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American Actor Training and Charismatic Group Structure: A Sociological/Artistic Perspective on the Trappings of Guruism

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Abstract

This article explores the potential for charismatic group structure (an intense form of group communion) and subsequent charismatic leadership to emerge in the traditional American collegiate acting classroom. The sociological theories of hierarchy, authoritarianism and charismatic leadership tendencies are compared to those found in contemporary acting classes built on the Stanislavsky System/Method model. The article is divided into the following sections addressing charismatic group structure and actor training: (1) The trappings of Guruism: Avoiding Negative Charismatic Leadership (2) Training The Teacher: Areas for Further Research and (3) Conclusions. The main intent of this article is a sociological and artistic examination of the contemporary acting teacher's role in encouraging positive and discouraging negative aspects of charismatic group behaviors in acting programs.

The Layman: If you will omit the evangelical tone, you may talk to me about theatre.

The Theatre Man: Fanaticism is not only inevitable with us, it is almost indispensable (Clurman 32).

Having spent a large portion of my pre-teen years living in a charismatic group in Southern California, I began to notice certain similarities between the language, dynamics and leadership of my grandfather's "church"¹ and the memoirs of theatre practitioners involved with the Group Theater in the 1930s (Stella Adler, Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner). This article is a portion of a larger area of research which endeavors to be one of the first projects serving as a comparison and contrast model of actor training approaches and spiritual/ religious charismatic group models and leadership. This research interest developed into a dissertation in 2002 to partially meet the requirements for a Ph.D. in Theatre Arts from the University of Oregon. There appear to be no books, articles or other research related specifically to charismatic groups and leadership, which naturally stem from a certain religiosity, as they affect acting or actor training. Acknowledging that the signature pedagogy of actor training in the U.S. is a direct descendant of Lee Strasberg's re-interpretation of Constantin Stanislavski's System, I researched the sociological and psychological aspects of current collegiate actor training programs and their potential sociological effects, both positive and negative, on students. Drawing from my experiences and expertise as a professional actor and teacher and my personal history as a young member of a charismatic group, I sought out the academic guidance and mentorship of leading sociologist and author Marion S. Goldman² to explore the possible connections between actor training and cult or charismatic group structure.

The recent attention to the potential for psychological and emotional

¹ "The Group" started in Reche Canyon, California and has since relocated to the high desert of Lucerne Valley. With their aging leader, the membership has dwindled to the few remaining faithful who live at and help run the current compound. The author has not had personal access to The Group for over 20 years. Research questions and theories were developed in part through years of counseling and deprogramming efforts as well as coursework in sociology, psychology and religion at the University of Oregon.

² Goldman is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon. She is the author of several books, including *Passionate Journeys: Why Successful Women Joined a Cult*. University of Michigan Press, 1999.

dependency between the acting student and the acting teacher as well as the current studies in the sociology of religious movements led to the main questions of this research: What historical actor training traditions have led to the current approach in the acting classroom, which may mirror charismatic group behaviors? In what way does the practice of charismatic leadership and group structure affect the acting classroom? What can be learned from identifying similarities and differences between the two? What is the resulting responsibility of the acting scholar and practitioner in incorporating (or ignoring) this information in their theory and practice?

The main purpose of this query is to identify the relationship between charismatic groups and leadership as seen in religious practice and common practice in the acting classroom which utilizes the “System” or “Method” as developed by Stanislavski and Strasberg, respectively. This article will not offer psychological and/or sociological answers regarding a method of avoiding or implementing religiosity or charismatic and/or authoritarian leadership in the acting classroom. This study seeks only to explore the relationship between charismatic groups and leadership and acting toward more insights and research in both fields. The hope is that by recognition of this sociological/artistic relationship, practitioners in the field of acting and teaching will be more aware of the impact of their leadership and participation.

Mutual Seduction: The Power of Need and the Need for Power

The human being desires rules. He desires something to come down from heaven and to be eternal so that he can hold onto it, so that he can feel safe and secure. As soon as somebody says something – if it is good, all the more so – there is a tendency for that observation to harden into a rule, into a magic thing that is kept and to which no one else is privy (Strasberg 42-43).

The history of the acting profession brings with it a tradition of commitment and devotion most often associated with religious and spiritual belief systems. The tradition of charismatic leadership in the theatre, one that often mirrors a guru-like attention to control and surrender, appears to be a result of the training of many acting teachers, especially those specifically schooled in one particular approach to acting (e.g.: *The Method*, *The Meisner Approach*). As the fount of resident

knowledge on such a highly emotionally charged endeavor such as acting, the temptation to surrender to the seduction of charismatic leadership is great. Even those teachers professing detachment are often unwittingly entering into guru/disciple relationships with their students. When the acting students view the instructor as their center, which is most often the case because the teacher holds the keys to everything from validation of emotional connection in a scene to the threat of non-advancement in the program, the natural tendency is for the teacher to likewise become attached to the *power* of being others' center:

Being treated as a knower is one of the most seductive and difficult places to be. One is treated very specially – for what is more special than being considered a vessel of truth?
(Kramer and Alstad 50).

The seduction of the continued feeling of being needed by students not only for sharing knowledge but for validation of their very existence can be overpowering if the instructor does not monitor his or her responses and reactions.

What is a Charismatic Group?

Marc Galanter, chairperson of the American Psychiatric Association's Committee on Religion and Psychiatry and author of *Cults: Faith, Healing and Coercion*, defines the charismatic group as having a set of three basic psychological elements: a shared belief system; a high level of social cohesiveness within the group; and a charismatic (sometimes divine) power attributed to the group's leadership (5). These three "umbrella" elements contribute to the group's common characteristics of belonging, leadership roles, meeting places, rules and regulations, membership, specified and/or exclusionary language and the idea of a "pay-off," or reward, for total sacrifice to these ideals (Levine 101-103). "Among these [charismatic] groups are religious cults, some highly cohesive self-improvement groups, and certain political action movements" (Galanter 3).

Galanter further defines the charismatic group as having a set of basic psychological elements:

Members (a) have a *shared belief system*, (b) sustain a high level of *social cohesiveness*, (c) are strongly influenced by the groups

behavioral norms, and (d) impute charismatic (or sometimes divine) power to the group or its leadership (5).

The conformity of the group arises from their shared system of beliefs, whether it is religious in nature or not. The group members' lives on a day-to-day basis, as well as their concern for each other's emotional and physical well-being, comprise and dictate the level of social cohesiveness. This cohesiveness is often manifested in frequent planned activities and rituals that the group participates in together. The group may adopt particular modes of conduct or rules that then translate into a codified set of behavioral norms. These norms not only guide members in appropriate conduct within the group, but also dictate proper behavior in unfamiliar situations. The attribution of charismatic powers may fall to the leader or to the group as a whole.

Examining the four major areas of charismatic group components - shared beliefs, behavioral norms, group cohesiveness and altered states of consciousness - and applying them specifically to training the actor, some "red flags" are identified. Monitored early enough, recognizing these tendencies can help the instructor avoid destructive aspects of charismatic leadership. The shared beliefs of an acting class are the binding force behind the energy necessary to obtain a degree in the field. The dedication essential to achieve graduation from college requires a set of shared beliefs among acting students, and the level of social control needed to operate as a cast depends on the healthy functioning of this belief system. It is the particular reinforcement of these beliefs that can be a danger in the acting classroom, especially if the specialized behaviors and language of the group becomes a dominating factor in demonstrating an individual's total commitment to the group. The acting teacher must be aware of facilitating a view of possessing an exalted level of knowledge, which can detract from the positive outcomes of group beliefs and lead students to transfer beliefs onto the teacher herself.

Behavioral norms, or those qualities which serve to bind the group together through appropriate conduct, are also an area easily manipulated by the acting teacher. The acting class is susceptible to a wide variety of behavioral norm rewards, ranging from the traditional grading structure to non-material rewards such as social reinforcements via applause, smiles and congratulations. The duty of the acting teacher is to make sure the rewards are related more toward maintaining the acting program's goals rather than specific leader expectations (such as inadvertently ignoring student critique which does not agree with the

teacher's view and consistently reinforcing that which does).

Psychiatrist Robert Lifton has identified eight psychological themes necessary and central to totalistic environments, such as those found in both cults and more strict charismatic groups (Singer 69-74). Lifton's eight criteria for charismatic group behavioral norm control techniques can then be applied specifically to the acting teacher. For example, when monitoring communication within the group, the leader must avoid *milieu control* devices that shut down or alter free response in the classroom. This applies to group feedback sessions, where a healthy, alternative point of view in critique must be nurtured, and the dissenting students made to understand that due to the entirely subjective nature of acting, opposite opinions will frequently be expressed – and welcomed. If the acting student feels that his or her emotional life is on the line, and freedom of expressing doubt, differing opinions and viewpoints is denied or negated, the natural result will be a setting of destructive behavioral norms within the group. Consequently, in order to maintain group cohesiveness it will become more and more necessary for the acting students to act as reinforcers of the leader's views, rather than experimenters on their own.

The acting teacher must also avoid the overuse of *loading of language*, or specialized and reinvented words and terms that exclude those not “in the know.” The difficulty with specialized language is that it is a necessity in the acting field when teaching various techniques and exercises. The turning point from positive reinforcement of learning to negative loading of language occurs when the group demonstrates a high level of “us versus them” cohesiveness that develops into an exclusionary group dynamic with the encouraging acting teacher as top of the hierarchy. For example, actor training programs are usually divided into upper and lower level courses, with eliminations occurring each semester or quarter up through the highest level classes. The lower division students are often purposefully excluded by the upper division students in a rehearsal setting because the specialized language is not at their disposal. Once again, this is a natural occurrence, but the acting teacher or director's task is to facilitate growth in the coursework. By making sure the specialized language is not used in a way to control, exclude or measure an acting student's worth, the teacher can deter students from seriously adopting charismatic group behaviors. As for the question of specialized language in the classroom, there seems to be no way to avoid its presence or use, but a close monitoring of potential abuses can help

avoid the most destructive tendencies.

The *demand for purity*, which manifests itself in acting programs and companies as a limitation on the students to seek additional instruction outside the department, can be a debilitating control mechanism if rigidly enforced. The prevailing sentiment of “spoiling one’s talent” by seeking training outside the group is fairly common and limiting in nature. Rather than acknowledge the value of a more rounded base of training in the actor, many teachers become feral and controlling of their students’ training.

The concept of being either a Method actor *or* a Meisner technique practitioner *or* rejecting the System altogether is a common division among acting teachers and students. Oftentimes the training system has adopted one viewpoint, and the student who does not thrive under that particular technique is eventually eliminated from the program. Just as the different learning modalities of individuals have come into play in the educational world³, the acting profession needs to acknowledge the individuality of learning styles and accommodate those differences for the good of the students. The goal of demanding purity in an acting program to reinforce group norms and behaviors as well as nurturing dependence on the group is misguided and potentially destructive. It is vital to adopt a healthy adaptation of various techniques and approaches, all welcomed so that the actor in training can begin to build their *own* approach to the craft, rather than imitating what they feel the group and teacher want. Many current textbooks incorporate a number of approaches, attempting a survey approach to various techniques, but the basis for most of the exercises and sample approaches comes from the method tradition. The instructor’s willingness to explore and broaden the horizons in the classroom (for example, incorporating some of the emerging movement based character creation techniques or non-Western traditions) will greatly affect the students’ willingness to question, experiment and critically evaluate their progress on their own.

The three most important control elements for the acting teacher, coach or director to be aware of misusing are *confession*, *mystical manipulation* and *dispensing of existence*. These three aspects of authoritarian and

³ Such as Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences theories which have been incorporated into the American education system (*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. NY: Basic Books, 1983; *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. NY: Basic Books, 1993)

charismatic power are not only the most potentially harmful to the students but are also the most easily misunderstood and manipulated forces in the classroom.

The use of confession techniques in classroom and rehearsal exercises is an integral part of the purist Method approach, and one often abused by acting teachers under the guise of breaking down personal emotional barriers in the students and getting them in touch with “themselves.” Exercises which center around intimate sharing of personal experiences with the group, especially if combined with altered consciousness elements such as dimming of lights and using rhythm to enter a relaxed, trance state, are bordering on psychotherapy techniques and can be harmful to students not ready for highly sensitive emotional commitment. The confession exercises, which often contain quasi-hypnotic language and phraseology such as, “think back to a time when you were...,” “let it all out...” or “this moment you’re remembering will live in _____ part of your body and inform your breath and movement” and even examples as simple as giving an emotion memory a narrative that is spoken out loud, can be fuel for the misguided acting teacher to use in later encounters with the student. Often times, acting teachers will *suggest* to the student a memory or event having some personal knowledge of the student often shared in confession exercises, to try and bring forth a truthful response in the actor on stage. This can be extremely harmful to the psyche of the student, as the emotional ties and depth of feeling in associating an event to a “real” moment in character may elicit too-powerful responses. This also becomes a highly effective control device for the teacher as the triggers and fears of the students are laid bare during confession exercises.

Harold Clurman remarks on confession as related to the Method and young, inexperienced actors:

With the immature and more credulous actor [Method acting] may even develop into an emotional self-indulgence, or in other cases into a sort of therapy. The actor being the extraordinary man suffering all sorts of repressions and anxieties seizes upon the revelation of himself as a purifying agent (Krasner 17).

The concept of acting being emotionally self-indulgent is not a new notion, but the danger lies in the manipulation of that indulgence by the teacher to gain personal insights into their “repressed” and “anxiety

stricken” students. This easily crosses over into therapy for the student, openly acknowledged by the teacher and used as classroom fodder. If the temptation to use emotional exercises and warm-ups as a “purifying agent” remains a given for the young and impressionable actor, it becomes the teacher’s duty to watch for the signs of confessional therapy taking place in the class. The group critique and discussion sessions are *not* a venue for counseling, and unless the leader has a license to practice therapy he or she is not qualified (no matter how much caring and personal involvement is present between students and instructor) to counsel students in any area other than acting technique. This includes deep emotional “release” exercises and class discussions designed to exorcise demons supposedly plaguing the actor.⁴

Another popular confession example, which takes varied forms is the “naked” exercise, in which students are demanded to strip either physically down to underwear or emotionally down to tears through some self-revelation exercise. These classes usually adopt aliases from the students such as “Crying 101” or “Naked Basics,” and are generally considered by the student group to be the turning point and test of loyalty to the department. These courses most often are part of the upper division curriculum and serve to engender a very specialized group dynamic. If the acting class is not demonstrating charismatic group behaviors before confession and exclusion exercises begin, they most likely will manifest the dynamic if not properly guided by the teacher.

In what way can the same growth in young actors be facilitated without a necessary emotional “stripping” of the students? If the instructor’s goal of the exercises is to create a bonded group dynamic, he or she needs to reexamine what *precisely* is intended by the need to demand total compliance of the student actors. If the goal is to become more emotionally free and open so as to transfer that freedom to the stage performance, there are a number of warm-ups and games that can tap into those elements without necessarily making the results public or mandatory. The unwavering expectation to weep or disrobe (even metaphorically) can become such a controlling factor that the exercise

⁴ Unfortunately, most often the training of an acting teacher will entail how to *reach* an emotional release in their students, but not how to *recover* from it. This of course raises the issue (one for another article) of how to educate teachers to achieve emotive and liminal states without crossing boundaries from which they cannot lead their students to properly recover from. Without requiring an additional degree in drama therapy and/or psychology, how can this be achieved?

becomes more about bending the students' will to the teacher's demands than an emotional connection (unless tension and shame are the desired outcomes). One way to avoid the control which accompanies confession, if those exercises are a vital part of the program, is to disallow public sharing – as enticing as it is for the group to verbalize and receive validation – so that any and all emotional boundaries are sole property of the student actor. The common agreement, “This will not go any further than this room,” is not necessarily a guarantee of positive confession outcomes. The sense of exclusionary, “us versus them” and pressure to respond are more indicative of charismatic group cohesiveness than silent and personal ownership of artistic growth.

Mystical manipulation, or the constructed sense that new discoveries made by the group are occurring spontaneously as a result of the leader's guidance in conjunction with new and special emotions, is one area where the acting teacher plays a pivotal role. The nature of acting entails a threshold state where discoveries are made, and the craft is dependent upon those moments of creative “lightning.” The danger lies in the tendency of the acting leader to claim credit and ownership of those liminal, or psychic threshold, moments, thereby nurturing a sense of divine insight into the group. If the students are continually led through spiritual exercises to the voice and direction of the one leader they can become entrenched in associating *that* leader with their own threshold states.

The spiritual and shamanistic aspect of acting is one of the most valuable and soul-filling aspects of the craft and should not be denied or avoided as it is a natural occurrence that has existed for centuries. The goal of the acting class, however, should be to train young actors to tap those resources *on their own*, outside the specific group and definitely not dependent on the teacher. The trappings of guruism lie in the addiction of both student and teacher to the giving/receiving of the threshold moment. The power that lies behind “awakening” a student can be almost irresistible to the acting teacher, especially those well-meaning leaders who are highly invested in their students' growth. Resisting the temptation to own spiritual moments and capitalize on that power is a must for the acting teacher. The inevitable quasi-worship that occurs in the students when these mystical moments happen for them is unavoidable, but a constant, verbal reminder from the teacher that the student is in charge of their own journey and education is one key to avoiding the mutual agreement to charismatic leadership and group

behaviors. Keeping the exercises and warm-ups general and private, without personal commentary or observations, allows the students to fully experience the same awakenings without the total attachment to the leader as magic key to their inner selves. Also, a repeated phrase as simple as, “This may not work for you...” can free the student from the pressure of expectation and a feeling of failing the teacher *and* themselves if the exercise is not leading them where they assume it should go. This pressure alleviated, the student is freer to truly experience where he or she is *at that moment*, rather than worrying about reaching a highly intuitive or spiritual state with the imminent judgment of the leader and fellow group members.

The final control issue for acting teachers to be aware of is the concept of *dispensing of existence*, or the threat of being cast out into nothingness if compliance is not maintained. This is a difficult situation, as the necessity of thinning acting programs is an economic part of the collegiate system. If the criteria for judgment rests solely on the nebulous factors such as “commitment” and “talent,” the threat/control aspect becomes too powerful a tool used by the teacher. There can be a measure of balance achieved, however, if the focus placed on aspects of the students’ academic lives that “weed them out” is shifted from a feeling of having failed the expectations of the leader to more concrete issues of attendance, written work and growth in knowledge. Unfortunately, there comes a time in every actor’s life when they will be judged on talent, as that is part of the professional world as well as academia. The difference may be as simple as setting up a paradigm for the program that attentively avoids charismatic group structures and leadership, which then makes the “rejection” less of a spiritual failure and more of a factor reflecting the professional practice of the art.

Often times, a notion has been cultivated in a theater arts department that a specific acting teacher’s memory is *long* and unforgiving, creating an unspoken pressure to absolutely conform or be, essentially, “blackballed” from the profession altogether. Too often, acting teachers use their skills and knowledge of the professional world to continually drive home the point that theatre is a small world, and every action performed and word spoken by the student will curse and follow them not only in the department, but also out into the professional world. This is true in a large sense, in that a professional reputation and reference does indeed precede the actor into auditions and interviews (due to the relatively small and close knit network of professional directors and

casting agents). However, if the acting student is not free to question, take risks and figure out their *own* technique in the collegiate setting, what is the point of the education? The threat of joining nothingness *for the rest of your life* is far too great a pressure to place on a young 18-24 year old budding actor. Although it is important that the acting teacher give insight into the professional world (as well as they may know it – often times exposure has been limited or outdated), it is imperative to remove the spoken and unspoken threats of elimination due to difference in approach, style or opinion. Simply put: if the teacher must use the power of rejection as a teaching tool, the basic approach of the instructor is under question. Enthusiasm and a healthy commitment level from the students should be generated from an open, positive and thought-provoking environment in the classroom, not a power hierarchy based on leader stamp of approval.

The result of shared beliefs and behavioral norms in a class is group cohesiveness, which differs in a charismatic group due to the level of conflict, tension and drama present in the daily lives of the members. Due to the average age of the students in a collegiate program, and the subject matter itself, there can be an extremely high level of tension, conflict and drama in the group. The craft demands drama, and in any situation where personal performance is subject to critique there is a natural level of tension and conflict among the actors. The key to healthy group cohesiveness is maintaining the separation from performance and “real life” in the classroom. The competition inherent in the art of acting greatly increases the risks for destructive cohesiveness, if the integration of identity and decision-making skills is tied into group and leader critique. If the criteria for cohesiveness is an enhanced well-being manifested by total fealty to the group’s goals and an overwhelming attention to other’s views of an individual, the cohesiveness can be manipulated by the instructor. As Galanter states, “acceptance and conformity bring relief from distress” (36). Therefore, leader exploitation and manipulation of reinforcement, negative and positive, gives undue power over the student’s everyday emotional lives. Critique and criticism should not include references to “the way we *always* do things” or “the class thinks you should....”

In addition to Lifton’s identified control techniques, there are special characteristics of traditional charismatic leaders that set them apart from traditional hierarchies. The charismatic leader often has helpers (sometimes labeled “lieutenants”) who are “active co-workers with the

prophet on his mission and who generally also possess some charismatic qualifications” (Bryman 25). This relationship is often mirrored in the acting classroom by the presence of upper-division actors in training who serve as coaches and classroom assistants to the teacher. This can be a very healthy relationship, as peer mentoring can be a valuable asset in any classroom setting. The balance, however, is shifted when the student helpers are expected to reinforce the leader’s views, serving as “spies” and enforcers of doctrine in the class. The power these upper division students can have is tremendous, for they are often regarded with a cultivated sense of awe by the lower division students. The pedagogical benefits of the student assistant relationship can be healthy, rewarding and inspired for teacher, students and helpers alike – *if* the assistants are encouraged to find their own teaching voice and techniques without an expected cohesiveness with all of the leader’s views and mandates. Many times these assistants are held up as examples in the acting classroom and their stories of “salvation” from negative habits and tendencies are told and retold as reinforcement by the teacher. Just as in a tent revival, the “saved” stand up with the charismatic leader to declare the leader’s power, thereby lending a patina of sacred science and mysticism to the gathering. This is an extreme example, but the manipulation of others in the hierarchy to reinforce the charisma of the leader and demonstrate the value of following is a danger to beware of. The acting teacher must make sure that the student assistants are there to provide a “checks and balances” approach rather than doctrinal reinforcement.

Altered states of consciousness, as the final criteria for charismatic group structures used in this study, is a common and useful technique in acting. The leader must make sure, however, that the goals of the meditative and threshold exercises used in rehearsal and classes are not self-serving in nature. Healthy altered consciousness exercises are relaxing, deepen the students’ sense of *personal* goals and strengthen the connection between group members – not the leader. Hence, the threshold exercises used in classes should never be “required sharing,” and a consistent non-personal approach must be maintained by the leader. Something as simple as verbally reminding students that they are *not* failing the exercise or even themselves if it does not work for them is a helpful method for those leading group meditative and liminal/threshold warm-ups. Oftentimes, charismatic group leaders will have the members perform everyday tasks together as a group while in a

trance or meditative state to reinforce group structure and dependence. One way an acting teacher can avoid this pitfall is to limit the meditative and liminal exercises to only include personal and private experiences. Avoid bringing the group to a high threshold state and then asking them to then join together and in some way use their collective energy to connect or build off of each other.⁵

In his book *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*, Lorne L. Dawson Points out that, most often, behavior modifications occur following a change in beliefs, leading to changes in attitudes, followed finally by changes in behavior. The student who is actively trying to fit into the group is more likely to modify behavior first in order to learn how to pass as a member (125-126). The acting teacher must be wary of this type of surrender in the students, often manifested in group critiques, journal writings and class discussions. When risks are asked or demanded of a student who is not prepared emotionally, they will most likely alter their behavior without the necessary attitude or belief changes. This simply reinforces the group and leader's control over the student, as they are rewarded not for truly attempting something that feels right for them, but for "playing the game" according to the rules of the class.

Training the Teacher: Areas for Further Research

There are two areas for further research to suggest as part of an acting trainer/teacher's continued education and self-evaluation. In addition to knowledge of the techniques and methods traditionally used in American actor training, the acting teacher must seek training and knowledge in various systems and approaches. Educating oneself on techniques, which may even be antithetical to personal approach, is a valuable tool for the teacher to maintain a balance of information passed on to students. There are numerous seminars, conferences and workshops designed to introduce acting educators to varying methods and emerging techniques. The recent growth of interest in non-Western acting styles

⁵ For example, many of the trust exercises used in acting classes are prefaced by a breathing or guided imagery focusing warm-up. Make sure the students are adequately out of the threshold state before grouping them together for emotionally risky trust games. Make sure to also return the room to its "normal state" of environment and then start the activity. Otherwise, students will begin to co-dependently associate the ability to be cohesive as a group with the liminal state.

and training has produced a volume of written works dedicated to exploring these methods. The “non-methodist” practitioners⁶ are all excellent starting points for examining approaches that veer away from the traditional American realism techniques.

The acting teacher must also seek education in psychological and sociological findings on leadership and group dynamics. These are vital elements in the acting classroom, but rarely touched upon or developed by theatre departments. Because the nature of acting demands such high levels of social, emotional and physical commitment from the students, teachers must expand their knowledge of performance to include effective leadership and teaching skills, identifying group behavior patterns, emotional triggers, feedback sessions with a large group dynamic and the techniques of psychodrama therapy. The focus can then be placed on appropriate use of this knowledge, rather than inadvertent misuse and abuse of control devices. Courses in sociology, psychology and even the societal aspects of religion are helpful in creating a base of knowledge for the acting instructor.

The final approach, after careful and thoughtful self-education, is to open dialogue between fellow teachers regarding the charismatic aspects of teaching acting. Discipleship is a known phenomenon among acting teachers, but something that is rarely spoken of and even more infrequently written about. If a body of knowledge, theory and various approaches in avoiding negative charismatic tendencies were disseminated with the same fervor as warm-ups, exercises and rehearsal games are among acting teachers, the shared responsibility of tackling the issue would alleviate much of the silence surrounding the subject.

⁶ For examples and further readings in non-Method approaches which are currently beginning to be incorporated into American actor training programs, please refer to the following: *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and the Theatre* by Anne Bogart; *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints* edited by Michel Bigelow Dixon and Joel A. Smith; *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal; *The Presence of the Actor* by Joseph Chaikin; *The Moving Body* by Jacques LeCoq; *The Way of Acting* by Tadashi Suzuki; *The Grotowski Sourcebook* edited by Lisa Wolford and Richard Schechner; *An Acrobat of the Heart* by Stephen Wangh and *Acting (Reconsidered: Theory and Practice)* edited by Phillip Zarilli.

Hopefully, if the seduction of authoritarian power is something openly addressed among theatre faculty, educators can become more cautious, conscientious and aware of both their need as teachers and the needs of their students.

Conclusion

All prepared systems fail. They fail when they are applied, except as examples of a process which was significant, at some time, for someone or some group. Process is dynamic: it's the evolution that takes place during work. Systems are recorded as ground plans, not to be followed any more than rules of courtship can be followed. We can get clues from others, but our own culture and sensibility and aesthetic will lead us into a totally new kind of expression, unless we simply imitate both the process and the findings of another. The aesthetic remakes system (Chaikin 71).

Joseph Chaikin is directly responding to the Method and the American tradition of reverence for a system that was significant "at some time, for some group." If an acting teacher can maintain focus on the dynamic and ever-changing evolution of the craft, he is one step closer to avoiding negative charismatic group structure and the seduction of authoritarian leadership. It is essential to remind students that the System, the Method, or any detailed approach, are merely ground plans to be redesigned according to the needs of each individual. More importantly, to maintain a healthy atmosphere of "this may not work for you" while refraining from negating the students' experiences requires the leader to become ultimately comfortable with non-authoritarian power structures in courses. Charismatic group dynamics will emerge from an authoritarian power structure, given the tendency to hold reverent a doctrinal system that simply imitates the process of a "master."

The most important factor in the future education of young actors is instructor awareness. Knowledge of the various systems, techniques and approaches is essential in providing alternatives to students who seek a balanced education in performance. The various "Methods" as taught by the masters studied here remain at the core of American actor training. Unfortunately, the original ideas have been "weakened by misunderstanding on the parts of actors, acting teachers, theorists and the Master teachers themselves" (Blair 207). Actors who become

educators must see themselves as historical researchers, current seekers of new techniques and potential theorists of their own, rather than adhering to one method they may have encountered in their training. Acting teachers must be educated to observe and take action against negative charismatic tendencies in both themselves and their students. The seduction of surrender may be too powerful for the young minds entering into a program to resist, but a conscientious leader can certainly avoid the potential destructiveness of a cult-like worshipping of any person or idea. That focus and knowledge must become built into acting educator training, otherwise the potential for harmful charismatic group and leader tendencies will take place in the acting classroom.

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