to human identity. And just as costume and makeup mitigate identity within the theatre, so too do they function within reality. Indeed, with each new collaborator that is introduced, a new series of involuntary inscriptions are made. The result is what might be considered an elaborate sketch. Details have been laid before you, shadows, shades, but this is not yet character in the embodied sense. What is missing from this retracing of character evolution is the influence of the actor.

Over the course of the rehearsal process an actor proceeds to build the identity of the character. Because part of the identity of character is made up of elements determined outside of the actor’s lived experience, it becomes imperative for the actor to attempt an experiential understanding of these elements. This is the basis for Active Analysis—or the Method of Physical Action—which will be discussed in depth later. The lived experience begins taking shape within the

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<sup>7</sup> These questions will be fully addressed in Chapter 3.

rehearsal room and it unfolds in two separate realms: the experience of the actor in our immediate reality and the experience of the character within the reality of the play. These 'two separate realms' can also be described by some more familiar terminology, either the 'dual representation' used by developmental psychologists or the 'dual consciousness' discussed by theatre anthropologists and practitioners. The actor is influenced by the director, the other actors, the rehearsal space, the props that the stage manager might have provided. Meanwhile the character is influenced by their friends, spouses, neighbors, the environment in which they live, the possessions that they have chosen to surround themselves with. These two paths operate in parallel, the given circumstances of the character exist within the given circumstances of the actor. The character's identity continues to expand as the actor continues the rehearsal process. With each rehearsal, the character experiences more, further defining their identity. As the character is introduced to an audience, so too is another layer of experience added. The actor and character now are subject to the influence of the outside world, however perceptible or imperceptible that influence may be. This constant development of identity could continue for as long as the actor is performing the role.

#### **7.4 Independent Character as Research Collaborator**

Can this work on character that I outlined above be relocated within a research context? The practical experiments I analyze in this thesis are my attempt at making such a translation and at developing a method for the transformational actor-researcher to collaborate with character. I also ask what type of knowledge might this collaboration generate? So far, I addressed a number of theoretical frameworks to support the notion of an independent character, ranging from enactive cognition to gender performativity. I also put forth that the transformational actor, through altering their means of perception, simultaneously alters their identity, both corporeally and conceptually and that engaging with transformation yields a character that exists outside of the actor, while the actor also maintains a connection to themselves. I also claimed that this character exists outside of the world of the play for it becomes an embodied being, living and breathing within the real world.

This is the first step in conceptualizing characters as potential research collaborators and as a vehicle for the actor-researcher. An independent character that experiences various phenomena differently than the actor may provide the actor with insight into what it is to *be* someone other than themselves. Existing and experiencing as an *other* might then offer access to experiences otherwise unavailable to the actor. When contextualizing this alongside a developmental psychologist's understanding of 'pretend play', it is possible to translate embodied knowledge derived from imagined circumstances into the real world. A transformational actor's practice—a type of serious play—is capable of facilitating this type of learning. While I investigate this possibility and in practice, I use my own personal fascination with villains as a case study. What can I learn about villains and their place for me and popular culture in general by exploring specific villains as independent characters, using transformational acting as a method of research?

## **8. Methodology**

Peter Brook writes, "For Artaud, theatre is fire; for Brecht, theatre is clear vision; for Stanislavsky, theatre is humanity" (Brook 43). Brook's abbreviated compendium illustrates the phenomenological nature of Stanislavski's theatre. Mark Fortier summarizes the key characteristic of phenomenology in *Theory/Theatre* (2002): "Phenomenology is concerned with what it is like for human beings to be alive in the world around them and how they perceive that world" (Fortier 38). According to Fortier's definition this research too is fundamentally phenomenological. However, detailed by Ysabel Clare in her doctoral thesis (2014), phenomenology when applied to theatre often loses its functionality when applied to theatre ("A Study of the Structure" 32). Instead, a more functional model exists in the phenomenologically-aligned methodology known as *heuristic inquiry*.

The heuristic approach is developed by Clark Moustakas, who writes about it extensively in *Loneliness* (1961), his autobiographical account of his loneliness when faced with the decision regarding an operation for his daughter's heart defect. Despite its foundations in and overlaps with phenomenology, heuristic inquiry is notably differentiated as follows:

- Heuristic inquiry honors relationship, while phenomenology stresses a certain degree of detachment.
- Heuristic inquiry invites creative elaboration of the findings as articulated through poetry, artwork, music, or other forms of creative expression, while phenomenology focuses on the distillation of experience.
- Heuristic inquiry embraces personal meaning, while phenomenology prefers structured experience.
- Heuristic inquiry highlights co-researcher essence, wholeness, and visibility, while phenomenology may lose research participants in the distillation of experience. (Sultan 26)

These differences support heuristic inquiry as a more functional methodological framework for this research. Firstly, the explicit acknowledgment of the researcher's experience empowers the practice of the actor-researcher, honoring the relationship between actor and character as a valid component of inquiry. The in-built creative nature of heuristic inquiry lends itself to the practice of the actor-researcher and encourages non-traditional methods of documentation and expression of experience. Heuristic inquiry makes space for the meaning-making of the transformational actor. It is very much a personal encounter based on the embodied experience of the actor-in-character. In fact transformation, and a shared transformation at that, is given great value within a heuristic framework: "The ultimate product is a story of personal transformation that has the potential to transform others" (McLeod 2007). Finally, and critically, placing the co-researcher in a position of prominence directly aligns with my central research questions; primarily whether an independent character might serve as a co-researcher within the practice of a transformational actor-researcher engaged in heuristic inquiry.

Although heuristic inquiry provides a functional phenomenology which can frame this thesis, it must also be considered that this is a piece of practice-as-research. As such, the actor-researcher's practice needs to be the primary focus. In its most basic form, this practice manifests itself in the creation and performance of the actor's score. The score generates embodied knowledge by making space for the emergence of the independent character who, within the outlined heuristic framework, serves as co-researcher. There is space in this structure, not only for my direct experience with the phenomenon in question, but also for the character's experience of the

phenomenon in question. The lens of our research is then narrowed even further, from practice-as-research, to performance-as-research, and from performance-as-research to specifically acting-as-research. The nuances here are elaborated by John Freeman in his book *Blood, Sweat and Theory* as he distinguishes the performance of self versus the performance of character:

By putting one's own body and experience forward within a live (arts) space the artist becomes both object and subject within the frame of the work and, as a consequence, this situation allows the artist to interrogate and articulate that relationship. We can say therefore that the performing of oneself is a feature of performance, even something central to it, whereas the submergence of self into character is a defining trait of acting. (Freeman 177)

The centrality of the performer's experience over the character's experience may be the defining feature between performance-as-research and acting-as-research, or at the very least, transformational acting-as-research. Navigating the concurrent subjective and objective forces raises the final research question I outlined earlier: How can I maintain my status as researcher throughout transformation?

The question of how the transformational actor-researcher is able to negotiate their various capacities as researcher, performer and collaborator is something that phenomenological pioneer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, would have found to be of vital concern. "We must thus try to understand how man is simultaneously subject and object, first person and third person, absolutely free and dependent" ("Titres et travaux" 12). Could a heuristic inquiry of researching with character be a step towards understanding how humanity might holistically negotiate their own simultaneous subjectivity/objectivity? My hypothesis is that by focusing on character-building via costume and makeup, the actor-researcher is afforded an opportunity to be able to 'take off' their character; to physically resume how they perceive the world as opposed to how the character perceives the world. These changes in perceptual dynamics are key, as "perception is viewed as the primary source of knowledge in heuristic inquiry" (Sultan 75). The materiality of costume and makeup may not only serve to enhance the phenomenon of an altered sense of self, but also might facilitate clear boundaries as to when the actor is engaging in practice and when the researcher may engage with their research collaborator. Costume and makeup are the theatrical tools with which I can

manipulate my perception, researching *within* transformation *via* the somatic and psychosomatic experience of character, removing these tools, and synthesizing the embodied knowledge from my position as actor-researcher. Following the relationship between perception and identity, the enactive framework provides a platform for the actor-researcher and character as their collaborator. As the transformational-actor researcher engages with their practice, the further they separate character from themselves and their own self-concept. In turn, the way in which their sensorimotor knowledge is affected, will result in different experiences of that same phenomenon, regardless of what the researcher may choose to investigate.

So what might this research look like? What research activities are undertaken and how can they be documented and disseminated as ‘new’ knowledge? In an abstract sense, this research takes shape as a refined form of pretend play. As an example of acting-as-research, this PhD uses my practice as an actor as its main mode of inquiry. Indeed, even the very first attempt at formulating a practice as research had an element of this: my initial experiment consisted of an attempt to embody four different characters, linked by their designation as ‘villains’, using external tools such as costume, makeup, and audio-visual material as aids or gateways. Although the experiment was initially conceived as an open opportunity to play on some of the themes that I have discussed, in hindsight it clearly indicated which elements would become key features of the research moving forward.<sup>8</sup>

The Initial Performance Experiment explicitly questioned my own personal fascination with the villain, and this collaboration with the villain figure remains a key element. Although my focus is on acting practice, it is important that there is a framework to test it. Exploring my relationship to dramatic villains through my practice as an actor aligns with the heuristic nature of this research and provides a running throughline to anchor the research to.

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<sup>8</sup> The full written and video documentation of this performance experiment may be found in Appendix A (pp. 208–216).



The next important feature of this practice research is the use of costume and makeup. Both of these elements are explored as objects of inquiry, as well as situated and linked to better-known transformational acting tools. They are used heavily as tools of experimentation, providing a better understanding of the effect of the costumatic approach on transformational acting-as-research, and aiding me in the creation of scores which emerge directly from the feedback received from costume and makeup choices.

Another element that remains from the first experiment is the mirror: I perform and refine scores in front of a mirror. The mirror can serve in a number of different ways, but ultimately it transforms the gaze of the actor into the gaze of an 'other', further shaping the transformation of actor into character.

In addition to these tools and elements, I employ the more traditional toolkit of the transformational actor that comes from my past training, honing in on and critically investigating specific approaches and practices from a canon of post-Stanislvskian practitioners including Brecht and Barba. The studio, or rehearsal room, is utilized as an open space for play where series of scores can be created through improvisations that lead to compositions. I not only work as the transformational actor-researcher, but also design and develop costume and makeup in search of the individual 'look and feel' for each character. These 'characters' are explored through improvisations which may vary from given tasks to more spontaneous and open play.

I document the experience of both the actor and character using a form of writing that symbolic anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls *thick description* (Geertz 312), providing a high level of detail in every account of practice, so as to retain an accurate record as well as provide adequate context so that the reader may have as complete a picture as possible of my process. The aim is to provide the reader with as much information as possible so that they may engage alongside myself as researcher in the heuristic process of meaning-making. There are also video links throughout the writing linking to video documentation of the practice. The reader is welcome to watch all of the video documentation provided, however there is a considerable number of hours-worth of footage.

Instead, my suggestion is to rely on the thick description using the video links to view specific moments or to gain clarification towards any of the written passages. Specific reference to the videos have been made in text by citing the time stamp (ie. 'Richard III (Part 1)' 00:01-00:05). These time stamps will include hyperlinks directing the reader to the relevant start times.

Finally, after having refined my *costumatic* approach to a repeatable form, I share and test it out with a group of performers in a workshop, teaching the fundamental concepts, exploring the key practices and collecting invaluable feedback. Performers have the opportunity to engage in this transformative practice, share space with the character they generate and reflect on and assess their own experience of character, with the help of pre-set questions. Due to its heuristic nature, my research is primarily focused on my own experience, yet the workshop provides an opportunity to open the methodology up to other performers and compare their experiences of embodying character via costume and makeup to those of my own.

The methodology I outline here is a structured approach at replicating something that is, at its core, truly unstructured. This is playing pretend to do research. This process seeks to elaborate dialogues with my villainous research collaborators, and then try to figure out how to disseminate these experiences into new knowledge. The intention of my work is twofold: robustly incorporating costume and makeup into the transformational actor's practice and aligning that practice of the transformational actor, and the subsequent creation of independent character, with heuristic research. Such a process may then legitimize the work of the transformational actor-researcher and present actor-researchers as capable of executing varying degrees of social research. I wrote earlier that although emergent, there was a degree of precedence set by other practitioners who have used character as a research collaborator of sorts. By examining their practices, I would like to situate my work in context and identify its originality.

## **9. Gap in Knowledge**

This research repurposes character within an academic context, not as a subject for inquiry but as a methodology of its own. Such a proposal is unique, especially when considered in relation to a Stanislavskian based character-building technique as it raises the question if other actors or researchers already use character as a method of inquiry. A brief examination of current practice that resonates with the idea of research through and with character will clarify the direction of my research and identify the gap in knowledge that this thesis hopes to fill.

Tim Crouch is a UK based multi-award-winning theatre artist, who began making his solo work in 2003. Since then, Crouch's plays have toured extensively, both domestically and internationally, and performed in translation across a range of European countries. Throughout Crouch's dramaturgy (at the time of writing this, spanning across 11 plays) intends to "minimise the division between the stage and the audience." (Ilter 399) It is this quality which has led him to the reworking of a number of Shakespearean texts. The project, *I, Shakespeare*, is composed of five individual plays including *I, Caliban* (2003), *I, Peaseblossom* (2004), *I, Banquo* (2005), *I, Malvolio* (2010), and *I, Cinna (The Poet)* (2012).<sup>9</sup> These plays, all originally intended to introduce Shakespeare to younger audiences, set about doing so by identifying characters who may have been pushed to the fringes of Shakespeare's narratives and giving them their moment to shine. In this way, through the very construct of the *I, Shakespeare* project, Crouch researches and reconfigures marginality via Shakespeare's characters. Each character also serves as an individual vehicle for research, for example, Malvolio and Caliban are used to explore themes of bullying and Cinna (the poet) questions the notion of authorship and authority. Emancipated by Crouch's work as actor-playwright, these independent characters serve as research collaborators.

In Tim Crouch's performances, transformation takes a form driven by the external gaze, relying of the transformative force of the audience rather than the experience of the actor. Speaking

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<sup>9</sup> *I, Cinna (The Poet)* was published as a self-standing play, but is ostensibly part of the *I, Shakespeare* project as a whole.

to Seda Ilter after a staging of *My Arm* in Brighton in 2010, Crouch elaborates on the transformative forces at work within his theatre:

In performance, I think there is a dynamic to transform that comes from the audience. So I can say that I am Hamlet, and I look like Tim Crouch...I am transformed but I am transformed just by a tiny shift in axis of perception. I still look like me, I speak like me, I wear my clothes. The transformation of me into fictional me, when it happens, happens through the audience's recalibration of who I am, not through anything I have done. (Ilter 400)

The limiting of physical transformation is deliberate, aiding in the reduction of divide in status between audience and performer. Instead of transformation existing for the audience as an illusion, Crouch involves them as active participants in the process. His work acknowledges the enactive framework which this writing has outlined, identifying that transformation exists as a perceptual shift. However, Crouch has chosen for his transformation to be exclusively shaped by the external gaze, minimizing the material transformation of the actor. This is an interesting experiment, but one where the focus lies more on the effect of the audience than the experiential understanding of the actor. I hope to question how the actor may experience a specific phenomenon differently by embodying the form of another. This certainly will be informed by the external gaze, but not exclusively as I believe that by removing the physical transformation from the performance of character and handing the transformative process over to the audience, the experiential understanding of the actor is no longer the primary source of investigation.

Actor, playwright and director Steven Berkoff is another artist whose work positions character as research collaborator. Berkoff's solo show, *Shakespeare's Villains* (1998), in particular aligns with this research due to my own noted interest in villains. Well-known for his onscreen performances as villains in the James Bond film, *Octopussy*, and the Rambo sequel, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, Berkoff assembles a cast of characters including Iago, Shylock, Richard III, and the Macbeths, among others, in what he promotes as "A Master Class in Evil" (Berkoff). Jumping between narration, characterization, lecture and anecdotal references to other notable actors' performances of these villains, Berkoff admittedly works towards a simplification that interlinks these characters. Discussing the nature of Shakespeare's villains, Berkoff shares that their

commonality is “the lack of love in their lives. Maybe it’s a simplistic interpretation, and I’m sure there are other cultural and political interpretations. But these are the insights of an actor-player” (Horowitz). What he describes as the “insights of an actor-player” are the essence of what this PhD builds on as the work of the actor-researcher. Although the conclusion may be simplistic (and who is to say that identifying a lack of love as fundamental to Shakespeare’s villains might not be applicable to other and even nonfiction villains) it is the process of transformational acting as research that concerns this thesis.

*Shakespeare’s Villains* serves as a performance-lecture structured around the presentation of Berkoff’s psychological analysis of character behavior. The audience is presented with the conclusion of what may have been derived from an embodied investigation of the villain; a summation of Berkoff’s experiences playing a variety of villainous characters. While *Shakespeare’s Villains* presents the actor with an opportunity to perform snippets from the featured plays of Shakespeare’s canon, I question whether these short scenes are signaling the existence of much deeper experiential and embodied character-work rather than actually demonstrating such work. Is it possible to adjust the means of disseminating experiential research so that an audience or reader might join the experience? As in Crouch’s work, could the audience become collaborators in the transformational process? Rather than presenting evidence to an audience to support a given conclusion, structured as a performative essay, the work can focus on how the transformation affected the actor, and in turn, the audience. This question of translating the actor-researcher’s experiential understanding into a communicable form without shortcutting the process is one that I address in Chapter 4.

The dramaturgy of Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter, but the practice of noted company member Roberta Carreri warrants specific attention again as an example of transformational acting at the service of the creation of independent characters who become collaborators. Carreri joined Odin Teatret in 1974 and was the last actor to be trained by Barba himself, with every following new company member serving as an

apprentice to one of the more experienced performers. Joining the group 10 years after their formation in 1964, she occupied a period of Odin Teatret's history which meant she was "in a unique position of being (1) recipient, (2) agent, and (3) transmitter of what Odin stands for and its way of doing things, its modus" (Carreri xiii). However, Odin's "modus" is less an outline of a specific technique than it is a personal approach for existing both professionally and socially. Carreri's book, *On Training and Performance* (2014), offers the reader a chance to observe the intimate process of an actor building a character, as well as building a performance.

Descriptions of process in creating performances such as *Judith* and *The Chronic Life* detail a fluid intersection between reality and fiction. For *Judith*, recurring themes within Carreri's work such as the "unborn prince" coincide with a personal "long[ing]" to have another child of her own (Carreri 111-112). When beginning the creative process of constructing a character, to be later translated into a performance score, and inserted into the montage of the emerging piece, *The Chronic Life*, Carreri admits that the crossroads into our lives and our 'selves' is the foundation: "We start from what we already have, offering each item as a gift, a journey into the land of memory" (Carreri 147). It is from this acknowledgment of a personal starting point for each character that transformation is then sought. According to Carreri, transformation is essential. "Putting on makeup, even ever so lightly, is the most important moment because, as Bertolt Brecht says in a poem, it helps me to remove every personal trace from my face" (116). Carreri is responding to how she prepares herself for *Judith* and, more than 20 years later, masking her own features remains a critical component to her process. For *The Chronic Life*, Carreri initially creates a character who is wearing a mask, only to have Eugenio Barba decide that the mask no longer works for the performance. "But I do not want to go back to being myself! So I decide to use green contact lenses and wear heavy make-up. Once again the miracle happens: I look at myself in the mirror and I do not recognise myself. Now I am ready to give up my mask" (Carreri 156).

The 'miracle' that Carreri describes alludes to is the very same 'magic' that Olivier feels when sitting in front of the mirror. Both actors use this tool in order to facilitate their own

transformation, transcending the intricate use of various techniques and craft so that they may simply embody their character. “In *The Million* as well as with *Judith*, in *Theatrum Mundi* as well as in *Mythos*, that which must be perceived is not the technique that I have learned but the character’s way of behaving which has its own coherent physical logic” (Nascimento 160). It is within these performances, and many more, that Carreri then has the opportunity of using a fictional character to reveal more about the very real starting point that it may have come from.

Such a personal form of research resonates with the methodology I propose for my own: ‘heuristic inquiry’ as a way of investigating the researcher’s experience of a specific phenomenon. Is Carreri’s work as an actor-researcher a form of heuristic inquiry? Yes, certainly. However, this is due to the level of insight she provides throughout her book and the copious amounts of writings published throughout her prolific career with Odin Teatret. Is Berkoff’s work a form of heuristic inquiry? In the form of *Shakespeare’s Villains*, not necessarily, but who is to say that it is not an unacknowledged summation of all his experience of playing the villain, made more accessible to an audience by psychologizing it. Is Crouch’s? Again, it may not be explicitly addressed in the same way as Carreri, but themes explored throughout his work indicate a potential for them to reflect a deeply personal level of research. What is made clear through the comparison of these three practitioners is that there is a level of precedence for the practice of the actor-researcher using character as a research collaborator. Theorizing transformational acting and offering a methodical approach enriched by the use of costume and makeup, this PhD will provide the vocabulary with which we can discuss the work of such transformational actors, but also pave the way for others to situate their transformational acting process as research.

## **10. Chapter Breakdown**

Chapter 1 traces transformational acting and independent character in the work of Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, Demidov, Brecht and Barba and continues to question the various intricacies of transformational acting, albeit framed through the lens of notable practitioners.

Historicizing transformation also allows for the continual questioning of character as research collaborator.

Chapter 2 addresses costume theory and how the somatic and perceptual experience of character-in-costume contributes to character as co-researcher. Documented practice questions the experience of taking on and removing a character's form as the writing and practice explore the ethical, philosophical, experiential, psychological and social implications that surround adopting the form of another, particularly in terms of disability.

Chapter 3 features makeup as focal point for the investigation of the psychosomatic power of the external gaze. Like costume, makeup is a wearable experience, however the primary impact of makeup is how it shifts the perception of others. The question then becomes how I, as actor, am affected when I am being perceived, or perceive 'myself', in a manner that is foreign to me? Documented practice serves as primary means of exploration, again questioning the experience of taking on and removing the physical form of character, this time in specific relation to makeup.

Chapter 4 highlights the practice-based nature of this inquiry, culminating in the combined use of costume and makeup alongside traditional transformational acting methods. Such a combination serves to refine the costumatic approach. Chapter 4 follows the development of practice beginning with an outside director-collaborator, shifting to a sustained solo practice and culminating in a workshop aimed at disseminating the costumatic approach to a mixed group of performers and non-performers. Throughout the writing, the reader will be provided with a series of corresponding video links. The reader is welcome to watch as much of the footage as desired, though I draw attention to specific moments to accompany the thick description where necessary.

The Conclusion revisits the research questions and returns readers to the various chapters within this thesis, noting various successes and failures along the way. A costumatic manifesto is issued detailing what the costumatic approach is and is not. This concise definition is a direct result of rigorous practice experiments. The subsequent refining of the costumatic approach also provides the opportunity to comment on whether or not it may be a successful research methodology.



# Chapter 1- Historicizing Transformational Acting

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## 1. Introduction

The Introduction proposed transformational acting as a form of professional pretend play and situated this proposal amongst relevant theoretical debates. Elements of modern neuroscientific theory, specifically concepts such as embodiment and enaction, were placed in dialogue with feminist theory in order to expand on how character, identity and transformation, among other things, should be understood within this research. I posited that transformational acting processes result in a kind of character which exists independently outside of the actor and outside of the original context of the play. Costume and makeup were then positioned alongside the theoretical framework alluding to the influence both elements may have on the formation of such a character. Having detailed the various theories in conversation with each other throughout this thesis, it is necessary to outline a framework of the transformational actor's practice. To do this I will draw a lineage of transformational acting through the practices and pedagogies of Konstantin Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, Nikolai Demidov, Bertolt Brecht and Eugenio Barba. Not only will this pedigree provide the reader a practical context for the research methods being proposed in this thesis, it will highlight a space for costume and makeup to be reintegrated into the actor's practice. The subsequent reintegration will be the focus of Chapters 2-4.

Considering the practitioners whom I have chosen, an apparent critique becomes necessary to address: why are they all White men? The issue of decolonizing the theatre and acting practices is one of particular importance. Groups such as the We See You, White American Theater (WSYWAT) collective have been hugely influential in identifying and criticizing a hierarchy within American theater founded on "racism and erasure" (Samuel). Sharrell D. Lockett and Tia M. Shaffer formalize the argument in their book, *Black Acting Methods* (2017):

As most acting classes in the United States of America operate within a Eurocentric theoretical framework of performance, while ushering actors through the exploration of emotionality and embodied renaissances. Often times, in the majority of U.S. acting classrooms, just like in other subject areas, White-ness overtly and covertly pervades the texts and linguistic structures, and those who do not share a White lineage or hue are

de-centered, misaligned, and exiled from a theatre history that they rightfully co-constructed. (Lockett and Shaffer 1)

Although Lockett and Shaffer are referring specifically to the U.S., the same Eurocentric bias dominates the curriculum of UK drama schools as well (Oram). Not only is there a distinct 'Whiteness' about the selected practitioners, there is also a distinct male-ness. This has been similarly problematized by scholars such as Cass Fleming, who has offered an alternative 'her-story' in which the practices of Suzanne Bing and other female French actor trainers have been used to dismantle the "'Master Teacher' narrative of the French lineage of actor training from Jacques Copeau, Michel Saint-Denis and Jacques Lecoq" (C. Fleming 353). While I recognize the inherent shortcomings of my approach, it is also necessary that I recognize my own lineage. I am a product of the American and British tradition of Eurocentric and male-centric actor pedagogy. As the basis of this research is my own practice as an actor, these particular practitioners reflect my learned understanding of transformational acting. However, as the writing continues beyond the historical and into the present, the group of practitioners that I work with diversifies. I turn toward female practitioner pedagogues such as Donatella Barbieri, Peta Lily and Sally Dean and engage with female collaborators such as Niamh O'Brien and Megan Lloyd-Jones, attempting to break this bias and move forward.

Establishing an understanding of character as an entity not entirely *within* the actor inherently means that the actor must move from the self to the character through transformation. Theatre scholar Craig Turner identifies this process as a kind of travel into character, or a type of bridge, as he writes about "the place where, psychologically and physically, the actor 'crosses over' into the world of the character and, in reverse, how the return journey is negotiated" ("Association Process" 172). Turner names this process of crossing over the Association Ritual, noting that Stanislavski chose to refer to it as the "threshold of the subconscious" (*An Actor's Work* 510). In order to visualize the shift between observation and participation, the world of the play is referred to as a 'dream world' and used to differentiate and specify the actor's role within the Association Ritual.

The dream world of pictures, sounds and feelings is no more than what the reader of a novel does for his private pleasure. But the actor, by definition, is not an observer. She doesn't tell you about her dream she shows you. The actor must go further, placing her entire body's presence, motion and will within the dream state. Her everyday reality must be replaced by the imagined one. To inhabit and respond directly to the dream world (through the body), she must somehow move into the dream character. ("Dreaming the Role" 19)

Despite the term 'dream' reinforcing the notion of the actor's practice as something ephemeral and fleeting, Turner advocates for a complete and embodied physical transformation. The Association Ritual encompasses the enactive power of perception and the performative nature of identity, inevitably resulting in the actor's experience of a separate sense of self: "By stepping into the character's point of view in that body, the actor's personal body feel and point of view is fundamentally—quite literally—transformed" ("Dreaming the Role" 19).

In Turner's terminology, the primary concern of this research is to construct an Association Ritual characterized by 'dressing up' and literally walking in the shoes of another. Costume and makeup are tools often neglected by practitioners who focus on actor training, even though they are fundamental to playing pretend which I presented as analogous to the work of the transformational actor. Investigating dressing up as a tool for transformation is both a result and a method of my research process; this is how I choose to cross over into the world of the character and the journey I map for transformational actor-researchers. How do costume and makeup fit within the greater context of transformational acting and how might previous practices inform how dressing up works to facilitate transformation? In this chapter I will trace a genealogy of transformational acting methods while at the same time examining how dressing up might fit in. Shifting attention from a purely theoretical analysis of transformational acting to relevant acting pedagogies reframes concepts discussed within the Introduction, such as enactivism and feminist performativity. This new context hopes to highlight various practical tools that enable transformation (and subsequently my own practice as transformational actor-researcher) while continuously testing and reinforcing the philosophical framework laid out in the previous chapter.

## 2. Stanislavski's Magic 'If'

Recalling a specific example from my initial performance experiment (Appendix A), I would like to unpack the steps I took to adjust my external form using the Wicked Witch of the West. I began my transformation by applying green makeup to my face and hands. I altered the qualities of my voice to imitate those of Margaret Hamilton's performance of the Wicked Witch. I got dressed in a black dress which I had chosen earlier from the costume rails. After putting the dress on, I then adopted an altered posture and moved around the space. However, as I made these changes, there was a perceptual shift taking place facilitated by my imagination. My task was to occupy this newly created form *as if* it was mine. When looking in the mirror, I viewed the green skin that I saw *as if* it was my own. The new sound and sensations of this adopted voice became embodied *as if* the voice was mine. I clothed myself in the black dress that I had chosen before *as if* it was a garment from my closet. My new posture and movement around the space were *as if* I was a witch. It is the use of this 'if' that invited me, and invites the actor, to take a leap of the imagination so their own given circumstances may then match the given circumstances of the character.

Stanislavski's *magic 'if'* is the primary means of transformation at work throughout a transformational actor's character-building process. In Turner's terms, 'if' is Stanislavski's Association Ritual, transporting the actor from reality into the dream world, the bridge that the actor uses to reach character. Stanislavski agreed that 'if' was, in fact, the primary stimulus for the imagination. The fictional Tortsov addresses his students, Kostya included, and decrees that "*if* acts as a lever to lift us out of the world of actuality and into the realm of imagination" (*An Actor Prepares* 40). Ysabel Clare visually maps this perceptual shift, labelling it, "The transformational step" ("A Study of the Structure" 372).

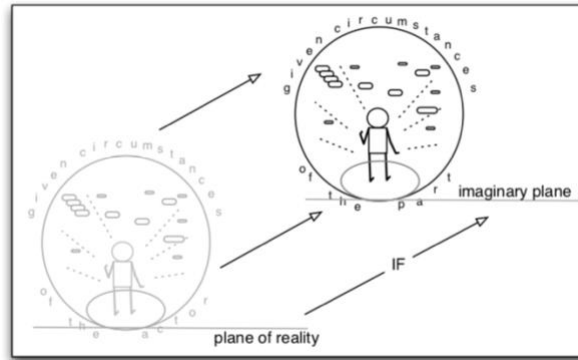


Figure 2 Clare, Ysabel. "The transformational step".

As seen in Clare's visualization, the function of 'if' is to transport the actor from the 'plane of reality' to the 'imaginary plane', from Blair's 'world proper' to the world of the character.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is 'if' that facilitates journey between myself and the Wicked Witch of the West. However, it is important to note that this transformational power of imagination is initially refuted by Stanislavski and evolves later like many other Stanislavskian concepts.

In the section titled "Emotion Memory", Tortsov is addressing the group of acting students when Grisha, one of Kostya's peers, interrupts Tortsov's teachings. "Do you mean to say that in every kind of role, from Hamlet to Sugar in *The Blue Bird*, we have to use our own, same, old feelings?" Tortsov responds with another question, "What else can you do? Do you expect an actor to invent all sorts of new sensations, or even a new soul, for every part he plays?" Grisha is in disbelief, so Tortsov continues: "*Never lose yourself on the stage. Always act in your own person as an artist. You can never get away from yourself*" (*An Actor Prepares* 152, italics in original).

I can understand Grisha's disbelief, particularly considering that enactivist and performative frameworks detail how one *can* get away from oneself. Stanislavski's assertion via Tortsov fundamentally rejects both. Comments about the soul of the character recall the limiting essentialist paradigm rejected by Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz. Such a notion of the soul also sidesteps the effects of a person's environment on their identity. Any adjustments to our circumstances,

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<sup>10</sup> I first discuss this in the Introduction, see pp. 38–39.

imaginary or not, result in a perceptual shift. These shifts in our perception affect our environment, engaging in the circuitous process of enaction, ultimately resulting in an altered sense of self. You can certainly “get away from yourself” and dressing up offers the actor one of those ways. Applying enaction to the concept of the magic ‘if’ asks the opposite question than the one Tortsov poses to his students; how could you *not* expect to invent new sensations when engaging with ‘if’?

Imagination, as described by Lakoff, Johnson and Gallese, is an embodied process, holistically linked to action and perception. Therefore, the use of ‘if’ and the subsequent stimulation of the imagination have the power to alter one’s sense of self, contradicting these early writings of Stanislavski. Comparing Benedetti’s translation of the same passage to Hapgood’s reveals a slightly different reading, albeit equally dismissive of the transformative power of the imagination:

We can understand, feel a role, put ourselves in its place and start behaving as the character would. That evokes experiences which are similar to the role in us. But these feelings belong not to the character the author has written, but to the actor himself. Whatever dreams you may have, whatever you may have experienced in reality or your imagination, you are always yourself. (*An Actor’s Work* 209)

This passage highlights a Stanislavski who is reluctant to acknowledge the concept of character. Were we to remove this passage from its original context, one might easily place it alongside David Mamet’s declaration that there is no character at all. This passage rejects the concept of dual consciousness, dual representation, or the idea that feelings can belong to both the actor and character, and at the same time, neither. It is important to recall Richard Schechner’s description of the actor “no longer ha[ving] a ‘me’ but a ‘not not me’” (Schechner 112). However, the magic ‘if’ recognizes the distance between actor and character in transformative acting where the actor is no longer themselves, but also ‘not not themselves’ and thus enables the actor to experience *as if* they were not themselves, thus performing a new identity. Through this very performance, the new identity is enacted into existence. Nevertheless, despite proposing an incredibly useful formulation with the magic ‘if’, Stanislavski is reluctant to recognize that it serves as a bridge to conjure another consciousness.

Observing how it is used in different contexts and disciplines reinforces the power of the magic 'if'. In 2019, Olivia Fuchs and Penny Cherns wrote extensively on the question of how Stanislavski's magic 'if' might be useful in peacebuilding. Within the context of the pair's research, 'if' is used to stimulate the imagination in order to recognize alternative behavior and how that might be useful to avoid situations of conflict. The peacebuilder remains focused on helping participants to shift their perceptions surrounding instances of conflict. The research report addresses the interchangeability of 'characters' and real people and frames Stanislavski's 'if' as a necessary aid in linking these two: "[If] is the tool to explore and analyse the attitudes, behaviours, motivations and underlying assumptions of both 'characters' and real people" (Fuchs and Cherns 232). Ultimately, Fuchs and Cherns acknowledge that their work "was only a beginning, a contribution to the imagining of 'if'" (Fuchs and Cherns 242), but their beginnings lend valuable support to this research.

This is hardly the first application of an actor's work towards cross-disciplinary research. Within the medical practice, simulated participants (SPs) are trained to use Stanislavski's 'if' so that they may "authentically engage health care trainees" (Smith et al 361). Doctors have found that the magic 'if' allows for insight into how patients might be feeling when confronted with difficult situations, allowing for trainable techniques to encourage empathy within medical curricula (Case and Brauner). All of this valuable research contributes towards the argument that the actor's use of 'if' can extend beyond the world of a play and offers support towards the idea of a transformational actor-researcher contributing towards cross-disciplinary research using character as a methodology and a collaborator. Fuchs and Cherns draw on similar theories as I did in the Introduction, citing Lakoff and Johnson's assertions on imitation (Fuchs and Cherns 236), as well as aligning themselves with the work of Vladimir Mirodan, admitting that the conflict transformation could be enhanced by "physical embodiment" and the perceptual changes this would bring about (Fuchs and Cherns 240). Even more strikingly, Fuchs and Cherns' research places an immense amount of value on the element of play, resonating with my earlier analysis of children's pretend play as a mode of research

and experiential learning: “Imaginative ‘play’ can explore new connections and understanding, helping to move beyond the restrictions of the perceived reality toward exploring some of the possible solutions latent within a situation” (Fuchs and Cherns 240).

Although intended for peacebuilding and conflict transformation, the idea of *playing pretend* as a method for developing insight about a specific situation is directly aligned with what this research is concerned with. Connecting ‘play’ with transformative processes in acting is made possible by Stanislavski’s ‘if’. By stimulating the imagination, the actor is afforded an experience that might never have been available to them. The transformational actor-researcher is afforded an opportunity to ask questions that they may never have thought to ask and find answers they may never have otherwise stumbled upon had they been stuck in their own selves and experiences. After all, “This word [‘if’] is not a statement, it’s a question to be answered” (*An Actor’s Work* 53). Such a reading of the magic ‘if’ places a far greater value on the *difference* between character and actor than Tortsov seems willing to admit. This difference is an invitation to undertake transformation *as* research.

It is from this point that we can best recognize the divergence in views between Stanislavski and one of his most noted pupils, Michael Chekhov. Michael Chekhov studied with Stanislavski during a period defined by the idea that “character and actor should be the same” (Kemp 145). This proved a vital inspiration to Chekhov’s work. While the dramaturgy and pedagogy of Stanislavski was everchanging, it is Chekhov’s rebellion that led to the conception of character being situated outside of oneself and paved the way for what we have been referring to as transformational acting. Rather than focusing on the similarities between actor and character, as was the concern of Stanislavski at the time, Michael Chekhov decided to focus on the differences between the two, adding that these differences were the very essence of character: “As you will never meet two persons precisely alike in life, so you will never find two identical parts in plays. That which constitutes their *difference* makes them *characters*” (M. Chekhov 77–78, italics in original). He would ask his students to question various aspects of their identity and self-concept in comparison to those of their character.



How was their thinking different than that of the character? Their emotions and feelings? Their will and inclinations? (M. Chekhov 134–135) And finally how does the character’s body reflect these differences in comparison to the actor’s body? Despite eventually altering his views, Stanislavski came to represent a tradition of character being seated *within* the actor, while Chekhov championed a character that existed *outside* of the actor. In order to achieve this, the magic ‘if’ was repurposed into what is known as the *imaginary body*.

### 3. Chekhov’s Imaginary Body

Chekhov recognized that the practice of viewing the imaginary body *as if* it were one’s own would invariably engage in a psychophysical transformation of self.

Your whole being, *psychologically and physically*, will be changed—I would not hesitate to say even *possessed*—by the character. When really taken on and exercised, the imaginary body stirs the actor’s will and feelings; it harmonizes them with the characteristic speech and movements, it transforms the actor into another person! (M. Chekhov 79)

What Chekhov describes is supported by an enactive framework. As discussed in the Introduction, the imagination stimulates identical neural pathways to action and thus alters the way we perceive. We replace our physical body with an imagined one. As the body is a holistic system, so too is the imagined body; variations of speech and movements are made one’s own through the operative ‘if’ of the imagination. The ability of the magic ‘if’ to synchronize the actor and character in the form of a fully embodied altered sense of self is further enhanced, as the imaginary body perceives differently to the actor’s body, altering not only the character’s body but also their perception and their environment. This perpetually shifting environment reflects the perceptual changes of the imaginary body, continuously deepening the transformation.

Chekhov goes on to assert that the effectiveness of the imaginary body will be enhanced and strengthened by adding to it an *imaginary center* (M. Chekhov 80). The imaginary center is described as having a similar power to the imaginary body. By shifting your character’s center “to some other place within or outside your body, you will feel that your whole psychological and physical attitude

will change, just as it changes when you step into an imaginary body” (M. Chekhov 80). The major difference between the two is that the imaginary center is something that is quite malleable. Not only is it moveable, so that the actor may experiment with its placement inside or outside of the body and how that might affect their character, it is also possible for the actor to adjust the *quality* of the center.

It is not enough to place it [the center] in the head, for example, and leave it there to do its own work. You must further stimulate it by investing it with various desired qualities. For a wise man, let us say, you would imagine the center in your head as big, shining and radiating, whereas for a stupid, fanatic or narrow-minded type of person you would imagine a small, tense and hard center. (M. Chekhov 81)

While the imaginary body serves the actor in relation to the character as a whole, the imaginary center is something that is much more workable. Either way, both tools initiate a shift in the actor’s perceptual experience resulting in the creation of character (M. Chekhov 81). The rate at which an actor might assimilate these perceptual changes will vary from performer to performer and character to character. For some, it may seem a sudden switch. For others, it may be a gradual, perhaps seemingly imperceptible shift. However, the enactive nature of the imaginary body and the magic ‘if’ render them irresistible forces.

The functionality of ‘if’ echoes the way that I used it in the studio throughout my Initial Performance Experiment (eg. Imagining how I would behave *if* the green colored skin I saw in the mirror were my own). As I wrote above, such a use of ‘if’ recalled feelings of reconnecting to my childhood sense of playing pretend. Chekhov writes that a similar method of play is integral to the refining of the imaginary body. “Consider creating and assuming character as a kind of quick and simple game. ‘Play’ with the imaginary body, changing and perfecting it until you are completely satisfied with your achievement” (M. Chekhov 79). Chekhov’s reference to the character-building process as simple is refreshing. Gone is the idea of an actor feverishly trying to make some groundbreaking insight into the innermost workings of the character they find themselves trying to portray. Instead, one must simply play, “a quick and simple game”.

What is equally important to the simplistic quality of playing is the idea of the imaginary body as separate and independent to that of the actor. Lenard Petit, founding member of the Michael Chekhov Association (MICHA) and director of the Michael Chekhov Acting Studio NYC, emphasizes the impact that this has on the actor:

Something happens when we imagine the character in the play, as a character, separate from ourselves. Doing that simple thing sets up for us a fantasy that surpasses the limits of our lives. We can imagine things described as belonging to the character, but that we do not possess. If I am myself all the time, I do not consciously feel my body. I seem to know who I am, because of the form I have. When I get sick or experience my body in another way, then I don't really 'feel myself' I feel somehow like a different person and I will continue to feel like a different person until I get well, and once again take my body for granted. So changing something about the body will immediately give me a different sense of self. This sense of self is what is meant by the use of the word psychology in the Chekhov technique. Changing the body will alter the psychology. (Petit 76)

Petit's description of a character outside of ourselves is exactly how the self operates while playing pretend. Speaking from my own personal experience, Santa Claus, Batman, Davy Crockett, Power Rangers and an endless array of varying pirates occupied my playing pretend because they allowed me to experience the world in a way that was different to my own perceptual experience. And the reason that I bought into these illusions so wholeheartedly was not because I was imagining what qualities of myself I would bring to the character should I find myself in a similar situation. It was because they were *not* me, and when I would play dress up, I would *feel* as though I was not myself. Petit compares this sensation to when we feel ill, but also acknowledges that by extending our consciousness into another, we ignite our own body and are more in tune with it when we return from the imaginary body. Could this be what children find so exhilarating about playing pretend? What actors find so exhilarating about performing?

Craig Turner's Association Ritual is also built on the foundational idea of character and actor as different. As such, it is not surprising that he claims Michael Chekhov's pedagogy as most in line with his Association Ritual model. Turner views the imaginary body as "a kind of spiritual/imaginative guide to the dream world; his speaking and gesturing provide a bridge from the actor's inner creative part, out to consciousness in a form that can be used by the voice and body" ("Dreaming the Role" 23). While I still feel ambivalent towards some of the metaphysical imagery

that Turner uses, there are parallels between imaginary body as guide to the dream world and imaginary body as collaborator within a research context. In accordance with the enactive and performative frameworks presented, the imaginary body transforms the actor via an embodied perceptual shift. These perceptual shifts “harmonize” the actor with the character. No longer is the actor answering questions about the character, the *character* is answering questions about *themselves*. In a performance context, this is the manner in which the imaginary body serves as a guide. For the transformational actor-researcher, the imaginary body as Association Ritual allows for characters to have ‘their own’ experience. Upon returning to the physical body, the role of researcher might be assumed in order to disseminate what the transformational actor experienced via character.

#### **4. Demidov’s Fantasy**

The idea of character answering questions about themselves is one that directly resonates with another practitioner who has been referred to as “Russian theatre’s best-kept secret” (Malaev-Babel). Nikolai Demidov was an integral part to the development of Stanislavski’s system. So much so that Stanislavski credited Demidov as an editor of his work (Demidov 1). However, following their “creative paths divid[ing]”, Demidov was no longer listed as an editor and was erased from the history of the theatre (Demidov 11). Fortunately, modern scholarship has shone a light on the practices of Nikolai Demidov, highlighting his commitment towards training creative freedom. This becomes particularly clear in analyzing his conception of ‘fantasy’, a predecessor to Stanislavski’s ‘method of physical action’.

Fantasy is not imagination. Fantasy is imagination in action. An actor who can easily fantasize in their imagination, outside of themselves, is often deprived of their chief ability – to be able to fantasize in action, with their body. This is the only kind of fantasy intrinsic to the actor. Actors who possess this quality, as they start their work on the role, may not be able to give a clear answer as to how they imagine their character – they do not see it outside of themselves. As soon as they start rehearsing, however, and try out their character in action, they find out that their body, face and voice already know it all, and can draw a live and complete image of the character. (Demidov 354-355)

Demidov's 'fantasy' is key in highlighting the embodied and enactive nature of the transformative 'if'. It is not conceptual. It is corporeal and active. It is playing pretend. Demidov recognizes the importance of perception and proposes fantasy as a way of adjusting the perception of the actor. The value in Demidov's fantasy, or imagination in action, is the assertion that physical actions stimulate the imagination. By discerning between what effectively might be categorized as daydreaming versus embodying imaginary circumstances, Demidov recognizes the holistic relationship between physicality and our imagination. What is being proposed is a transformation of Stanislavski's original conceptualization of 'if' as Demidov's conception of fantasy allows the actor to ask who is the character I create *if* I move this way? How about *if* I move that way? The experiential stimulation of the imagination, and the emphasis placed on physical action in the creation of character constitute a practical implementation of what Lakoff and Johnson had theorized as our body's ability to shape conceptual thought: "Our abilities to move the way we do and to track the motion of other things give motion a major role in our conceptual system...What is important is that the peculiar nature of our bodies shapes our very possibilities for conceptualization and categorization" (Lakoff and Johnson 19). What Lakoff and Johnson deem peculiar is the very thing that drives the transformational actor. By embodying identifiable differences between themselves and their character, the actor alters their sense of self both conceptually and physically. Physicality ignites imagination and the active imagination deepens the physicality.

Imagination in action recalls Craig Turner's 'dream world'; fantasy is not the "dream world of pictures," but requires "[the] entire body's presence, motion and will" ("Dreaming the Role" 19). To achieve this, Demidov points to the rehearsal process as serving as fantasy's Association Ritual, the bridge between the actor's self and character. There are certainly similarities between Demidov's claim that character in action provides the actor all they need to know and Turner's claim that Chekhov's imaginary body allows for character to serve as the actor's guide. However, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance placed on rehearsal which is critical to the effectiveness of Demidov's practice. Turner writes, "Rehearsals are surprising forays into open-ended explorations of

the character's world, not mechanical work-throughs of logically-justified intellectual material" ("Dreaming the Role" 20). As Demidov and Turner both recognize, the rehearsal room is a space for the imagination to be active and embodied. In other words, the rehearsal room serves as an invaluable space for *play*. It is a space where character is allowed to inform the actor, and for purposes of this research, a space where character is allowed to inform the researcher. Throughout the rehearsal process, character-building (or the Association Ritual) continues, eventually reaching a point where the act of rehearsing the production becomes repetitive. Renowned theatre critic Charles Marowitz, whom I called upon in the Introduction as a speaker for the value of independent character, asserts that this is critical for transformation: "The actor in effect, hypnotizes himself by repetitions of his role" (Marowitz 100). Developed through fantasy, imagination in action, playing pretend, or however else one might like to refer to it, the actor generates a repeatable series of actions that will sustain them in enacting the character throughout the performance. In essence, the actor's score.

The rehearsal room, or studio, provides the space and opportunity to allow the imagination the freedom to create. Although children may not require a designated space for playing pretend, this is essential for the professional form of pretend play perhaps due to the constraints and expectations of adulthood. Demidov's conception of fantasy as imagination in action and acknowledgement of the importance of the rehearsal space indicate that a method of *doing* is integral to the creation of the subsequent repeatable actions or scores. Improvisation becomes integral in the creation of these scores. Some material might not be useful. Other times it might be critical. But over the course of the rehearsal process, the actor's score – in which the independent character resides – becomes more and more refined.

So far I followed primarily John Lutterbie's general definition of score; my own discussion of this aspect of the actor's work has remained fairly broad. Following on from my analysis of Demidov's active imagination, now I will identify how the score is a significant aspect of the transformational actor's process. Phillip Zarrilli highlights the acting score as a primary source of

“embodied, sensorimotor knowledge” (Zarrilli 646), yet what I would like to propose is a more specific application which addresses how the transformational actor might use score. Improvisation and open-ended play slowly give way to the repeatability of score as the character begins to emerge and take shape.

According to Demidov, the creation of the transformational actor’s score begins with fantasizing in action which provides the actor with the means for authorship. Such a method of creation allows for a more organic discovery of “thoughtful, precise, intelligent, and effective series of actions that sustains the performer throughout the performance” (Lutterbie 194). Demidov reinforces the idea that continually engaging with the imagination results in a continuously more refined character and transformation. As the transformational actor continues to fantasize in this manner, the repeatable scores generated soon give way to a character’s behavior, a second nature or series of habitual responses that begin to form the character as an embodied presence. As the process continues, the actor comes closer and closer to the character, moving along the bridge into the character’s world. By repeating these initial scores, the character’s behavior becomes more deeply embodied by the actor. The actor is then able to fantasize in a more informed manner, more efficiently developing yet more scores which in turn enable a closer affinity with the character. As the actor’s intimate awareness of their character’s behavior deepens, the scores generated in rehearsal increasingly move the actor towards deeper and more embodied transformation. This behavior-centric understanding of character informs movement, language and gesture (the three components of score identified by Lutterbie). As new knowledge continues to be generated, it can once again be integrated into the series of repeatable scores, further enhancing the connection to character. Like a wheel of cheese rolling down a hill, this process continues to gain momentum the more the actor repeats it.

I would like to offer more examples of how the actor’s score might be put into practice in order to evidence its effectiveness, particularly understood as a treasure chest of behaviors for the character and thus as a key method of transformation. The redirection of an actor’s attention to the

behavioral intricacies of their character rather than their psychology is one that occupied the work of epic theatre figurehead, Bertolt Brecht. I will now discuss how Brecht's work offers insight into and demonstrates unexpected convergences with the (post-)Stanislvskian practice I have discussed so far.

## 5. Brecht's Behavioral Score

Brecht redirected the actor's attention from the psychology of a character to their behavior and required his actors to create a behavioral backstory for their characters, rather than an emotional, or biographical one: "When he is to drink beer in your play, then you also have to know how he would eat eggs, read the papers, sleep with his wife and kick the bucket" (qtd in Sokel 177). Even though his behavioral score resonates with what I have been discussing, it needs to be acknowledged that Brecht's actor operates in a completely different type of theatre than the Stanislavskian actor. Consequently, the type of 'playing pretend' is also completely different: this is not the kind of playing dress up where you slam the door when you realize someone is watching. Brecht's pretend is like when a friend is over or when mom decides to join in. This is not necessarily the type of fantasy that an actor might lose themselves in or one in which they transcend completely into the 'dream world' in Turner's words. Brecht specifically notes that the level of imitation that he expects from his actors should be executed without any intention of "trying to subject their spectators to an illusion" (Brecht 185). This idea of *showing* a behavior is apparent when demonstrating to a partner how a customer at work behaved earlier that day. It is demonstrative in nature rather than representational. This shift between representational to presentational dictated by Brecht cultivates a more direct relationship with the audience. For Brecht, transformation is not the aim of the actor but rather something that the actor is holding back from:

The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying. He is not Lear, Harpagon, Schweik; he shows them. He reproduces their remarks as authentically as he can; he puts forward their way of behaving to the best of his abilities and knowledge of men; but never tries to persuade himself (and thereby others) that this amounts to a complete transformation. (Brecht 185)



What Brecht envisioned for this new conception of theatre was to presenting audiences action over emotion (Sokel 179).

Despite resisting the idea of transformation, Brecht provided his actors with the tools to be able to alter their sense of self. The behavioral, action-based score is subsequently a physical one, and as I quoted Mirodan's assertion earlier, the beginnings of a transformational actor's process. So while Brecht directs the actor's focus away from the union of character and actor, the behavioral score invariably leads them in that direction. The subsequent transformation, whether intentional or not, is something that Brecht is eventually forced to acknowledge, just as Stanislavski eventually conceded that character and actor are indeed different. In 1953, excerpts of Stanislavski's book, *An Actor's Work*, were published in German for the first time, and very shortly after, Brecht wrote the following response:

Before you assimilate a character in the play, or lose yourself in it, there is a first phase: you become familiar with the character and do not understand it...The second phase is that of empathy, of the search for the truth of the character in the subjective sense, you let the character do what *it* wants, how it wants, criticism be damned, society should only pay for what is needed. – But it is not a matter of diving in head first. You let your character react to the other characters, the surrounding, the specific plot in the easiest, that is, the most natural way. This gathering continues slowly until you dive, until you jump into the final form of character, becoming one with it. (Brecht 280)

Three years before his death, Brecht has changed his stance on transformational acting; the rhetoric of abandoning transformation has been replaced by the complete acceptance of its necessity within the character-building process. What remains is a meticulous description of character responding to their environment. Brecht writes that the 'gathering continues', referring to the fact that environment and character are continually shaping each other, learning through their actions. Finally, the actor achieves complete immersion within character: transformation. In addition to recognizing character as an entity existing outside of the world of the play, Brecht also articulates the inherent importance of the rehearsal process and the influence of the environment on the transformational actor.

## **6. Method of Physical Actions**

Demidov's conception of fantasy and Brecht's behavioral focus clearly reflect a Meyerholdian influence, exemplifying the psychophysical ideal represented in the decree "all psychological states are determined by physiological processes" (Meyerhold 199). The invocation of the term psychophysical is a deliberate choice to return us to the practice of Stanislavski. The term, and the psychophysical training associated with it, represent a fusion between the mind and the body. It is these very binaries, necessary in breaking down a complex technique into understandable relationships, that contribute to the idea of division rather than a holistic integration of the human organism, deepening a tradition of misunderstanding Stanislavski and his system. With the benefit of hindsight, it becomes clear that Stanislavski's system was far from complete in 1923 and 1924 when the Moscow Art Theatre made their two momentous tours to the United States. Nor was it complete when Michael Chekhov left Russia in 1928.<sup>11</sup> Joseph Roach directly addresses this historical fact in his seminal reinterpretation of acting theory through a modern scientific lens, *The Player's Passion*: "The Stanislavski System did not fully mature until the 1930s, and it was by no means a closed book at the time of the master's death in 1938. It culminated in the development of the 'method of physical actions'" (Roach 197). Stanislavski felt this culmination, also referred to as 'active analysis', synthesized all his previous work and theories on acting.

What Stanislavski wanted to provide was a method for actors to explore the play, the events as they unfold, in terms of what they would do in the various situations the author provided, using exercises and improvisations. It is active analysis on the rehearsal-room floor, as opposed to the reflective, formal analysis that takes place in the study; it first asks what happens, rather than what the dramaturgical structure is. (Benedetti xv)

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<sup>11</sup> The incomplete impression of Stanislavski's practice from each different slice of history was enhanced by former MAT students, such as Michael Chekhov and Nikolai Demidov. The result has contributed to the idea that his system is solely intended to work from the inside-out, privileging the imagined psychology of the character. This confusion was further augmented by the Moscow Art Theatre touring the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. When they came to New York, they brought with them four plays from their early repertoire: *Tsar Fiodor*, *The Lower Depths*, *The Cherry Orchard* and *Three Sisters* (Benedetti 282-287). The Group Theatre was then formed in response to this incomplete portrait of Stanislavski's work. Lee Strasberg, under the influence of Richard Boleslavsky's diluted "First Six Lessons" (Benedetti 286), placed "sense memory" and "emotional recall" on a pedestal. This is not to say that emotional recall is the source of disembodied acting. On the contrary, it is entirely possible for these techniques to be included and integrated in a holistic, non-dualistic practice. However, the influence of Stanislavski's system on Strasberg's Method has proven to enhance a false synonymity between Stanislavski and affective memory.

Jean Benedetti's description of active analysis reiterates that this later phase of Stanislavski's work correlates with a modern cognitive understanding of imagination and perception. This final development of his career, undoubtedly inspired by the pedagogy and practice of Chekhov, Demidov, Meyerhold and even Brecht, truly embraces a holistic union between the psychological and the physical, transforming the function of 'if'. Through this model, similarly to the imaginary body, the actor no longer finds themselves asking 'What would I do *if* I were in these circumstances?', but rather finds themselves within these circumstances, embodying them *as if* they were reality, simply asking 'What do I do now?' In his own words, Stanislavski described both the 'method of physical actions' and 'active analysis' as being carried out "simultaneously by all the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical forces of our nature; this is not theoretical [research] but practical research for the sake of a genuine objective, which we attain through physical actions" (*Creating a Role* 202).

This integral piece of Stanislavski's system recognizes the holistic nature of an actor's practice. However, Stanislavski's reference to a 'genuine objective' alludes to a set of limits towards the application of this research. It is possible to interpret this as a manifestation of the dramatic (and only so) function of character. In her detailing of a functional model of active analysis, theatre and cognitive studies scholar Rhonda Blair locates the character within a restricted dramatic context: "It is evident in all of Stanislavsky's writings that the work on a character cannot be separated from the world of the play" (Blair 33). The use of the phrase 'world of the play' might seem to serve as a replacement for 'environment', but it is important to note that the 'world of the play' and the play itself are not necessarily the same thing. The play itself is a finite landscape. What the playwright has written and published is relatively unchangeable. Although this may seem limiting, Blair's usage of the phrase 'world of the play' might be read as an indication of the relationship between perceiver and their environment. In the case of character, the world of the play is their environment – not just what is visible in the play text itself but everything else that is invisible, suggested, yet nevertheless there. If an enactive lens is applied, the character and its environment are dynamically and

continuously shaping, shifting and informing each other. What Stanislavski may not have realized at the time was that his 'method of physical actions' and 'active analysis' were the very means necessary to separate character from the world of the play.

A linguistic comparison of these key terms 'method of physical actions', 'active analysis' and 'enaction' reveal a common element: ACTION. It is Stanislavski's focus on physical actions that correlate his practice with theories of embodied cognition, and more specifically, enaction. Alva Noë's description of how perception functions within the enactive paradigm also emphasizes action:

Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. *What we perceive* is determined by *what we do* (or what we know how to do); it is determined by what we are *ready* to do. In ways I try to make precise, we *enact* our perceptual experience; we act it out. (*Action in Perception 1*)

By redirecting the actor's attention to the actions of their character, Stanislavski encourages a shift in perceptual experience. As Demidov refers to this in relation to fantasy, the rehearsal room is a designated space for imagination in action. It is what Chekhov refers to as the imaginary body that indicates what the character would do, what the character would know how to do, and what they were ready to do. Through improvisations and exercises, these boundaries and limitations are explored, pushed and established. The given circumstances here most likely serve as inspiration, but they are often meant to provide the actor an opportunity to explore unseen elements of the play. What seems to be unanimously acknowledged is the necessity for the performer to have a space to *play*. After all, that is the name of the task at hand, is it not?

## 6.1 Active Analysis in Action

Drawing on my own training, I would like to reflect on an instance of active analysis in practice in order to demonstrate how a functional and practical model of active analysis brings together the various practitioners I have discussed. As mentioned in the Preface, during my time studying at GITIS in Moscow, I found myself playing the title role in Anton Chekhov's *Platonov*. On the first day of rehearsals, I was expecting to have a discussion of the play, read through it with the cast, discuss again, read again, etc. Instead, we setup the space. Plastic chairs were pushed together

to form a garden bench. The director shouted something in Russian and the translator said. “The curtain is the house,” referring to the huge black curtain far upstage. More Russian: “This is when you arrive to the house.” I was filled with anxiety. Did I have the wrong copy of the script, because I definitely did not remember this scene. The director was Vera Babicheva, an experienced actress and a GITIS faculty member for over 20 years, unwavering in her commitment to the Stanislavski system. As she spoke to me, she indiscriminately threw a silver bucket on the stage. I waited for the translator. “You come to the house and see the love of your life flirting with four old men.” And that was that. I entered the space, struggling to authenticate some level of fury. Some Russian and a gesture. I did not need the translator for that. She wanted me to kick the bucket. Start from the top. I came in again. The fury was not as difficult to authenticate, because all I was thinking about was how I was going to smash the bucket. I remember wearing boots at the time, and because of that not thinking about how it might feel on my foot. I hauled off and kicked the bucket and it immediately hurt. I swore. I went into monologue about how I couldn’t believe this. What sort of an idiot would leave a bucket out there? She stopped me. “Good. Do it again. No words.” This continued (luckily, I quickly developed a way to kick the bucket without hurting myself) until we had constructed what eventually would become the first scene of the play, written not by Anton Chekhov, but by the circumstances he had created, my physical actions or behavioral score, and the inspiration of the director. It was from the very simple act of kicking a bucket that my Platonov was born. His swagger and thinking that he could kick that bucket over the fence. The embarrassment when he found out that he could not and, instead, hurt himself. The need to suppress that pain by using anger. All of this came from the requested behavior of *kicking the bucket* (would Brecht not be proud?).<sup>12</sup> From this moment I could see the body of a man who behaved like this, and more than that, I could feel how different it felt in my own body. In this instance, Platonov’s imaginary body was pure action, just like that, I was engaged in Demidov’s fantasy.

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<sup>12</sup> “You also have to know how he would...*kick the bucket*” (qtd in Sokel 177; emphasis added).

Continuing this process of embodied exploration immediately extends beyond the ‘world of the play’. What began as myself, Ben perceiving *my* environment shifted to Platonov perceiving *his* environment. This was achieved through the use of ‘if’: how would Platonov react *if* he saw Anna Petrovna flirting with a group of old men? To embody this, I then translated it to action: ‘Kick this bucket as *if* Platonov saw the love of his life flirting with a group of old men?’ To enact this, I, as Platonov, reacted to Anna Petrovna flirting with a group of old men. By engaging with this method, it gradually became easier and easier to set aside my ‘normal’ behavior and exist as the character, responding to the environment as the character would.

This is due to the circuitous nature of enaction. With every repetition, the environment becomes clearer, shaping the identity of the character. The identity of the character (their physical life, relationships, etc.) is continuously refined, in turn, defining, refining, and strengthening the actor’s material impression of the environment. It is no longer *their* (the character’s) environment, but *your* environment; the physical actions will alter the perceptual experience, and subsequently alter the sense of self. This is foundational to the concept of performative identity, which I discussed in dialogue with Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz. What is implied here is that the actor does not simply build a character that exists within the world of the play, but a *being* into whom they are transformed. A living, experiencing entity outside of themselves; what I have been calling an independent character. Mirodan echoes the performative nature of identity as he describes the physical starting points of the transformative: “If I may reiterate: this approach to acting entails the *deliberate construction of character as, first and foremost, a physical process.*” (Mirodan 19) Stanislavski further emphasizes the importance of this physical starting point, writing that the psychological understanding of character may form the wings of an airplane, built to carry the actor into the “realm of imagination” (*Stanislavski’s Legacy* 45). But, “if the aeroplane had no solid runway, could it get off the ground? Of course not. That is why our first concern is with the building of a solid runway, compounded of physical actions made concrete by their own truth.”

(*Stanislavski’s Legacy* 46)

Being lifted into the realm of imagination signifies both actor and character's journey towards independence, or the route towards the "not me, not not me" in Schechner's terms. Tracking character through narrative recalls the words of Charles Marowitz, explaining the separation from their original context. In *The Dilated Body* (1985), Eugenio Barba charts the transformation of Captain Van der Decken and his voyage around the Cape of Good Hope into the mythology of the Flying Dutchman. This is a great example of an independent character built through the embodied active imagination of people. What begins rooted in reality is reshaped by the popular imagination. With each reincarnation, the Captain and his *curse* simultaneously provide and receive inspiration by those who share in the lore. When Richard Wagner encounters the tale, his own imagination and personal experiences further transform the Flying Dutchman narrative, leading to the creation of *Der Fliegende Holländer*. This variation on Heinrich Heine's retelling is then altogether reshaped at the hands of Strindberg. Barba historicizes the chain of adaptations adeptly and notes that the performer faces a much harder task when it comes to monitoring their transformation.

The *leaping* 'behaviour' of thought is easy to observe when it manifests itself in the peripeteias of a famous story. What is difficult is to make oneself so flexible as not to impede the manifestations and disorientations of this behavior in the placid flow of one's own thinking. (*The Dilated Body* 19)

By linking and differentiating the action of tracing the historical development of a character with the actor's engagement with character through the rehearsal process, Barba identifies a challenge for the transformational actor-researcher. The transformational actor must allow the 'leaps' in behavior, resulting from the actor's engagement of the magic 'if', fantasy, the imaginary body, etc., while the researcher (who is also the actor) must not impede the flow of transformation. There are seemingly opposing forces involved in this methodology which Barba reconciles by developing a highly adaptable technique that can offer varying degrees of transformation as each individual actor interprets in terms of their interests and their personalities.

## **7. Actor's Dramaturgy**

The 'actor's dramaturgy' is a term invented by Barba, intended to encapsulate the individualistic nature of the actor's work. Barba offers the term to incorporate the actor's self into the discussion of acting technique.

With this term, I referred to their [the actors'] individual creative contribution to the growth of a performance, and to an ability to root what they recounted into a structure of organic actions...Thus by 'organic' I mean the actions that unleash a kinaesthetic commitment and are sensorially convincing for the spectator, whatever the convention and genre used by the actor. (*On Directing and Dramaturgy* 23)

Barba refers to these actions that sensorially inspire the spectator as "real actions". At the core of Barba's theatre is the creation of a "score of real actions" and the primary method by which Odin Teatret develops this score is through improvisations which are shaped by the actor's dramaturgy (*On Directing and Dramaturgy* 26). Barba might propose a theme or an idea for the actors to improvise on. The actors improvise, then generate repeatable scores. Barba then shapes these into the montages that ultimately become performances.

While this is a reductive description of a long-term intensive process, Roberta Carreri, provides a more detailed portrait of contributing her actor's dramaturgy to various Odin Teatret performances. According to Carreri, Barba acknowledges that working with improvisation may cultivate what this thesis has been describing as 'persona acting': "When you improvise, you are repeating your mannerisms. We have to be able to rid ourselves of these" (qtd in Carreri 147). Carreri writes that the search to avoid their own clichés was one that occupied every member of Odin Teatret and each new performance presented an opportunity to attempt to find a new solution (Carreri 146). The result is that there is no specific 'character-building technique' that can be ascribed to Odin Teatret; but rather, as Barba writes, "the so-called 'building of the character' consisted in composing a kaleidoscope of structured actions in order to orient or disorient the spectator" (*On Directing and Dramaturgy* 117). This kaleidoscope of structured actions is executed in a number of different ways: some more traditional than others. In his notes on *The Gospel according to Oxyrhincus*, Barba writes, "I had given specific characters to the actors at the very beginning, asking them to develop their biographies and write them down" (*On Directing and Dramaturgy*



119). Elsewhere, he recalls giving the actors themes with the intention that each actor's approach would mold and shape them in unique and specific ways. However, what remains a constant is the creation of performance scores via improvisations.

These improvisations can be likened to pretend play, made possible through an open space for experimentation. In the chapter "Composing a character", Carreri writes about the *Fiskedam*, a Danish word meaning a breeding pool for fish (Carreri 88). She explains that it is during the *Fiskedam* period of their training and rehearsal process that actors are able to experiment in whatever ways they may want. "There was space for even the craziest ideas, such as roller skating, unicycling, wearing green or red wigs, dressing up and taking photographs" (Carreri 88). The *Fiskedam* offers a place to play, and more specifically, a space to play in costume. Some of Odin Teatret's most iconic characters are born in this context, including Iben Nagel Rasmussen's Katrin (Carreri 89), who appears in two performances, *Brecht's Ashes* and *The Great Cities Under the Moon*, as well as featuring in the film *Dressed in White*.

*Dressed in White* (1976) documents an important effort to make character 'independent' and presents a case in point for the collaboration between actor and character to conduct research. The film follows Nagel Rasmussen's arrival at an Italian village, masked and always carrying her drum. What follows is a surreal combination of fiction and reality, where the Italian village ultimately rejects the intrusion of such a performative figure. I would like to suggest that this is transformational acting-as-research at work: Nagel Rasmussen uses character in a way that investigates, discovers and articulates how a specific community reacts to an outsider. Framing *Dressed in White* as research repositions the actor-researcher as uniquely equipped to engage in social research. The idea that character can be used as a jumping-off point, specifically for enabling research, is certainly valuable for this thesis. By affording the actor the possibility of working on and with character without any relation to a certain text, characters are torn from the page and thrown into the world. The recontextualization of character means that they no longer exist as vehicles for their playwrights, but extend their function to be potential research collaborators. This independent

character may then serve as a vehicle for the transformative actor, to work heuristically while embodying the circumstances of a being entirely outside of oneself.

Despite some of these methods directly aligning with this research, the intended function of Barba's dramaturgy is unique. The aim of Barba's theatre is to identify what is at the core of a character and to strip away the excess until the sensation could be translated viscerally to any audience in the world. The deconstruction of sensation is the primary focus of the actor's dramaturgy, however this work is often a solitary endeavor. A metaphor that Barba often uses to describe both his theatre and his actors is the "floating island". Rather than concern themselves with how they might interact with other actors, the intention is instead to remain fixated on their personal response to the material (J. Turner 33). In this way, the actor's dramaturgy functions as a form of heuristic research where improvisations are used to inspire research questions as well as explore them. Barba serves as a research facilitator, harmonizing the work of the individual players into various forms, eventually solidifying the structure into what they would perform and, very frequently, tour for audiences.

## **8. Conclusion**

The lineage of acting practice and pedagogy that I have traced highlights a variety of transformative tools aiding in the emergence of an independent character. This character is capable of extending beyond the work of the playwright, perceiving and experiencing in ways separate to how the actor perceives and experiences. The impetus for this perceptual shift begins with the magic 'if', providing the actor a means for activating their imagination. By creating an imagined physical form, the actor can engage with the idea of their character differing from themselves. Active analysis gives the actor freedom to allow their imagination into action, developing and transforming via fantasy. The character generated through this process affords the transformational actor an opportunity to learn from the experience of the character as an other being, exposing an opportunity for character to contribute to research.

My journey through these historical approaches has heralded the value of ‘playing pretend’ and engaging with the imagination and identified a variety of tools that might aid the transformational actor. These tools can be enhanced by the reintroduction of the idea of ‘dressing up’ which uses costume and makeup to facilitate the fantasy, one of my key proposals in this research. However, this idea contradicts Michael Chekhov’s belief that such external factors are superficial compared to the actor’s embodied work: “Th[e] assumption of the character’s imaginary physical form influences your psychology ten times stronger than any garment” (M. Chekhov 79). But doesn’t the garment help the actor actively imagine and assume the physical form of the character? Having written a considerable amount on the power of the imagination, what is the problem of materializing the character’s body through costume and makeup? Alva Noë writes that “what we perceive is determined by what we do (or what we know how to do)” and what we are ready to do (*Action in Perception* 1). Costume and makeup push the boundaries of the imagination beyond what we might think we can do, or maybe more importantly, cannot do. At this point I would like to introduce the *costumatic approach*: the conscious use of costume and makeup in a transformational character-building process. The next two chapters address and define this approach in more detail and ask how working with costume and makeup, in a *costumatic way*, alongside the transformational tools identified in this chapter such as active analysis, imaginary body, fantasy, the actor’s score, work on behavior and the actor’s dramaturgy, can enrich the actor-researcher’s Association Ritual and enable a process of research. The following chapters will attempt to examine costume and makeup in isolation, and then in an integrated system with the other transformational tools discussed in this chapter.

## Chapter 2- Naked Villainy: Costume and Character

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### 1. Introduction

Having outlined the transformational practices of others, the focus of the writing now shifts towards my own practice. The previous two chapters position theory in such a way to support the inclusion of costume in the transformational actor's toolbox. Rather than being sucked into the trap of referring to this process using the restrictive binary of *outside-in* or *inside-out*, this chapter will elaborate on my meaning behind introducing the term 'costumatic'. The term is a portmanteau, combining the words 'costume' and 'somatic', inspired by Sally Dean's Somatic Costumes™ to be discussed in the following pages. This approach to character is not new—other actors have worked with costume and harvested its power to evoke character phenomenologically. However, I find that this term, *costumatic*, goes further as it not only negates harmful dichotomies such as 'out/in', but also recognizes the agency of costume and how it might be integrated within acting technique.

The *costumatic* approach to character is also an opportunity to reintroduce play back into the actor's process. Just as a child might hunt through a trunk of costumes as a means to inspire how they might 'play pretend', so too is the transformational actor inspired by the costume trunk. A *costumatic* approach reengages with the idea of acting as a professional form of pretend play. *Costumatic* also refers to the inclusion of makeup in the actors process,<sup>13</sup> and both are wielded purposefully as practical stimulation for the imagination and embodied perception, directing, facilitating, manipulating, and informing the experience of the transformational actor-researcher. Although notably affected by somatic feedback, it is important to mention that the *costumatic* approach exists within an enactive framework, and therefore does not neglect the impact of the psychosomatic experience, informed by how the gaze of others might influence the perceived experience. Although for organizational ease I have artificially separated these two components, I recognize that they are operating simultaneously within a holistic system.

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<sup>13</sup> Makeup and its placement within the *costumatic* approach is the subject of Chapter 3.

This chapter also introduces another set of voices to the discussion at hand, in the form of critical costume scholarship. Researcher-practitioners such as Rachel Hann, Aoife Monks, Donatella Barbieri and Sally Dean offer support for the cross-disciplinary usage of costume and echo the proclamations of its importance to the performance making process. Some of their practices, particularly Dean's and Barbieri's serve as major influences on my own development of the practice of the transformational actor-researcher.

My practice also inadvertently stumbles into the intricate and complicated dilemma of the ethical implications presented by taking on the form of an other. Extended readings covering the subject of disability alongside documented experimentation guide me and the reader through the development of the emergent methodology that is the costumatic approach.

## **2. Costume as Enactive**

"Garments so close to our bodies also articulate the soul" (Wilson xi). A prolific author on the subjects of fashion, feminism, and popular culture, Elizabeth Wilson's statement reflects the vital link that she draws between the history of fashion and modernity in her book *Adorned in Dreams* (1985). Exploring the connection between identity and fashion is not just about looking at how what we wear represents who we are, but also about acknowledging how they shape who we are in line with the principles of embodiment and enaction that I discussed previously. The relationship that Wilson qualifies resonates with Varela's argument regarding enaction: "We propose as a name the term *enactive* to emphasize the growing conviction that cognition is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs" (Varela et al. 9). The "variety of actions" that an individual performs is directly affected by their physical form, which is directly affected by what they wear, which in turn directly affects their cognition, and ultimately, their identity.

Such an enactive understanding of identity resonates with correlating theories of transformation and perception. This experiential framework recognizes that the body is constantly processing and producing knowledge. The body as subject, as well as object, as agent and as perceiver, is enacting the world around itself, both consciously and by default. Rather than existing as a fixed entity, the body and the impressions it makes of the surrounding world, are guided and shaped by the perceiver's actions. This is a circuitous process where the environment affects the agent's actions and the agent's actions affect their environment. Both the environment and the actions are affecting and being affected by the agent's mode of perception within the "local situation" (Varela et al. 173). This local situation and its perception and enaction are interrelated with the perceiver's body, and therefore, what they put on their body. In the terms of this research, it follows that as the actor/performer is the perceiver we are investigating, then it needs to be acknowledged that costume is a structure that "determines how the perceiver can act and be modulated by environmental events" (Varela et al. 173).

This fluid understanding of the body, not as a fixed entity but as a malleable construct, rejects the essentialist paradigm and begins to accept the body as the sum of a variety of influences. This idea is what cultural scenographer Rachel Hann refers to as "body assemblages" ("Body Assemblages"). Although I could use this as an opportunity to digress and expand on the intricacies of assemblage theory, I am more interested in the way Hann links this idea of body assemblages to costume. By reconsidering the body as assemblage, Hann also makes space to reconsider the influence and agency of costume. In line with the enactive framework that I have laid out earlier, Hann proposes costume as a wearable environment ("Scenographic Futures" 3:48-3:51).

Seeing costume as environment, given an enactive theoretical lens, is critical to understanding how the transformational actor might use costume toward character. As Wilson observes, its closeness to the body renders costume – and makeup for that matter – a truly powerful tool. Hann offers that this closeness can be referred to as the "hug of a costume", and that this hugging is what delivers its agency:

In viewing the act of costuming as a hug, this challenges scholars and practitioners to consider costume as an active and reactive performance agent. Beyond a descriptive practice, costume shapes movement through an effective reciprocal exchange between body and costume: where the immediacy of the costumed act affects both the worn and the wearer. (“Debating Critical Costume” 35)

Revisiting Stanislavski and the fictional Kostya, the hugging is demonstrated as effective in manipulating a performer’s local situation and how such a garmented embodiment of an other’s local situation may evoke deep transformation. Inspired by Tortsov’s example of the Englishman, Kostya finds himself within a costume storeroom searching for something to dress a character. He doesn’t know who that character will be yet, but finds himself drawn to “a simple old morning coat” (*Building a Character* 11). Kostya is deeply affected by witnessing this morning coat. In fact, he does not wear the costume at all, yet finds that it has invaded his unconscious, stirring a “terrifying sense of fatefulness” (*Building a Character* 11). The mere thought of embodying the old morning coat evokes a visceral reaction – a testament to the power of Michael Chekhov’s imaginary body, who wrote that “th[e] assumption of the character’s imaginary physical form influences your psychology ten times more strongly than any garment” (M. Chekhov 79). Just *imagining* wearing the coat is powerful.

However, Kostya’s imagined experience of wearing the costume falls short of transformative. The character remains unclear in his mind, barely appearing in bouts of inspiration (*Building a Character* 13-14), only to vanish back into ephemeral obscurity. This continues fruitlessly until the moment when Kostya finally puts the coat on and begins to physically embody the costume. Then his transformation takes place.

I sent a call boy for [a quill pen] and while waiting for his return, I paced up and down the room, feeling how all the parts of my body, features, facial lines, fell into their proper places and established themselves. After walking around the room two or three times, with an uncertain, uneven gait I glanced in the mirror and did not recognize myself. Since I had looked into it the last time a fresh transformation had taken place in me. (*Building a Character* 17)

When the call boy returns, he doesn’t recognize Kostya at first. Once he takes to the stage, Tortsov struggles to recognize him as well. He effectively disappears into character. So much so that Tortsov gives him a congratulatory hug, echoing the hug of the costume (*Building a Character* 20).

What Stanislavski demonstrates through Kostya is the ideal approach to dressing-up which Aoife Monks addresses in her seminal text on performance costume, *An Actor in Costume* (2010). In claiming that “the costume is a body that can be taken off” Monks draws attention to the indistinguishability of performer and performance as mediated by costume (Monks 11). Understood through the enactive lens, the costume *is* the actor’s body onstage while the actor’s body simultaneously brings the costume to life. Kostya’s transformation, facilitated by the old morning coat, exemplifies the powerful relationship between the actor and costume which Monks succinctly summarizes: “Putting a personality on creates personality within, surprising the actor with its force” (Monks 60). This is the power of costuming, shaping the actor’s body and altering their identity simultaneously from the outside-in and the inside-out. In this way, costume serves as a method to activate experience *and* perceptual change. Monks describes this phenomenon as an “external stimulus that transforms the actor’s interior private self” (Monks 61). It is important to note that rather than referring to a transformation of the character’s self, Monks chooses to write of the actor’s self. However reluctant Tortsov—or Stanislavski himself for that matter—may have been to accept the influence of externalities, the reality is that the actor is powerless against the effects of costume because it alters their identity. This new identity *is* character.

Stanislavski and Chekhov’s reluctance to embrace the influence of costume is comparable to its wider treatment within the academic community. It is only recent that costume’s inherent agency has been recognized. *Critical Costume*, co-founded by Rachel Hann and Sidsel Bech in 2013, is a research platform to develop and share new scholarship on the status of costume. Hann writes, “[the event] was developed in response to individuals such as Donatella Barbieri and Aoife Monks, questioning why theatre and performance academics rarely spoke of costume when it was evidently significant to the practices under discussion” (“Debating Critical Costume” 21).

Hann’s work details how costume can bridge a number of disciplines and provides support for some of the claims of my research regarding the implications of transformational acting outside of the theatre:



The costume methodologies are not just about performing character but they're also about thinking about the way in which we feel with our bodies and how our bodies as assemblage – as all these different things coming together which is not a singular unit but it's always something which is in process – can be explored, identified and critiqued through costume as an eventful happening, as an intervention into our conventions and into a normativity of appearance. (“Body Assemblages” 15:19-15:51)

Such an invitation to involve costume interdisciplinarily is one that this research readily accepts. The point is driven home that “Costume is far from trivial” (“Debating Critical Costume” 28).

Modern feminist theory supports the idea of costume's agency and its placement as a vital cross-disciplinary practice. I discussed Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler earlier and argued that the notion of performativity embraces enaction and recognizes the role of the body as a producer of meaning rather than an inert passenger (Grosz xi). Grosz describes the body as “inscriptive surface”, not only due to the various ‘external’ factors which bear on it including socially regulated performances, but as a result of its own psychic interiority (Grosz 27). This mirrors the enactive process undergone by the transformational actor. Character is shaped, or inscribed, by the psychophysical presence different to the actor's habitual form (invoked through costume, adjustments to posture and gait, vocal changes, etc.) which in turn has an effect on the character/actor's psychic interiority. At the same time, the ever-changing psychic interiority of the character/actor is also inscribing their psychophysical presence.

Grosz notes the capacity of the body, as ‘inscriptive surface’, for narrative. The body becomes the page for a multitude of social narratives to be written, “creat[ing] characters and plots through the textualization of the body's contours” (Grosz 119). Every moment of every life is continuously absorbed by the body, and subsequently constructed, moment by moment, exemplifying the principles of enaction. If I am the actor, as my body is affected by my environment and my choices within my environment, my inner life responds, radiating outwardly so that it is affecting and being affected by my bodily influences, imagined or otherwise. The body is a driving force behind the perceiver's actions, not only as a direct lens through which the environment is experienced but also as an archive that has significant impact on the construction of the self-

concept. As our body shapes our actions and shifts our perception, it is changed and it stores these changes in such a way that means the self-concept is similarly shaped and altered.

Grosz's voluntary means of inscription echo the words of Sally Dean, a somatic practitioner whose research has led her to the creation of repeatable Somatic Costumes™:

In our daily-life observations, we see how what we wear affects the way we move and how we are perceived. If I wear high heels, for example, I walk in an entirely different way than if I wear boots. My experience of my feet, and indeed of my whole body, is different; I create a quite different 'character', and the basis for my interactions with my environment and with others around me also changes. ("Somatic movement" 168)

Dean reflects an enactive point of view and shares in Monks' concept of costume as perceptual instigator. She seems to suggest that the actor may be able to manipulate or design their costumes in order to access character-specific experiences, as long as they maintain a heightened level of awareness dedicated to dressing-up. Oftentimes in daily life, we note how our clothes present us as a specific character *to* the world but not how they in turn affect the character that we *are*. One may or may not acknowledge that what we wear has an effect on our perceptual experience or on the perceptual experience of others we may encounter, as the purpose of this type of habitual dressing is functional rather than eliciting a specific response. This level of awareness is what Dean refers to as 'daily-life wearing' ("Aware-Wearing" 232). An alternative to daily-life wearing, "'Aware-Wearing' is a somatic approach to wearing that invites wearers to bring attention to their perceptions and experiences of themselves, the costume, others and the environment" ("Aware-Wearing" 232). The '*Aware-Wearer*' recognizes the enactive framework dictating the significance of what is put on the body, but more than that, they are aware and sensitive to how what they put on their body makes them experience. This sensitivity affords the actor the opportunity to consider how their methods of inscription might affect their character.

The difference between Dean's Somatic Costume™ versus costume in the costumatic sense is the design of the Somatic Costume™ towards a specific perceptual experience. As a participant at one of Dean's drop-in classes at the Siobhan Davies Dance Studio in London, I had an opportunity to explore within four of her costumes, including the "Balloon Hat" and the "Tube/Boundary" costume.

I specifically chose the word “within” because that is where the exploration takes place: once the external form has been assumed. Dean explains the intention behind each of these two costumes: “...we created the Balloon Hat to give the head a sense of volume and buoyancy, while the Tube/Boundary costume aimed to sense the boundary of the skin” (“Where is the Body” 99). The costumes are successful in drawing bodily attention towards the intended location. The reason for this is because this is how they are designed. Through ‘Aware-Wearing’, Dean achieves a method for reintroducing the body into the costume design process and creating inhabitable tools to guide the wearer towards specific somatic experiences.

Can ‘Aware-Wearing’ Somatic Costumes™ function as a way of providing the actor a deeper, more embodied connection to a character’s imaginary center? In Dean’s Somatic Costumes™, the quality of material and placement are critical in generating specific sensorimotor knowledge for the wearer. Materiality and locality resonate with how Michael Chekhov outlines the imaginary center. But the actor cannot simply have a costume designed specifically to distill the exact quality and placement of the character’s imaginary center without experimentation. The actor must play with these elements until they have discovered the exact combination. This is why the transformational actor-researcher must be an Aware-Wearer in order to use costume effectively as an acting tool. Aware-Wearing allows them the opportunity to enhance the experience of the character’s imaginary body, their imaginary center, or even the fantasy that has been created within the actor’s imagination. In this way, they must become costume designer. Inversely, to aid in the actor’s transformation, designated costume designers must engage with Dean’s Aware-Wearing methodology. By focusing on the perceptual experience of the costume, an actor may then effectively manipulate their transformation, and what they may learn from such a transformation. This calculated, costume-led character-building process, and the subsequent character, may then serve as independent research collaborators. Rather than a character in a play, the transformational, costume-driven actor, finds their character a fully embodied, living, breathing entity existing within our lived experience. As critically acclaimed actor, Mark Rylance describes, “The clothes inspire me

to believe I am a real person rather than just a character presented in a play” (qtd in Tiramani 16).

Donatella Barbieri, a performance costume scholar and designer, offers a similar proposal to Dean’s ‘Aware-Wearing’, opting to use the term ‘mind-full body’ when discussing the importance of the perceptual experience in costume (“The Body” 197). For performance costume scholarship, experiencing costume rather than merely observing costume provides a critical component to the field of study that has yet to be significantly explored (“Aware-Wearing” 229). Recalling Monks, the actor’s body and the costume cannot exist without each other and therefore cannot be separated. It is the transformational actor-researcher, whose practice empowers them to disappear within the experience of the costume while their *other self* continues as researcher who can support this inquiry. Such a phenomenological framing of costume guides Barbieri’s practice-based research leading her development of a “costume-practice-led methodology for performance-making” (“The Body” 197). This approach recognizes that if costume is brought in at an early enough stage, its capacity to alter the perceptual experience of the actor will instigate and dictate the entirety of the performance. In the case of the transformational actor-researcher, costume has the agency to instigate and dictate the direction of the research.

In the following section, I will critically account for a workshop I participated in, facilitated by Donatella Barbieri at the London College of Fashion. This personal account provides practical insight towards Barbieri’s “costume-practice-led methodology for performance-making” which served as a starting point for my practice-based research on Richard III.

### **3. Brouček with Barbieri: A Practical Exploration**

Over the course of two months (December 2016-January 2017), I worked closely with two costume design students at the London College of Fashion, Geyi Zhou and Han Li, under the supervision of Donatella Barbieri. The aim of the project was for the designers to create costume pieces that would then inform the architecture of a performance. The performance itself would be created in movement sessions of an hour and a half in duration led by choreographer and clown,

Peta Lily. As a performer, my experience within this project was as a living mannequin for the majority of the process as the performative costumes required the inhabitation of a body. Before any type of performing was required of me, I had been in for three separate costume fittings, with each of my designers. The first fitting consisted of muslin mock-ups and some large air conditioning ducts which were fitted over my arms. I had no idea what character I was supposed to be playing and there were no signs that I was going to find that out anytime soon. The only information that I had received upon volunteering was that the students would be working on characters from a Czech opera, *The Excursions of Mr. Brouček to the Moon and to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century*.

For the second costume fitting, I received slightly more information. I tried on a very large woolen suit jacket, along with some oversized trousers void of any fasteners; they would be safety pinned. The designer of this particular costume, Li, showed me his design board and I saw a Chaplin-esque figure, dressed like a man who had fallen on destitution, slumped over with a bottle of booze. My quick Googling of the source material led me to believe that this meant that I would be playing the title character, but I didn't ask and no one offered. My second designer, Zhou, presented a costume which was far more surreal. After escaping Li's oversized jacket and trousers, I found myself stepping into a 'rocket suit', where my arms were the AC ducts I had tried on, my legs some accordion-like plastic tubing, and my torso was covered in a magnetized, silver padding, so that I would be able to collect 'space trash' as I moved through the performance space. I also tried on a pair of long-johns, which did not have any holes for my hands. There was a long discussion between Zhou and Barbieri about how to create a fake bottom for me as well as where my 'space sausages' were going to be hidden in the costume. When I went in for the third fitting, I got to see this artificial bottom (attached to a very comfortable pair of Calvin Klein underwear), as well as trying on a hood that made my transition into 'rocket man' complete. Li's trousers now had fasteners, but I was still shirtless inside a very large and heavy wool suit. Some of this level of detail may seem irrelevant at first, but I have chosen to include it because it is all vital to the sensorimotor experience: the itchiness of the wool on my bare skin, the aluminum ducts crinkling around my arms, or the fullness

of my artificial bottom. This was the extent of the information that I had before we made it to performance day.

When I arrived to perform, first wearing Li's design, I dressed (wearing a sleeveless collared shirt which Li had decided to not put any buttons on), my oversized suit, and a bowler hat. The studio was a small photography studio that had been converted to resemble a blackbox theatre. There were two assistants and a photographer in the space, along with Lily, Barbieri, Li and Zhou. This remained the case for both performance sessions. The work with Lily was composed of several different techniques, but for the most part, consisted of side-coaching to create an acting score over the course of an hour. Once the acting score had been created, the final half-hour of our session was then dedicated to reenacting that score. Following introductions, Lily and I jumped right in. She immediately insisted on inserting a prop into the playing area: a bottle of beer, represented by a water bottle. After being coached through drinking the entire bottle of 'beer', I was then encouraged to interact with my costume, to move as if I was the fabric of my costume. Lily pointed out some holes in my trousers and asked me to create a gesture from this hole. At some point, my bowler hat fell off. "Now go to pick it up, but remember that you have had quite a lot to drink tonight". I began to make my way towards where the hat had fallen, but in transitioning from my abstract gesture towards a position that I could walk from, my shoes slipped on the wood flooring. Lily picked up on this and made note of it through her coaching: "Brouček's shoes are old, his clothes are ripped, and now he's lost his hat". With this newfound context, we created a short score, reminiscent of a *lazzo* of sorts, where Brouček bent down to pick up his hat, inevitably kicking it a bit further away from him. At this point, I, as a performer, thought that this stock bit was artificial and perhaps, even out of place, but it did not stay that way for long. As I began repeating the score, it started to feel as if this small section of imposed elementary clowning seamlessly became embodied and felt like Brouček's own actions. Our work continued like this: I would be encouraged to allow the movements, textures, or structure of the costume to inform my movements as a performer, and Lily would add elements that derived from her knowledge of the source material. At the end of our hour and a half session, I

was completely drenched in sweat and exhausted. But I could not wait to return to perform in Zhou's design. What we had created, within the limited timeframe, was miraculous to me. Without any backstory or advanced character work, I was participating in the research, indeed conducting research and generating knowledge through the way in which I was occupying and working within the costume. Obviously, Lily and Barbieri both had advanced knowledge of the piece as they had done this project before with previous students, but what was created was a true product of the costume itself.

What transpired in that first session with Peta Lily is difficult to look back upon and analyze, because it went by so quickly, but ultimately resulted in an embodied experience with the character. Despite Lily's side coaching, I felt that I was Brouček throughout my experience. The imaginary situations that we were creating within the studio felt real and immediate: I was consumed with greed, but logic was escaping me because of my intoxication. I yearned for friendship, only to find companionship with my bottle, which only led to more confusion, and eventually hopelessness. I was easily able to combine Lily's voice with my own impulses to naturally move and respond to what Li's costume was giving me, which was a lot. Even from the costume fittings, what I was wearing and how I was being costumed had a noticeable effect on me and my perceptions of the project (in the same way Kostya's imagination was immediately stirred by the morning coat). The movement score within the hot and stifling wool suit left me drenched in perspiration, which then added to my sense of intoxication. The fact that I had nothing else to wear fueled my greed, driving me to desire enough money to buy something more comfortable. Even the smallest of details about my costume proved to have an effect on me: when I was left without fasteners for my trousers I was irritated. When I did not have a shirt to wear, and when the shirt that I was wearing did not have buttons, I felt uncomfortable. As researcher I noted how my very tangible and immediate reactions provided evidence for costume's indisputable capacity to alter perception and consequently identity.



*Figure 3 Costume, Movement and Performance Workshop 2017, MA Costume Design for Performance at LCF.*

When I returned to perform for Zhou, I discovered that I was playing the same character, but in a slightly later part of the opera. Brouček, the alcoholic, miserly landlord was fed up with his life on earth and somehow became a rocket and flew himself to the moon. To reflect this, Zhou had created two separate looks. The first was a set of long underwear, with the prosthetic bottom that I had tried on earlier protruding from the rear flap. The second was the rocket suit that Brouček was to discover. This suit was very similar to what I had tried on in my first fitting, constructed out of massive plastic tubing for the legs, air conditioning ducts for the arms and a padded torso. A pair of goggles had been added, and the hood had been heavily structured so that when I pulled it over my head, it would complete my transformation into a human rocket.

Lily's approach to the work was similar in structure to when we worked with Li's costume, but the execution had slightly changed and this was in direct relation to the costume. This time the acting score was shaped by one singular event: the discovery of the rocket suit. Brouček awoke from a bender, alone and in his pajamas, and found a pile of what appeared to be rubbish. Lily continued with her side-coaching which invited me to explore the individual elements of the rocket suit: the goggles, the large tube-like legs, the air conditioning duct arms, the sensation of zipping up the suit, the moment of pulling the hood over my head, and collecting random bits of "space garbage" with the magnetic strips hidden within the costume. This was the impetus for the creation of this session's acting score. Before even beginning the process of dressing within the costume, Lily would direct me to examine the suit, to look inside and see if anything was living in there. What would



happen if I put my head in the leg hole? My leg in the arm hole? Constantly discovering.

While exploring the costume as a separate object before putting it on seems different to exploring within the costume as aware-wearer, what is in common is the implicit sense of searching. This process features throughout this practice-based research. Is exploring (within) a costume the research itself? The ongoing process as opposed to the settled product? Within this specific context, the sense of experimentation and discovery that were produced by such a foreign costume piece, directly affected the tone of our session. Whereas, in the first session, the familiarity of the character wearing his own clothes allowed for small scenes to be created, this second session was dictated by the introduction of the new character that was the rocket suit, and eventually, Brouček in the rocket suit. Perhaps the tonal shift may have been influenced by the fact that we had already worked together once before or because the point within the story was slightly different. But I feel that the true source of change was the costume itself, and it was certainly making the strongest impression upon the performance score. Just as the costume changed my experience as a performer, and in turn, my experience as Brouček, the costume also undoubtedly had an effect on Lily as a director and choreographer. Again, after an hour and a half of nonstop physical work, I was exhausted. But, again we had created a robust physical score that produced a deep emotional connection between actor and character. As the performer, I now felt as if I had crystal clear pictures of both Broučeks. From the two scores that had been generated, I would have felt confident continuing through a rehearsal process with the two characters that the costumes had produced. The garments dictated my physical actions and my physical actions dictated the character's inner life.



Figure 4 Costume, Movement and Performance Workshop 2017, MA Costume Design for Performance at LCF.

#### 4. A Costumatic Approach

Barbieri's "costume-practice-led methodology of performance-making" is fundamentally phenomenological ("The Body" 197). It recognizes the experience of the actor-in-costume as the source of action. The methodology demands 'Aware-Wearing' in that the actor must be receptive to what the costume is offering and the subsequent perceptual changes. I identify this methodical embodied engagement with and within costume as the *costumatic approach*: it builds on the instinctive process of pretend play that informed my very first performance experiment (Appendix A) with the insights I developed through my practical research into the work of Dean, Barbieri, and Lily.

Now is a good time to give a little more information on this Initial Performance Experiment. Having identified the figure of the villain as my heuristic research collaborator, I began by selecting a specific list of characters that I wanted to play, which included Richard III, Wicked Witch of the West, Captain Hook, and the Joker. I then gathered appropriate costumes and makeup to use as the

primary tools which would facilitate my transformation. As a performer, I was satisfied with the results: playing pretend using costume and makeup brought about a strong connection with each of my characters. As a researcher, however, my discovery was a startling realization of the overarching theme of disability that permeated these iconic villains. These characters that I had chosen inadvertently placed me within the context of disability studies. A marked materiality, which at first seemed to harmonize with a costumatic approach, began to reveal itself as replicating impairment. Could the costumatic approach be used to research the link between disability and villainy that these figures from popular culture embodied? I suddenly found myself faced with a series of profound ethical questions. *Should* a costumatic approach be used to research the link between disability and villainy?

Disability studies is an emergent field. Historically, the predominant view towards disability has been what is now known as the medical model which holds that disability is solely a medical condition and therefore presents an opportunity for a cure. The medical model casts disabled people in the role of “patients”, individuals who have fallen victim to unique pathologies, rather than a group of citizens demanding and deserving civil rights and equitable access (Sandahl and Auslander 129). This harmful and archaic view has been countered by the social model of disability which, from the 1970s onwards, shifts the understanding of disability away from the individual towards society. It is social structures that create disability by constructing an exclusionary world which disables some and not others (T. Shakespeare 2).

The social model of disability is hailed as the “big idea” of the disability movement (Hasler), as it represents a progressive approach to disability, in contrast with the medical model which harks back to an outdated and problematic view. Tom Shakespeare outlines the impact of the social model on individuals and on societies in the second edition of *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited* (2014):

Replacing a traditional deficit approach with a social oppression understanding was and remains very liberating for disabled individuals. Suddenly, people were able to understand that it was society that was at fault, not them. They did not need to change; society needed

to change. They did not have to feel sorry for themselves; rather, they could be angry. (T. Shakespeare 11)

The rejection of the medical model in favor of a social model of disability brings about a number of positive initiatives and opens up disability studies as a field of study that is a necessary and important component of social and political sciences. But that is not to say that there are not issues that lie within the social model itself. Critics point out that politicizing disability runs the risk of disregarding the individual and the individual's needs. If disability is located as a cultural construct, does that not run the risk of effacing or dismissing the different experiences and subjectivities of disabled individuals? The social model of disability is thus "accused of neglecting cultural imagery, certain personal experiences and the impacts of impairment" (Ellis 3).

John Swain and Sally French offer an entirely new paradigm, recognizing the relevance of impairment, while still acknowledging the contextualizing social factors and barriers through their *affirmative model of disability*. Just as the social model set out in opposition of the medical model, the affirmative model aims to challenge the "tragedy model" of disability:

The social model says that all disabled people are subjected to discrimination/oppression, whether or not they feel or understand themselves to be. The affirmative model says that all disabled people are subjected to a tragedy view of themselves and their lives, whether or not they feel or understand themselves to be subjected to such a view. (Swain and French 75)

The affirmative model therefore stands in direct opposition to the dominant views and portrayals of the experience of disability. Swain and French further identify what they call the "tragedy model" of disability as an extension of what Carol Thomas describes as "narrative identity" in her book, *Female Forms* (1999). This narrative identity is something that is commonly recognized among disability scholars; literature, film, drama, art—they all have an impact on identity, including the means with which the disabled community identify or are identified.

There is a multitude of narratives which focus on disability. This phenomenon is extensively discussed by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder who describe it as "narrative prosthesis":

The coinage of the phrase 'narrative prosthesis' argues that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch on which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potential, and social critique. Yet, at the same time, literature avoids

designating disability itself as a source for derisive social myths that need to be interrogated. (Mitchell and Snyder 17)

The idea of narrative prosthesis is one that is particularly relevant to the research discussed here as the figure of the disabled person emerges as a character who escapes the various texts in which they originate. There are so many stories and characters that hinge on disability, and more often than not, disability as metaphor. The actual experience of disability is put aside in order for disability to represent or stand in for something else; indeed, my practice engaging with iconic villains revealed that disability has been manipulated as a metaphor for villainy or its source. While this example embodies a negative manifestation of the narrative function of disability, equally problematically, disability also stands in for resilience and determination. Tobin Siebers observes in *Disability Aesthetics* (2010) that popular culture will continue to be drawn to stories that feature disability because the metaphor of disability is one that offers emotional fulfillment through the experience of watching characters overcome adversity (Siebers 4).

Furthermore, there are rewards for the performance of narrative prosthesis. As renowned disability theatre scholar Petra Kuppers notes, “Performers can perform disability and this performance has currency, tradition and weight in the social sphere of popular culture: film actors playing disabled characters have carried off a number of Oscars, making it seem that acting disabled is the highest achievement possible” (Kuppers 12). But what these popular culture tropes have rewarded only serves to continue and perpetuate the use of disability as metaphor rather than disability as experience. It is also important to mention certain “representational conundrums” within this discussion of ethical dimensions of performing disability (Sandahl 130). The longstanding debate as to whether non-disabled performers should and can be cast in the role of disabled characters serves to reinforce the importance of being mindful and responsible to the lived experience of disability. It brings to fore the subjective experience of the disabled individual, whether or not their experience is medically, socially or aesthetically mediated.

While an undeniable act of *ableist* privilege, embodying impairment through costume within a research setting directs the performer’s attention to the experience of disability and/or

impairment. If the work is not the creation of a cultural product but the generation of knowledge, can the “representational conundrums” that bear on casting decisions apply? Can I, a non-disabled performer, continue with my research on villains, using costume and makeup, after having observed this common element?

As I approach the villain heuristically, I propose to approach disability also heuristically, which means I can only raise these questions collaboratively with a character. Out of the iconic figures I started with, I invite Richard III to continue with me, as the character of Richard III as presented in Shakespeare’s 16<sup>th</sup> century play is one that has been widely recognized as an example of narrative prosthesis. Throughout their chapter, “Performing Deformity: The Making and Unmaking of Richard III”, Mitchell and Snyder identify that Shakespeare’s use of disability to villainize Richard is related to wider “dehumanising social attitudes toward disabled people” (Mitchell and Snyder 18) There is also evidence that Shakespeare’s depiction of Richard is heavily biased, serving as pro-Tudor propaganda (Richards 19). In reference to this literature, Barbieri cautions that recreating certain conditions of this text through costume may also recreate damaging relationships towards disability (*Costume in Performance* 181). Can the costumatic approach be used to research the link between disability and villainy? More specifically, can a transformational actor-researcher’s embodiment of Shakespeare’s Richard III generate affirmative insight, despite thorough critique and documentation of the problematic context in which this particular character operates? With the attention focused on the experience of the researcher, what insights can be gained into disability from the perspective of a non-disabled performer? Having already outlined the importance of costume-led experimentation to this research as a whole, and in an attempt to find answers to these questions, I carried out the following studio-based experiments using a costumatic approach to transformation building on the (post-)Stanislawskian approaches discussed in the previous chapter alongside principles of aware-wearing and actor-led design discussed above. I will outline these experiments, critically reflect on some of my findings and draw insights regarding both my methodology and the subject of disability.

## 5. Studio-Based Practice

### 5.1 Richard III Studio Experiment 1

**Corresponding Video Links:** 'Richard III (Part 1)' – <https://youtu.be/5w88hIV2Eno>

'Richard III (Part 2)' – <https://youtu.be/apKTDMdA-3s>

'Richard III (Part 3)' – <https://youtu.be/yK-J-sDkSTO>

I entered the studio in order to create and perform within costume pieces based on Shakespeare's Richard III as an independent character. My plan was to engage in embodied exploration, reflective practice and creative exploration using my lived experience of costume as well as video documentation.<sup>14</sup> To construct my costume piece, I began with an industrial lumbar support brace with suspenders. I then constructed a pouch to function as Richard's hump. I felt that it was vital for the hump to have weight to it, so I initially used a microwavable plush-toy filled with beads. This gave me some semblance of the weight while retaining the pliability necessary to mold the shape of the hump to my shoulder. The 'hump pouch' was then attached to the suspenders of the lower back brace. In addition to this manufactured hump, I also had a black tunic that I intended to wear as an outer layer.

It is important to note here that I was not constructing these costume elements in order to look like Richard or perform Richard in a particular representational context, but rather to investigate if it would be possible to encounter him and indeed collaborate with him by attempting to create a costumatic transformational acting-research opportunity. I wanted to raise the questions laid out above *with* Richard.

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<sup>14</sup> For this initial experiment, a video recording device was placed on a tripod within the studio but it was not used for reflection. The reason for this was due to the experiment's focus on lived experience from within the costume rather than observing an experience from the outside which is also why there were not any additional outside observers. The process was designed to support the heuristic nature of the research thusly targeting the researcher's direct experience. For this same reason, I chose to not have a costume designer involved instead directing my attention to my own somatic experience and 'Aware-Wearing'.

As an invitation to the character, I also chose to introduce text into my performative embodiment, selecting the following section from Shakespeare's play:

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,  
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;  
I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty  
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;  
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,  
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
Deformed, unfinish'd, sent before my time  
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,  
And that so lamely and unfashionable  
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;  
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,  
Have no delight to pass away the time,  
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun  
And descant on mine own deformity:  
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,  
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,  
I am determin'd to prove a villain  
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.

*(Richard III, 1.1.14-31)*

I chose this section for a very specific reason. At this point within the play, Richard spends fourteen lines lamenting his physical form. He embarks on a verbal tirade of self-hatred, only to eventually conclude that the effects of his impairment are that he will now become a villain; a true piece of narrative prosthesis. Shakespeare represents a villain who actively chooses to place himself within the historically-situated archetype and uses his disfiguration as excuse for the actions that unfold over the course of the play. The other reason I chose this text is because Shakespeare does not list specific impairments within this passage. It is incredibly vague, and as a result, can be removed from



the Richard III which we have all come to know through the performances of Olivier, Sher, McKellen and many others.<sup>15</sup> The indelible images of these actors in costume require a strict disregard to those who have come before. Such a requirement to ignore visual references is echoed in a remark made by Lars Eidinger in a post-show Q&A, following his tour de force performance in the Schaubühne's *Richard III*: "I'm not so interested in any kind of references, I mean, they are there nevertheless. I don't have to point them out...It has so much to do with me, you know? I betray, I'm evil, I have evil thoughts, all the time, and I have to be truthful to this" (Eidinger).



Figure 5 Screenshots from Studio Experiment 1

Throughout this first experiment in the studio, I found myself struggling with the iconography of costume and the visual references it evoked. My frustrations accentuated with the introduction of text, I felt as if I was clawing towards an endpoint, a fully realized performance, rather than living within the costume. Finally, with the addition of having to deal with the filming equipment along with these other variables, I felt lost within too many elements, unable to focus on what I had set out to do.

But the experience of the costume was strong enough to extend beyond my overwhelmed state within the studio. The costume immediately altered the shape of my body and, in turn,

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<sup>15</sup> The productions being referenced are the Old Vic production starring Laurence Olivier (1944), the Royal Shakespeare Company's production starring Antony Sher (1984), and the National Theatre's production starring Ian McKellen (1990).

affected the possibilities and impossibilities of movement. The shape, form, and weight of my left shoulder and upper back were no longer that of my own. These parts of me moved differently. I moved differently. The lower back support was tight around my waist and the sensation of breathing was no longer what I was familiar with. My reach had changed. It became difficult to dress myself. When pulling the tunic over the hump, the weight of the costume on my left shoulder became enhanced, triggering an unexpected reaction of remembering in the body my own experience of impairment and disability.

One of my acting teachers used to love saying, “We are our scars”, which with his harsh American accent, sounded more like, “We are are scars”. I have and am three major scars, the stories of which I should discuss. In 2010, while running late to one of my movement classes, the gears on my bicycle slipped, my left foot came off the pedal and into the spokes of the front wheel causing a very abrupt stop and resulting in me flipping over the handlebars and onto my collar bone. After one titanium plate, 8 bone screws, a very long time with my arm in a sling, and a massive scar across my left shoulder, I was better than ever. In 2015, something a bit more serious happened. While play wrestling in the garden, my friend and I lost our balance and landed head first with our combined weight on my neck. After emergency services arrived and took me to the first hospital, it was determined that I had broken my neck and would require emergency surgery. What I didn’t know at the time was the severity of these injuries. It wasn’t until after the doctors, originally estimating 4 hours, spent 10 hours installing a titanium bracket, explained to me the extent of what had been done. From the simple fall in the garden, I had crushed my C6 and C7 vertebrae, fractured my C4 and C5 vertebrae, tore all of my cervical ligaments and placed my spinal cord within millimeters of being severed. I am grateful to say that I fully recovered with minimal side effects. All that remains are two more scars to the one I already had: one small horizontal scar across my throat and a much larger vertical scar down the back of my neck.

The titanium plate in my collarbone is what my hump was sitting on as I moved around the studio and this somatic experience triggered a very specific reaction within me. Reminding me of my

injuries which I thought I had recovered from and left behind, it felt as if a weakness of mine had been made visible for the world to see. I felt resentful, defensive and aggressive. It was this discovery that was most successful from this studio experiment. As a result of my aware-wearing of costume, I was able to navigate the extraneous elements of my performance experiment and draw out the kernel of insight about my own experience with a deeply personal relationship with impairment. Richard III could serve as a research collaborator, but not in the way that I initially thought. I wasn't playing pretend to create a performance of Richard III but rather to spend time with him and what he did this time round was remind me that I could indeed connect with the experience of disability.

## **5.2 Richard III Studio Experiment 2**

Moving forward, the next studio experiment needed to remove the words and the visual influences and exist within the physical circumstances, the local situation that would bring me as actor and Richard as independent character together. Following Studio Experiment 1, I formulated a more prescriptive plan before going back into the studio in order to be able to completely surrender myself to the framework I had created. Firstly, I modified my hump to have even more weight, using a mixture of uncooked rice and lentils. This extra weight of the new hump heavily pressed down on my titanium plate. As a result of the additional weight, more straps had to be added to the lumbar brace's suspenders in order to keep the hump attached to my body as I would move around the space. There was a secondary benefit to these practical additions because, as more straps were added, they enhanced the sense of constriction. This was furthered by the addition of a new costume piece into my Richard, choosing this time to wear a neck brace. Although the choice drew inspiration from the Schaubühne production and Lars Eidinger's Richard, it was rooted in my personal history as much as the character's.

As my role grew from performer to costume designer/performer, I knew that I did not want to make the same mistakes again and overwhelm myself in the studio by trying to be director as

well. I found myself battling against the side-coaching that was going on in my head. I struggled to separate the thoughts and awareness of director versus the thoughts and awareness of my Richard while inhabiting costume. This is one of the reasons that I decided not to record myself. I also chose not to set specific tasks or use a piece of text or place anything additional within the space. I wanted to alleviate the pressures of having to achieve something tangible, as well as to avoid assuming the role of director.

Instead, I had my two costume pieces. I dimmed the lights and simply moved through the space, following my body's impulses. I began on the ground. My body wouldn't lie flat. I felt that I had to assume a twisted shape to compensate for my massive hump and to find somewhere that felt comfortable. Shifting from floor to standing, I reached my left hand to the ground to give myself stability; the weight of the hump surprised me and my wrist gave out. I collapsed back to the ground. As I moved, I was continuously reminded of such bodily limitations. I went to roll and felt unsafe in my neck brace. As the physical sensations continued, emotions began to follow. Feelings of self-pity, self-loathing, of disparity, followed by growing feelings of anger – deep violent anger and hatred. This costume that I had created triggered powerful emotions within me. I felt that it was not possible for me to hide my insecurities, weaknesses or self-doubts, because they were on the surface, for all the world to see. Upon reflection, this reaction proves fascinating. In a studio all on my own, how was it that I was experiencing an external gaze? Had the externality of character extended so deeply as to internalize the gaze of others?

After being in the studio for what felt like forever, but was, in actuality, only an hour, I began saying the lines from the text I had chosen in the previous experiment. As I reintroduced the text, I wept. This piece of text resonated so personally and so painfully, in a way that I had never thought possible. I was surprised as a performer. There was an element of the personal built-in to the design of the experience: returning to the plastic prison that my neck brace provided. It is undeniable that such a costume piece will recall memories and emotions from a time in my life when I was not sure if I would be able to walk again. Both costume pieces triggered feelings that I had always suppressed,

confronting me with physical consequences which I had feared may have resulted from these injuries. To say that it was a powerful experience would be a massive understatement. What I had discovered was not only a resonant portrayal of a character (at least in the actor's dramaturgy), but also experiential knowledge about this Richard's physicality, the specific conditions of his body, form, weight, movement, etc.

It is interesting that the costumatic approach initiated my transformation by recalling personal experience. Costume served as instigator to access a piece of my own physical history. And yet, it was *not* a physical history of my own. So who is this character now? As Schechner described, the experiences were not mine, but at the same time they were not *not* mine (Schechner 112); they were the experiences of my research collaborator, Shakespeare's Richard III, and at the same time *not* Richard's.

By activating my imagination, the costume nurtured a considerable amount of empathy. This aligns with the discussion in the Introduction about how developmental psychology explains pretend play. The byproduct of pretending to be another person certainly was an enhanced level of cognitive flexibility. I was able to transcend my own traumatic experience and experience another one where the consequences of my actions may have been more severe. To contextualize this with Stanislavski's terminology, the "external distortion" of a hump filled with rice and lentils and a plastic neck brace had a profound transformational effect on my perceptual experience (*Building a Character* 7), through which I was able to gain new insight in the form of empathy. Using aware-wearing, I was able to manipulate my voluntary methods of inscription in order to enhance their effect, capitalizing on costume's enactive nature. The resulting discoveries via costume and character supported my hunch (pun very much intended) that transformational acting-as-research, and specifically the use of character and character-building as research collaborator within the context of heuristic inquiry, is a methodology that can be used to generate new knowledge. What is that new knowledge? I'm not necessarily sure yet. Certainly this methodology can be used for further costume scholarship. But can the transformational actor-researcher cross disciplinary

boundaries and produce social research? Considering these early experiments concerning Richard III and how I experienced adopting the form of an other, there are signs to indicate that, within a heuristic context, new knowledge can be generated via transformation but it needs to carefully consider representational issues and subject positions.

## 6. Conclusion

The theoretical framework established by modern cognitive science provides evidence to support the notion of character serving as research collaborator. Further support is lent to this theory by Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Butler, and other feminist theorists who assert that changes to the way we perceive fundamentally alters our 'selves'. Integrating this approach with a (post-)Stanislvskian approach to character-building creates an opportunity for costume to be used as an actor-researcher's primary means of accessing their research collaborator. The insights of costume theorists such as Rachel Hann, Aoife Monks, Sally Dean and Donatella Barbieri provide even more theoretical support while also putting forth some principles for a practical methodology characterized by researching from within costume.

What follows is a very important ethical question; is it *acceptable* to take on the form of an *other*? Were the discussion focused on using the title character of Rajiv Joseph's *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (2012) to provide insight into the idea of displacement, the answer might seem more straightforward. However, my choice of the villain, which is both personal and coincidental, unwittingly led me to using costume to assume impairment and the complex ethical questions that such a practice raises. The subsequent research surrounding the field of disability studies, made necessary by the selection of Richard III as research collaborator, evidences just how valuable transformational acting-as-research may be.

The costumatic attempt at experiencing specific factors of Richard's body, weight, and movement had value on a personal and heuristic level. By replicating these factors in an embodied way, I generated embodied knowledge which enacted an affirmative paradigm of disability as it

directed the focus towards lived experience. Does the transformational actor-researcher's costumatic approach offer a true experiential understanding of disability? To claim that a true understanding can be achieved would be a flagrant act of appropriation. However, it is vital to our understanding of humanity, for which empathy and fellow-feeling are key, to *attempt* an experiential understanding of others. I wrote earlier that as a self-identifying non-disabled performer, it was an act of privilege to attempt to replicate impairment through costume. This recognition of privilege is vital; however, it is a responsibility of privilege to venture towards compassion and understanding.

My research made clear that the archetypal figure of the villain is plagued with narrative prosthesis and paints a disturbing picture of the villainization of disability. What I experienced as common, recognizable albeit strong feelings of vulnerability and exposure have been historically attached to representations of disability as an enactment of a narrative function, symbolically and problematically suggesting a connection between villainy and impairment. On the basis of the wider discussion of representation that I briefly addressed, I would argue that it is not appropriate to replicate disability and factors of impairment outside of a studio/performance laboratory setting. However, if using an experiential methodology might foster an affirmative paradigm of disability within the performer, and subsequently the audience, therein lies the value. Fundamentally, costume is an excellent tool at navigating the perceptual experience of a performer. For a transformational actor-researcher, it offers an opportunity to engage with a variety of research collaborators in order to access heuristic understandings of subjects that may otherwise have been out of reach. It remains increasingly important for the researcher to possess a discerning point of view with regards to the ethical implications of any character they may find themselves attempting to 'become'.

What is an undeniable byproduct of my costumed experimentation with character is new insight. This insight, a form of embodied knowledge, seems to have the potential to be documented as research. But how might this research work, logistically? Is the actor consciously in the process of

researching through their transformation? Are they researching mid performance? The best way for me to hypothesize on the production of research within the transformational actor-researcher model is to use a metaphor from a piece of popular culture which I have already touched upon; *The Wizard of Oz*. When Dorothy finds herself in Oz, she is thrust into a world completely separate than her own. Despite retaining her own self-concept, her identity is altered by who she meets along the way. Once Dorothy reaches the Wizard and completes her journey, she is quickly returned to her life in Kansas only to discover that this was all a dream. But from that dream state of Oz, Dorothy returns to her immediate reality armed with the lessons that she learned from her companions and her battle with the Wicked Witch of the West. The actor-researcher returns from their journey into character with insight, and through methods such as thick description, can disseminate their insight into research.

This chapter has focused primarily on the somatic changes that costume makes to the experience of the transformational actor-researcher. As mentioned, the costumatic approach is not only concerned with these somatic elements, but also the perceived 'psychosomatic' forces at work regarding the outside gaze. Makeup, along with the influence of the mirror, were important elements for the initial performance experiment (Appendix A) and are equally important to the costumatic approach. As such, the following chapter will continue with performance-based experimentation this time to examine makeup as a transformational tool, before attempting to reintegrate costume and makeup alongside the various other transformational tools discussed in Chapter 1.



## Chapter 3- Put on a Happy Face: Makeup and the Mirror

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### 1. Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, the *-matic* part of *costumatic* refers to the somatic influence that costume has on the actor's work towards character. This influence is also psychosomatic in that it manifests through the external gaze of an other. The social constructivist approach to identity and the theory of enactive cognition both draw attention to how wearing an external garment affects the wearer. Yet this is not only because the physicality and perception are changed but also because of the awareness of how others' perception is also influenced. These multiple layers facilitate fundamental shifts in identity, in other words, transformation. Both costume and makeup function on somatic *and* psychosomatic levels, although makeup does not have the same level of physical bearing on the wearer as costume. Because of this, costume more naturally lends itself towards the exploration of the felt, somatic, experience of the character-building process. Makeup shifts the focus to the psychosomatic. Apart from the application process, makeup is not as tangible as costume. On the contrary, it is something that can often be forgotten. It is the gaze of others that remind the wearer of its presence: rushing out after a performance, forgetting to fully wash off the makeup, only to remember after receiving strange looks from shop assistants and other passersby. Although the illusory, intangible nature of makeup might make it elusive, this does not mean that it is any less powerful or influential a tool for the transformational actor than costume.

Mask, which will later make its way into this chapter, is a hybrid between the two. While the face is the site of transformation for both mask and makeup, mask carries with it a formidable somatic presence. The material of the mask, the weight on the face, the size of the eyeholes; all of these tangible components make it like a costume for the face. Mask can restrict facial movement and expressivity in ways that makeup cannot. Both trigger transformation via a manipulation of an external gaze, though mask relies on the relationship with a physicalized audience (Wright 94). I

make a point here to specify a 'physicalized audience' because this very much differs to the audience that an actor might find staring back at them in the mirror, although this audience may be equally transformative. Analyzing the relationship between the transformational actor and the mirror is crucial to understanding the efficacy of makeup as a transformational tool and its placement within the costumatic approach.

On several occasions in this writing I have quoted various actors referencing the importance of makeup to their acting process and transformation. However, academic writing on makeup in relation to acting theory or to performance pedagogy is scarce. Hidden within the Introduction of Richard Corson's *Stage Makeup*, Uta Hagen addresses the influence of makeup on an actor's process.

In addition to such fundamentals as the assimilation and projection of character in terms of age, environment, and health, there is an area of psychological support which makeup can give the actor comparable only to the assistance of a perfect costume. Just as robes or rags can give the actor the *feel* of a character, so can makeup. The visual image reflected in his dressing room mirror can be as important to the actor as it will later become to the audience. (1)

Hagen recognizes that costume is a useful tool in giving the actor the *feel* of the character and argues that makeup is capable of providing the same. She goes on to assert that it is through the use of the mirror that the actor is able to fully integrate what makeup offers into their performance. This placement of the mirror as symbiotic to makeup aligns with some of the actors' accounts. Olivier, who was known for creating complete makeups for his characters, ascribes a level of enchantment to what happens when looking in the mirror at his made-up face: "Makeup is a strange thing...for me, that's where a lot of the magic still lies...I stood up and again looked in the mirror. The monster stared back at me and smiled" (*On Acting* 125). There is a parallel between Olivier's and Roberta Carreri's use of makeup, as Carreri also wrote that the application of makeup, however slight, was the most important part of her pre-performance routine (Carreri 116), alluding to a similar reason why it is so important to her. "Once again the miracle happens: I look at myself in the mirror and I do not recognise myself" (Carreri 156). Both performers identify the moment of transformation, or the recognition of an other in one's own image, with the experience of makeup in the mirror.

The mirror played a similarly important role within my Initial Performance Experiment (Appendix A). With each character that I created, whether it was Captain Hook, Richard III, The Wicked Witch of the West, or the Joker, whenever I felt that I was losing connection with the character I found myself drifting back to the mirror. But why is that? What is this transformative ‘miracle’ or ‘magic’ that the mirror provides? How might the relationship between makeup and the mirror be understood in a way that the transformational actor might effectively use these tools on a consistent basis? Unlike performance costume, there is a lack of scholarly research addressing performance makeup. For this reason, I will examine the individual components that constitute the phenomenon of performance makeup before practically exploring how they work in tandem. I will offer a brief survey of how the mirror self-experience has been theorized in modern psychology and link my findings to research concerning mask-work and the role of the face in mitigating identity. Combining these discoveries with my practical experimentations, this chapter will seek to provide in-depth academic analysis of the function of makeup in relation to the practice of the transformational actor, and subsequently the transformational actor-researcher.

## **2. Conceptualizations of the Mirror**

It could be argued that the mirror is one of the most important tools available for the cognitive development of identity and the self-concept. The mirror and how human beings come to relate to the mirror, has been conceptualized, theorized, and analyzed for decades. Notably, Jacques Lacan offered a psychoanalytical revision of psychological and biological data in his ‘mirror stage’, or ‘*stade du miroir*’, in order to describe how an infant constructs a sense of self toward which they will strive their entire life (Lacan 14). This Lacanian framing of the mirror is in direct response to the work of Freud and argues that the moment of self-recognition in the mirror is the basis for the development of the superego (O’Neill 206). Such an assessment of the development of the human psyche paved the way for later phenomenological responses to the mirror stage, which better lend themselves to the nature of this research.

There are articulations of the relationship between self and mirror that predate Lacan's psychologization of the mirror such as American sociologist Charles Cooley's concept of the 'looking-glass self' which he introduces in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902). The looking-glass self situates the formation of the self-image as a consequence of the attitudes of others. Parallels can immediately be drawn between Cooley and the theories of enaction and social constructivism which put forth that the self is shaped by the environment in which it exists. Similarly, the looking-glass self is produced by actions taken within a given environment, filtered through the real or imagined reactions of others to those actions. It is the imagined perceptions of others that form a metaphorical mirror through which the self is constructed:

The looking-glass self has three components. First, Cooley argued that actors learn about themselves in every situation by exercising their imagination to reflect on their social performance. In doing so, they imagine themselves as others must see them, and this construction of what others must see is fundamentally like an image reflected back in a mirror. (Shaffer 53–54)

Even though Shaffer uses the word actor to mean a person, it is very appropriate for the context of this research as he effectively frames the looking-glass self in a way that is easily applicable to the practice of the transformational actor. As Shaffer describes how the actor learns about themselves, the transformational actor might replace that with how they learn about their character. It is inevitable that an actor engaged in the transformative process described in this writing, and more specifically a costumatic one, has been confronted with the thought of how 'others must see them'. A transformational actor *in* character, already engaging in an act of imagining themselves *as if* they were an other, also envisions how they appear to others.

Cooley's argument postulates that imagining the gaze of others and reacting to that fiction results in fundamental changes to the self. Such an argument strengthens the role of the imagination, but fundamentally aligns with the ideas that this writing has already explored in dialogue with Butler, Grosz, Noë and other social constructivists cited throughout, which evidences the impact of Cooley's contribution and the longevity of his proposal. But what about the actual mirror itself? Cooley's work identifies how the gaze of others is able to replicate the reflection of a

mirror. But is the mirror able to stand in for the gaze of others in the same way that Cooley hypothesizes the gaze of others stands in for the mirror? Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological perspective on the self will help answer this question. Following the publication of his seminal *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty wrote an essay titled "The Child's Relations with Others" (1964) in which he challenges the work of classical psychologists and argues that the self is not something internal and isolated but rather formed in relation to the world around it. He discusses and analyzes the mirror-self experience through this inherently enactive lens.

Merleau-Ponty's initial argument centers around the idea that the mirror is an opportunity for the child to experience themselves in ways that they would not have been able to on their own ("The Child's Relations" 125). The result is an alienation of sorts, where the specular image presented by seeing one's own reflection tears away the "lived *me*" and replaces it with the "imaginary *me*" ("The Child's Relations" 136). The 'imaginary me' that is being referred to is the exterior image of the self, made accessible by looking in the mirror. This exterior image in the mirror is "analogous" to the image generated by the perceptions of others, leading to the assertion that the mirror-induced initial alienation is merely preparation for "another still more serious alienation, which will be the alienation by others" ("The Child's Relations" 136). Drawing an analogy between the mirror and the imagined gaze of others implies a more complex reading of the relationship between self and mirror: one where the simple act of recognizing a mirror-image as oneself is layered with the acknowledgement of existing within a space where the self is exposed to others. By complicating the process of mirror self-recognition, Merleau-Ponty introduces the possibility of a more nuanced understanding with various degrees of self-recognition.

### **3. Partial Mirror Self-Recognition**

It is also worth mentioning Gallup's mirror test. Gordon Gallup Jr., an American psychologist, pioneered a test in an attempt to measure the capacity for self-recognition in animals and humans. The essence of Gallup's mirror test is the placement of a red mark on an unaware, usually

anaesthetized, subject and observing whether they investigate or try to remove the mark from their body upon seeing it on their reflection. This test has been used to evidence self-recognition and, subsequently, the existence of a self-concept (“Chimpanzees”, “Self-awareness”, “Self-recognition”). However, agreeing with Gallup’s claims regarding the findings and implications of his mirror test means conceding that recognizing oneself in the mirror is an “all-or-nothing phenomenon” (Brandl 279). Instead, what is being proposed by modern scholars such as Johannes Brandl is the concept of “partial self-recognition”—the idea that recognizing oneself in the mirror is a gradual process, building towards recognizing what is being seen in the mirror (Brandl 280).

Brandl initiates the discussion of partial self-recognition by first outlining an anecdote shared by physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach, who once got on a bus and thought that there was a sympathetic figure of a tired, weary looking schoolteacher in front of him, only to realize that he was simply looking at a reflection of himself (Brandl 280). Mach’s anecdote serves as an opportunity for Brandl to breakdown the process of self-recognition occurring in this instance in four stages: 1.) Mach sees someone who looks like a tired schoolteacher, 2.) he sees that this person is stepping onto the bus at the exact same time, 3.) “recognizing the awkwardness of the coincidence and suspecting that there may be no other person there,” 4.) he realizes that he is simply looking at his own reflection (Brandl 280–281). Brandl continues his analysis of Mach’s anecdote by writing a series of clauses that a subject, S, must come to know if they are to recognize themselves in the mirror.

- (i) that the perceptual experience is not to be taken at face value,
- (ii) that the source of the visual impression of another person is oneself,
- (iii) that the appearance of another person provides information about oneself,
- (iv) that one is looking at an image of oneself. (Brandl 281)

If these four clauses were not enough, Brandl goes a step further in simplifying what is meant should S not meet any of these four clauses. “As long as a subject does not explicitly form the belief that she is seeing herself in the mirror, we do not have a case of mirror self-recognition in the full sense” (Brandl 281).

So what would happen if the subject were actively trying to form the belief that she was not

seeing herself in the mirror? Such a practice, ultimately that of the transformational actor, fundamentally contradicts the clauses of mirror self-recognition. The actor must take their perceptual experience at face value, particularly within the proposed costumatic model, otherwise negating one element of the perceptual experience might completely unravel the entire transformation. The following three clauses all refer to *oneself*. But the transformational actor, and more specifically the transformational actor-researcher, is not looking for more information about *themselves*. They are looking for information about the *character*; a separate entity that the transformational actor has metaphorically given birth to using the techniques that have been outlined in previous chapters. The mirror then is no longer a tool for self-recognition, but for *other*-recognition, character-recognition, or however else one might want to describe what Laurence Olivier experiences when he sees Richard III staring back at him in the mirror. Following this logic, ideas of dual representation and dual consciousness, previously discussed in relation to transformational acting and pretend play, present themselves as natural outcomes of looking in the mirror.

When seeing myself in the mirror, I am seeing myself as others see me. I am also seeing myself as if I was another, ie., I am adopting an alienating perspective on myself. The enigmatic and uncanny character of the specular image is precisely due to this intermingling of self and other. It is me that I see in the mirror, but the me that I see has not quite the same familiarity and immediacy as the me I know from inner experience. The me I see in the mirror is distant and yet close, it is felt as another, and yet myself. Even though the specular image might indeed look like any other person, it retains its unbreakable link to me. It shows up every time I look in the mirror, it is glued to me in the sense that it moves with me. (Rochat & Zahavi 209)

Rochat and Zahavi refer to what is happening in the mirror as an “intermingling of self and other”. The mirror serves as a crucible for self and other to be amalgamated. What emerges is a dual consciousness, ‘distant and yet close’, not me, but also not not me (Schechner 112). This is what happens when Laurence Olivier looks in the mirror and sees Richard III, while at the same time, is merely seeing himself. What Rochat and Zahavi describe is not specifically an actor looking in the mirror. They are generalizing the phenomenon of mirror self-recognition and through this generalization, the creation of a dual consciousness is outlined. Applying their description to the

experience of a transformational actor looking into the mirror with skillfully applied makeup in order to look drastically different begs the question of how the “unbreakable link” functions. I would like to suggest that the effect of the mirror is amplified given these circumstances; Olivier knows that it is his own reflection in the mirror, but the person he sees staring back does not resemble him. His belief that it is him in the mirror is immediately called into question, however the “unbreakable link” remains in that he is still in control of how this being moves. I view this as an occurrence of partial recognition.

Recalling Brandl’s terminology, this partial recognition actually engages with the same cognitive phenomenon as pretend play, using the imagination in order to bridge the gap between “not recognizing oneself” while simultaneously possessing the innate knowledge that the reflection one sees in the mirror is oneself (Brandl 290). In order to more accurately describe what is occurring during partial recognition, Brandl asserts another four-part series of clauses:

- (i) The child is still in the grip of seeing another child.
- (ii) It does not believe, but pretends that there is another child in front of her.
- (iii) It realizes that by using her normal skills it can control the duplicate body in the mirror.
- (iv) It is motivated to act such that the other child looks normal, or is good looking, charming, etc. (Brandl 291)

What Brandl acknowledges in this set of clauses begins by contradicting the earlier set regarding Mach’s anecdote by rejecting that the perceptual experience should not be taken at face value. Instead, not fully believing that it is an entirely separate being in front of them, the child employs an act of pretense to continue the illusion that someone else is being observed. This pretending is done automatically due to a lingering impression that, although unlikely, it may be another person in the mirror (Brandl 292). To rectify this conceptually, the brain continues the game without skipping a beat.

It is important to note that Brandl identifies this phenomenon of partial recognition as occurring in children. But why should partial recognition be limited to children? Is it not possible to occur in adults? Perhaps unlike a child, an adult is most likely hyperaware of their own reflection in the mirror. It therefore becomes more unlikely that the adult finds themselves still in the grip of



seeing another adult. But, as I questioned earlier, what if that adult were actively trying to disguise themselves through the application of makeup? As adults, the development of self-recognition has already occurred and the actor particularly will be very familiar with how they look in a mirror. However, if, even for an instance, they might look in the mirror and not recognize who is looking back, they may be experiencing partial recognition. Transformational actors by definition are consumed by the task of creating characters that exist outside the actor's own personality and traits; the physical appearance of the actor is also something that will be altered. Using makeup introduces a change to physical appearance that directly impacts the experience and recognition of self, as mediated through the mirror which reflects the gaze of others as well as oneself. The mirror thus becomes the very tool to create an only partially recognizable reflection and thus leading to transformation and the experience of dual consciousness. The mirror enacts the magic, as Roberta Carreri comments, once she had achieved a makeup that allowed her to look in the mirror and not recognize herself, the 'magic' is back.

The mirror is thus an incredibly effective tool for the transformational actor. By looking in the mirror, the actor already engages in a form of othering. Just as Cooley argues that the gaze of others works in the same way as a mirror, Merleau-Ponty counters that the mirror serves to place the self within the imagined gaze of others. In this way, the mirror also stimulates the imagination. Firstly, the actor looking in the mirror at themselves must imagine their face as if it were the character they endeavor to become. Without this step, how might they understand how to apply the makeup? Secondly, the mirror triggers the imagining of others' reactions to the self. Without any added effort, the mirror reflects an entity that is 'not me', but also 'not not me' and initiates the work of the transformational actor.

However, the effects of the mirror are in no way limited to the actor. Whether it is an actor in front of the mirror before they go on stage or someone in front of the mirror before they go on a date, the mirror will have this effect. What is more specific to the transformational actor is the intentional alteration of the mirrored reflection. By altering the appearance of the self to fit the

appearance of a character, or other, the transformational actor looking in the mirror is facilitating the phenomenon of partial recognition. The transformational actor uses their tools to invite the phenomenon of partial recognition, tip-toeing towards the point of occurrence. Throughout the trepidatious journey towards partial recognition, both a facilitation and an invitation, the actor is also experiencing this phenomenon for themselves. Such an experience triggers the pretend play that is intrinsic to the practice of the transformational actor.

The costumatic approach outlined within this thesis benefits greatly from the inclusion of the mirror as both costume and makeup contribute towards partial recognition, and equally serve as stimuli for the actor to imagine how their character will be perceived by others in the outside world. However, the aim of this chapter (and the previous chapter) is to study costume and makeup in isolation before reuniting them. While costume primarily serves to dress the body, makeup is often used quite specifically on a site which holds a unique degree of importance: the face.

#### **4. The Face as Site for Transformation**

One notable difference between costume and makeup is the area of the body which is being affected. Costume primarily makes changes to the body, but it is not limited to a specific location. Performance makeup on the other hand is a more localized transformative tool, most commonly applied to the face, sharing it as site for transformation with mask, a makeup-costume as discussed earlier. Might mask serve as an intermediary, inform the costumatic use of makeup and enhance our understanding of the transformational mechanics at work?

As a site for transformation, the face carries unique implications that other areas of the body do not share. In addition to making vital functions, such as eating and breathing, possible, the face also houses the primary receptors of four out of the 'five senses', taste, smell, sight, and sound (Talley 13). But what makes the face unique is the fact that as well as facilitating vital functionality, it enacts a social life. In the words of bioethicist John A. Robertson,

Faces are the external manifestation of our persons (our souls?). They provide information about age, gender, ethnicity, and emotional states, and help to form the image that others have of us. Indeed, our face often provides the image that we have of ourselves (Robertson 32).

In any given environment, the face shapes the perception of others as well as the perceptual experience of the self, and for that reason has been the site of transformation for thousands of years, specifically through the use of mask. Anthropologist Harry Shapiro asserts that, “the mask is among the oldest items in our present culture. As far back as the Upper Paleolithic Era, perhaps 50,000 years ago its use was already known” (Shapiro 26). While some have argued that while “masks are global”, they are not necessarily universal (Eldredge 3), there is often an alternative method of masking. For example, aboriginal groups in Australia have not been linked with a tradition of mask use, however they do have a “highly developed use of facial and body paint, with feather, cane and clay embellishments” (Eldredge 3). Numerous theatrical traditions have adopted the use of mask and many Eastern traditions are still characterized by this (ie. Japanese Noh, Indian Krishnattam, Balinese Topeng Dance, etc.) This tradition has also steadily shaped the development of Western theatre, dating back to its early origins within Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome. These later developed, particularly during the Renaissance, into a form of masked theatre that is deeply rooted within archetype, in the form of *commedia dell’arte*, and have since been developed, reinvented and revitalized an innumerable amount of times throughout the history of the theatre.

Beyond sharing the face as the site of transformation, mask and performance makeup also trigger similar degrees of transformation. In Sears A. Eldredge’s training manual, *Mask Improvisation* (1996), he refers to the experience of losing oneself within the mask as “the plunge” (Eldredge 33). In his seminal *Impro* (1979), Keith Johnstone opts for the terms “trance” and “possession” (Johnstone 145, 150). The idea that the self-concept can be replaced by the character that the mask represents is fairly common, particularly in cultures where there is an established tradition of masked theatre. John Wright, the co-founder of Trestle Theatre Company, renowned for their mask and physical theatre productions, describes an encounter while on a trip to Bali. Alit, Wright’s potential mentor, has just completed a performance and Wright offers a compliment in the form of

expressing how well Alit had “played” the mask. Alit insists that he did not play. Assuming that his meaning was lost in translation, Wright apologizes and clarifies that his intention was to congratulate Alit on his performance. “I did not ‘perform’. I was not there” (Wright 85). Alit’s insistence that he was possessed by the mask is one that aligns with the purpose of Balinese Topeng mask theatre. At its core, Topeng is a religious ceremony founded on the belief that the performer is subject to divine transformation once they put on their mask (Rubin and Sedana 104). For Wright, this idea is in direct opposition to his Western understanding of mask: “In the West, it’s perfectly reasonable to use a mask to create a representation of a god without turning into one. In our culture, masks are designed to inspire play” (Wright 86).

But why is it not reasonable to use a mask to become something other than ourselves? While masks may be designed for play, can play not also be a vehicle for transformation? As the work of Stanislavski, Chekhov, Demidov and Barba have all indicated, play is integral to the transformational actor’s process. So why is it necessary to separate turning into character from playing character? Is it not possible to do both? Keith Johnstone writes, “it’s difficult to understand the power of the Mask if you’ve only seen it in illustrations, or in museums” (Johnstone 142). The remainder of this chapter is focused on practical experimentation aimed at answering these questions within the context of performance makeup, beginning with an embodied understanding of mask.

I have some previous experience working with masks: in my undergraduate training at California State University, Fullerton, I had one module in which we made neutral half-masks and another module where we explored archetypes in full mask, but my memory is limited. During a three-week period studying at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Bali in 2015, I spent time learning Topeng mask, but this was only a minor component within a myriad of other traditional performance techniques studied. In order to return to the practice of mask with these newfound questions about transformation, I enrolled in a three-day intensive workshop led by Peta Lily, with whom I had worked at the London College of Fashion. In this workshop, we would be working in half

mask and exploring nine different archetypes: the hero, the fool, the child, the hag, the mother, the trickster, the maiden, the devil, and death.

### **5. *The Alchemy of Archetypes with Lily: A Workshop***

The workshop that Lily led derived from the mask work of John Wright, detailed in *Playing the Mask: Acting Without Bullshit* (2017), as well as Janet B. Rodgers and Frankie Armstrong's book, *Acting and Singing with Archetypes* (2009). Following the guidance laid out in Armstrong's book, Lily then cultivated the "possibility for release into exploration, play and impulse" (Lily). Each day began with an extensive physical and vocal warmup. After that, we worked through an experiential archetypal journey. This took the form of a guided meditation lead by Lily. We began with closed eyes and in stillness, but were encouraged to allow our bodies to respond to what we were listening to. We had experiential journeys for each of the archetypes. It wasn't until the final portion of each day when we began working with the actual masks.

The masks were introduced to us in doses. On the first day of the workshop, after numerous ensemble building exercises, we had only completed the guided journeys of the hero and the mother, so these were the only two masks that Lily made available to work with. For the first session with the masks, I made a conscious decision that I wanted to observe rather than participate directly. When shifting into the mask work, we would create a performance space with a semi-circle of chairs with Lily sat in the middle. The performer would stand in the space, turned upstage while Lily helped them place the mask they had chosen comfortably on their face. Once the performer had the mask on, she would return to her seat and ring her chimes, inviting the archetype to come play with us. Although it was a masked actor onstage, I choose to refer to it as the archetype because that is the presence that was felt. Regardless of who wore the mask or which mask was worn, my impression was that the presence of the archetype was felt rather than the presence of the actor. Lily would then direct and interact through the archetype. She would ask it questions, encourage it to follow impulses that she saw, or simply serve as witness to what the archetype wanted to do.

As I observed, I was struck by the transformative power of the mask. The first person to explore in front of the group was a gentleman who I would imagine to be in his late thirties or early forties. He decided that he would like to try the mother. When Lily rang her chimes and he turned around from facing upstage, he was not the individual that I had come to know. Gone were the mannerisms that I had observed throughout the day. What existed instead was a tragic mother weeping for what she had lost. When Lily asked for the mother to vocalize, what came out was a noise unlike any that I would hear from him for the duration of the workshop. I was transfixed by this seemingly magical transformation which transpired before my eyes in a matter of seconds.

Although it seemed to last an eternity, it probably was only about five minutes that the performer was in the mask. Lily signaled to the performer that it was time to leave the archetype behind by shaking a small, skull-shaped rattle. The next performer chose the mask of the hero. She was small in stature and meek in demeanor; a puppeteer who looked no more than seventeen or eighteen, but in reality was closer to thirty. Once again, when she turned downstage to reveal the archetype, I was shocked. There was more than just an altered physicality and vocal quality. There was something intangible that was utterly captivating. Lily said to us early on the first day that she had once heard that archetype entered the body through the nape of the neck. And what I witnessed was as if a separate entity had opened a portal and entered into the individual. This was also being reflected in what the performers were saying after they removed the masks. Sentiments of feeling out of control or in another body were being echoed time and time again. I could not wait to experience it.

The second day of the workshop was when I had my first experience of wearing one of the masks. Before we started with our mask work, in addition to our physical warmup and continued meditations, we also began working with text through a technique that we referred to as 'feeding in'. As we finished an archetypal journey, we would split off into pairs and work through a piece of text relating to the archetype that we had just explored. One half of the pair would read the lines to their partner, line by line, as the other half would take in each line as if the impulse was coming from

themselves. This is a technique that we would eventually use on the final day of the workshop, when we combined the masks with text. The second day also included photographer Nick Cowell, whom Lily had hired in order to generate images to advertise for future workshops. As a result, I was lucky enough to have some photos of some of my time in the masks.

When we wrapped up the first part of the second day, we had worked through seven of the archetypes. With seven masks available for us to choose, I knew immediately which one that I wanted to play with: the devil. When we had worked through the devil's journey, there was a mantra that we were given: "I am beautiful and I can do whatever I wish". This is what was going through my mind as I stood, back towards the rest of the group, as Lily passed the devil mask to me. I placed the half-mask on my face and pulled the strap over my head. The eyeholes in the mask are quite small, and when you open your eyes and are looking through these small little holes, there is a very strange sensation of being in someone else's skin. From that point on, I cannot describe any specifics of what went on while I was in the mask. I know that the audience seemed scared. I know that despite being encouraged to introduce text, all I could manage to muster were guttural noises varying in pitch and volume. And what remains most vivid in my mind is the moment when I took the mask off, feeling like I had lost control and only vaguely aware of what had taken place. It reminded me of the morning after drinking too much alcohol and blacking out; you do not know what happened but bits and pieces disjointedly trickle in. My peers expressed to me that they weren't able to see any of me there in front of them and this is exactly how I felt.

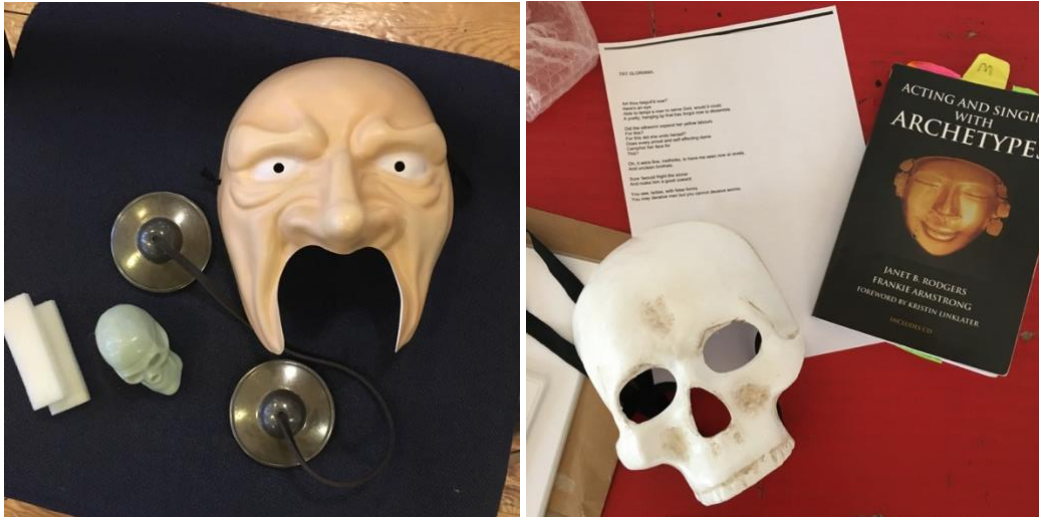


Figure 6 The Devil, chimes and skull rattle (left). Death, excerpt from *Gloriana*, and Rodgers and Armstrong's book (right).



Figure 7 (Clockwise from top left) *The Child*, *The Devil's reach*, and *the Devil's gaze*. Photos by Nick Cowell Photography.

Having spent this time in the masks, I could relate to Keith Johnstone's summation that "a mask is a device for drawing the personality out of the body and allowing a spirit to take possession of it" (Johnstone 142). Johnstone's use of the word spirit clings onto a religious connotation, but I agree that the mask allowed for character to take possession. But my transformation via mask was purely facilitated by the physicalized audience. Was I experiencing partial recognition through the eyes of another rather than by looking at my own reflection? As soon as I had the mask on, I was



being transformed by the gaze of the audience and how they were responding to the face that they saw on my body. And then how they were reacting to how my actions were matching the face that was on my body. The feedback that I was receiving then guided me towards other actions which were gauged off of the audience's response. It was an enactive process where the constantly shifting environment was affecting my sense of self at such a rapid rate that before I knew it, I had completely lost myself and was operating as if I were a completely other being.

Rochat and Zahavi described an "intermingling of self and other" (209). In this case, this happens with the audience rather than in the mirror. The reaction to 'not recognizing an audience's reaction to oneself' may be equally as effective as not recognizing 'one's own reflection'. In order to facilitate such a transformation, the audience must be receiving a really strong and visceral impetus. As face is commonly read for social information any changes made to one are likely to have a major impact on an audience, let alone a total transformation. How might this work with makeup? What is it like to apply makeup in front of an audience? Will I be able to trigger similar levels of partial recognition and transformation using makeup in a similar way to how mask was used?

## 6. Partnered Makeup Experiment

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Joker (Part 1)' – <https://youtu.be/sDnwlplBx2s>

Following up on the relationality of mask, I decided to set up an experiment to investigate further the relational aspect of makeup between an actor and an audience. My work with mask was illustrative of the effect that an audience can have on transformation, so how might that function when makeup is the medium for transformation? My exploration of costume focused on Richard III and for makeup the character of the Joker seemed to be a fitting choice. The Joker, first introduced in DC comics *Batman #1* (1940), does not have a consistent origin story, but it is generally agreed that his physical appearance is the result of falling in a vat of acid (Weiner & Peaslee xviii). The accident leaves the Joker with white, clown-like skin, green hair, and ruby red lips. This has not limited the variety of interpretations of the Joker's iconic look, perhaps most notably portrayed on

film by Cesar Romero, Jack Nicholson and Heath Ledger. I take the iconic looks of these three embodiments of the Joker as the raw material for this practical experiment to investigate the similarities, differences and practical application of makeup that creates the individualized image associated with each portrayal as well as to explore their function in relation to an audience.

For the Partnered Makeup Experiment I invited my partner Megan Lloyd-Jones to be my audience. Initially, I thought that working with my romantic partner might be problematic and that her overfamiliarity with me, her intimate knowledge and exposure to my work might be detrimental to what I am trying to investigate. Despite these potential pitfalls, I feel that this closeness may, on the contrary, benefit the practical experiment. Our shared training, both having graduated from East 15 Acting School, provides a common ground and her deep familiarity with my physical appearance means any changes that manage to alter Megan's perception will be even more impactful towards a stranger or a random audience member. The closeness of our relationship may thus serve as a type of control. As I prepared for the experiment, I also came upon an unplanned discovery: performance makeup often requires a clean-shaven face and at the time of this experiment, I had a full beard. This presented an opportunity for an additional element. By incrementally shaving my face in front of Megan I can make alterations to my face that are slightly more subtle than the application of full Joker makeup. The following writing will give a step by step description of the process and detail the reactions and responses between me, Megan and my changing face.

### **6.1 Shaving the Face**

The studio was setup with a long table separating Megan and me. I placed a small magnified mirror, my makeup set, and my electric shaver close to me. Two cameras were set to document both Megan and myself throughout the experiment. This written documentation of the experiment combines my experience from within the experiment as well as my observations from the footage. I laid out a sheet of plastic on the table to catch the shaved hair. Then, I shaved off the patch of facial hair on my chin, leaving very thick sideburns that linked into a moustache and a small patch of hair

just below my lower lip, also referred to as a 'soul patch'. Aside from our shared laughter, Megan does not show a noticeable physicalized response to this change. However, she verbalizes her new impression based on this new styling of facial hair: "It makes you look more severe, but also more posh" ('Joker (Part 1)' [5:28-5:35](#)). Megan then notes that I had chosen to leave the soul patch. In realizing I ask, "Do you think it will make a difference if I shave it?" And off comes the soul patch. "It does actually. It takes the severity away. It makes you look nice". She adds on to her response, "Isn't that weird?" ('Joker (Part 1)' [6:46-6:55](#))

In reviewing the footage of this experiment, filmed for documentation purposes, there is something that strikes me as strange. This small facial alteration, shaving the hair occupying the space just beneath my lower lip, evoked a physical response as well as the logical and verbal feedback. Megan's tone of voice slightly went higher and she shifted in her seat. She seemed to be equally fascinated by how such a small change could alter her perception of me. What I also am struck by is my inadvertent stumbling upon an experiment about gender performativity. By choosing my romantic partner as a research partner, I chose someone with whom our relationship is built on specific gender roles. These roles both affect and are affected by how I perform my gender and my facial hair, or lack thereof, is a powerful piece of that performance. As recently as April 2021, the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology cite facial hair as "a central part of identity in transmen and critical to a successful gender transition" (Pathoulas et al. 2). Consequently, my critical interpretation of the 'shaving the face' component of this practice experiment engages with gendered performativity, though this is not what I set out to investigate. Despite my focus being elsewhere, gender becomes the main parameter of vocabulary used to describe my interactions with Megan and the site for investigating how changes made to the face reflect one's self-perception through the gaze of an other.

Returning to the experiment, I then shaved off the thick sideburns that travelled along my jawline as well as the bit that connected to the moustache. A handlebar moustache with sideburns that stretched down below the level of my ear remained. I switched off the beard trimmer and

brought the mirror to my face. Megan started laughing immediately. "It's just so funny because you keep making character faces as you do them. Your face changes". In reviewing the footage, I can see that once presented with my own image in the mirror, I do begin to pull faces, but I remember being surprised by this observation. "Would you kiss me? Would you find me sexy at night?" I asked, searching for some sort of reaction. "No" was the swift and definitive response that I received. Sheepishly, I reply "Why? I feel like this one is quite handsome". Clearly the way in which this facial hair style is being viewed has inspired a reaction within myself. I'm not sure if this reaction is of an actor feeling dejected that their character was not received as they intended or a partner feeling rejected. Maybe it's both. My solution is to shave off the handles of the moustache.

After shaving the two centimeters on either side that extended below the corners of my mouth, there was a noticeable shift in Megan. Gone was the immediate laughter, replaced by a soft analytical stillness. "You look like a dad," slips out immediately. During the experiment, I was too occupied with examining myself within the mirror to notice, but my impression from watching the video documentation is that she became slightly broody. This change in facial hair style resonated with an idea of masculinity which inspired thoughts of a future life together. Feeling compelled to pass judgment on the changes, she finally utters, "I don't know, I kinda like it. I don't hate it". The tone transcended the comical reaction that the handlebar moustache had received and instead returned to the territory of being considered attractive. Subconsciously, my response to being perceived as not attractive had immediately adjusted my physical appearance to reach a point where I was fulfilling my partner's gender expectations. "I don't hate it". "Yeah, because I look good with a moustache," I arrogantly retorted. "Yeah, you do," Megan replied in a pitch that was far higher than her usual. As I continued to examine my face in the mirror, the truth was finally divulged. "It's quite sexy, actually". My shock is clearly captured on camera as I look up from the mirror and involuntarily utter "Oh, wow" ('Joker (Part 1)' [12:20-12:38](#)).

This process of performing facial hair for an audience is one that echoes the archetypal mask-work explored with Lily. Each change that I make results in an experiential searching. I am

trying on a variety of 'male' archetypes searching for the one that yields an 'appropriate' response. Megan comments on the faces that I pull as I make these changes. I am unaware at the time but these faces are my own attempts at trying on the mask that each facial hair configuration creates. The difference is that rather than a half mask, this mask is sometimes no more than the width of my upper lip.

In addition to playing with the face and letting the face perform each facial hairstyle, there is also a continual reading of the audience. In addition to the mirror, Megan's eyes and tone of voice become vital reflectors of the character's identity. Perhaps it is this quality that lends itself to the effectiveness of mask as a tool to cut through the "bullshit" as John Wright calls it. An actor wearing mask has their attention forced onto their scene partner. Whether consciously or not, they are continually mining for information from their scene partner, the character's audience, filtering through the feedback that they are receiving in order to derive any information about their character's identity.

## **6.2 Applying the Makeup**

Once I completely shaved off my moustache, my face was prepped and ready for the application of makeup. I began by laying out the reference images that I had compiled of Cesar Romero, Jack Nicholson and Heath Ledger's respective Jokers; three pages, a sheet for each performer. With these images in front of us, Megan and I discussed the obvious similarities and differences between the three separate portrayals. The white face and green hair were very clear visual motifs. All three also featured a prominent, painted set of red lips, however, the painting of their lips was all slightly different. Romero's upper lip is very straight (the result of the actor's refusal to shave off his trademark moustache) (Hassoun 11), whereas Nicholson's Joker has overemphasized the shape of the lip using the lipstick. Ledger's is clearly the most different, stylistically speaking, which is understandable as Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy was a major innovation in terms of the superhero movie. Ledger's lip has a messy, haphazard quality, and extends far beyond the

lips, covering the actor's prosthetic scars that extend up the cheek. The other major difference that I focused on was that of the eye makeup. Romero's Joker has top and bottom eyeliner, potentially some mascara, in an attempt to emphasize the eye. Nicholson's eyes have been left unaltered apart from the white makeup of the face, while Ledger, again breaking from tradition, has heavy black surrounding the eye socket.

Unsure about how I wanted to proceed, I decided that it would be best to work with half of the face, so that there would be something to compare it to. The first step was then for me to apply the white makeup to half my face as we both had identified this white face as a clear common denominator. Unfortunately, one of the cameras then began to experience technical difficulties, so at points, there is only video of Megan's reactions, but luckily audio still kept recording. What it was able to capture was that as soon as the white began approaching the area around my eyes, I began to perceive myself in a different manner, expressing how I felt scary. Perhaps this is similar to the sense of power and anonymity that performers often speak of when engaging in mask work? Perhaps this sensation added to the reckless villainy that has become associated with this particular character? Once half of my face was white, I decided to add eyeliner. I first applied the eyeliner to side of my face that was white and then applied it to the other eye, in an attempt to provide further insight into how it might be working in conjunction with the white face paint.

This may have worked better in theory than in practice as I feel that having two separate looks on the same face made it difficult to analyze them objectively. After not really gaining any strong sense of difference between the eye makeups, I then began to paint on the red lips, starting with the straight-lip look of Romero and then adjusting the lip to mirror that of Nicholson. Again there were not any strong or immediate responses from either Megan or myself. I began to postulate that perhaps, because I was applying the makeup myself, in front of the audience, that it was diminishing its impact, whereas if it had been applied earlier and then revealed, that it might prove far more impactful. As I had explored the minute differences between Romero and Nicholson's Jokers, I decided to paint the other half of my face white in order to explore Ledger's

Joker. On one side of my face was Nicholson's well put together and sharp makeup, while the other side featured Ledger's sloppy, wild and maniacal makeup.

When I finished the application and looked up from the mirror, Megan repeated a sentiment that she had said earlier while I was shaving; "It's so funny what it does to you" ('Joker (Part 1)' [56:10-56:18](#)). I am fascinated by this idea, as I was unaware of any changes within myself that were clearly noticeable to an audience. She followed her comments up by saying, "Yeah, it's so much harsher," and in review I have to agree with her. For lack of a better word, the messy look of Ledger's Joker conveys a deeper level of insanity and yields a far greater intimidation factor. Nicholson's meticulously painted face has a far creepier and eerie feel to it, which is interesting to note, as the director of the 1989 *Batman* film was Tim Burton, whose aesthetic is often described as creepy and eerie.

### **6.3 Reflecting on the Partnered Makeup Experiment**

Ultimately, this particular practical exploration serves to reinforce the idea that the self-concept, and subsequently the self-concept of character, is dictated by the perception of others. Although the focus and analysis on the three Jokers perhaps present a digression from my original questions, the facial hair experiment presented some invaluable knowledge about shifting identities and the actor's attempt at 'inhabiting' them. As changes to the face of the actor are made, noticeable shifts in the audience follow. These shifts serve to replicate the partial recognition that may occur when an actor is working with a mirror. Contrary to the imagined gaze of others conceptualized in Cooley's looking-glass self, the gaze of an other is physicalized by the other person sharing the space. The changes detected in the audience are internalized by the actor, resulting in fundamental alterations to the self-concept, forging the character's identity. The experiment indicates that the actor's response to the audience may be either conscious or subconscious and that changes in facial hair indicate the perception of various identities, or characters, existing

without any further adjustments made to the actor. But the experiment does not actually test the actor's relationship with the mirror as a direct result of introducing a partner into the practice.

Instead of using the mirror, I use the other actor in the room. Although the presence of an audience seems to replicate the partial recognition necessary to reach transformation, there still are questions as to whether this might be achieved by an actor on their own. Even when I finish the process of shaving and begin applying makeup, I neglect the mirror and its influence on my transformation by allowing my focus to be on the other person's reactions to the changes in makeup. I am also far too focused on analyzing the differences of the makeup across three performers. Because my focus is on this, so is my audience's, which distracts us both in experiencing the shifts in perception and performance. Rather than questioning how the physicalized gaze of an audience might replace the imagined gaze of an other provided by the mirror, this experiment draws on how perceived differences are reflected in the characterizations that have become associated with these specific performances. Discussions surrounding the iconography of a character or performance of a character presents a similar trap as the one I fell in when using Richard III as a vehicle to explore costume. The Joker can still remain the vehicle, but the focus of the experiment needs to remain on using performance makeup to reach a point where I am no longer able to recognize myself in the mirror. Just like with Richard, it is not about the Joker of popular culture and pre-determined images, which presents an even bigger challenge as the Joker is from a comic book. While the partnered experiment was a logical next step following the mask workshop, another experiment is required to hone in on the moment that character emerges and how I might use the mirror to create, or rather invite *my* Joker.

## **7. Returning to the Mirror**

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Joker (Part 2)' – <https://youtu.be/KhcHqPsgLUg>

The idea behind the new experiment was to create a makeup for the Joker that was not influenced by outside referential images. I considered doing visual research to create a mood board



to assist me in creating this character through makeup, but I decided to attempt an 'Aware-wearing' equivalent of applying makeup. What might this 'aware-applying' look like? The objective of performance makeup intended for transformation is to alter the appearance of my face to a point where I no longer recognize myself. Therefore, the aware-applying process needs to be a reflective and thoughtful one. Patience is necessary in navigating the back and forth between the mirror and the face, knowing that any element might need to be removed and reapplied if I am not receiving the desired feedback from the mirror. Once the familiar appearance of the face transitions beyond the readily recognizable, the partial mirror self-recognition that occurs invites character to coexist with the actor. The actor-as-makeup-artist then can design the makeup as they are applying it, guiding the transformation through the interaction with the mirror.

The first thing I did was to establish an area where I was going to work. Full-length mirrors are advantageously placed in the corner of my flat's living room. In this corner I set up a chair and a small table where I could set out my makeup. I laid out a variety of pigmented creme foundations: red, green, yellow, blue and black along with eyeliner, mascara and a few brushes and applicator sponges. I set up my laptop in order to document the process. Then I sat down in my chair and looked at my face. I do not know how often I actually take the time to do this. To really look at myself. Not just to get ready, or to check my hair, or brush my teeth. This is a different type of looking and is necessary to differentiate by using another term to describe it. I gazed into the mirror to see myself. To recognize the person that was staring back at me. And I did recognize him. The person who returned my gaze was familiar. Memories were triggered of a time where my face looked different, thinner, with fewer lines. There was not a sense of judgment when making these observations, but a shared understanding that I found within the reflection of my eyes.

After taking the time to *recognize* myself, the next step was to move towards the unrecognizable. I started off with the white; the result of Batman throwing the Joker in a vat of acid. I began applying the white makeup to my forehead, the bridge of my nose and cheeks, but I still wasn't sure what I direction I wanted to go. I realized that the application of the white cream

foundation had softened the appearance of my eyebrows. I used my eyeliner pencil to darken one of my eyebrows and to add a bit more angularity to them so that they appeared sharp and severe. I gazed into my eyes again. Still recognizable. My eyes needed to pop. I chose eyeliner to do this but opted for red rather than black. My hope was to create a crazed, up-all-night look for the character. After lining both eyes I gazed again. There was more of a frantic energy there and my eyes were more prominent, but the person in the mirror was still recognizable. I wanted my eyes bigger and found myself drawn to my eyelashes. Mascara would add to the effect of my eyes popping. I grabbed the mascara that I had laid out and applied it to my eyelashes. I could tell that the mascara was old and it wasn't making the changes to my appearance that I wanted. I quickly left the space I had set up and grabbed my partner's. Applying this mascara was much easier than the previous one, and immediately I could see my eyes change in appearance.

The mascara worked on two levels. It executed my desired *look* for the character. In analyzing my reflection in the mirror and choosing how I wanted the character to appear, I had consciously decided that my eyes needed to be accentuated. The mascara achieved this. But the mascara also represented a behavioral choice. I associate mascara with theatricality and performed femininity, so when I looked at myself with long lashes there was a feeling of beauty that was not necessarily recognizable. There was a feeling of rebellion. Images of Alex from *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). My mind drifted. I was no longer Ben, the actor applying makeup, but the Joker applying makeup. A piece of the character had been revealed. But something was not right. Having made the changes to my eyes, the penciled eyebrow no longer felt right so I used a makeup wipe to remove what had been done only to reapply the white creme foundation. And then I was stuck.

Staring at my makeup kit wondering what to do. Gazing at my face. Back to my makeup. Back to my face. Then an idea. I still wanted something done to my eyebrows but the black had not worked. But what about green? Another effect of the Joker's acid accident was green hair, so who is to say that it did not result in green eyebrows. Instead of using my eyeliner pencil, I used a green creme foundation and one of my brushes to apply it. The result was that the individual hairs

clumped together and spread out with an unkempt effect as well as now being green. I also was able to add the sharpness that I had been wanting. The application of makeup to one eyebrow made me realize that this was the right direction, so I continued with the second. I then started to apply some more white creme foundation to my chin. As I did this I noticed my lips. I smiled. I put down the white and picked up the red and a makeup brush to begin painting on the Joker's red smile.

Once I finished painting my smile, I did not necessarily feel any different than I had after the addition of the green eyebrows. At this point there was still a large amount of my face that had yet to be covered in white. I started with the area around my eyes, sponging the white foundation while being careful not to mess with any of the eye makeup that I had already applied. When I finished, I leaned away from the mirror and gazed. Someone new was starting to come through. I began making faces, playing with the new face that I saw in the mirror. My body shifted to the front of the chair and my breath became heavier. I raised my eyebrows as high as they could go. I noticed how this accentuated the wrinkles on my forehead. I smiled, as big as I could, showing as much of my teeth as possible. My attention was drawn to the wrinkles in the corners of my eyes. Something about these elements of aging in combination with the clown makeup struck me. It was something that I wanted to accentuate. Using one of my flat brushes and a black creme foundation, I began painting in the lines on my forehead. The person I saw staring back at me was haggard and worn. Onto the eyes. This added to the sense that he had seen a lot of life. I chose to add heavy bags under the eyes which I interpreted as indicating sleepless nights. The Joker was there in the mirror, but something was not completely right.

I wanted my cheeks to have a sunken-in feeling, so I used the black creme foundation to create shadows, but it interfered with the extended red makeup of the smile. I grabbed one of my makeup wipes to undo the mistake and cover the face with white, opting to extend the red higher onto the cheek in order to achieve this effect. There he was. I sat back and saw the Joker in the mirror. I don't remember doing this, but in watching the footage I observed: I literally say 'Hello' to the mirror and the quality of my voice is one that I'm not familiar with ("Joker (Part 2)" [38:15](#)). I

stretched my arms out and leant back in my chair, just gazing. The eyes went wide, the eyebrows moving, a smile came out of nowhere. The character and I reached the point of union. I began to laugh, experimenting which one fit this person in the mirror.



*Figure 8 Screenshot from the Joker in process*

Following this moment of union with the character, I feel compelled to find a suitable costume to pair with the makeup. As I separate myself from the mirror, I feel that I lose the Joker. Without the strong somatic feedback that a costume might give, the psychosomatic influence of the makeup is nonexistent without being confronted by my reflection in the mirror. I remove my makeup knowing that the next experiment needs to begin with creating a costume before applying my makeup, but there are also a number of important discoveries. The first is the efficacy of working with the mirror as an audience/scene partner. It is possible to develop a dialogic relationship with the mirror, an ongoing conversation between the madeup face and its reflection, which informs the makeup designer and the actor. This is apparent in how the lines of my face find a way into my Joker. Initially, I remark on how the lines on my face made me think back to times where I looked in the mirror and didn't these same lines. Is there a level of subconscious partial recognition occurring? What happens next is that these same lines serve as inspiration for my transformation into the Joker. I am able to enhance the experience of partial recognition and conjure the Joker precisely by accentuating and overexaggerating these lines. I don't know what this means but I know it is necessary to return to the mirror, this time with a costume.

## 8. Returning to the Mirror, Again

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Joker (Part 3)' – <https://youtu.be/RLLKbT9N9KQ>

To avoid the disconnect that I experienced in the previous attempt, this next experiment began in my closet, guiding myself through an aware-wearing process. The Joker is linked to the color purple, therefore I used this as a jumping off point for my costume design. Not owning a lot of purple myself, my options were limited to a purple long-sleeve Henley. The fabric of the shirt had texture and weight to it, which I liked for the character. It was like a piece of armor. It produced feelings of impenetrability. Were it not for the color guiding my choice of top, I would have normally started with my choice of underwear and socks. For my underwear, I was not receiving any particular impulses. I decided to go with black boxer briefs. I put them on, but then I was struck by the idea that they were not funny enough. I decided instead on a pair of pink boxer briefs with cactuses on them. The randomness struck me as funny. It is the Joker after all. There must be a sense of fun. This also guided my choice of socks, as I opt for a pair with fried eggs. But why should they be matching? So I swapped one fried egg sock out with one that has a series of 'thumbs up'.

Moving to the trousers, I had some insight from the previous experiment when I had tried on a few variations of costumes. Slacks were not going to work, so jeans were probably going to be the best option. I tried on a pair of black skinny jeans: definitely the right choice. I do not know how to describe how I knew this, but there was a feeling of resonance. The structure of the denim matched the weight of the textured Henley. This was even before looking in the mirror. The feeling derived purely from the somatic feedback of the costume. However, upon gazing in the mirror, I immediately wanted the jeans to be ripped. I had another pair of black skinny jeans with rips so I quickly changed into them and liked them better. I was still receiving similar somatic feedback and now what I saw in the mirror was beginning to align with a notion of the Joker whose face I had created in the previous experiment. The remaining two elements of my costume were my footwear and a jacket. For the previous experiment, I played around with various types of blazers, trying on a

black one and a burgundy one. I wish that I were able to pinpoint what about it did not work, but the blazer did not achieve a level of resonance with the character. The best description I can come to is that it felt too formal. Instead, I decided to try an overcoat, something with more length to allow for more movement within the costume. I had two options but decided to go with a grey and black plaid overcoat. The wool material provided texture and weight, adding to the armor-like feel. Carrying on from this, I decided to wear dark charcoal boots. The boots made me feel strong and like people cannot mess with me because I could kick their head in. That was dark. Thoughts that were not ordinarily in my head began trickling in. I must have been on track with the costume. I looked at myself in the mirror. I felt like a punk, ready to take to the streets and cause havoc. This is exactly what I wanted. Now to add the next layer: the makeup.

The application process for the makeup was familiar. In the previous experiment, I was creating on my face. This time I was replicating, while making a few minor adjustments. I wanted my eyebrows to be a brighter green, so I mixed some yellow in. I wanted my eyes to appear more bloodshot, so I added additional layers of red eyeliner underneath my eyes. Because I knew what this particular makeup was, I was not taking as much time to examine my reflection, so when I finished the application process I had an opportunity to take in who is staring back at me. There he was. I wanted to see him fully dressed, so I stood up and put my coat on. There was the Joker that I had been feeling inside me now being reflected back in the mirror. My imagination was immediately triggered to skulking around the streets of Gotham. The streets were on fire, anarchy all around me while I reveled in the destruction. These thoughts caught me off-guard and I started laughing at the sheer absurdity of it. But the laugh was my own, not the Joker's. I looked back into the mirror to find myself again. But it wasn't actually myself, was it? It was the Joker. But it was not really him either. I looked specifically into my eyes. The eyes staring back at me were crazed. Depravity was staring back at me. Another laugh came out, but this laugh was not the same. Now I could hear the Joker.

To remain physically engaged with the character I predesigned a task for the Joker to attempt. Inspired by the character's namesake, I set a deck of playing cards out to build a house of

cards. My intention with this task was to set a challenge nearly impossible to achieve which meant that I could continually attempt the task without the worry of completing it. However, in actuality, the task was not very fulfilling, and I found myself losing the character. I went back to the mirror to find him again. Then I returned to the cards, only to lose him again. I identified straight away that I was not being engaged physically enough. Building the house of cards was proving to be too closed off for the rest of the body. How could I get more of my body involved in this task? I suddenly had an idea to alter the task by adding the element of shooting rubber bands at the cards. I decided that some music might be helpful to create some sort of atmosphere. Not wanting to waste too much time, I searched 'the Joker' in Spotify to see if anything came up and up pops the soundtrack to the film *Joker* (2019). I selected it. I had set up a small house of cards on the butcher's block within my living room studio so I grabbed my rubber bands and moved to the other side of the room. I took one and wrapped it around my hand like a gun. "Bang!" I shout as I let it fly across the room towards the playing card structure. It flew over the top. "Noooooooooooo," I screamed and grabbed another rubber band. Another 'bang' and another miss. I continued this. Miss after miss after miss. I was getting more and more frustrated. I shot at least 20 rubber bands, maybe more, and I was not able to knock down the playing cards. But my frustration was not leading me closer to the Joker. Instead I could feel Ben, the actor-researcher, becoming frustrated. Self-critical ideas questioning the design of the experiment began to circulate my thoughts as I continued to shoot rubber band after rubber band. I ran out of rubber bands and I strode over to the cards and smacked them off the butcher's block screaming 'F\*\*k!'. At this point my attention was drawn to my laptop, which I had setup for documentation purposes. The way I had set my laptop up, the screen was blacked out, but there was still the small green light beside the camera to indicate that it was recording. I realized that I had an audience. I quickly turned back to the mirror. There he was again. Frank Sinatra's "That's Life" began playing through the speaker. Now the Joker as the performer could come out to play. I grabbed the laptop and started serenading the camera. But something was different. There was a definitive change. A new voice came out singing along with the song. I didn't know the lyrics myself, but the

Joker seemed to have no problem at all in making up an entirely new set of lyrics. As the song reached the crescendo I set the laptop down and started prancing across the floor, dancing with complete freedom and abandon, lost within the Joker.



*Figure 9 Screenshots from the Joker in process*

## **9. Reflection on the Aware-Applying Experiments**

These two experiments practically explore a number of concepts that have been discussed throughout this writing. The first is the role of the mirror and the 'looking-glass self' as a transformational tool. The looking-glass self is facilitated by the imagination constructing an idea of how one might be perceived by others. This imagined reaction of others shapes the self-concept. For the transformational actor working with the mirror, the reflection of the actor in skillfully applied makeup births the dual consciousness characteristic to transformation. It is at this point that the looking-glass self enhances the effects of the actual looking glass. The reflection of character in the mirror inspires the imagination to begin thinking about how others will perceive them, further adding to the identity of the character. Is it the actor imagining how the audience might perceive them in character or the character (not the actor but also not not the actor) imagining how others might perceive them within their environment? I'm not necessarily sure if this makes a difference. Regardless of whether the audience is a theatrical audience or a more societal audience, the imagined external gaze of either one is powerful. What is critical is that there is an audience for the character.



However, the need for a live audience or scene partner within the space is still palpable. Although the mirror is a strong presence, one that I can return to for a reunion with my character, I cannot feel the mirror's gaze when I am not facing it directly. This completely contradicts what I have experienced while working with Peta Lily and the archetypal masks where, regardless of whether I was facing the audience, I could feel them. Subsequently, whether conscious or not, my imagination was triggered to create ideas of how my actions were being perceived, enhancing the transformation. When gazing at myself in the mirror as the Joker I feel transformed. This transformation is achieved through a carefully designed costume and makeup, along with the various enactive phenomena discussed in relation to the mirror. But as soon as I stepped away from the mirror it is weakened. According to John Wright, the mirror activates the "telling self" whereas the reflection that other people provide instigates the "doing self" which is intrinsically more performative and theatrical (Wright 94). There is certainly a degree of validity to this observation. Though it does not align with my partnered experiment in which I was too preoccupied with discussing the changes and their effects rather than absorbing the changes, which in turn presented a shortcoming. But perhaps what Wright observes is relevant to my research in a different way: perhaps, it is not possible to heuristically explore transformational acting via the 'telling self'. It needs to be the 'doing self' that is engaged.

Is the presence of an actual audience essential in order to engage with the *doing self*? No, I find that the *idea* of an audience is enough. In the solo experiment described above, my connection with the Joker diminishes as I aimlessly shoot rubber bands at playing cards, yet a shift in mindset reinvigorates my connection to character as soon as I notice that I am being watched. Spotting the camera on my laptop, I choose to digest this observation as character rather than actor-researcher. *They're looking at me.* Suddenly the *doing self* comes alive, bringing the 'audience' closer. Singing, dancing and performing for them, even though there isn't an audience at all, just a laptop with a blank screen and a little green light indicating that the camera is in use. Using the costume and makeup as impetus for play, I am able to accelerate the transformation along with this imagined

audience. Critical character elements such as voice and movement follow and I suddenly feel that I become a passenger as the character takes over. The makeup and the mirror initiate this relationship with character, but it is the connection to action, similar to active analysis and Demidov's fantasy, which results in transformation.

I wrote at the beginning of this chapter that I was attempting to artificially isolate makeup so that I might more easily compare costume and makeup. This proved challenging. Firstly, aware-wearing, Sally Dean's approach to somatic costume design discussed in the previous chapter, was repurposed as a performance makeup design/application technique. This introduced an element of play into the design process and was incredibly helpful when trying to avoid the influence of popular imagery. The aware-applying forced my focus onto *my* face and how the Joker would take over, not how the Joker has taken over other faces. However, once the makeup had been applied to my face, I immediately felt the need for a complementary costume. This impulse led to the decision to aware-wear my costume before applying my makeup for the next experiment. It was very important to have undergone the aware-wearing design process before conducting the experiment, so that there was not an opportunity to disconnect from character, but I believe that it was necessary that I had already designed my makeup. By designing the makeup first, the costume design is in support of the makeup as the aware-wearing is in response to the image that has been created in front of the mirror. However, should the order be reversed and the transformational actor aware-wears a costume before attempting to aware-apply their makeup, a harmonious and effective costume and makeup design should still be achieved.

Initially throughout my makeup experiments, I struggled to realize a sense of deep and meaningful research about myself and my personal fascination with villains. While exploring Richard III, I was able to achieve a level of resonance with the character which triggered new forms of relating to past trauma from my life. My quest for an experiential communion with character had also inspired my research to expand into the field of disability studies; something I was not prepared for but am grateful for. Although I struggled to admit it initially, the Joker provided another layer of

autobiography and offered a window into the desire to capture the attention of others. The need for an audience is what ultimately inspired the transformation, and as a performer maybe this says more about the Joker and myself than I give it credit for. For the Joker, it was as if the character had no need to exist unless there was an audience present. Whether the intention was to entertain or to horrify that audience, I'm not sure. There is a fine line between the two. Maybe it is an easier option to choose the latter. Regardless, the Joker hated to not be seen and thrived when presented with the idea that everyone was watching. I wonder if the same was not true for myself. Were I to return to the Joker, he most definitely could assist in further discovery about my own performative nature.

The Joker also made me look at my face. Had I chosen another character to assist my exploration of makeup, that character would have done the same, but the Joker made me look at my face in a very specific way. How do I smile? What happens to my face when I smile? Every wrinkle that appeared and how, as the smile got bigger, the wrinkles got deeper and more grotesque. In this way, the Joker also became an informant on ageing. I watched the life drain from my face as I painted deeper and deeper lines. Perhaps that is where the transformation derived from. A fear of recognizing who was looking back at me, basing the transformative partial recognition on a *desire* to not recognize who is staring back rather than an arbitrary occurrence. Through these discoveries, the Joker informed me about makeup as mask from behind the mask, or within the mask rather. Makeup, and mask for that matter, alter identity by making changes to the appearance of the face. However, the true transformative power is how the actor sees others, or imagines others, reacting to these changes. The resulting cyclical process of alterations and reactions is what makes makeup such an effective enactive transformational tool.

The Joker as research collaborator also indicated the shortcomings of my own experimentation thus far, particularly when it came to engaging with what Wright refers to as the *doing self*. When exploring costume via Richard III, Richard's *doing self* was activated through the somatic feedback received from the costume. The speed in which an emotional response to this feedback was triggered altered the course of the experiment. My experiment with the Joker did not

trigger the same degree of emotion and meant that the *telling self* needed to intervene in setting a task for the *doing self* to complete. The task that I initially chose, building a house of cards and shooting it down with rubber bands, was not physically engaging. My inadvertent discovery of performing Frank Sinatra's "That's Life" to an imaginary audience, on the other hand, was physically engaging and points to the direction that the next set of practical experimentation needs to go. As this chapter and the previous seek to view costume and makeup in isolation, the next chapter embraces the link between the two within the context of the costumatic approach. The transformational practices of Stanislavski, Chekhov, Demidov and Barba will be integrated with the costumatic approach along with the introduction of the concept of audience as a means to activate the imagination and engage with research via pretend, or transformational acting-as-research.

## Chapter 4- A Pirate's Life: Refining the Costumatic

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### 1. Introduction

So far the writing has contextualized transformational acting-as-research within modern theories of cognition, performativity and pretend play. A historical lineage of the practice and pedagogy of notable theatre practitioners detailed a tradition of transformation which brings about a dual consciousness that I referred to as character. The following chapters focused on costume and makeup and combined theory and practice to situate the costumatic approach among the other transformational tools. This practice-led chapter aims to complete the research by testing out all of the transformational tools discussed to see how they work in tandem and what happens when they are combined. I also ask if working with all elements of the costumatic approach along with the actor's tools surveyed in Chapter 1 affords the opportunity to return to the line of heuristic inquiry which drove me here in the first place: why am I fascinated with villains? More specifically, why do I feel a particular affinity to the character of Captain Hook? Throughout my research I have engaged with specific characters as research collaborators: Richard III guided me through an exploration of costume and the Joker did the same for makeup. Captain Hook will be my chosen research collaborator for this final piece of practice research which will combine the two elements that make up the costumatic approach, as well as other transformational acting tools such as the imaginary body and active analysis in a more holistic exploration.

In addition to critically reflecting on my costumatic practice alongside my exploration of Captain Hook, this chapter also features an attempt at disseminating my practice to others. So far this writing has relied on thick description of *my own* experience paired with video documentation to provide an account of transformation and any potential for research via transformation. Can the costumatic approach be taught to others so that they might experience transformation for themselves? An acting workshop serves as the setting to trial methods explored within this writing with others. Alongside the material discussed throughout this thesis, the process of fine tuning my

own practice will directly inform the structure of the workshop. Feedback from participants reflecting on their experience of the costumatic approach will be analysed to evaluate the potential efficacy of my methodology.

## **2. Pandemic Adjustments**

The previous chapter placed a lot of focus on the external gaze, which in performance translates to audience. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent restrictions came at a point in my research where I was about to begin a prolonged period of studio-based practice in collaboration with a director. My aim was to open up the work to an audience; not necessarily and only an audience in the more traditional sense, but simply an audience for character, which can be a scene partner, a director, and/or anyone viewing a performance. For obvious reasons, this had to be rethought and redesigned. Fortunately, my practice with the Joker indicated adjustments that could be made.

With Goldsmiths campus being locked-down along with everywhere else, I needed to use my home as a studio like many other theatre practitioners, rearranging the furniture in the living room to create a space where I could work. Secondly, my director Niamh O'Brien, a Goldsmiths alumna, would only be able to participate virtually. Although an obstacle, working with a director through Zoom resonated with my encounter with the Joker. When using the mirror, for example, the reflection provided serves as a virtual audience. There is a perceived gaze despite the 'other's' gaze not necessarily emanating from someone sharing the same physical space. Another example of the effectiveness of a virtual audience is the way I, as the Joker, responded to the rediscovery that I was being recorded. My transformation was reinvigorated by the idea that others *were* watching, even though a part of me knew that there was no one watching and this recording was possibly only ever going to be seen by me. Although an audience for character is necessary to the functionality of performance makeup's transformative effect, it may be possible that they do not have to physically be in the space. Perhaps this adjustment was not entirely problematic but helpful in some respects.

The final difficulty that I had to contend with was that I did not have any outside access to costume pieces. I utilised the Goldsmiths Theatre & Performance department costume storeroom on campus for my previous costumed experiments (both Richard III and the Initial Performance Experiment). This was no longer accessible; however, this did not disadvantage the research either. Rummaging in the limited items in my closet became aligned with the image of a child playing dress-up. Rather than an actor being costumed, I was forced to return to the basic mechanisms of playing dress-up by searching through the items I have available and paying attention to how they might activate my imagination. More focus could then be applied to the somatic feedback that a costume provides rather than being drawn to pieces due to their alignment with a pre-conceived notion of what the character looks like. The makeup experiments with the Joker were not aimed at interrogating costume's effect on transformation, but the costume that I pieced together from my closet was able to contribute towards the transformation that I experienced. With these adjustments and considerations taken into account, I could continue devising my practice.

### **3. Creating My *Fiskedam***

When discussing the work of Eugenio Barba, Odin Teatret and Roberta Carreri, the term *fiskedam* was introduced. *Fiskedam*, a Danish word meaning a breeding pool for fish, describes a period during the actor's training where they are able to experiment in whatever ways they may want: "There was space for even the craziest ideas, such as roller skating, unicycling, wearing green or red wigs, dressing up and taking photographs" (Carreri 88). The *fiskedam* is a place to play, and more specifically, play in costume and this is exactly what I hope to create in my studio. The addition of a third party introduces someone who can help reel out what has been created in the breeding pond or lead me to areas that I may not be aware of from within the pool. In this case Niamh serves as guide through her direction of character-based improvisations. The parameters of this particular breeding pool is delineated by the character that I have chosen to serve as research collaborator,

Captain Hook, the choice of which is informed by the line of heuristic inquiry that I shared at the start of this writing, questioning my own lifelong fascination with this particular character.

So then how will this particular period of practice be setup? There is a need to balance my own work with the input of an 'other'. How should I navigate the director's influence from steering the research in another direction? To reconcile this, along with trying to avoid the trap of being influenced by previous portrayals and popular imagery, I decided on exploring Captain Hook using a more indirect approach. So that I, as researcher, was still in control of the direction of the practice, I integrated a piece of writing that I completed for my master's thesis at East 15 Acting School. *An Awfully Big Adventure: Captain Hook from Page to Performance* (2015) is an extensive literary analysis of various appearances of Captain Hook from his inception in 1904 to 2015. The result is a compendium of qualities and traits essential to the character of Captain Hook. I gave this text to Niamh as a piece of source material. Similarly to my work in Russia and with Peta Lily, Niamh would serve as a 'side coach' guiding me through improvisations based on characters she mined from the text. These characters, which were expressly not Captain Hook but inspired by traits of Captain Hook's, were introduced to me in the form of brief prompts: a few sentences describing an aspect or an element which could be used to build character but not full characters. This indirect method gave the space for me as transformational actor-researcher to still have the opportunity to realize my character using costume and makeup rather than having it fully dictated by the director.

Niamh sent these prompts to me the day before our studio sessions. It was purposefully left for the day before so that there was not much time for me to overthink what I received. My task was to take each prompt and, in response, create a look for the character indicated via the aware-wearing and aware-applying processes that were discussed in Chapter 2 and 3. Each session, as I worked through my transformational process as an actor, I also tested the methodology by asking if the costume and makeup created for each character served as inspiration for play once in the virtual studio with Niamh? Will playing pretend in costume and makeup lead to transformation? Will such a transformation allow access to an experiential exploration of whatever element of Captain Hook



that inspired Niamh and indirectly invite Captain Hook into the space through an intermediary character? These experiments seek answers for these questions while simultaneously and continually refining the costumatic approach and my own practice as transformational actor-researcher.

#### **4. A Prolonged Period of Practice (October 2020-February 2021)**

As the title of this section suggests, the next portion of the writing details a prolonged period of practice. This lasted between October 2020 through February 2021, roughly occurring on a weekly basis and usually lasting about an hour and a half per session. Due to the volume of practice, attention will be given to key moments in the practice's development. As such, some sessions may be detailed in their entirety while others might not be mentioned. A combination of thick description and quoted journal passages will be used to communicate and reflect on my journey as transformational actor-researcher and discuss the evolution of the practice. Niamh and I conducted all of our sessions on Zoom and I also would have Photo Booth recording in the background in order to document our work. Although Niamh and I would informally discuss the sessions afterwards, these discussions would center around my experiences and not Niamh's observations therefore I did not formally collect feedback from her. I will include in the writing links to the relevant video documentation of the sessions. Unfortunately due to technical difficulties, some footage is unrecoverable. However, where possible I will also provide links to footage that is not addressed at length within the writing. As with all video links throughout the writing, the reader is welcome to watch all of the video documentation provided, however there is a considerable number of hours-worth of footage. Instead, my suggestion is to rely on the thick description using the video links to view specific moments or to gain clarification towards any of the written passages.

##### **4.1 Angel**

**Corresponding Video Link: 'Angel' – <https://youtu.be/E6pi9MRFOwk>**<sup>16</sup>

The day before our scheduled studio session, I received the following character prompt from Niamh in my email inbox:

An Angel who's just appeared in the processing office of the afterlife. You have tattered wings, bruised/cut hands and a scruffy/dirty demeanour. You can only wear one shoe, the other can be either carried or thrown away.

The first thing that struck me about the prompt was the practical considerations of how I would create the angel wings. So this initial drove me away from aware-wearing as I was more preoccupied with finding something suitable based on what I had in my closet. My solution was to use wire clothes hangers and affix them to my body using cling film. For the rest of the costume, I was able to return to the experience-led, aware-wearing design process. Inspired by the 'scruffy/dirty' descriptor, I tried to pull the costume pieces from the dirty laundry rather than the closet. I found a pair of ripped jeans. There was a flannel shirt which happened to have been left in the washer a bit too long so it had a smell of mildew. Mismatched socks, both with holes in them, were chosen to go underneath a pair of boots, although only one was put on the foot as per the breakdown. For the makeup, I started with red eyeliner to give the effect that I had not been able to sleep very well. My skin seemed a bit too well cared for, so pock marks and wrinkles were added and enhanced. I covered my hands with bruises as well as dirt under and around the nails.



*Figure 10 Images of the costume and makeup for the angel character*

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<sup>16</sup> Due to technical difficulties, the footage is cut off prematurely.

Once I had moved into my studio space, I set my laptop on a table in the corner of the room. This first session immediately started with a structured improvisation. Niamh asked me to grab a chair. Suddenly we were in the 'processing room of the afterlife'. I struggled to find my character, especially seated, without an opportunity to physically explore the character. Niamh, took on the role of an employee of the processing facility and began interrogating me, asking me about my regrets, life choices, sins, what was the last thing I could remember before I died, etc. As a result, the improvisation became a form of hot-seating. Hot-seating is an explorative form of character research where an actor is asked about their character's life outside of the world of the play, however, it does not encourage an experiential understanding of these happenings. Borrowing John Wright's terms, hot-seating encourages the *telling self* rather than the *doing self* (Wright 94).

My concern is that without any physical exploration of characters, the material generated from this type of improvisation can only be from the actor because there has not been enough time for the somatic and psychosomatic feedback of the costume and makeup to have been absorbed. Instead of the character answering questions about themselves I found myself, as the actor, answering questions *about* the character. There were moments throughout the improvisation that made me believe if I had more time moving with the character that I could have found them. My most surprising discovery was the power of smell. Having come from the back of my closet, there was a mildew scent which otherwise would have meant the shirt was put straight into the laundry. The result was that sometimes I could smell my shirt and it would immediately take me outside of myself. It didn't smell like me. Instinctually I would look in the mirror and see someone I didn't recognize. I felt pity for myself. How could I let myself get here? I was happy to be dead. These were brief flickers of character that did not materialise in transformation.

Following the experiment, Niamh and I had a debrief where I was able to express my concerns and we were able to agree on adjustments to be made for the next studio session. The costumatic approach worked as it successfully combined elements of Chekhov's imaginary body with aware-wearing costume design and aware-applying makeup design. The character prompt that

Niamh provided was successful in activating my imagination into creating a character different from myself. This person dressed, smelled and looked different enough to what I have come to know as myself that there were moments where I got lost in the sensory experience of an other. But these moments were not sustainable because they were not being absorbed by the whole body. It was necessary to incorporate the imaginary body, perhaps using the imaginary center. We agreed to implement a period of physical exploration at the beginning of each studio session aimed at locating the imaginary center of the character and in seeking a fuller and more sustainable embodiment of character.

#### **4.2 Baseball Dad<sup>17</sup>**

Having agreed upon the direction we were going to continue with these characters, Niamh sent me the next prompt ahead of our studio session:

The stereotypical 'baseball Dad' who manages the local weekend kid's team. Your outfit is coordinated and over-intensely professional, and you chew gum constantly to combat the stress/look like your idols. There is one area in your outfit that holds all of your most valuable items with ease and convenience (not pockets).

As someone who is a baseball fan and owns a number of hats and jerseys supporting my team, the Los Angeles Dodgers, it was really important not to use any of that in creating this costume so that it would be easier not to recognize myself when looking in the mirror. For that reason I deliberately chose to wear my partner's Boston Red Sox hat. Khaki chinos gave me the impression of professionalism on the field, partnered with football boots repurposed to emulate baseball cleats. I had a red baseball style t-shirt that I wore with a windbreaker over it. The windbreaker makes a very distinct swishy sound when moving with it as well as making me look like I have quite a big belly. As for the area of my outfit meant to hold everything, I used a black fanny pack (or bum bag depending on where you are from). Rather than completing a full makeup, I decided to shave my facial hair into a goatee as this fit the image of 'baseball dad' that I had in my head.

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<sup>17</sup> This is an instance of unrecoverable footage.



*Figure 11 Images of the costume and makeup for the baseball dad character*

Niamh and I began this session with me walking around the space. “Should I be chewing gum?” I asked Niamh. “Yeah, if you feel like that’s right”. I reached into my bag and grabbed two pieces of gum. The gum itself was in a plastic container so that the pieces rattled around when shaken. I started chewing as I walked and this action immediately began to affect my behavior. I could feel myself moving around the space in a cadence that was dictated by the rate I was chewing my gum. The swish of my windbreaker was prevalent. There was a quality about my shoes, indoor football boots, on the wood floor. It felt foreign. After walking around the space for a period, I paused and looked at myself in the mirror. What I saw matched the imaginary body that I had visualized. But it already was deeper than just an image, resulting from the brief time I had spent moving around the space. The gum-chewing had given me some behavioral insight. Sounds coming from my jacket and shoes added yet another layer.

Drawing me out of my trance in front of the mirror, Niamh asked, “Now where does this character lead from?” This rephrasing of the imaginary center immediately returned me to my actor’s telling self. Ben, the actor, decided that the character would lead from his chest. “So move around the space leading from the chest,” Niamh intervened. Chest puffed out I began to move around the space. After a period, Niamh then suggested that I move the imaginary center to another part of the body. Now my actor’s telling self was in the backseat again. I moved through leading with my head, my hips, my feet, only to return to the chest. But it was not quite the chest. It was a little

higher. As I continued the gum chewing, I felt the tendency to jut my chin out. What if I led from the chin? I moved around the space leading from the chin. Something about it fit. And the feeling of it ‘fitting’ came from how my imagination was stirred. Scenarios began playing out in my head. As I was walking around, I felt I was walking up and down the baseline. I would stop to watch a pitch. My hands found themselves in my pockets and I began rocking from side to side, matching the nervous cadence of my gum chewing as I eagerly awaited the result of the pitch.

Niamh recognized this and joined in the game. “They just hit a home run to win the game!” Ecstasy flowed through my body as I threw my hat off and was jumping up and down, cheering wildly. “Oh no. The other team just caught it”. Immediate anguish and disbelief hit me. The emotions were so negative though that I quickly disengaged, as I had suddenly realized I was in a nightmare and that I had the option to wake up. What just happened? The character’s *doing self* had taken over the game of pretend. How was I able to access the character’s *doing self*? By combining an effective – and affective – imaginary body with an imaginary center. Rather than these two elements remaining limited by the actor’s telling self, the studio exploration allowed for the imaginary to become embodied. Then my character’s audience, serving as both scene partner and director, instigated an imaginary scenario based on how she perceived my embodied imagination. Her response was reminiscent of Demidov’s fantasy in action. We were playing an enactive game of pretend, shaped by actor, character and audience.

Surprisingly, I was able to return to the character quite quickly. Reflecting on what happened in terms of the transformational tools I have discussed previously illustrates the effective usage of such tools. Part of the ease of returning to character is certainly due to the imaginary center. Refocusing on leading with my chin, my sensorimotor experience shifts to one that is familiar as this character rather than myself as actor. I am also aware that our improvisations had begun to create a behavioral score which influenced the character’s ease of accessibility for me. Hands in pockets and rocking side to side while nervously chewing my gum and I was right there again standing on the baseline. The character’s behavioral score, discussed earlier in this writing in relation to Brecht,

served as an anchor to hold on to. Similar to how the imaginary center shifted my perceptual experience, the character's did so in a way that expedited the transformation.

### 4.3 Bobby-Ray

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Bobby-Ray' – <https://youtu.be/h7HtThFvIWA>

In the next studio session we began to explore not just the placement but the quality of the imaginary center, introducing ideas of scale and weight into our practice, this time playing with the idea of a farmer.

A farmer who owns the smallest plot of land in the area. Your outfit is grander than your ownings would suggest and you always wear a hat of some form. You're usually found holding some type of stick or corn (or anything relating to nature). You live for this lifestyle but your appearance doesn't imply explicitly that you like to get your hands dirty. Actively consider how the location's weather will impact the Farmer's outfit choice.

The piece of this prompt that initially caught my attention was the idea of wearing a hat at all times. What kind of hat? I was conscientious that, being American, my idea of a farmer was probably very different to someone who has grown up in England. I decided to release that and follow my instincts, which was to choose a cowboy hat. Following my selection of hat, I debated what footwear to choose. My options were either work boots or cowboy boots. Bearing in mind the idea that my outfit was "grander than my ownings", I decided on wearing the cowboy boots. For underwear, I felt that boxer shorts were appropriate to the character. At the risk of oversharing, I normally wear boxer briefs so boxer shorts already were giving me a different sensation. My next decision was what shirt to wear. I had a series of plaid flannel shirts, but then I came across a brown shirt with snaps. For a farmer, this shirt seemed a bit more ostentatious, and the snaps made it seem more weather conscientious because it was easy to take off whenever it got too hot or things needed to get dirty. I also felt that I needed a jacket too in case the weather went the other direction. Jeans seemed like an obvious choice for the trousers because they were workwear. Because the jacket I chose was also denim, I invented narrative that the character thought that matching double denim was classy. A large and ostentatious belt buckle also seemed right for someone who wanted to

appear that they had more than they actually did. As it was with the baseball dad, I decided that facial hair change would be more effective than full makeup so I decided to go with a handlebar mustache. Because there wasn't too much growth there, I accentuated it with a bit of eyeliner so that it would stand out more. Finally, I needed to figure out what I would use for a stick. On the balcony were tomato plants, with bamboo sticks as support for their stalks. I decided to take one of these. The stick was a little over a foot in length, so not very long.



Figure 12 Images of the costume and makeup for the farmer character

We began the session in the same way that we did last time. I moved around the space. Niamh asked, "Where does this character lead from?" My instinct was to be led by my belt buckle. I moved around the space with my belt buckle area as my imaginary center eventually developing a potential character walk. "So if this is a five, what would a six look like?" My hips slightly pressed forward as I continued my walk. "With each movement up the scale it gets a little more extreme. It weighs heavier. It pulls you harder". With this insightful direction, the *qualities* of my imaginary center became involved in the playing pretend. Of the imaginary center, Michael Chekhov writes, "It is not enough to place it [the center] in the head, for example, and leave it there to do its own work. You must further stimulate it by investing it with various desired qualities" (Chekhov 81). Using the scaling system, various qualities can be explored in an embodied way. It is a type of aware-wearing



but for the quality and placement of the imaginary center, moving the imaginary center in the body until it is located somewhere that feels 'right'. Once situated, this approach allows one to work with levels and qualities and to specify how the imaginary center functions more than as a mere location, but as a kind of aware-embodied-imagining. It also provides the possibility to leave each discovery behind to move somewhere else, to different possibilities and qualities. Each of these qualities were tried on, like a costume, as Niamh guided me through the scale as well as the body. From the initial choice of my belt buckle, I moved to my shoulders and then my head, eventually moving back down the body, leading with my knees and then my feet. Each time I changed the position of the imaginary center, we would work the scales, moving up to a ten and working our way back down to a one.

Each of Niamh's provocations contributed to a deepening of the game of pretend. And the costume served to enhance this effect. When I had moved my imaginary center to my head, I could imagine that the hat on my head weighed me down. The lapels of my jacket were an easy place to help focus my mind on the idea of being pulled from my shoulders. Eventually I chose to settle with my imaginary center resting around my belt buckle; my costume-inspired choice had been reinforced by my physical exploration. What I had discovered through this period was that adding the quality of weight aged my character. There was also something uncomfortable about this imagined weight attached to the center which made it difficult to carry myself. This affected the way that I walked. The sound of the cowboy boots on the floor were a dominant sound. Niamh responded to the costume and began questioning how my walk was being affected. Was I proud of this sound? Was I self-conscious about it?

As I continued moving around the space, deepening my connection to the character's imaginary body, Niamh then asked me to start thinking about the voice of the character. I began by breathing into my imaginary center. Leading from the belt buckle, my breath worked its way deep down into my pelvic floor. A regional American southern drawl responded to the costume. "What's your name?" I looked into the mirror. "Bobby-Ray", I instinctually replied. Moving around, Niamh asked what was Bobby-Ray at a five? He was friendly, confident. Greeting his neighbors around

town. "Hi, how are you?" I said as I moved around the space. As we moved down the scale, he became contemplative. Patient. Sensitive. Sensitive to the environment around him. The ground beneath his feet, the imaginary dirt underneath his nails. We moved back up to a five and continued up the scale. The increase in intensity meant that I was getting hotter, underneath the jacket. I liked the feeling of it though, so to counter this, I took off my hat. It was not enough. I took off my jacket. Then I rolled up my sleeves. Suddenly, and out of nowhere, Bobby-Ray became very aggressive and protective of his cattle. "You can get the fuck out of here, do you understand me?!" An imagined physical altercation took place. We moved back down to a five and I felt the need to redress myself.

We moved on to a series of questions, similar to the hot-seating described from the session with the angel character. But this time I did not find it as interruptive to my transformation as the first time. As Niamh asked me questions, it felt like Bobby-Ray was able to answer for himself rather than myself as the actor having to answer on the character's behalf. It is difficult to explain how I observed this as tangibly different. The best way to describe it is that there is a pause to think of an answer which causes my actor self to reengage rather than an impulsive blurting out which feels indicative of character answering. The extra time spent exploring the character's imaginary body, developing his voice and beginning to actively analyze how he existed within his community along with the extremes of his behavior had painted a fairly detailed portrait. Bobby-Ray was then able to answer questions instinctively and confidently. Bobby-Ray was somewhere in his fifties (fifty-two if I remember correctly). He was an only child. His father, also Bobby-Ray, taught him how to farm from a very young age. He did not have a wife or kids. He was in a serious relationship, but she didn't understand that the farm was the priority and so he ended things with her. Niamh asked what were the three things that made him most angry. Laziness, lack of respect, and false entitlement. Asked for an example, he said that he found it more and more difficult to find good, honest workers. Now all he could seem to find were kids who he felt were constantly trying to take advantage of him.

Niamh wanted to see the aggressive side to Bobby-Ray and we decided to play a scene where he was confronting someone he caught taking an unauthorized break. Niamh would play this

character. It started off respectfully. Bobby-Ray reasonably communicated that breaks were to be taken by all of them and all together and if any additional break needed to be taken, it needed to be run by him. The worker started mouthing off, saying that Bobby-Ray was pushing him too hard. Bobby-Ray responded by saying that they were both out there together, doing the same thing so if he could do it as a fifty-year-old man, the worker should be able to do it easily. The scene continued and escalated to a point where Bobby-Ray was refusing to pay the worker for the hours that he worked, on account of the fact that the wage agreed upon was a day rate and that he was not completing the work day. It ended with him threatening to call the police to have the worker forcibly removed.

We ended the scene and Niamh said that if this scene was a five, she wanted to see what a ten would be. I communicated that I had struggled to raise intensity levels because my scene partner was essentially a computer, so I was struggling to add more physicality to the performance. Niamh asked if I had any sort of stuffed animal or anything in the house, so I went and got a teddy bear from the other room. We reset and said that this was now the fourth or fifth time that I have caught this worker doing this. The scene quickly escalated to a point where Niamh's character was demanding to be paid despite not completing the job that had been agreed upon. When Bobby-Ray made it clear that this was not how it was going to work, the worker began issuing threats of coming back to the farm and stealing the money, regardless of whether or not that meant by force. The following is a passage from my journal about my response within the session:

I'm not sure how I reached this point, but at some point I grabbed a plastic axe off one of my shelves (it was out as a Halloween decoration) and held it as a shotgun. The little punk wasn't fazed. He continued to insult my age. The size of my genitals. The fact that I *owed* him the money. He continued to insist that I needed to pay him *his* money for the time that he had worked. Eventually the hat and jacket were off again and the sleeves were rolled up. I grabbed him (the bear) by the throat with the shotgun to his belly. "I may be an old timer but this ain't my first rodeo. So you're gonna shut the fuck up and get the fuck off my land, otherwise you and your friends ain't ever gonna be leavin' here" (something like that). This finally shut him up. He threw some general threats back, like he'd be coming back here when I was sleeping. I told him I'd be waiting for him. We ended the scene and the session there.

The transformation that I experienced in this session is the most effective one that I had experienced in the sessions with Niamh thus far. What allowed for this was the time and patience given to the exploration of the character's imaginary form. This was developed in collaboration with the character's costume and makeup, creating a unified character that I could then see in the mirror, inevitably deepening the transformation by triggering my embodied imagination. The character's audience, Niamh, provoked and responded to various stimuli and how her character's actions were received by Bobby-Ray. The continual deepening of transformation through this enactive process extended beyond character. As the journal writing indicates, the 'I' as actor with teddy bear and Halloween decoration shifted to the 'I' as Bobby-Ray confronting the worker without a moment's hesitation. Such fluidity indicates a possibility for the transformational actor-researcher to oscillate between researcher and character, seamlessly moving between the 'plane of reality' and the 'imaginary plane' ("A Study of the Structure" 372).

Whether or not it was a result of such a deep connection to character or not, this session also led to my first piece of insight relating to Captain Hook, particularly following the confrontation with the worker. Reflecting on the improvisation, the worker's insolence and entitlement had pushed Bobby-Ray to his limits. I could see parallels between the insolence of youth shown by Peter Pan when cutting off Hook's hand only to incessantly goad and taunt Hook about it. Peter felt entitled to take whatever he wanted. In Bobby-Ray's case, he stood up to the worker. The threat of violence was able to neutralize the situation, however Bobby-Ray would have followed through on his threats if he had been pushed to. If I was in the same place, I do not think I would have been able to commit to these threats in the same way. Is this a reason why I am drawn to villainous characters, and Captain Hook in particular? As someone who was bullied as a child, I can empathize with the need to stand up for what is mine and not let others take advantage of me. Captain Hook is a pirate. Retaliation and retribution do not infringe on his moral compass. He's a villain. As an adult, I have taken conscious steps to clearly communicate my boundaries to those around me so that I do not feel bullied. For Hook, violence, fear and intimidation set those boundaries. Being a pirate, his

emotional intelligence is not questioned in accordance with his actions. They are simply written off by being motivated by vengeance. But revenge-seeking could be attributed to a transgression of personal boundaries, communicating a general lack of respect for the individual. In Bobby-Ray's case, he did clearly communicate his boundaries and expectations, and yet they still were not listened to or respected. He firmly stood his ground, eventually having to resort to an animalistic rage. I felt a direct relationship between this conflict and the one between Hook and Pan.

#### **4.4 Reflecting on the Process**

Niamh and I effectively refined our process to a repeatable methodology which we used to generate more characters including a fastidious butler,<sup>18</sup> a young man obsessed with carry bags,<sup>19</sup> and a crocodile who was king of their section of river.<sup>20</sup> For each character, a prompt is given. Costume and makeup are designed/found to fit the imaginary body that the prompt produces. An imaginary center is shifted throughout the body while simultaneously experimenting with its quality. Degrees of internalizing/externalizing are tested using a scaling system. Partnered improvisations create scenarios which deepen the exploratory physical work, facilitate transformational acting and help build a behavioral score. Some level of hot-seating or character interview remains in the process, but I realize that it is a necessary tool to communicate character with my scene partner. Although Niamh is guiding me through various exploratory exercises, she is not able to know everything that is going on within me. By questioning the character, the actor is able to remain committed to the transformative journey while the director or scene partner is able to gather information that will help move the session in a way that does not contradict what the actor or actor-researcher is experiencing.

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<sup>18</sup> Corresponding Video Link: 'Giles' – <https://youtu.be/cdwHFXjoll>

<sup>19</sup> This is an instance of unrecoverable footage.

<sup>20</sup> Corresponding Video Link: 'Crocodile' – <https://youtu.be/AJknHlv7av8>

This process is a refined costumatic approach. The influence of costume and makeup is simultaneously supported by the transformational tools of notable practitioners as well as supporting and driving those same tools to different levels. This dialectical relationship echoes the enactive framework which has dominated the writing. For example, the conceptualized imaginary body informs the actor and their aware-wearing/aware-applying character design. In return, the costume and makeup then inform the placement and quality of the imaginary center which may reshape the imaginary body. Various improvised scenarios operate in the same way as Stanislavski's active analysis and Demidov's fantasy in action. These improvisations are instances of playing pretend inspired and sustained by costume and makeup while also being maintained by costume and makeup. In the context of transformational acting-as-research, the playscape created within the studio is the arena for discovery. And discoveries come in two different shapes: insight in relation to the methodology and insight in relation to the actor's self. Both sets of insight are achieved in collaboration with character, however only the second type of insight relates to the character's identity.

I began to question whether the process was too cyclical. Would the characters that I was creating live outside of their costumes? The behavioral scores of each character were generated by costume such as how the baseball dad moved in response to the sound of his jacket, how the farmer used his hat to greet others and the constant self-surveillance of the butler that everything, including his appearance, remain in its place. Yet costume is also something that belongs in a context; just as human beings change their dress, would these characters not change outfits to suit their environments? Would they survive as characters if they did? Would these behavioral cues be transferable if the character was placed in another costume? What if the butler were on holiday in swim trunks and a casual shirt rather than a waistcoat and formal trousers?<sup>21</sup> What if the farmer

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<sup>21</sup> Corresponding Video Link: 'Giles (Holiday)' – <https://youtu.be/QBDhlz1lydo>

were in his pajamas?<sup>22</sup> What if the baseball dad had to wear a suit and tie?<sup>23</sup> To test whether the costume/makeup to character journey was too logically complete, Niamh and I decided to introduce unsettling circumstances into the character's world.

I will use the character of the butler, Giles, as an example of the process. Although my intention was to build a costume that was opposite to the original, there was still a level of aware-wearing. The type of bathing suit that I wore was chosen specifically for its length. I chose a hat because I felt he would be conscientious about the sun. For that same reason I applied sunscreen so that I could trigger the smell of being on holiday. I also felt the need to bring in some props such as a towel and a book for him to read on the beach. Niamh and I began to work in a similar manner, moving through the space and exploring where this more relaxed Giles leads from. This exploration was furthered through the use of the one-to-ten scale, honing the placement and quality of the center for this particular version of Giles. What was interesting was that the center which I had originally settled on for Giles—placed within the chest—remained dominant while there was also a sense of tentative searching from the feet. I theorized in the moment that this had to do with Giles not feeling altogether comfortable within the relaxed footwear that he found himself in. Niamh then directed me to visualize the beach that I was on and to reintroduce Giles' voice by verbalizing what I was seeing. The return to the character's voice deepened my experience of Giles by further distancing the character from myself as the actor. As Niamh guided me to take my towel and book and find a spot on the beach, I found myself instinctively enacting elements of the behavioral score which I had built in the original session. A meticulous nature showed itself as I laid out my towel. I brushed off the sand that the wind blew onto it. My sandals and hat were carefully removed and decisively placed next to me. There was precision in Giles' relaxation. The guided improvisation led to a beachside restaurant where Giles was confronted with a waiter whose service standards did not meet his own ('Giles (Holiday)' [1:03:30](#)). Throughout this interaction I could feel the rigid and

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<sup>22</sup> Corresponding Video Link: 'Bobby-Ray (Pajamas)' – <https://youtu.be/wrbCH4n6N9o>

<sup>23</sup> This is an instance of unrecoverable footage.

demanding Giles from the previous session being drawn out despite the relaxed and more casual outfit that I was wearing. There was a consistency of character which was not distracted by the change of costume. Instead, this change of costume accessed further levels of detail by revealing aspects of the character which had not been previously explored.

But how was this consistency of character achieved? The foundation of the transformational tools discussed earlier served to solidify the character. The imaginary body, strengthened by the experiential character work from the previous studio session, was able to provide continuity. Dedicating attention to the imaginary center and exploring fully how it affects the character reinforces the imaginary body. This reinforced imaginary body shapes the character's behavioral score. The improvisations then serve to reinforce the behavioral score and the imaginary body. Continual layering and strengthening of physicalized character detail result in a strikingly vivid embodied understanding of character, strong enough to exist in a different set of circumstances. Each of these elements feed off of each other, however they also retain their independence. The imaginary body might stay the same while a new behavioral score is enacted, or the imaginary center is shifted based on a new costume. I began to visualize my characters as paper dolls. By returning to the aware-wearing process, I was able to redress the character in a new costume, which would fit them just as much as the initial costume and could then be tried out in new scenarios.

## **5. Changing Direction**

Unfortunately, the work with Niamh did not bring me closer to Hook. It was very valuable as this sustained period of practice led to insight on the costumatic method and the actor-character journey by introducing unknowns and a sense of adventure. However, the indirect approach that I had opted for absented Hook from the space. Although Niamh's prompts originated from elements of Captain Hook as discussed in my MFA dissertation, my interpretation of each prompt did not necessarily lead to the same things that inspired Niamh in the first place. As a result, the characters that emerged did not fully resonate with my understanding of Captain Hook and did not offer me



the opportunity to explore the character in the way that I expected. Bobby-Ray was the exception and not the rule; for the most part, what I received from each character remained within their own immediate context. I decided to approach the character of Captain Hook directly. Having found some success in my work with the Joker, I wondered if I could adapt the work with Niamh into a solo practice. Using J.M. Barrie's script as the source material, could I apply this more refined costumatic method directly to Captain Hook?

## **6. Captain Hook**

Having spent a significant period of time developing a process with an outside director, the task at hand was to adapt this partnered practice to a solo practice. Considering my previous experiments with Richard III and the Joker, I was confident that the work that had been done with Niamh would equate to a more refined relationship with the costumatic approach and would lend itself to a richer solo experience. This assumption was supported by the research thus far indicating that greater degrees of specificity result in a deeper embodiment of character. Applying a costumatically-led acting technique to Captain Hook would hopefully result in transformation, another term for a deep level of character embodiment, and a subsequent collaborative relationship with character. The subsequent account of my experimentation will feature lengthy description of my process, analysis of my experience and corresponding links to video documentation. As with previous sections, the reader is suggested to rely on the passages of thick description, using the video links to view specific moments or to gain clarification towards any of the writing.

### **6.1 Assembling the Pieces**

I started by sourcing the costume. I knew from working with the Joker that I had struggled sourcing a costume from my own closet. Finding an appropriate and inspiring costume would be even more difficult after having used a variety of my own clothes to create characters with Niamh. It would be ideal to go to some sort of warehouse or storeroom where I could lean into the aware-

wearing process and try on a number of costume pieces in order to build *my* Captain Hook. However, if I were to hire or borrow items, I would have them only for a limited period of time and would need to be incredibly conscious of not doing anything to damage or harm the garment. I decided that purchasing the costume would be the best course of action to enable freedom throughout the experimentation process. This meant that the initial aware-wearing design process became more of *aware-shopping*; imagining what the potential experience of each item might be.

My initial focus was on the mustache. I felt that this was a critical piece to the makeup and I wanted to be absolutely sure that I got it right. Although I could attempt to grow it out, I didn't feel confident that I could achieve the volume of mustache that I was after, so I put in some considerable research on reputable companies specializing in fake mustaches. Kryolan are an industry standard brand known for their 'real hair' beards and mustaches. I found a black version with curled ends. Next on my list of priorities was the coat. There was a particular red that I had in mind. Not too wine colored but also not too plastic feeling. I wanted something bold and striking. The coat also needed to convey elegance. The fabric itself should be textured. Once I found the color I was looking for, I settled on one which had a jacquard pattern and silver trim and embellishments. For the shirt there had to be ruffles. Rather than a cravat, I wanted ruffles on the shirt and an exposed chest to convey a more rugged Captain Hook. There also needed to be ruffles on the cuffs so that they could show outside the cuff of the coat. I found a shirt which was laced across the chest and included a belt, which I thought would make an interesting addition to play with. The trousers and shoes were both incredibly difficult to conceive and to source. I decided on a black pair of trousers with some freedom in the thigh and crotch but laced around the calf. For the shoes I decided to experiment with my partner's shoes as she is only a size smaller than me and I felt that the constriction would be a helpful quality for the character.

There were a number of accessories which I found myself debating whether they were necessary or not. The first was a sword. I searched high and low to find something which didn't feel like a toy and ultimately failed. As I wasn't about to purchase a rapier, my Captain Hook would be

swordless. Finding a hook that did not feel like a toy was also a dilemma. What I found was a hook that had ornate designs making it look different to the stereotypical silver hook found accompanying most children's Halloween costumes. My final conundrum was over whether my Hook needed his iconic hair. J.M. Barrie explicitly writes of Hook's hair being "dressed in long black curls which look like black candles about to melt" (Barrie 108). I was dubious of wigs within my price range, my choices being limited to one from the fancy-dress brand Smiffys™. In the end I caved, purchasing both a hat and wig from the same brand. If they did not work for me, it would be much easier to decide to not use them rather than realize that they were the missing piece to my Hook.

## 6.2 Applying the Mustache

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Captain Hook (Part 1)' – <https://youtu.be/8zxYdneiKrk>

The aware-applying design process for Captain Hook's makeup was heavily reliant on the application of the mustache. The mustache itself is a delicate piece of lace which has the strands of hair threaded through it. To adhere to the face, the lace backing needs to be stuck on using an adhesive called spirit gum.



*Figure 13 Kryolan mustache front and back post-application*

My intention at the beginning of this session was to apply the mustache and aware-apply the makeup. If I felt really good, maybe I would finish by moving around the space in my makeup. Unfortunately the session's sole focus became the application and removal of the mustache, ultimately resulting in the decision that I wasn't going to be using it.

Following a quick shave, I began the application process by heavily saturating the upper lip area with spirit gum. I then placed the mustache at the center point immediately below my nose and applied pressure outwards. The hairs were dangling too far into my mouth so I trimmed the excess hair. At this point I started to remove makeup from my bag, selecting materials that I deemed appropriate with the intention to continue with the aware-applying design of Captain Hook's makeup. Becoming distracted by the mustache not sitting on my face in a way that I was happy with, I grabbed some mustache wax in order to fix it. What followed was an extended period of micro-adjustments which incrementally caused me to get more and more frustrated. The mustache would not look right to me, so I would try to curl it. Trying to curl it would pull at the adhesion to my face. Fixing that would make me think that the other side of the mustache was not right. It continued like this for a while before I finally gave up and decided to remove the prosthetic. This process requires a flat brush doused in spirit gum remover to patiently dab along the lace until the edge begins to come up. Once this happens, the flat brush is slotted behind the lace to incrementally loosen the hair piece while being cautious enough to not damage the lace. Needless to say, I quickly realized that the prosthetic mustache would not be a part of my Captain Hook.

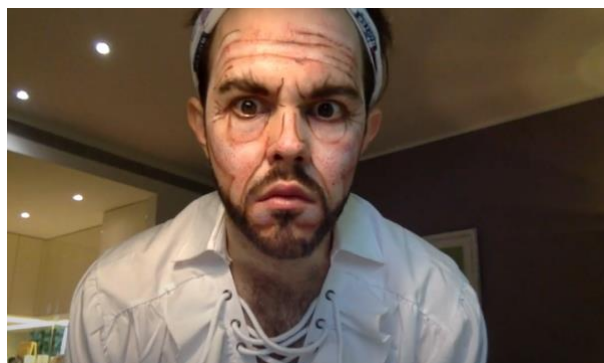
### **6.3 Building the Hook Look**

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Captain Hook (Part 2)' – <https://youtu.be/ee2Fgr1ul3U>

After allowing my own facial hair to grow back out, I was ready to get back to it. During this brief hiatus I had the opportunity to analyze why the mustache hadn't worked in the way that I had hoped. Could it be that the mustache represented too much of the iconography of the character? Was I subconsciously avoiding a trap that I had fallen into with Richard III and the Joker? I decided to follow my instincts and began to conceive of a Hook derived from my own face. Informed by the insights generated by my embodiment of Bobby-Ray, I recalled the indignation felt towards the apathy and insolence of youth. To enhance this chasm between myself and those younger than me, I wanted to see what I would look like if my Captain Hook was really old. Concerned about getting

makeup on my costume, I put my shirt on and sat down in front of the mirror. Studying my face, I was searching for my old, tired Captain Hook to show himself to me.

When looking at my face, the first place that struck me was the circles beneath my own eyes. Hook's were even heavier. So many sleepless nights fearing that the crocodile was going to find him. So many years of torment at the hands of Peter Pan. The wrinkles then followed. The crow's feet beside the eye. The furrowed brow. Each heavy line of shadow that I painted onto my face represented painful amounts of worry. Sunken in cheeks added to the illusion of a dejected man. To enhance the shadows, I began to add highlights. I chose to use white because I was beginning to get the sense that Hook was not a very well men. His skin was a pasty and pale complexion. The years of anxiety, worry, anger, and thirst for vengeance had taken their toll. But Hook did not want anyone to know. I imagined that he somehow dyed his facial hair in a desperate attempt to feign youthfulness and virility. I colored my own beard in with an eyeliner pencil and did the same with my eyebrows, taking the opportunity to make them appear bushier. Using a stipple sponge, I added some flecks of red to indicate skin damage on the cheeks and the forehead. I added extra red to the nose to indicate the effects of years of alcohol abuse. I also used character shadow to paint on liver spots. As I finished with my makeup I took a moment to look at myself in the mirror ('Captain Hook (Part 2)' [40:22](#)). I was instantly struck by the heaviness that I saw. My breath began to reflect this heaviness becoming labored. I remember thinking to myself, "How did we get here?" This is never where I had intended to end up. A sad, tired old pirate captain. My Captain Hook was there.



*Figure 14 Screenshot of Captain Hook staring at the camera.*

## 6.4 Finding Myself Lost at Sea

**Corresponding Video Links:** 'Captain Hook (Part 3)' – <https://youtu.be/3uBukvBGZNI>

Immediately following having found my Hook's makeup, and pleased with how decisively I had come to it, I finished changing into costume. I had on my shirt, the belt and my trousers. I did not put on shoes at that point because I wanted to explore the sensation of the shirt and the trousers before adding additional elements. I started to move around the space. I entered a fencing *en garde* and imagined a few blade strokes. But I was desperately struggling to focus. I found myself inadvertently regressing to methods which I have since problematized; wrapping my hand with a bandage to mimic the effects of amputation. I felt that the trousers that I was wearing were not right so I went to my room and came back with leggings to see if I liked them better. I did not. I changed back into the original trousers and attempted to find the character's center but I could not get my mind right and decided to take a break.

Returning to the character after half an hour, I topped up my makeup and decided that I needed to more fully realize the costume.<sup>24</sup> I felt that I needed to make significant changes as I had struggled so much earlier. I removed my belt and decided to wrap the plastic hook onto my hand. As each layer was added I tried to give myself time to acknowledge their individual effect but in looking back at the footage I can see that there was a part of me that was rushing the process. Once the hook was in place, I added the coat. The coat was perfect, but the shirt did not look right. I tucked it into the trousers but what it needed was the belt that I had removed. For the shoes I had decided on a pair of my partners black leather knee-high boots which also had a heel on them. Together with the coat, I instantly felt closer to the character. An elegance and arrogance were radiating from the chest. But there was still something missing and there was something inside of me which was not allowing myself the patience to look for it. I went to get the wig and immediately abandoned that idea, eventually giving up a second time.

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<sup>24</sup> 'Captain Hook (Part 4)' – <https://youtu.be/Lc7I4e-ZrP4>

Recognizing that wrapping the hand was not something that I wanted to continue, I decided to abandon the hook altogether for my third session of the day.<sup>25</sup> Reassured by some of my costumed elements such as my coat and shoes, I returned to the belt. Interestingly, a belt was also an integral piece of Bobby-Ray's piece of costume/imaginary center. Experimenting whether the belt should go on the outside of the coat or around the shirt as I had it originally, I decided on the shirt. Then I thought that I should give the wig a second chance. I also included the hat in this look. I liked the image that I saw in the mirror. It felt like Captain Hook was staring back at me. To enhance the mood, I added some dramatic piano music as I thought this might be what Hook played in his cabin. But as I began to move around the space the wig began to get in my face. I attempted to pin the sides of the wig back so that I felt more free to move around. Perhaps this was misguided. Maybe Hook's hair also gets in his way. Once I had pinned the wig, the hat began to draw my attention as I became aware that it was nearly falling off after the slightest of movements. Once I removed the hat, the image of the wig in the mirror took me completely out. I took the wig off as well and attempted to return to my practice. I grabbed the hook again to try and salvage the session but I had lost all patience and focus. Frustratedly I stopped.

I still tried one more time to make a connection to character.<sup>26</sup> This time I knew that I was not going to use the wig. I was not going to use the hat. I was not going to wrap the hand but I was still going to use the hook. I liked using the music so I changed it to a more classical playlist so that I was not leaning too hard on creating a dramatic atmosphere. I moved around the space. This was it. This was the costume. I instantly felt the center in my chest. Elegance and arrogance. It reminded me of the butler character that I had created with Niamh but with power. This center had weight but moving upwards. But when I looked in the mirror this did not resonate with the face that I saw in the mirror. Facing the mirror I tried to place and find the breath of the character. Moving around the

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<sup>25</sup> 'Captain Hook (Part 5)' – [https://youtu.be/ikG\\_ArXnuBA](https://youtu.be/ikG_ArXnuBA)

<sup>26</sup> 'Captain Hook (Part 6)' – <https://youtu.be/bmA7491RYdc>

space again and using this placement of breath I started to introduce voice but was immediately drawn away from any sort of connection to character that I had developed. I attempted to channel my frustrations into the character but it was gone and this time I knew that I needed to let it go and approach Hook at another time. What I realized was that I had inadvertently abandoned my own costumatic method. I was giving up before even moving the imaginary center around and exploring the degree of expression. Why had I not afforded myself the same level of patience that I normally had? Perhaps without the presence of a director I was too eager to force a connection to character. Or maybe my own fondness for Captain Hook was pressurizing the process; a subconscious expectation that a connection should already be established. Regardless of the reason, I knew that I needed to be more patient with myself as an actor and my practice.

## **6.5 Finding Freedom in Aggression**

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Captain Hook (Part 7)' – <https://youtu.be/zUZZUPkUOsc>

Throughout the application process ahead of this session, I decided that I wanted to use music to set the scene rather than create the mood. I wanted to make it easier for myself to step into Hook's environment. As I applied my makeup, I struggled to find the right playlist until I stumbled upon some sea shanties. These immediately triggered my imagination. I began imagining that it was my crew that I could hear on the other side of my cabin door. Rather than doing makeup for a character experiment, I was getting ready to go on deck. I suddenly began to feel very lonely. The camaraderie that I was sensing from the sea shanties was beyond me. I was the Captain. I was not to fraternize with other members of the crew. I realized how sad it was that there was no one that I could share my true self with. I had to go to such great lengths to build an image before presenting myself to my crew. I was the only one being chased by the crocodile, no one else. I was the only one with a petulant boy gloating over having left me maimed. This added to the weight of each wrinkle that I painted onto my face.



As I got to my feet and began moving around the space, I felt a familiarity with the shape and form of Captain Hook. The previous sessions that I initially viewed as a complete failure had generated valuable relationships between my body and the garments that I was wearing. Situating my imaginary center in my chest felt like a perfect fit. I moved around the space and I felt my Captain Hook moving with me. It wasn't a complete transformation. But he was close. Feeling that character presence gave me confidence that I was working in the right direction. I wanted to start working on Hook's voice knowing I eventually wanted to incorporate text, but I was scared of losing the character and this is evident in the work. Watching the footage back there is an obvious trepidation in my voice but then there is a moment where I decided to grab the hook and it seems to trigger a different approach ('Captain Hook (Part 7)' [43:35](#)). Once I put the hook on, I was reminded of the pain that I was experiencing during the makeup application. This triggered aggression. If I was already alone then I didn't need to care about anyone else except for me.

The vocal work that followed enabled transformation. And this vocal work was enabled by a freedom generated from aggression. There were moments of mockery. Of taunting. Of challenging. And when the character started to slip, I found myself continually being drawn back to shouting 'No!'. The voice was fluid in the sense that it was certainly not consistent. But the aggression and antagonism gave me avenues to explore the voice without losing character. There could be those inconsistencies but because the drive for using the voice was resonant with the character, I was able to hold on to my sense of transformation. The image of the hook in the mirror enhanced my sense of aggression by adding a level of threat. Suddenly I was armed with a weapon giving me an inherent possibility of violence. But this exploration was incredibly bombastic in energy. Lots of shouting. It made me wonder if I could shift my Hook into a place of stillness while still retaining transformation.

## 6.6 Finding Freedom in Stillness

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Captain Hook (Part 8)' – <https://youtu.be/T48rW-zPPdA>

Adding text to my exploration of Captain Hook was something I was keen to try. I had attempted to incorporate speech in the previous session, this time it would serve as my primary interest. The text that I decided on is a section of *Peter Pan* that is often referred to as ‘Hook’s Soliloquy’:

**HOOK** (*communing with his ego*) How still the night is; nothing sounds alive. Now is the hour when children in their homes are a-bed; their lips bright-browed with the good-night chocolate, and their tongues drowsily searching for belated crumbs housed insecurely on their shining cheeks. Compare with them the children on this boat about to walk the plank. Split my infinitives, but 'tis my hour of triumph! (*Clinging to this fair prospect he dances a few jubilant steps, but they fall below his usual form.*) And yet some disk spirit compels me now to make my dying speech, lest when dying there may be no time for it. All mortals envy me, yet better perhaps for Hook to have had less ambition! O fame, fame, thou glittering bauble — No little children love me. I am told they play at Peter Pan, and that the strongest always chooses to be Peter. They would rather be a Twin than Hook; they force the baby to be Hook. The baby! that is where the canker gnaws. (Barrie 138-139)

I decided to print a copy of the text so that I could have it in the space with me. Having done the makeup a number of times at this point, I felt that I could speed through it. I wish that I had not because there were certain details that were compromised such as the definition of certain wrinkles or highlights which took away from the connection I felt when looking in the mirror. Once the makeup was applied I finished getting into costume and began to move around the space with the text in my hand. Because I was planning on using the text throughout, I chose to not use the hook in this session.

The introduction of text and subsequent reintroduction of voice instantly made me feel uncomfortable. My body felt stiff. My voice did not feel grounded. And the confidence and connection to character that I felt that I had finally been reaching seemed to have disappeared. What was helpful was that the text served as a task to keep me occupied within the space. Despite feeling disconnected from my practice, I could say to myself “It’s fine. Just use this time to memorize the lines”. And by pushing through I was then able to *play* with the text and reengage with my practice via that sense of play. This resembled how the task that I had established for the Joker—building a house of cards and shooting rubber bands at it—focused the practice. But after a short while I felt myself slipping away from character, so I decided to engage in other ways. First was

bringing out the rum ('Captain Hook (Part 8)' [36:35](#)). Personally, rum is not something that I normally drink so by having the taste and smell of it on me instantly made me feel like someone else. I bought into this transformational spark and tried to integrate it into learning the text. I paced and paced. Experimented in every way I could imagine until I remembered to just be still.

I changed tack and decided to build the world around me. I pulled up some ship sound effects on my phone and dragged a chair into the space ('Captain Hook (Part 8)' [56:10](#)). I just stood there listening. Listening to the sound of the sea lapping up the side of the ship. The creaking of the wood as the ship swayed in the waves. The motion became embodied and I found myself swaying too. I could see my breath in the night air. The stars were above my head. The night felt peaceful. I sipped on my rum. It burned. But it was consumed by the stillness that surrounded me. "How still the night is". I began to speak. And what I delivered was perhaps the most overindulgent piece of acting I have ever done, managing to turn a relatively small chunk of text into something that lasted almost ten minutes. But allowing myself that space to *feel* my way through the text was also allowing space for Hook to feel *his* way through the text, not knowing what he was going to say next. This brought about a full understanding of the severity of some of the things that he is says: a group of children are aboard his ship waiting to walk the plank to their deaths rather than being at home in their beds like they're supposed to be. And yet he is compelled to make *his* dying speech.

The time and space that I was allowing myself as an actor opened up the text to be transformative. I could appreciate the significance of what it meant to feel compelled to say my last words. I did not know why, but I could feel death. Whether it was the crocodile or Peter or my heart just giving up, I knew it was coming. And there was a moment where I wanted it.<sup>27</sup> Only to be reminded that after all I had done, no little children loved me. The idea of not being adored as a pirate hurt. All children love to play pirates. And yet no one loves to play as Captain Hook. I was devastated. It made me question my whole life. It honestly felt like an existential crisis as Captain

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<sup>27</sup> Could this be reminiscent of the Angel character?

Hook and then I snapped out of it ('Captain Hook (Part 8)' [1:04:38](#)). What I brought with me was a greater appreciation for Captain Hook on a human level. Although it felt at the time like it was triggered by experiencing his existential crisis, it was also facilitated by all of the experiential work that I had put into Hook. The continual transformational work was simultaneously adding more layers to my performance and revealing more layers about this character. Although I already felt like I had achieved transformations and gleaned insight from my experience as character, I wondered what more I could experience if I continued the work.

## 6.7 Finding Freedom in Movement

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'Captain Hook (Part 9)' – <https://youtu.be/oosc2eSCkpE>

Although I had found a number of connections with my Captain Hook, the one thing that I had yet to generate was any sort of behavioral score. This was my focus. I took extra care in applying my makeup because I did not appreciate the disconnect that I felt when looking in the mirror during the last session. I also chose a classical music playlist because I felt that was the music that Hook would have appreciated. I carried over the care and attention to detail into how I dressed myself, finding the joy in becoming Captain Hook. Eventually this shifted to Hook finding joy in becoming Captain Hook; enjoying the process of becoming his own mythology. I adjusted my shirt and belt. I put on my coat with a flourish and adjusted my collar to exactly where I wanted it. My shirt cuffs were pulled out beyond the jacket cuff.

Playing a ticking clock sound effect from my phone, I began running around the room imagining that I was being chased by the crocodile. In case I fell I decided not to wear the hook for the time being. After running around a few times until I was out of breath, I gathered myself as if I needed to save face in front of my crew. I felt I should have the hook. Then I started running again. My shoes made it very difficult to run so I found myself lifting my knees slightly higher. I started using my hook to slash at jungle foliage that was in my way as I raced away from the crocodile. I quickly stopped the sound effect on my phone and stood there waiting. My chest heaving with

breath. Listening to hear if I had outrun the crocodile. Was today the day that death would finally catch me? The activation of breath also engaged with the character's imaginary center. Voice began to flow out of me as I shouted at Peter Pan. I was desperate for some type of retribution or at least an admission of guilt. Of course, being in a studio alone all I was met with was silence. This made me angry so I started swinging at him with my hook ('Captain Hook (Part 9)' [55:23](#)). I swung away in futility. I swung until I broke down because I knew that no matter how hard I tried I was never going to catch him.

## 6.8 Conclusion

At the end of my time with Captain Hook I felt a tremendous amount of pressure to have a definitive answer to the question: why am I so fascinated with Captain Hook? What I have are a series of insights that make me empathize with the character even more. I was particularly struck by the experience of his loneliness. There were moments where it felt soul-crushingly lonely. No one could relate to what I was going through. I was in an environment where my bravado and cruelty were essential otherwise there was no telling which member of my crew might turn mutinous. I was the only one constantly fearing for my life. Where that end would come from, I never knew. It could be the crocodile, Peter Pan or any other pirate who decided that they were finished with me. In a world where everyone else could celebrate being forever young, I was stuck feeling forever old.

I found great amounts of joy in the freedom to let loose and eviscerate someone with my words. The hero is meant to play by the rules and exist within the guidelines and values outlined by society, but the villain is free to exist within whatever set of rules they deem are appropriate. If something or someone irritated Hook, he could unload his full frustrations onto them without mincing a single word. Should someone think twice about his position of power, he could gut them with his hook. Maybe that is the secret behind popularity of some celebrities. Society relish in their villainy; the freedom to abandon decorum and tell people that what they are doing is absolutely and

entirely wrong and insult them the whole way through.<sup>28</sup> It was exhilarating—and sometimes therapeutic—to embody someone with such power and such venom.

I felt great amounts of pain at the idea of losing my hand to a little boy who felt no remorse. Not only that, but he continually was antagonizing Hook. Peter Pan was a constant reminder of personal failure. His mere existence was emasculating. There was a sense that he had jeopardized Hook's legacy. In Hook's eyes he should have been the character that every child wanted to play and yet he was the one no one wanted to play. After years of pirating and solidifying his legend, his place in the hearts and minds of children everywhere was stolen away by the same boy who stole his hand. I desperately wished that there was a way that I could have told him that there was at least one person who always chose to play Captain Hook. I wonder how he would feel knowing that boy continued to play Captain Hook into adulthood?

Ultimately, the costumatic approach led me to the experience of transformation. Not on a grandiose scale where I forgot about being Ben, but on micro-levels, where I felt, experienced, touched, tasted, lived what seemed to be Hook's reality and world. I gained insights from these transformations. This process seems to be one that could continually be pushed further and further, continually deepening the connection to character. What is necessary is patience. There were a number of times where a connection with character was not made. In the moment these occurrences were incredibly frustrating. But it seemed that the sessions were still valuable in contributing towards an embodiment of character at later sessions. Dedicating time to the refining of costume and makeup was effective in building character, in the same way that dedicating time to the refining of the imaginary center was effective. But these insights are informed solely from my own experience. What I have developed is effective for me but will it be effective for others?

Thus far I have opted to provide detailed description so that the reader may access my own experience. But is there a way to allow others to experience the costumatic for themselves? In an

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon Ramsay is an excellent example of this.

attempt to answer this, I staged a workshop to guide other actors through a similar practice to the one I was honing on my own. This would entail using the aware-wearing/aware-applying process to generate shared experiences. Will these shared experiences be struck with comparable insights? Will there be any insight generated at all? This workshop will also question how the costumatic approach might exist within a pedagogical setting?

## **7. Acting with Character (AWC) Workshop**

The idea for a workshop sprung out of my own questioning about how I might share my practice. As a piece of heuristic inquiry, the focus has been on *my* practice as a transformational actor, how the introduction of costume and makeup affect that process and how such a practice might be situated within a research context. Having thus far shared my encounters with character through thick description, the question becomes how might these experiences be made accessible to others? Once I began thinking in this way about how to truly *share* the experience rather than *describe* the experience, it became clear that a workshop might be the most effective way to disseminate the experiences concerned in this writing. The workshop format also provides an opportunity to investigate a number of other questions about the costumatic approach. How might this methodology function within a pedagogical setting? Can it be taught to others? Would others share similar experiences? How might this methodology be made accessible to those with varied levels of training or performance background?

### **7.1 Workshop Design & Participant Recruitment**

The design of the workshop, titled 'Acting with Character' (AWC), aims to condense my research process into two days. The first day will introduce practitioners and techniques while day two will feature costume and makeup, working towards a long form improvisation. This workshop design was submitted to Goldsmiths Department of Theatre & Performance and received Ethical

Approval on 28/12/2021.<sup>29</sup> The submission also included that feedback would be obtained throughout the workshop and would be documented by photo and video. Participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Form—also approved—agreeing that their feedback and participation in the workshop may be used for research purposes.<sup>30</sup> Recruitment for this workshop was fairly broad in the sense that it was my intention to cast as wide a net as possible. Samantha Rowe, Office Administrator for Goldsmiths Department of Theatre & Performance, forwarded an email that I drafted out to all students within the department. I also reached out to Donatella Barbieri with the same email asking if she could circulate it amongst her students in the MA Costume Design course at London College of Fashion (LCF). The Goldsmiths Drama Society was also involved, advertising the workshop on their social media channels. The result was a total of fifteen participants registering interest. Upon registering interest an email was sent containing an Ethics Information document, a document outlining what to bring, and a digital copy of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* so that we would have a shared source material to draw characters from.

Of those fifteen, two were people I knew previously: my partner, Megan Lloyd-Jones, and a friend, Luke Mazzamuto. I have written about the fact that Megan and I trained together at East 15. Luke is also a professional actor, but does not have any formalized training. Megan had prior knowledge of my research, but Luke did not. On the day of the workshop six other participants joined, all from varied backgrounds. Two costume design students from LCF, two BA students and two MA students from Goldsmiths. One of the MA students is an engineer with a PhD, who decided to switch disciplines to study on the MA Applied Theatre course. The other is a dancer on the MA Performance Making course. In total I had eight participants, which, despite being significantly less than anticipated, was enough of a turnout to work with the original workshop design. I mention the composition of the group as a way of demonstrating the variety of experience levels and potential familiarity with what will be covered.

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<sup>29</sup> A copy of the Ethics Approval Form can be found in Appendix B.

<sup>30</sup> Copies of the Information Sheet and Informed Consent form can be found in Appendix C and D.



The workshop was filmed in its entirety and is available to watch. The links will be provided at the beginning of each relevant section. As my primary material, I will focus on the experience of the participants as reported by them as participant-observers and not my own observations about the participants. As such, this portion of writing will detail the happenings of the workshop and the participants' first-hand feedback about their experiences. My own analysis will be reserved for the Conclusion section.

However, I would note a few modifications I made to the original workshop design in order to better accommodate the group. Even though I originally planned a two-day workshop, I switched to one-day only, primarily as in response to participants who were uncomfortable with improvisations and/or unable to sustain it for long periods. When I asked at the start how people felt about improvising, only Megan and Luke said they were comfortable with it. I was quite concerned that the workshop was dead in the water at that point. But I learned that perhaps my terminology needed to change. Once I had the group on their feet and engaged in imagination-based exercises, it became clear to me that everyone had the confidence to engage in improvisations. They were all doing it! There was not a single member of the group who was not fully committed to the exercises. The modification that needed to be made was that I needed to call the improvisations something else. Using the language of pretend play seemed to make everyone much more comfortable.

The second adjustment was that instead of improvising individually or in small groups, I chose to work with the whole group. This seemed to work very well as everyone seemed to feel safer taking risks within the group setting. It was also helpful having Megan and Luke as they were more comfortable responding to the prompts. This meant that they were able to set the tone of each practice and indicate a sense of direction, while also being able to step back and leave space for the other participants to explore. But what was noticeable was the lack of ability to engage in improvisations for long periods of time. There was a sense that I was receiving from the inexperienced performers that after a certain duration of time their connection to character seemed to weaken. Although this was not altogether dissimilar to my own experience with character, once

this began to happen the performer's own self-consciousness began to creep into the space and made it so that the improvisation or exercise remained effective for a limited amount of time. For these reasons the material that I thought would take a day to move through ended up only taking half the day.

This also affected how long the final improvisation was able to be sustained for, which meant that the second half of the day was more than enough time to move through the foundational makeup material and also build and embody their pirates. What *was* effective was the time that I had dedicated for the participants to explore the application process of their makeups. Multiple participants commented on how the additional time with the makeup allowed them to continually add layers of detail which resulted in feelings of deeper embodiment of their character. This time is also critical because using makeup in this way was completely new to almost every participant, with the exception of Megan. The time allowed participants to make mistakes, to remove and readjust certain elements of their makeup, and to experiment with how certain techniques or additions might affect the way they experience their character. As I mentioned earlier, I would like to focus my attention on the participants' feedback. Each piece of practice was followed by a group reflection. The feedback from these reflections will be cited with the relevant time stamps directing the reader to the appropriate section of the video.

## 7.2 The Magic 'If'

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'AWC (Part 1)' – <https://youtu.be/jUcbVgEk1X4?t=1027>

('Part 1' 17:07-29:24)

After discussing some foundational information about Stanislavski and introducing the idea of the magic 'if', I asked everyone to get up on their feet and put it into practice. The prompt was: "I want you to act *as if* you are a candle" ('AWC (Part 1)' [18:47](#)). After embodying their candles for a few moments, I asked them to release that and continue to move around the space. Then I asked them to act as if they were a panther. Again, a few moments to embody their panther before I asked

them to release it and continue moving the space. Finally, I asked them to act as if they were a rainstorm. The prompts I chose were arbitrary, but I felt they offered a variety of possibilities for embodiment. Once participants released their rainstorms and continued to move around the space, I let the group know that we would be returning to our candles. Only this time I began to introduce an added degree of specificity. What kind of candle are you? Are you a tall skinny candle? Are you a tea light? Are you a scented candle in a glass jar? What is your wick like? Is it long and fresh or is it small and burnt down? These types of questions were posed to the group while they continued to embody their candle. We released the candle and returned to the panther. Is your panther hungry? Are your ribs exposed? Are you the king of the jungle? Are you queen of the jungle? And finally we were back with the rain storm. Is there lightning? Thunder? Is the wind howling? How heavy are your raindrops?

After releasing the rainstorm we gathered in a circle to share feedback about how the groups' experience of playing with the magic 'if'. "So how did that feel for people?" ('AWC (Part 1)' [25:36](#)) Overwhelmingly, the group responded to the second version of the exercise over the first. It was the process of incorporating such specific details which served to deepen the experience of embodiment. As I introduced more detail, these nuances enhanced the participants' imaginative possibilities. Being prompted by specifics which they may not have thought of freed the imagination and the subsequent embodiment. With the focus having shifted to the more detail-oriented method of embodiment, it was a natural segue to begin talking about Michael Chekhov and how these details might be incorporated into the development of the imaginary body.

### **7.3 The Imaginary Body**

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'AWC (Part 1)' – <https://youtu.be/jUcbVgEk1X4?t=1942>

('Part 1' 32:22-1:20:00)

To begin the exploration of the imaginary body, I started with a provocation directly from Michael Chekhov. I asked the actors to begin imagining a character who was "lazy, sluggish and

awkward” (Chekhov 78). As the actors began to move around the space, I began to ask them a series of questions aimed at triggering specific decisions regarding the imaginary body that they are building. Is this character taller than you or shorter than you? How are the characters feet? Wider or narrower than yours? How are the hands? How’s their posture? Do they slouch? Do they hunch? Once I finished offering suggestions via these questions, I asked the group to walk their characters around the space. There was a moment of hesitancy so I intervened with a scenario: you are walking to catch a bus. The bus is not there yet, you do not have a reason to run for it, but you have an intention of where you are looking to go. The group began to move around the space with this newfound purpose while still retaining the character which they had just built. My next suggestion was to begin to find the voice for the character using the phrase “Hey, wait” in a halfhearted attempt to make the bus wait. “Think about where that voice sits. Where is it coming from?” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [37:24-37:28](#)), I ask the group. “Is it coming from the pelvic bowl? From your stomach? Your chest? Your throat?” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [37:30-37:35](#)). After giving the group a few moments to explore where that voice was coming from, I could feel a sense of disengagement so I brought the exercise to an end and reconvened in a circle to discuss.

“How did we feel with our imaginary bodies?” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [38:55-38:59](#)) “Gross,” is the immediate reply that I get. This theme of transformation carried to the next bit of feedback offered by Luke, who described that widening his stance and adjusting his posture pushed him to a place where he began to experience someone outside of himself: “I feel so not me right now” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [39:24-39:29](#)). But he also expressed that he felt it really difficult to sustain. I then took the opportunity to explain some of the relevant theory before explaining that we were going to continue our work with the imaginary body with a focus on the Darling children from *Peter Pan*. In an effort to get an equal split between Wendy, John and Michaels, I asked the question of who was comfortable with character improvisations. Megan and Luke were the only ones who raised their hands. Pushing through, I decided to move forward in delegating characters and continuing with the imaginary body work. However, before we moved on Megan offered a piece of feedback which echoed something I

had experienced when working with Captain Hook. “The physicality and transforming through physical actions was really successful in myself personally. The additional adding of voice brought Megan back into my body” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [47:04-47:17](#)). In the moment, I found this interesting because it corresponded with a sense of disengagement that I felt from the group following the addition of voice. My suggestion to Megan and to the group as a whole was to allow themselves the patience to continue playing with it.

Following that slight digression, we returned to the imaginary body work. I began this segment by asking the group to find a space where they could lay down. Once everyone was situated, I asked them to begin by closing their eyes and imagining a fog. Out of the fog coming towards them was their character but they could not see them yet. All they could see was a shadowy figure moving towards them. I then began to ask them similar leading questions as I had earlier in order to define this shadow moving towards them. “Are they shorter than you? Are they taller than you? Do they have a small head? Big head?” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [50:58-51:17](#)) As the body moves closer through the fog more details become apparent. What are they wearing? Closer still, even more detail is becoming visible. What color are their eyes? Are their fingernails clean? Now with the image of the character clearly defined by their imagination, I asked the group to move to their feet and try on their imaginary body as if it was a second skin. One of the costume designers, Maria, immediately adjusted her trousers by tucking one of the legs up and into the waistband (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [54:20-54:30](#)). Is she instinctively working in a costumatic way?

“Now begin to ask yourself, ‘Where does my character lead from?’” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [55:13-55:18](#)) I continued to offer a number of possibilities of where that center might be whether that was the head, chest, knees, feet, etc. After giving the group time to find their own center, I then asked that everyone try leading from the head. How did this feel for the character? Was it the same as the original center or was it different? Did this provide new insights? Next I introduced the one-to-ten scale that I used with Niamh, starting at a five as neutral and moving towards a ten which was an exploded version of leading from the head. Then I led the group back down the scale towards a one

which was an insular and absorbed version of leading from the head. We repeated this moving down the body to the chest followed by the kneecaps. Then the quality of imaginary center was explored through questions such as whether the center was light and airy? Was it fluid? Was it heavy? Was it hot? Following this I asked them to attempt to find the voice of their character by introducing themselves. I could sense the disconnect happening again, so I quickly placed them into the scenario of playing in their nursery. What I began to see was that everyone was improvising. They just did not like to call it that. After they had been playing for a period, I wanted to test how they responded to direction midgame. “A little less noise please,” I interjected as if I was Mr. Darling shouting from downstairs (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [1:10:32 -1:10:35](#)). Everyone responded in character. Immediate relief came over me as I realized that I probably could get everyone to participate in the character improvisations if I framed them as group play. After a little while longer I brought that to a close and asked everyone into a circle to share feedback.

Initially the group was reluctant to volunteer their feedback. Megan and Luke were the first to share their experiences, which both happened to be versions of Michael. However, when I specified my request for feedback from the other two characters – Wendy and John – I got a chance to hear from more of the group. Oriel, one of the BA students, offered that the exploring of various centers provided really useful information about the character and who they are by finding out what centers *didn’t* work. “Even if it doesn’t feel natural to the character, just in knowing it doesn’t feel natural to the character lets you know about the character a bit more” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [1:15:35 -1:15:43](#)). Oriel then continued by echoing what Megan had said about the voice, adding that maybe it would have been easier if there was text. I find this idea very interesting because it also rings true of my own experience with Captain Hook. Perhaps knowing the character’s word choices might be the extra information necessary to help realize the character’s voice. Maria shared that being ‘told off’ by my Mr. Darling triggered feelings from her childhood which brought her even deeper into character (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [1:18:05 -1:18:23](#)). Encouraged by the response to the imaginary body

work, I continued the discussion to Demidov's conception of fantasy and the influence it had on active analysis.

#### 7.4 Fantasy/Active Analysis

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'AWC (Part 1)' – <https://youtu.be/jUcbVgEk1X4?t=5160>

'AWC (Part 2)' – <https://youtu.be/F6E3hVpYKVQ>

('Part 1' 1:26:00-1:38:25, 'Part 2' 0:00-37:06)

Following a general discussion about Demidov, his conception of fantasy as imagination and how that contributed to Stanislavski's active analysis, I asked the group if they felt more comfortable improvising in a similar way to what we had done with the imaginary body. Everybody agreed except for the student with the engineering background, Weina, who expressed some hesitancy. We agreed that she would give it a go but that she could step out of the game and observe if at any point she felt uncomfortable. I then asked the group to place some chairs in the space so that they had material objects to incorporate into their game. "So go ahead and move around the space and find your character. Find your Wendy, Michael or John" ('AWC (Part 1)' [1:26:43-1:26:51](#)). I then started to suggest playing with levels asking what it might feel like for the character to stand on one of the chairs or what it might be like on the floor? "Then I will introduce to the group that you all want to play a game. And you want to play 'Peter Pan'. And the story you have agreed on is 'Peter Pan and the Adventure of Crocodile Creek'" ('AWC (Part 1)' [1:28:07-1:28:26](#)). As the game began to unfold, I continued to coach and guide the improvisation from the side, offering mostly narrative interventions to help in the progress of the improvisation. It was during this first session of improvising that I recognized the value of having Luke and Megan as participants. Because the group was lacking in traditional actor training and were self-conscious about improvising on their own, it was helpful to have two participants who could initiate the direction of the game but also have the awareness to step back and allow the other members of the group the space to respond and engage with their offerings to the game.

The improvisation naturally found an ending and I joined the group to ask them how they felt about what they had just experienced. “I’m not sure whether I’m in the character but I’m definitely not this age [referring to her own age]. I’m like a child” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [1:33:36-1:33:43](#)). This was Weina’s feedback who, despite her initial hesitation, had participated throughout the entire improvisation. I then shifted the discussion to the idea of relationship and whether this improvisation had any effect on developing the relationship between characters. Oriel responded by saying, “I think so. I feel like I felt more...like...responsible. Because when we were just experimenting like on our own, I built up a character that was way more like didn’t really care about anybody else. But then when you’re actually interacting with your siblings. I then became—I felt way more responsible” (‘AWC (Part 1)’ [1:36:09-1:36:29](#)). She continued by questioning what the improvisation might have been like if she had played Wendy, feeling like she might have more of a personal connection to that character. Inspired by the idea, I suggested that we shuffle our characters and give the character building exercise another go.

After leading the group through visualizing their imaginary body, moving with their imaginary body, trying out their imaginary centers and honing their choices, we moved back into the character improvisations. As we brought them to a close and I began to ask for feedback, Megan shared with Oriel, “John is hard” (‘AWC (Part 2)’ [25:48-25:50](#)). Oriel, who had played John in the previous round of improvisations, agreed and offered her own experience of John as being a very sad character. Luke, who also was playing John, agreed and expressed feelings of being torn between wanting to relate more to his older sister or to his younger brother, caught in this middle child limbo (‘AWC (Part 2)’ [26:10-26:18](#)). Taeyun, the dancer, also expressed a sense of confusion coming from the character which led to Megan attempting an explanation:

I do wonder if that is also the character though. Like we’re experiencing like the character. As the actor you’re confused but John is confused as well. And it’s like this weird—because like it was buying in to the make believe but not buying in to the make believe and then me as the actor was also doing that. So it was this weird dichotomy of like, I as the actor didn’t know if I was—this is getting meta—Megan playing John not knowing what John wants or if it was John confusing Megan. (‘AWC (Part 2)’ [27:33-28:09](#))



Sunny, another Goldsmiths BA student, followed up what Megan was saying by sharing that when she had played John in the previous game, she felt her center was very heavy as opposed to Michael's which was very light and floaty. This focus on John and the confusion and heaviness that is being expressed by the group interests me. Why do they all converge around similar feelings? And these feelings they are getting, are they providing insight into a particular archetype? Perhaps this character would be a useful research collaborator to explore this moment of adolescence when you find yourself in limbo unable to feel comfortable within your own skin, or even what it's like being a middle child within a family of three.

The next half of the day focused on incorporating costume and makeup into the techniques that we had already explored. Before introducing the costumatic approach as a whole, I found it necessary to offer some basic information about makeup such as application techniques and facial skeletal anatomy. I walked participants through an 'old' age makeup, as a way to teach application techniques while also giving the group an experience of makeup dictating character. This is documented in 'AWC (Part 3)': <https://youtu.be/QN4jxndjPFw>

The latter part of the video—from [58:40](#) onwards—shows the actors going through the process of selecting their costumes and rebuilding their makeups to support the feedback that their costume gives them. This was prefaced by explaining the ideas behind aware-wearing and aware-applying. Following this, I ask the group onto their feet to begin the character-building process established in the first half of the workshop.

## **7.5 The Costumatic Approach**

**Corresponding Video Link:** 'AWC (Part 4)' – <https://youtu.be/NYIFrBmBvPM>

As the group began to move around the space dressed and madeup as their pirates, I asked for their attention to be drawn to costume. "What does that fabric feel like? What is that structure? Is it structure? Is it flowing? How do we feel?" ('AWC (Part 4)' [14:06-14:14](#)) There was an immediate period of adjustments as the group arranged or rearranged their costumes as I guided them through

checking in with the feedback they were receiving. After building the character's imaginary body, experimenting with the imaginary center, and attempting to place the character's voice, the circumstances of the improvisation were explained. They are all shipmates, bound by an oath to protect the ship with their lives. None of them are the captain. Tasked with exploring their surroundings, the group set out on their voyage. Along the way the pirates encounter enemy ships, an island with treasure, a potential mutiny, eventually leading to their untimely deaths at the hands of a commandeering crew ('AWC (Part 4)' [39:34-53:00](#)). As the group returned from their pirate adventures, we once again gathered in a circle to share feedback from the entire costumatic approach.

Being that there was a long period where we hadn't stopped for feedback, I asked everyone to think back to the initial application of the 'old'-age makeup. Oriel spoke to the phenomenon of partial recognition, admitting that the shock experienced at seeing character in the mirror instead of self eventually became something joyful.

As [the makeup] became more naturalistic looking it actually started getting quite like horrible. It was really not nice to see yourself like that. So then like halfway through I looked in the mirror and was like 'Oh my god. I can't believe that's actually me. That's horrible'. And then towards the end I started loving it. I was like 'This is great. I can't believe how much I've transformed'" ('AWC (Part 4)' [55:01-55:25](#))

Sunny said that what Oriel referred to as the makeup seeming "horrible" had pushed her out of her comfort zone from normally playing "cute" characters ('AWC (Part 4)' [57:08-57:17](#)). Sunny also was the first to speak about the amount of time that I dedicated towards the application of the makeup, reflecting that even though she finished quickly the added time gave her the opportunity to continually return and add further layers of detail. Yiqi, one of the costume designers who had been more reserved throughout the day, expressed that the makeup provided her a lot of material to explore herself as well as character. As she applied the makeup step by step, she found herself being confronted by the imagined differences between herself and the face that was gradually appearing in the mirror. This was unexpected and a "unique experience" ('AWC (Part 4)' [58:06-58:49](#)). Maria echoed points that both Sunny and Yiqi made, recognizing that the amount of time afforded to the

application process allowed her to invest in the details that she was adding ('AWC (Part 4)' [58:50-59:24](#)). It was interesting to hear that the time afforded to the process of applying makeup had been received so well and so effectively.

Moving on to adding costume into their practice, I was particularly curious about the responses of the two costume designers. Yiqi and Maria both shared instances of reading the costume and mining it for character details such as the color of the costume informing the temperament of the character or the general haphazard appearance speaking to the level of their pirate's intoxication ('AWC (Part 4)' [1:02:10-1:04:07](#)). Taeyun felt that the introduction of costume made some of the imaginary body work redundant. The costume was informing where the center was and how the character walked ('AWC (Part 4)' [1:01:24-1:01:58](#)). Oriel referred back to Sunny's point about being pushed out of her comfort zone. Costume added to this experience for Oriel by navigating her away from more iconic or "classic" characters or a type of character that an actor may be more particularly inclined to ('AWC (Part 4)' [1:05:48-1:07:00](#)). Shifting the focus of the feedback towards the improvisations, I asked the group how they felt on the pirate ship. Taeyun explained that coming from a dance background where there was no text involved, the sound of her own voice was a distraction but that her scene partners were able to pull her back in to the scene. "When other people are doing something, it really hits me to react to it as a character" ('AWC (Part 4)' [1:14:59-1:15:07](#)).

Maria felt the push and pull between her actor-self and character-self too, suggesting that maybe working with a wall of mirrors would have been helpful to remind her of how she looks. Because she could not see her face looking differently, she still felt as though she was herself. Her train of thought continued to offer an alternative. Had the makeup been a prosthetic or something which might give the actor a stronger somatic response, this could work in the same way as the mirror ('AWC (Part 4)' [1:15:50-1:17:49](#)). Taeyun responded to Maria by articulating how working with costume and makeup freed her in a similar way that mask might. "I don't act. It's just so so cringey for me to do all of those things". And yet wearing costume and makeup allowed her to

embody a character within whom those things no longer felt cringey ('AWC (Part 4)' [1:19:53-1:20:39](#)). As the discussion tapered off, I offered my gratitude for the inspiring level of commitment shown by the group and brought the session to a close.

## 8. Conclusion

It is possible to facilitate transformation by combining costume and makeup within a space intended for play (a *fiskedam*, after Roberta Carreri). Viewing the practice of the transformational actor as pretend play makes it accessible to actors and non-actors alike. Costume and makeup serve as material tools to enhance the work of those equipped with additional transformational tools or to compensate for more formalized training. Participants noting that costume might negate the need for imaginary center work do not indicate the imaginary center as an ineffective technique. On the contrary, this participant's experience demonstrates that the costumatic approach opens the door to engaging with more complex acting techniques and for using the idea of the imaginary center in more complex ways with and through costume. And when used by an already experienced actor, the costumatic approach can be used to push the boundaries of traditional transformational techniques.

One commonality observed from the participants' feedback and my own experience with the costumatic is the matter of the voice. Both participants and I found that the introduction of the character's voice immediately disconnected us from our embodiment. Why is that? Is it the voice of self that is very familiar and because it is 'heard', always experienced both from within and from without, it breaks the illusion of playing someone else? Or is it the presence of words? Does that suddenly bring people back into their heads, their judgements and their self-consciousness? Perhaps the voice, similar to the face in the mirror, needs to be obstructed from recognition working towards a type of partial-voice recognition. In this case, text might become an invaluable tool. From my own practice, the use of text made finding the voice easier. Like costume and makeup, the words of the character belong to someone else and can support the actor's transformation. The text is almost like a costume for the voice: it provides something for the voice to wear. Having a script gives the actor

the character's words and negates the judgements and self-consciousness that might be triggered by having to improvise dialogue. This would be an interesting direction to further this research.

The costumatic approach is functional both as a solo technique and in an ensemble. Experiences shared by workshop participants of being pushed out of their comfort zones is exactly how the technique accesses transformation. The use of the term 'comfort zone' represents the familiar. An actor remaining in their comfort zone may continue to feel like themselves. Alternatively, using costume and makeup as methods of inscription immediately begins to shape the actors means of perception and their subsequent self-concept. They start to no longer feel like themselves. Given time, they may then have the opportunity to process these perceptual changes and continue to add to them. The actors' gaze on themselves, on others and the immediate feedback that they receive from each other also inscribes. Continually adding and refining enhances the effect of the perceptual changes and deepens the actors connection to the new self-concept which occupies their dual consciousness. Of course, there are significant influences which draw the actor back to their original self-concept. After all, this is the actor's default mode of perception. But if the actor chooses to return to their dual consciousness by adopting associated methods of inscription to a specific self-concept, they will systematically reveal more and more about that *character*. Eventually the actor may reach a point where that character becomes a second skin and the actor might slip in and out sharing insights between both consciousnesses.

# Conclusion

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## 1. Introduction

The driving question of this thesis has been what *is* the costumatic approach? What is this transformational acting technique characterized by costume and makeup? To answer these questions, this thesis has charted the development of my own practice as an actor into the emergent transformational acting technique that I have titled the costumatic approach. Through the refining of techniques, this thesis has demonstrated that the application of the costumatic approach can lead to a sense of deep embodiment of character. The phenomenon of such an embodiment can be described as the actor experiencing dual consciousness, or, using Schechner's terminology, where the embodied character simultaneously exists as a *not me* and also a *not not me* (Schechner 112). The concept of dual consciousness is similar to that of dual representation, an integral element to pretend play. By linking pretend play and transformational acting this writing questioned whether a transformational actor-researcher might be able to engage with their dual consciousness in such a way that character may serve as research collaborator. I was hopeful that this collaboration might extend the reach of the actor-researcher beyond the more logical boundaries of performance research and potentially empower them to contribute cross-disciplinarily.

The theoretical framework for transformational acting as research crosses a number of fields, starting with developmental psychology. Pretend play serves as a relatable example of the use of costume and makeup with the intention of the wearer being able to experience in a way other than themselves. Connecting to pretend play is also useful to highlight evidence showing that children are using their embodiment of character as a method of learning. Finally, assimilating pretend play and transformational acting addresses the fact that both serve as an imaginative extension of consciousness. Similar to dual consciousness, pretend play triggers the imagination to "think about a representation in two different ways at the same time" (Carlson and White 168).

Engaging the imagination in similar ways, transformational acting and pretend play complement models of experiential learning and align with neuroscientific principles. Repositioning the imagination as a primary and active component of meaning-making benefits from theories of enaction. The enactive framework is characterized by a circuitous and ever-evolving understanding of perception. A transformational actor's practice and their subsequent use of their imagination is argued as fundamental in shaping the actor's means of perceiving.

Placing neuroscience in conversation with the work of feminist theorists such as Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz evidences that costume and makeup can lead to fundamental and transformative changes to the self-concept as well as supporting the claims of an independent character. Butler and Grosz's respective theories of performativity and inscription address the intricacies surrounding the social constructivism and the process through which identity is built. The identity of the character that the actor enacts onstage is just as material—or immaterial—as the identity that the actor enacts socially. Costume and makeup serve as methods of inscription and contribute towards a shift in the perceptual experience of the actor. Adjusting the immediate environment of the actor affects how they perceive and subsequently affects the self-concept. These changes are significant enough to argue that the practice of a transformational actor engaged in the costumatic approach might deepen the dual consciousness occurring in the actor who is representing them. This deepened relationship between actor and character may then be recontextualized to one where character might serve as research collaborator for the transformational actor-researcher.

As an addition to the practice of the transformational actor, this writing positions the costumatic approach amongst a number of preexisting transformational methods. Konstantin Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, Nikolai Demidov, Bertolt Brecht and Eugenio Barba are all referenced in examining practices and pedagogies that are particularly transformational. Adopting the language set forth by theatre scholar Craig Turner, character and transformation is framed as a separate world which the actor must travel to. Techniques such as Stanislavski's magic 'if' and method of physical

action—also referred to as active analysis, Chekhov’s imaginary body and center, Demidov’s fantasy, Brecht’s behavioral score and Barba’s use of the actor’s dramaturgy are all strategies to ferry the actor into “the world of character” (“Association Process” 172). The particular techniques that are introduced are intended to be layered on top of the previous, each activating the imagination in their own specific way while being informed by the work of the other practitioners. Not only does Chapter 1 describe a historical lineage for the transformational actor, but it also outlines a functional foundation for the reintroduction of and experimentation with costume and makeup. These practice-based experiments occupy the subsequent Chapters 2-4.

In developing the costumatic approach, I sought to investigate costume and makeup separately before combining them. Similar to the various tools and techniques discussed in Chapter 1, the inclusion of costume in the transformational actor’s practice is to offer the actor another opportunity to trigger the imagination and manipulate the actor’s embodied perception. A costumatic approach reengages with the idea of acting as a professional form of pretend play. Just as a child might hunt through a trunk of costumes as a means to inspire how they might ‘play pretend’, so too is the transformational actor inspired by the costume trunk. To legitimize this practice, a new set of voices are introduced in the form of critical costume scholarship. Researcher-practitioners such as Rachel Hann, Aoife Monks, Donatella Barbieri and Sally Dean offer support for recognizing the resonance of costume outside the theatrical context and echo the proclamations of its importance to the performance making process. Some of their practices, particularly Dean’s and Barbieri’s, serve as key influences for my own development of the practice of the transformational actor-researcher. My practice also inadvertently stumbles into the intricate and complicated dilemma of the ethical implications presented by taking on the form of an other. Extended readings covering the subject of disability alongside documented experimentation guide myself and the reader through the development of the emergent methodology that is the costumatic approach.

While Chapter 2 focuses primarily on the somatic changes that costume makes to the experience of the transformational actor-researcher, Chapter 3 directs the reader’s attention to the



perceived 'psychosomatic' forces at work regarding the outside gaze. Makeup, along with the influence of the mirror—important elements within the Initial Performance Experiment—prove equally important to the costumatic approach. While I recognize that both costume and makeup function on somatic *and* psychosomatic levels, I problematize that makeup does not have the same level of physical bearance on the wearer as costume. In order to investigate if costume more naturally lends itself towards the exploration of the felt, somatic, experience of the character-building process, I artificially separate them in my investigation and analysis.

There is limited academic literature on makeup in relation to acting theory or performance pedagogy. I focus on the mirror to theorize makeup. I explore the relationship between the transformational actor and the mirror to ascertain efficacy of makeup as a transformational tool and its placement within the costumatic. Tracing the mirror through the writings of Jacques Lacan, Charles Cooley and Maurice Merleau-Ponty along with contemporary scholars such as Johannes Brandl, Dan Zahavi and Philippe Rochat result in situating dual representation and dual consciousness as natural outcomes of looking in the mirror. Following this logic, the mirror becomes just as important a tool for the actor as the magic 'if'. The transformative effects of the mirror are enhanced by the fact that makeup uses the face as its primary site for transformation. Similarities are drawn between makeup and mask and are explored through firsthand accounts of a workshop with Peta Lily. As my experimentation shifts to applying my own makeup, a process is developed which reflects the work with costume; an application process that is aware of the body's responses to the feedback being received, this time in the mirror.

Having a better understanding of my own use of costume and makeup, I continue to refine the costumatic approach by shifting my focus towards the character of Captain Hook. I begin by working with a director to build characters inspired by Captain Hook, derived from shared character traits. This process reinforces the costumatic approach as an effective character building technique but it raises questions regarding working towards a character directly or indirectly. Solo practice leads to a confidence in the costumatic approach where I am effectively and consistently

experiencing degrees of transformation through the reintegration of costume and makeup alongside more traditional transformational tools. However, I decide to investigate if and how my experiences might be disseminated to others. By designing a workshop based on the structure of this writing I lead participants along a similar journey to my own so that they may develop a personal relationship to the costumatic approach. The result and participant's feedback confirm that the costumatic approach is an effective transformational technique. Not only that, but the costumatic approach's relationship to ideas of pretend play seem to make it accessible for performers and non-performers alike.

## **2. The *Costumatic* Manifesto**

Before offering further reflections on the convergence of transformational acting methods with costume and makeup, I would like to set out a costumatic manifesto. These points will lead the following reflection.

- The costumatic approach is a character-building technique.
- The costumatic approach is collaborative.
- The costumatic approach accepts an enactive understanding of perception.
- The costumatic approach is an accessible trigger for the imagination.
- The costumatic approach is an effective transformational tool.

Although admittedly reductive, this manifesto lays claim to what this writing has evidenced about the costumatic approach. There are additional claims that this thesis has alluded, but before addressing these, I would like to clarify what the costumatic approach is *not*.

- The costumatic approach is not to be referred to as 'outside-in.'
- The costumatic approach is not solely reserved for actors.
- The costumatic approach is not a standalone technique.
- The costumatic approach is not intended to replace the work of other practitioners and collaborators (ie. designers, directors, scene partners).

Having summarized the writing, the following reflections will respond to the claims detailed in these manifestos.

### 3. Manifesto Reflections

The costumatic approach is a character-building technique. Above all else, this is true. Another way of phrasing this is that the costumatic approach is a technique for accessing dual consciousness. Notice that I do not mention that the costumatic is for the *actor* to access their dual consciousness. If the reactions from the Acting with Character Workshop indicate anything, it is that the costumatic approach is applicable to actors and non-actors alike. Although the costumatic approach *is* a character-building technique, character can be interpreted in a more sociological sense. I might choose to apply the costumatic approach to build the character that I want to take into a job interview in the same way that I might have built Captain Hook. The aware-wearing process will be incredibly similar and the aware-applying process might be modified to adjusting my facial hair and hair styling. The magic 'if' might be used to imagine how I might respond *if* I was asked a certain question. My imaginary body might be one built with the express purpose of building confidence. Continuing in this way, I hope the reader can imagine how the costumatic approach functions as a character-building technique applicable to a number of different settings.

The adaptability of the costumatic approach is derived from its accessibility. Michael Chekhov asserted that, when used properly, the imagination is exponentially more powerful than material means (Chekhov 79). However, not everyone is trained to use their imagination in such specific and exacting ways as is an actor. The material imaginative trigger provided by costume and makeup is one that helps non-actors into the world of the character. For those who may be reluctant to the idea of manually shifting their means of perception, the costumatic approach offers no other alternative. As noted by the participants of the workshop, costume and makeup push us out of our comfort zones. The element of play that the costumatic approach possesses also helps to make other acting exercises less intimidating. Participants may be reluctant to improvise, but as an

improvisation is reframed as play, it is accessible. This effect is further enhanced following the introduction of costume and makeup. For the trained actor, who may already have a developed and powerful imaginative instrument, the costumatic approach may be less of an entry point and more of a magnifying glass. The feedback that the actor receives from the costume and makeup allow for a continually deepening relationship to character by enhancing the level of imaginative detail that the actor might add to their character.

This idea of the costumatic approach as magnifying glass or any other sort of amplification system is exactly why it is not a standalone technique. First of all, this thesis has been very clear about the lineage of transformational acting. Therefore it is already apparent that the reintegration of costume and makeup is meant to be an additive to the aforementioned traditions rather than a replacement. Who is to say that the costumatic approach could not be applied to another set of techniques or character-building processes? For example, *The Lucid Body* by Fay Simpson details a character-building technique which heavily features the use of chakras and Jungian psychology to develop a character's persona and shadow. While I do not wish to oversimplify Simpson's work, I can envision how the costumatic approach may assist. What footwear might support the character's relationship to their root chakra? Does the wearing of bright eye shadow have anything to do with their desire to express themselves relating to the throat chakra? I don't want to spend too much time converting the costumatic approach to fit with other techniques, but I do want to make it clear how the costumatic approach is collaborative at its core.

This is also why the costumatic approach is not intended to replace the work of any other collaborator. In fact, it should be used to encourage collaboration. An actor who understands the costumatic approach recognizes the importance of everyone involved. Not only are the costume and makeup designers integral to the creation of character, but so too are the lighting designer, set designer, director, scene partners etc. This is the enactive nature of the costumatic approach. Therefore, a costumatically trained actor will be equipped with the tools to foster collaborative relationships and integrate the work of other practitioners into their own practice. It is this inherent

collaborative nature that was at the core of my hypothesis regarding the efficacy of the costumatic approach as a research methodology.

#### **4. Is the Costumatic Approach a Research Methodology?**

The simplest answer to this question is yes. But in actuality, the answer is far from simple. When beginning my research, my intention was that I would research the concept of villainy by embodying a number of villains. What this thesis evolved into was the development of the technique that I had intended to use in order to embody these villains, which has since been titled the costumatic approach. As the costumatic approach is an addition to the tools of a transformational actor, this writing has been aimed at examining the phenomenon of an actor's transformation—also referred to as the accessing of the actor's dual consciousness—and what the relationship to character may be. Costume and makeup were strategically used to access the phenomenon of an actor's transformation and deepen the relationship between actor and character. So, in terms of heuristically investigating the transformational actor's relationship to character, the costumatic approach is a phenomenologically aligned research methodology.

That being said, the costumatic approach as research methodology will always exist within an heuristic framework. This is due to the costumatic approach affecting the experience of the wearer: it is subjective, embodied and known by the person experiencing the phenomenon in question. One benefit of this is the empowerment of the transformational actor-researcher. There are multiple points throughout this writing which highlight opportunities for the costumatic approach to be applied within a research setting. Critical costume scholarship is a discipline that would benefit greatly from an actor-researcher who is sensitive to the influence of costume. An argument could also be made that there is a need for critical makeup scholarship and the costumatic approach might help in furthering such a discipline. However, I would like to offer some suggestions for other ways that the costumatic approach might be used. Although these have not been evidenced in this writing, I would argue that they are not completely unsubstantiated.

When exploring Richard III a vital digression took place where I was forced to contend with the intricacies of replicating disability via costume. The research journey that I went on informed me of details such as an affirmative paradigm and narrative prosthesis, details that I would have been ignorant of had I not chosen to explore the character costumatically. As my exploration continued, I also was confronted with my own trauma at experiencing the restriction of my own abilities. The Joker's face reflected back the face of an attention hungry psychopath who desperately needed others to affirm his own value. Captain Hook offered a grotesque and painful amount of loneliness made worse by an unrelenting and petulant youth. Some workshop participants found the family dynamic of the three Darling siblings as a vehicle to reexperience childhood while others expressed a sense of being lost reminiscent of a pubescent journey into adulthood. These experiences offer the possibility of the costumatic approach operating cross-disciplinarily. As a phenomenologically aligned methodology, perhaps it could be applied within a sociological or anthropological context.

These claims are beyond the scope of what this thesis can address. Instead it is important to recognize the achievements of this research which is, first and foremost, legitimizing a form of professional pretend play characterized by the inclusion of costume and makeup within an academic context. A transformational actor may use their ability to access their dual consciousness—to access character—to become a transformational actor-researcher. The relationship with character may be mined for a variety of insights not originally available to the actor had they not extended their consciousness and perceptual experience into an other. Although there are a number of intricacies surrounding such an extension of self, costume and makeup are valuable tools at facilitating such a transformation. The differing insights contributed by self and character support the claims that character may serve as a research collaborator. However, further exploration is required to determine the appropriate contexts for this collaborator's input. As for myself, having returned from my metaphorical journey to Oz, I still feel that I am coming to terms with the insights drawn from my experiences with villainy. It could be the freedom afforded to those who are predetermined to break

the rules. Or maybe the sense of power in situations where I as Ben might otherwise feel powerless.

Or perhaps they're just the most fun to dress up as.

# Appendix A- Initial Performance Experiment

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## Initial Performance Experiment

October 2016

Goldsmiths, University of London

Corresponding Video Link: 'Initial Performance Experiment' – <https://youtu.be/BhpPWWDWpeU>

This initial experiment was designed to explore my own practice within a research setting. Could my practice as a transformational actor lead to a deep and resonant characterization, particularly when presented with limited time? To test this, I first decided to focus on villains in film rather than on the stage. Then I chose the specific performances: Laurence Olivier's Richard III, Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch of the West, Dustin Hoffman's Captain Hook, and Heath Ledger's Joker. Once those were selected, I watched these actors and their villainous performances and I began to create a compilation of their scenes to use later in the studio. Costume pieces were sourced to assist in recreating the shell of each character. Once in the studio, multiple cameras were setup and the selection of scenes were projected onto one of the walls. I moved methodically through each character; putting on makeup, mimicking the voice that I heard in the projected scenes, dressing myself within the costume, and finally moving around the space. As the footage for each character came to its end, so too would my embodiment. Costume and makeup would be removed and the process would begin again with the following character.

The choice to focus on film performances rather than stage performances was due, in part, to these characters' public resonance and pop culture status. My assumption was that the iconography of individual performances could have made finding a connection with the role more difficult as a performer. I have often heard directors speak of 'making the role your own'. What they are probably referring to is finding a way for the role to resonate personally, so that the resulting performance is received by an audience as coming from a place of truth. Would it be possible to find



this resonance while performing in the shadow of another's performance? I assumed that this potential interference would be helpful, serving almost as a control of sorts. If I somehow was able to find a connection to *these* performances, then I must be onto something.

My selection of performances to focus on drew from a combination of some of my dream roles, and the performances of those roles that I had found inspirational. I ultimately decided upon Laurence Olivier's Richard III, Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch of the West, Dustin Hoffman's Captain Hook, and Heath Ledger's Joker. In hindsight I can see that what I found inspirational was these actors' abilities to transform. Each of these actors present themselves to the world in a manner very much in opposition of the characters that have earned them all considerable amounts of acclaim. Their ability to disappear within a role is the very same phenomenon that I found enthralling and fulfilling as an actor myself. Suddenly, transformational acting had introduced itself as a primary focus of the experiment based on my selection of performances.

It is also worth noting the inherent link between their transformation and these actors' use of costume and makeup, which reflected a particular approach to these selected roles. Laurence Olivier wrote, referring to his iconic portrayal of Richard III, "Nose on, wig on, makeup complete. There, staring back at me from the mirror, was my Richard, exactly as I wanted him...Makeup is a strange thing...for me, that's where a lot of the magic still lies...I stood up and again looked in the mirror. The monster stared back at me and smiled" (*On Acting* 125). Dustin Hoffman's portrayal of J.M. Barrie's infamous pirate captain, in Spielberg's 1991 film *Hook*, is regarded by many as the definitive performance of the fearsome, iron-handed pirate. Of the performance Hoffman said, "it's funny because doing this part [Captain Hook] reminded me of doing 'Tootsie'. You put the make-up on, and suddenly you are that person" (Murphy).

Similarly, Margaret Hamilton, when asked about getting to play the Wicked Witch of the West, said, "It's not a particularly difficult role to play. You just ring your hands and roll your eyes and rant and rave and shriek" (Garrett). Heath Ledger's turn as The Joker in the 2012 film, *The Dark Knight*, which earned him a posthumous Academy Award, began with the creation of the character's

unique, and now iconic, look. Director Christopher Nolan spoke about Ledger's approach in a behind the scenes featurette, saying, "He developed the look of the character with Lindy Hemming, the costume designer, with John Caglione for the makeup, and myself, over a long period of time so we would experiment with pieces over time" ("Christopher Nolan" 1:42-1:52).

The words of the performers themselves, Olivier, Hoffman and Hamilton, all address their performances in simplistic, almost childlike, terms. Images of playing dress-up immediately recall the games we used to play as children where in an instant, we were fully immersed within our own fabricated reality. Was it this seemingly simplistic process of dressing up—adopting the form of another via costume and makeup—that led to the creation of personally resonant and popular characters? Following this logic, should I not be able to replicate their transformation and receive a certain degree of resonance with the role myself by using only their physical framework?

In that case, what exactly is their physical framework? There is no way that I could adopt each of these actor's exact height and weight. Nor could I recreate each of their costumes to an exacting degree of sameness without a considerable amount of time and resources. Instead, it became necessary to isolate elements of each performance that felt evocative of the iconography associated with each performance. I must admit that my selection process is certainly imperfect; the task at hand was ultimately an exercise in mimicry. By mimicking the work of other actors, would I feel something for myself? An even greater degree of importance then rests on developing a method of mimicry for the continuation of this experiment.

Once I had identified the four performances, I began scouring their respective films, working towards creating a compilation of scenes to use in the studio. *Richard III* was my starting point. At any point that Olivier engaged in dialogue, soliloquy included, I would add it to my compilation so that the result was a consolidated film of Olivier's performance in *Richard III*, rather than the film in its entirety. The selection of scenes was impartial; a nondiscriminatory gathering of all moments within the film where the actor/character was featured on screen. When I had finished with *Richard III* I moved on to *The Wizard of Oz*, followed by *Hook* and finishing with *The Dark Knight*. Throughout

the film harvesting process, certain physical aspects of characterization stood out to me. Some were more obvious than others: it is no surprise to anyone that Captain Hook has a hook for a hand, and Heath Ledger's Joker continuously makes reference to his facial scarring. Others were more obscure, like the prosthetic hand that Olivier wears as Richard III, ostensibly pinning down the ring finger and middle finger of his left hand, or the hyperextended claw shape that Margaret Hamilton's hands often took as the Wicked Witch of the West.

Informed by these observations, I sourced a series of costume pieces. This process was a self-centered one in that it was entirely reliant on what evoked similar sensations within me as when I was watching the performances on film. Despite the subjectivity of each choice, I assumed that the various other forms of mimicry that I was attempting would override any discrepancy between the costumes in the films versus the costume pieces I was wearing in the studio. That being said, I knew that I would have to be judicious with how I chose each piece as I would need to take advantage of the resources available through Goldsmiths, limiting my search to what was available in the costume store. Color seemed to be an important element, as it holds a significant amount of meaning, and while I may not find exact garments, I could at least hope to find similar colors. Form was another attribute that was guiding my search, followed by the material that the costume was made of.

The first thing that I stumbled upon was a large selection of doublets, which was exactly what I was hoping to find for Richard III as he wears one throughout the majority of the film. I settled on a fitted black one as the color immediately evoked a sense of fear. Why the color black inspired this within me is a question that could potentially fuel an entire PhD, but for now, that was the basis for choosing the doublet that I did. The fit was also perfect, as it was a little too tight for me and pulled my shoulders forward, forcing me into a hunched position. The next piece that I found was a purple leather coat. Its color stood out from the other garments on the rack, drawing me to it as I knew that purple was quintessential for the Joker. The jacket itself was almost like a leather trench coat. The length that this gave was serendipitous, as Heath Ledger's Joker often wore a purple overcoat. While the leather was not identical to what he wore in the film, it inspired an

anarchic feeling within me which very much corresponded with the character. Finding something for Captain Hook was more difficult than I had expected. My hope was to find a red frock coat, expecting that I might have to compromise on the color, but there were no frock coats to be found. What I settled on instead was a white lace cuffed shirt, which did mimic the form of a similar garment that Dustin Hoffman wore, but did not feature the red so often associated with Captain Hook. On the other end of the spectrum, the Wicked Witch of the West proved easier than expected. An easily spotted section of costume rail full of black dresses yielded multiple long sleeved and flowy options. The flow was especially important as this evoked the quality of flight and mimicked movement that might occur while riding a broomstick.

With costumes and films sourced, I was ready for the experiment. For documentation, I procured a Canon EOS 60D DSLR equipped with a wide-angle lens and a Flip UltraHD cam, as well as an HD projector for the film compilations. In the space I setup one corner of the studio with the Flip cam positioned beside a mirror where I had my makeup kit and costume pieces. Filming the opposite angle, I placed the Canon DSLR on a tripod. The Canon DSLR had some technical issues, so much of the documentation of the experiment is from the footage filmed by the Flip UltraHD cam. Using an HD projector, I projected the film compilations on one of the walls of the studio.

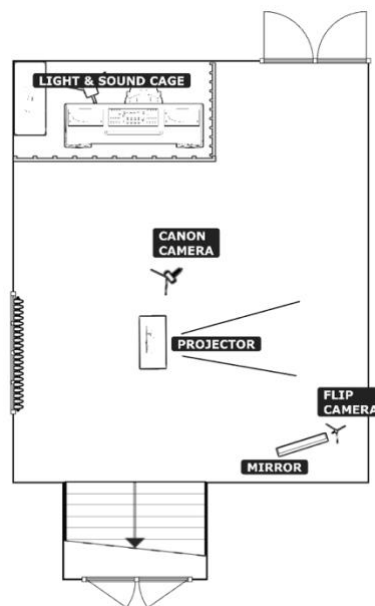


Figure 15 Diagram of the Initial Performance Experiment layout within Studio 1

At the beginning of each character assumption, I would start by putting on makeup in the mirror and slowly adopting the character's voice by mimicking the dialogue that was in the video footage. After my makeup was complete and my costume piece was in place, I would move around the studio space, continuing the vocal mimicry and adding the physical mimicry. As I continued to move, I could more freely explore with my body and my voice. The space became my playground, and the projected film became my playmate. I would hear words or phrases and begin to repeat them as they would transform in my mouth. Expressions that were completely foreign to me would start to feel as my own. With every repetition of a phrase or movement this sensation grew stronger and stronger. What I began to feel was the character becoming emboldened. Could this have been my imagination? Certainly. But there was a definite shift where Ben, the actor, moving around the space in costume no longer existed and was replaced by Richard moving around the space, no longer in costume and makeup. Spatially, I was not transported anywhere. I was still moving about within Studio One at Goldsmiths, but after this shift, which happened with every single character, I no longer had a conscious sense of being Ben anymore.

Despite having the entire studio to work with, I found myself constantly drawn back to the mirror and the camera placed beside it. As Olivier described, when I looked into the mirror the eyes staring back at me were not my own. Everything about my altered appearance served to enhance the feeling that I was, not only other than myself, but that I was these characters. To see my face as green added to *being* the witch. My mustache and eyebrows *were* those of Captain Hook, not mine. The shape of the mouth as I mimicked the vocal patterns of each performance were not shapes that I was used to seeing. Nor was the somatic experience, the physical sensation of how I talked, walked, breathed, one that I was familiar with. The mirror compounded all of these feelings on a subconscious level. Noticing that I did not look like myself became a background observation, eventually superseded by finding comfort in the mirror, reminding myself how I looked. It felt as though this shift coincided with a deepening connection to character, moving beyond my own gaze

into the gaze of the character. The feelings that would arise as each character looked at themselves in the mirror only served to enhance the embodiment.

I also felt the gaze of others through the lens of both cameras. Although one of them did not document in the manner that I had hoped, the camera beside the mirror often captured exchanges between the characters and non-existent scene partners. Sometimes the camera was my nemesis. Sometimes my confident. Other times it was my victim. But it always maintained the role of scene partner. And the lack of response that I received invoked different reactions from me depending on the role that I was projecting onto the camera; fear, aggression, false hope. Regardless of how I was viewing the camera at any given point in time, it contributed towards enhancing any type of transformative sensation, which ultimately was my intention throughout this experiment. At the outset, I had hoped to achieve some type of transcendent moment in which the varying elements of the character filter through the role and resonate within me as the performer. How would this manifest itself? If I'm being honest, I hadn't necessarily thought that through. But what I experienced within the studio—this sense of *other* occupying my body—was what I inevitably was working towards. Upon completion, I would then remove my costume and makeup, and transition into the next character. Removing the material form of each character returned me into myself. As I wiped away various forms of makeup, I began to see Ben again, and in doing so, could feel a reunion between my body and my *self*.

Initially, this solo practice developed a clear linking of specific imagery. Despite it seeming glaringly obvious in hindsight, it was not until I took on the form of Richard's hunched back and shriveled hand, and then transitioned into the Wicked Witch's hunched form and clawed hand, that I was able to observe an unavoidable connection between these four characters. There were three key elements that I felt linked these characters: a clawed or constricted positioning of the hands, a hunched posture, and a cathartic laugh. I am reluctant to describe the laugh as evil, per se, because that is placing a judgment upon it. Rather, as I worked my way through these characters, there felt to be a build-up of energy and the only way to release this energy was through laughter. This

trapped energy often began with the hands. Throughout the experiment, I had utilized a self-securing elastic bandage to recreate the shriveled hand that characterized Olivier's Richard III, as well as wrapping the hand that would have been occupied by Hook's hook. With both characters, this had an effect of stifling my channels of expression. No longer could energy freely flow out of my limbs. The subsequent effect was an inner rage that was a direct result from having to work so hard. This same energetic block was replicated through the claw of the Wicked Witch of the West. This claw felt like it was just as much work as Richard's shriveled hand or Hook's amputated hand, despite the latter two being tightly wrapped in a bandage.

What was most valuable from the experiment was what I assumed to be of secondary importance: the sensation of transformation. By adopting various physical elements of another actor's portrayal of iconic characters, I found myself unknowingly engulfed in moments where I felt that I was no longer myself. What began as mimicry evolved into embodied transformation. As I edited the footage that I had recorded from the experiment, I was drawn to multiple moments where I can see myself as performer disappear within the character: the hysteria of the Wicked Witch's laugh, the threatening edge behind the Joker's perceived freedom of movement, the stifled rage underneath the potentially comic Richard III and Captain Hook. One might ask whether the connection being made was with the actor or the character? I would respond simply by stating that the form that I was assuming was not that of the actor but of the character that they had created. I recognize that it is difficult to be objective in analyzing one's own performance in this way, but the true value of this experiment lies in the questions raised about transformation and a character that exists outside of the context in which it was written.

# Appendix B- Ethics Approval Form

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## Ethical Approval Form (EAF1)

**CONFIDENTIAL**

**GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE University of London**

**Research Ethics Committee**

NAME OF APPLICANT: Ben LaMontagne-Schenck

DEPARTMENT: Theatre and Performance

This form should be completed in typescript and returned to the Secretary of the Research Ethics Committee, for any research project, teaching procedure or routine investigation involving human participants or animals to be undertaken in the College or by or upon Goldsmiths College staff outside the College.

1. **Title of proposed project:** Actor Training Workshop Investigating Tools for Character Building

2. **Brief outline of the project, including its purpose:**

The project in question is an observed and video recorded actor training workshop investigating tools for character building. The happenings of this workshop, including participant feedback and observations, will contribute towards a PhD thesis focused on an emergent character building technique/research methodology. The aims of this workshop is to observe how methods explored within the corresponding PhD thesis might be applied in a pedagogical setting. The heuristic nature of the thesis has been researcher-centric, so your participation in this workshop allows the focus to transition to how other actors might respond to the costume and makeup focused methods proposed in the thesis.

3. **Proposed starting date:** 28/01/2022

4. **If external grant funding is being secured, does the research need ethical approval prior to the initiation of that funding?**

Not applicable

5. **Has the project been approved by an Ethics Committee external to the College? If so please specify.**

*(NB for projects so approved, applicants may if they wish submit a copy of that application, but should sign the back of the form and return it as specified above)*



Not applicable

- 6. Please provide an ethical self-evaluation of the proposed research. Reference should be made to the ESRC Research Ethics Framework , to professional guidelines (such as provided by the BPS, the BSA or the SRA) or to guidelines by government (e.g. GSR) on ethical practice and research. You may wish to provide your response on a separate sheet.**

The Acting Training Workshop being proposed will take place over three days. With the focus being on character building a variety of tasks will be asked of participants including taking part in a daily physical warm-up, engaging in solo and group improvisations, and experimenting with costume and makeup in order to create character. Throughout the workshop participants will be asked to join in group reflection and feedback sessions following exercises. Participants will be kept safe by constant communication between participants and myself, the primary researcher. If at any point a participant begins to feel the slightest degree of discomfort, they will not be required to participate. The information and consent forms make sure that all participants are aware of what they are choosing to participate in from the outset, and they also have the opportunity to decide if they wish their participation be anonymous.

The Acting Training Workshop being proposed adheres to the Code of Practice for Research laid out by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO). The proposed workshop is in line with the research questions raised within my PhD and the proposed workshop is an effective way to attempt to answer these questions. The European Research Council (ERC) also indicates that there is no issues raised on their relevant Ethics Checklist. In relation to what is detailed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), all participants will be treated with respect and professionalism. Absolute care has been taken by myself to outline any possibility of the slightest of risks and to inform the participant of these so that they may have the opportunity to make the decision for themselves as to whether or not this workshop is right for them.

- 7. State the variables to be studied, topics to be investigated, procedures to be used and/or the measurements to be made. (Please attach a separate sheet if necessary)**

What is being studied is how a transformational acting process characterized by a pronounced focus on costume and makeup might be disseminated to other actors. The primary nature of the research has been heuristic, meaning solely focused on my own experience as actor-researcher. This study uses an acting workshop as a format to translate this research to other performers so that they may experience this acting technique themselves and so that myself, as researcher, may experience the efficacy of these techniques within a pedagogical setting.

**8. Specify the number of and type of participant(s) likely to be involved.**

Roughly 20 participants from the Goldsmiths Drama Society

**9. State the likely duration of the project and where it will be undertaken.**

2 day workshop at Goldsmiths campus

**10. State the potential adverse consequences to the participant(s), or particular groups of people, if any, and what precautions are to be taken.**

COVID-19 preventative measures will be taken including hand sanitizing stations available, masks wearing when possible, and negative lateral flow test required for participation.

**11. State any procedures which may cause discomfort, distress or harm to the participant(s), or particular groups of people, and the degree of discomfort or distress likely to be entailed.**

Minimal levels of discomfort may occur due to the self-exploratory nature of acting. This minimal discomfort might not occur, however participants may end their participation at any point throughout the workshop if unwanted discomfort does occur. To facilitate levels of openness and play, a safe and open space will be created. Communication will remain open and honest between myself and participants and all participants wishes will be respected and heard. A safe space to explore various acting techniques will be created and maintained.

**12. State how the participant(s) will be recruited. (Please attach copies of any recruiting materials if used).**

All participation is voluntary. Volunteers know about the workshop through the Goldsmiths Drama Society.

**13. State if the participant(s) will be paid, and if so, provide details and state reasons for payment.**

No, participants will not be paid.

**14. State the manner in which the participant(s) consent will be obtained (if written, please include a copy of the intended consent form).**

Written consent will be obtained (consent form to be included)

**14a. Will the participant(s) be fully informed about the nature of the project and of what they will be required to do?**

Yes

**14b. Is there any deception involved?**

No

**14c. Will the participant(s) be told they can withdraw from participation at any time, if they wish?**

Yes

**14d. Will data be treated confidentially regarding personal information, and what will the participant(s) be told about this?**

Yes

**14e. If the participant(s) are young persons under the age of 18 years or 'vulnerable persons' (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), how will consent be given (i.e. from the participant themselves or from a third party such as a parent or guardian) and how will assent to the research be asked for?**

Not applicable

**15. Will the data be confidential?**

**15a. Will the data be anonymous?**

Participants will have the opportunity to choose whether they wish to be anonymous or not.

15b. How will the data remain confidential?

It will be stored on a password protected external hard drive.

15c. How long will the data be stored? And how will it be eventually destroyed?

Data will be stored on a password protected external hard drive for an indefinite period of time for the sole purpose of being used for non-commercial research projects.

**16. Will the research involve the investigation of illegal conduct? If yes, give details and say how you will be protected from harm or suspicion of illegal conduct?**

No

**17. Is it possible that the research might disclose information regarding child sexual abuse or neglect? If yes, indicate how such information will be passed to the relevant authorities (e.g. social workers, police), but also indicate how participants will be informed about the handling of such information were disclosure of this kind to occur. A warning to this effect must be included in the consent form if such disclosure is likely to occur.**

No

**18. State what kind of feedback, if any, will be offered to participants.**

Verbal feedback will be given to participants throughout the course of the acting workshop.

**19. State the expertise of the applicant for conducting the research proposed.**

I have worked as a professional actor since 2011. In 2013 I graduated from California State University, Fullerton with a BA in Theatre Arts. In 2015 I graduated from East 15 Acting School, University of Essex with an MFA in Acting with a distinction. I have also studied at the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS) and the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (Bali). My training, alongside my experience as a professional actor has provided me with the expertise to refine a transformational acting technique and to disseminate it to a group of other performers. As an educator, I have taught drama to children age 8-18 and have worked as a director for the same age group at The Brat Pack Theatre School (Essex). I have

also worked as a director professionally, touring to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival as well as London. These collaborative experiences with other performers also add to my level of expertise.

**20. In cases of research with young persons under the age of 18 years or 'vulnerable persons' (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), or with those in legal custody, will face-to-face interviews or observations or experiments be overseen by a third party (such as a teacher, care worker or prison officer)?**

Not applicable

**21. If data is collected from an institutional location (such as a school, prison, hospital), has agreement been obtained by the relevant authority (e.g. Head Teacher, Local Education Authority, Home Office)?**

Not applicable

**22. For those conducting research with young persons under the age of 18 years or 'vulnerable persons' (e.g. with learning difficulties or with severe cognitive disability), do the investigators have Criminal Records Bureau clearance? (Ordinarily unsupervised research with minors would require such clearance. Please see *College Code of Practice on Research Ethics*, 2005).**

Not applicable

**23. Will research place the investigators in situations of harm, injury or criminality?**

No

**24. Will the research cause harm or damage to bystanders or the immediate environment?**

No

**25. Are there any conflicts of interest regarding the investigation and dissemination of the research (e.g. with regard to compromising independence or objectivity due to financial gain)?**

No

26. Is the research likely to have any negative impact on the academic status or reputation of the College?

No

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**ALL APPLICANTS**

Please note that the Committee should be notified of any adverse or unforeseen circumstances arising out of this study.

**Signature of Applicant**

**Date**

Benjamin LaMontagne-Schenck

20/12/21

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**TO BE COMPLETED BY HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

Please note that the College Research Ethics Committee should be notified of any adverse or unforeseen circumstances arising out of this study or of any emerging ethical concerns that the Head of Department may have about the research once it has commenced.

Has there been appropriate peer review and discussion of the ethical implications of the research in the department (i.e. with yourself as Head of Department or the Departmental Research Ethics Committee or Research Committee)?

Yes

Are the ethical implications of the proposed research adequately described in this application?

Yes

**Signature of Head of Department**

**Date**



28.12.21

## Appendix C- Participant Information Sheet

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### **Participant Information Sheet for Acting with Character Workshop**

**Dated 08/02/2022**

**Title of the research study: Acting with Character**

Primary Researcher:

Ben LaMontagne-Schenck

Department of Theatre and Performance

+44 7547 876635

blamo001@gold.ac.uk

*You are being invited to take part in a research study in the form of a practice based workshop. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.*

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The happenings of this workshop, including the feedback and observations, will contribute towards a PhD thesis focused on an emergent character building technique and how this technique might mean that the character building process might contribute towards cross-disciplinary research. The aim of this workshop is to observe how methods explored within the thesis might be applied in a pedagogical setting. The focus of this thesis is on the experience of the researcher, so your participation in this workshop allows the focus to transition to how yourself and other actors might respond to the costume and makeup focused methods proposed in the thesis.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

*It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to give your consent.*

#### **Can I withdraw from the study?**

*You can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study, you will be asked what you want to happen to data you have provided up to that point, but please note that after 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022, anonymised data can no longer be removed from the study.*

#### **What will happen if I take part?**

The workshop will take place over two days. With the focus being on character building and transformational, a variety of tasks will be asked of participants including engaging in solo and group improvisations and experimenting with costume and makeup in order to create character. Throughout the workshop participants will be asked to join in group reflection and feedback sessions following exercises.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how to build character. They will practically explore character building techniques developed by notable practitioners such as Konstantin Stanislavski, Michael Chekhov, and Nikolai Demidov, among others. Participants will also be introduced to more emergent character building techniques characterized by the prioritization of costume and makeup. They will also gain insight into the design process and leave with skills relating to the application of stage makeup.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

Physical character building may present opportunities for minimal degrees of physical and/or emotional discomfort. Performers will never be asked to continue beyond their own personal boundaries.

**Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?**

If the participant wishes to remain anonymous, they have that option. However, participants may also want their information properly attributed to them. The information collected, whether through written or oral feedback or audio/visual documentation may be shared for non-commercial purposes. Participants have the option to choose whether they remain anonymous or not.

The data being collected refers specifically to the reflection and feedback throughout the workshop. This data is necessary to compare the experiences of those building character using the specified techniques. It will be documented by video recording. It will be stored on a password protected external hard drive stored in the possession of the primary researcher.

The data collected during the course of the study might be used for additional or subsequent research publications.

**Limits to confidentiality**

Confidentiality will be respected subject to legal constraints and professional guidelines. Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases Goldsmiths may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies or agencies.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the research will be used for my PhD thesis and for other non-commercial applications, including scholarly publications and grant or fellowship applications, etc.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is organised alongside Goldsmiths Department of Theatre and Performance and has been approved by the department.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If you have any concerns about your participation or about the study in general, you should first contact the principal researcher (listed above). If you feel your complaint has not been satisfactorily handled, you can contact the Chair of the Goldsmiths Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee via Research Services (020 7919 7770, [reisc@gold.ac.uk](mailto:reisc@gold.ac.uk)).

Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering whether to take part in this research study.



# Data Protection Privacy Notice

## The General Data Protection Regulation [GDPR] and Goldsmiths Research: guidelines for participants

Please note that this document does not constitute, and should not be construed as, legal advice. These guidelines are designed to help participants understand their rights under GDPR which came into force on 25 May 2018.

### Your rights as a participant (data subject) in this study

The updated data protection regulation is a series of conditions designed to protect an individual's personal data. Not all data collected for research is personal data.

Personal data is data such that a living individual can be identified; collection of personal data is sometimes essential in conducting research and GDPR sets out that data subjects should be treated in a lawful and fair manner and that information about the data processing should be explained clearly and transparently. Some data we might ask to collect falls under the heading of **special categories data**. This type of information includes data about an individual's race; ethnic origin; politics; religion; trade union membership; genetics; biometrics (where used for ID purposes); health; sex life; or sexual orientation. This data requires particular care.

Under GDPR you have the following rights over your personal data<sup>31</sup>:

- **The right to be informed.** You must be informed if your personal data is being used.
- **The right of access.** You can ask for a copy of your data by making a 'subject access request'.
- **The right to rectification.** You can ask for your data held to be corrected.
- **The right to erasure.** You can ask for your data to be deleted.
- **The right to restrict processing.** You can limit the way an organisation uses your personal data if you are concerned about the accuracy of the data or how it is being used.
- **The right to data portability.** You have the right to get your personal data from an organisation in a way that is accessible and machine-readable. You also have the right to ask an organisation to transfer your data to another organisation.
- **The right to object.** You have the right to object to the use of your personal data in some circumstances. You have an absolute right to object to an organisation using your data for direct marketing.
- **How your data is processed using automated decision making and profiling.** You have the right not to be subject to a decision that is based solely on automated processing if the decision affects your legal rights or other equally important matters; to understand the reasons behind decisions made about you by automated processing and the possible consequences of the decisions, and to object to profiling in certain situations, including for direct marketing purposes.

Please note that these rights are not absolute and only apply in certain circumstances. You should also be informed how long your data will be retained and who it might be shared with.

### How does Goldsmiths treat my contribution to this study?

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<sup>31</sup> <https://ico.org.uk/your-data-matters/>

Your participation in this research is very valuable and any personal data you provide will be treated in confidence using the best technical means available to us. The university's legal basis for processing your data<sup>32</sup> as part of our research findings is a "task carried out in the public interest". This means that our research is designed to improve the health, happiness and well-being of society and to help us better understand the world we live in. It is not going to be used for marketing or commercial purposes.

In addition to our legal basis under Article 6 (as described above), for **special categories data** as defined under Article 9 of GDPR, our condition for processing is that it is "necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes".<sup>33</sup>

If your data contributes to data from a group then your ability to remove data may be limited as the study progresses, when removal of your data may cause damage to the dataset.

**You should also know that you may contact any of the following people if you are unhappy about the way your data or your participation in this study are being treated:**

- Goldsmiths Data Protection Officer – [dp@gold.ac.uk](mailto:dp@gold.ac.uk) (concerning your rights to control personal data).
- Chair, Goldsmiths Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee - via [reisc@gold.ac.uk](mailto:reisc@gold.ac.uk), REISC Secretary (for any other element of the study).
- You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office at <https://ico.org.uk/make-a-complaint/>

*This information has been provided by the Research Ethics and Integrity Sub-Committee with advice from the Research Services and Governance and Legal Teams.*

*Version: 13 August 2018*

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<sup>32</sup> GDPR Article 6; the six lawful bases for processing data are explained here: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/>

<sup>33</sup> Article 9 of the GDPR requires this type of data to be treated with great care because of the more significant risks to a person's fundamental rights and freedoms that mishandling might cause, eg, by putting them at risk of unlawful discrimination.

# Appendix D- Informed Consent Form

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## Informed consent form

### Informed Consent for Transformational Acting Workshop

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes No

#### 1. Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the study information dated **08/02/2022**, or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

I understand that if I do decide to withdraw, data can no longer be removed from the study after 01/03/2022.

I understand that taking part in the study involves engaging in a number of performative tasks aimed at building character. I understand this workshop will be documented via audio/visual recordings that may be used for non-commercial applications, including scholarly publications and grant or fellowship applications, etc.

I understand that taking part in the study has the possibility for physical and/or physical discomfort as potential risk.

#### 2. Use of the information in the study

I understand that information I provide will be used for the primary researcher's PhD and that it may be used for additional or subsequent research publications.

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my fullname or where I live, will not be shared beyond the study team.

I agree that my information can be quoted in research outputs.

I agree to have my name attributed to any quoted participation in subsequent research [check no if you wish to remain anonymized]

### 3. Future use and reuse of the information by others

I give permission for the audio/visual recording of the workshop that I participate in to be used for future research and learning.

### 4. Signatures

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]                      Signature                      Date

For participants unable to sign their name, mark the box instead of signing

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form with the potential participant and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of witness [IN CAPITALS]                      Signature                      Date

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of researcher [IN CAPITALS]                      Signature                      Date

### 5. Study contact details for further information

Ben LaMontagne-Schenck  
Department of Theatre and Performance  
+44 7547 876635  
blamo001@gold.ac.uk

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