

**Beyond Repetition;  
Investigating how Sanford Meisner's training process  
diminishes self-consciousness and enhances spontaneity in actors.**

Philippa Strandberg-Long

Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy by Research  
in the subject of Drama

School of Arts  
University of Kent

December 2019

Word Count: 88 905

## **Acknowledgments**

My first thank you goes to my fantastic supervisors Nicola Shaughnessy, Freya Vass-Rhee and Robert Shaughnessy. Robert, thank you for encouraging me to voice my opinions and ideas early on. Freya, thank you for your continuous help, time and rigorous scrutiny of my writing, you pushed me to levels I didn't know I could achieve — even when I didn't want to! Nickie, thank you for being a constant support to me throughout this journey, both in an academic and personal way. You have always believed that I had something important to say, pushed me when I needed a push and caught me when I needed catching, from my heart I thank you.

A huge thank you to the University of Kent for believing in the importance of this research and awarding me a full GTA scholarship, without which this study would have never been possible.

Tony Marcel and Phil Barnard, thank you both for your generosity and expertise in areas where I was fumbling in the dark.

Fourth Monkey Actor Training Company and Italia Conti Academy, thank you for your support with spaces and students for my workshops and interviews.

To all my students — and in particular the ones that took part in my research sessions — thank you for your interest, commitment and enthusiasm, this is all for you, you are the reason I do what I do.

To my children, thank you for never wanting to talk about my thesis and thus keeping me sane. To my parents, thank you for always listening.

And lastly, to Rob, my husband and partner in life. Thank you for always believing in me, for making sure I reach my potential and for never letting me give up. I love you.

## **Abstract**

This thesis interrogates Sanford Meisner's approach to acting, a process that is often misunderstood, mis-taught, and shrouded in mystery. Since the technique's introduction to the UK in the mid-nineties, discrepancies in its interpretation have highlighted a lack of direct scholarship on the technique itself, as well as the safeguarding of the practice by current Meisner practitioners. This thesis both addresses myths and illuminates Meisner's process by investigating how three of Meisner's foundational exercises allow the actor to become less self-conscious and in turn more spontaneous. This challenges established actor training demands such as 'stop thinking' and 'get out of your head', and demonstrates both the value of Meisner's process and the need to interrogate such vocabulary further. The research is conducted through literary inquiries into publications on actor training in conjunction with theories on the psychology of attention and motivation. The study is reinforced by classroom observations, student case studies and interviews, and directly addresses how the technique diminishes self-consciousness and increases spontaneity in the actor.

First, the thesis clarifies the difference between self-awareness and self-consciousness, explaining how the latter negatively affects the actor's ability to be present and spontaneous. Secondly, the Repetition exercise is contextualised within attention theory, flow and mind wandering to explore how the Meisner technique trains the actor to reduce their self-focus. Consideration of this exercise offers evidence that different attentional networks are activated depending on how much attention is directed to task, which rests on the challenge-skill balance being continually adjusted in order for the actor to sustain task-focus and avoid mind wandering. This demonstrates that finding the balance between skill and challenge in relation to task, while layering the exercises in an extended developmental training-process, is integral to the Meisner method. Additionally, this section highlights the increasing problem of politeness and its effect on Meisner training and the students' ability to act on impulse. Further, two types of mind wandering — spontaneous and deliberate — are analysed, suggesting that task-related thinking can still be employed in this exercise, without risking self-consciousness and inward focus.

Next, the thesis turns to Meisner's Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercises using research on divided attention and motivation to highlight the

importance of difficulty, urgency and plausibility in terms of the task. As this chapter shows, the balance between observation and objective comes into play as the technique progresses, which, when considered in reference to E.T Higgins' 1997 regulatory focus theory, indicates that the use of *prevention focus* (motivations based on trying to prevent something) sustains the motivation for longer durations even when success seems unlikely, in comparison to *promotion focus* (trying to gain something). This provides an additional key finding of this study. Moreover, interrogating how instinct works alongside chosen actions — which are based on motivation rather than impulse — presents a new way to access emotional connection and affect in actors, an original finding that can be expanded on and used by actor trainers in any context.

By addressing gaps in actor training scholarship, particularly misconceptions of Meisner's practice, and through the novel theoretical and practice-based approach taken, this thesis equips acting tutors with the information and empowerment to fully utilise the process. The interrogation of the Meisner method's foundational exercise stage enhances understanding of how this technique facilitates a less self-conscious and more spontaneous performer, while also establishing its value, applications and importance within the field of actor training as a whole.

# **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Meisner in context .....</b>	<b>13</b>
1:1 From an American institution to a European revelation.....	14
1:2 Exploring the full technique .....	23
1:3 Meisner in focus.....	37
<b>Chapter 2: The battle with the self.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Chapter 3: On Repetition and attention.....</b>	<b>63</b>
3:1 The Repetition exercise .....	63
3:2 Attention-models, Repetition and flow .....	72
3:3 The effect of mind wandering.....	90
<b>Chapter 4: Process, practices and problems .....</b>	<b>103</b>
4:1 Process, process, process.....	103
4:2 Practical perspectives: developments of the Repetition exercise .....	110
4:3 “Fuck polite!” The problem with politeness in actor training .....	128
<b>Chapter 5: Upping the ante — adding the activity.....</b>	<b>145</b>
5:1 Independent Activity and Knock on the Door .....	145
5:2 The need for specificity, urgency and difficulty.....	156
5:3 The motivation in the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door .....	164
<b>Chapter 6: From impulse to action .....</b>	<b>175</b>
6.1 The knock on effect: Developed practice and case studies of the Knock on the Door exercise.....	175
6:2 The reaction in counter-action: How Meisner technique and Active Analysis complement each other.....	200
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>259</b>
Appendix 1: Practitioner interviews .....	259
Appendix 2: Student interviews .....	263
Appendix 3: Feedback forms research workshops, spring 2018.....	282

## **Table of Figures**

<b>Figure 1:</b> Table showing the ideas and concepts of Rapoport & Sudakov that inspired Meisner's process.....	26
<b>Figure 2:</b> Table showing characteristics of objective and subjective self-awareness.....	53
<b>Figure 3:</b> Table showing the differences between private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness and social anxiety.....	56
<b>Figure 4:</b> Table showing the difference between Attention Training and Attention State Training.....	60
<b>Figure 5:</b> Graph showing the relationship between effortful focus and mind wandering.....	60
<b>Figure 6:</b> Flow Diagram.....	82
<b>Figure 7:</b> Table showing the difference between self-rumination and self-reflection .....	94
<b>Figure 8:</b> Components of the Independent Activity .....	158
<b>Figure 9:</b> Table showing examples of the difference in promotion and prevention focus .....	167
<b>Figure 10:</b> Table showing examples of Independent Activities motivated by promotion or prevention focus.....	170
<b>Figure 11:</b> Flow diagram showing the emotions surrounding the flow state .....	172
<b>Figure 12:</b> Active Analysis étude setup .....	208
<b>Figure 13:</b> Action-Reaction Triangle .....	210

## Introduction

### In pursuit of 'no thinking'

As an actor and actor trainer, I was compelled to conduct this research due to personal challenges with the language used around spontaneity when training actors, which, seemed problematic and ill advised. Logically impossible commands such as 'stop thinking' and 'get out of your head' are under-interrogated; especially as these widely used demands seldom provide adequate support or direction to the student in question. "Get out of your head" — a missive often issued by tutors to young acting students in moments of intellectualisation or self-consciousness — felt undeniably unhelpful for a training actor to take on board. It seemed like a counterintuitive instruction for someone who was analysing too much: achieving what the instructor wanted would still mean using one's head, just in a *different* way — a way that was never explained. From my own observations, the note to "stop thinking" rarely leads to an improved performance, and is often followed by confusion and silence as the student's attention turns inward to an even greater extent than before as to try and work out how exactly one might get out one's head; most likely the opposite of what the tutor intended.

As an actor, I found a problematic disconnect in applying theoretical work to my practice, as it often seemed to work against that organic present state towards which I was encouraged. Stanislavski's written biographies, actors' questions, script analysis and the widespread use of *actioning* through *verbing* — however useful as preparation — made the instruction "get out of your head" even harder to fathom. Instead it chipped away at my instincts and made me feel less present and more self-conscious on stage. I was introduced to the Meisner technique in my third year of drama school, and it challenged everything I thought I had learnt about acting throughout the three-year course. Instead of trying so hard to be present — which in itself is futile — I found an ease in working in a way that allows you to truly use yourself and your instincts, whilst in effect training your mind to 'forget' about the audience and your own ability. This technique, although rigorous, made acting feel easy and enjoyable.

As an acting teacher and course-leader, I am confronted daily with young actors struggling with self-consciousness. Some may have acted for fun or as a hobby before

drama school and upon arrival, are suddenly faced with the presentation of a rigorous craft and a sense of seriousness about their chosen vocation; the pressure can make it hard to remember what you enjoyed about the craft to begin with, in turn making us doubt our ability and choices. When acute self-focus takes hold, it can lead to students questioning their every move, which in turn destroys impulse and instinct, sometimes to the extent that even things that come naturally, like walking and standing, become difficult and laboured; in other words, “we don’t know what to do with ourselves”. The same happens with text — words become distorted as inflections and stresses end up in odd places due to the fact that the actor is not connected to the language because our instincts are muted. Self-consciousness in actors can lead to audience awareness — as we start to view ourselves objectively through their eyes — resulting in us turning the attention to our own selves and evaluating our responses rather than reacting to the present moment. This disconnect directly affects our ability to ‘be in the moment’ or ‘get out of our own heads’.

Meisner technique homes in on listening to and observing the immediate surroundings to such an extent that we start to respond impulsively to what we experience. Personally, I noted that as I undertook more training in the Meisner technique, I found a radical difference in my ability to connect to other actors on stage, and subsequently avoid second-guessing my actions. Yet, there are problems with the transmission of Meisner technique from teacher to student in the UK that often distort or dilute the power of these techniques. While I will discuss the reason for these challenges in greater detail in Chapter 1, one notable argument is the lack of research and literature on exactly how and why Meisner technique is effective in making the actor less self-conscious and in turn more spontaneous. As my own work as a teacher makes me eager to understand fully why the process has this effect on actors, this thesis is an attempt to begin to fill that knowledge gap by examining the Meisner technique in the context of psychology of attention, especially in terms of the redirecting of the actor’s focus away from the self.

It is important to mention here that I approach this work from the perspective of an actor trainer, researcher and actor, which supports and widens the applicability of the research. The thesis is of a pedagogical nature and is based on both observations made in the classroom and publications focusing on the teaching of Meisner technique — successively explained through literature on psychology of attention —



in order to provide scholarly and practical resources for teachers of acting. To further clarify the student involvement and cultural perspective of the practical work, it should be noted that the Meisner technique sessions, research workshops and student feedback were conducted with students undertaking drama school training in London, UK. The students involved are primarily from Fourth Monkey's 2-year accelerated actor training programme and Italia Conti Academy's 3-year BA Hons Acting course where, for the last seven years, I have taught a year-long Meisner module situated in year one and year two of training.<sup>1</sup>

### Defining self-consciousness

Before we can discuss how the Meisner technique can help diminish or eliminate self-consciousness in the training actor, the term must be clarified. To define *self-consciousness* for the purposes of this thesis, we must differentiate it from *self-awareness*, with which it is commonly confused. Self-consciousness is the state we enter when we direct our focus inwards, towards ourselves as an object in the space and away from the external environment and the present moment. This form of focus on the self is often due to on-going evaluation of how others perceive us in that moment: how we come across, whether we are doing something correctly, how we can be better, and if others are judging us. Being aware of our own body and mind, however, is different. Self-awareness, in this thesis, refers to awareness of our own feelings, desires, personality and needs. To be aware of how we feel and what we want to achieve is crucial for actors, especially since the actor is encouraged to use themselves in their work, and to draw upon personal opinions, memories and situations.

Self-consciousness, on the other hand, is a more acute sense of self in relation to others. We generally do not feel self-conscious unless we are being watched; it is the observation and judgement of oneself whilst in the context of others that subsequently gives rise to feelings that are problematic for actors such as worry and anxiety. Integral to the elimination of those problematic feelings, and situated in the centre of this work, is the ability to overcome the need for validation during performance. Self-evaluation and self-critique certainly have a place in an actor's life,

---

<sup>1</sup> I devised the module for both courses in accordance with the hours and group size allocated by the institutions to be taught alongside Stanislavski-based scene study classes. The Fourth Monkey students were seen 3.5 hours per week in smaller groups of eight, whereas the Italia Conti students were seen 2 hours per week, in groups of 14.

but self-reflective practice should, in my opinion, occur *after* the performance, not during, as it blocks the actor's ability to commit to the present action and communicate with their partner. Thus, self-consciousness, as defined above, is the central target of this inquiry, while self-awareness is a tool that students can use while practicing the Meisner technique to achieve the goal of eliminating self-consciousness.

### Interpreting Meisner technique

Meisner technique presents a markedly different way of exploring and experiencing the concept of redirected focus and full commitment to the present moment. The technique demands that the actor redirect their attention from themselves and their actions onto their partner. The actor learns to thoroughly observe their partner and respond to their partner's behaviour, as every action becomes a reaction to what is seen and perceived. The technique offers the actor a chance to invest oneself fully in the moment, and the way that the process improves the actor's impulses and attention to task through predominantly practical exercises — rather than theoretical — make it an effective option for combating self-consciousness.

After having experienced the technique as an actor, I spent the majority of my Masters studies in actor training exploring the pedagogic practice and fundamental principles of the Meisner process. This further solidified the nature of the step-by-step process involved in the technique, and the importance of it being adhered to. Upon commencing my Meisner teaching practice, I was struck with the way that the nature of the exercises put students in a position that would initially heighten their self-consciousness. Meisner's beginning exercises are strongly focused on directing the attention outwards, towards the partner or an activity — which becomes the source of the reactions — meaning that the actions are instinctive responses rather than calculated actions. By asking students to comment on what they observe in each other, the technique would not just enhance their attention of the other person, but also amplify their sense of "being watched" and possibly judged, thus amplifying the self-consciousness that follows those sensations. As the exercises progressed, however, it became increasingly harder for the students to focus on themselves, and once absolute commitment to the exercises was reached, their self-consciousness seemed to diminish considerably. The way the Meisner exercises are constructed, ordered and layered trains this skill in the actor, and forces the attention away from

the self over the course of the training process. The length of time it takes to change the individual actor's perception and ability to sustain external attention varies, but success lies in clear understanding of the complete process, and the fact that it is indeed a process — something that is not always the case when this technique is taught as this thesis will demonstrate.

The history of Meisner technique, and its late arrival to the UK, illuminate the origins of this frequent shortcoming in Meisner instruction. Although Meisner technique is well known in America, it can be argued that not all who teach the technique have a solid understanding of the full process and its origin. A disparity in teaching practices within the UK Meisner community — evolved through different interpretations not always in line with the original purposes of the technique — has added a somewhat opaque element to the process that is certainly not helped by the lack of publications analysing the particulars and the psychological workings of the technique. Many acting processes, including the Meisner technique, are solely handed down to the next generation of acting teachers through anecdotal sharing of classes and practical work alone — an apprenticeship method, rather than the creation of formal texts. As important as it is for acting teachers to experience the work for themselves and learn from those “in the know”, this linear inheritance means that we do not always understand *why* the techniques work, what exactly makes the exercises effective, or indeed the reasons an exercise might be unsuccessful. Whilst talking to Meisner practitioners with a direct lineage to Sanford Meisner himself, I noted a sense of unwillingness to criticise or acknowledge possible difficulties in the process. Yet, in my experience, practitioners who have learnt the teachings from a secondary source seem more willing to examine the theory as well as the practical aspect of the technique and are more likely to acknowledge possible problems. By undertaking this research, I hope to eliminate the heavy reliance on lineage, as the investigation will allow teachers to engage with their students in a way that is supported by a deeper understanding of the process based in tangibility and fact.

### Psychology, cognition, and Meisner

As individuals experience, perceive, and learn in many different ways, it is important to understand the underlying psychology of a given process in order to teach it fully and with rigour. This thesis will seek to uncover and explain the psychological processes underpinning Meisner's foundational exercises — especially in regard to

the attentional element — in order to create a comprehensive understanding of how the Meisner technique trains the actor's spontaneity and diminishes their self-consciousness. The methodology for this thesis is largely text-based research into Meisner technique and the psychology of attention, supported throughout by my own experience as a teacher of the technique, my observations of the students, students' feedback and constant research-based interrogation of my own practice.

Much acting process is based on psychology, yet even though our knowledge and understanding of psychology and cognition has deepened with new research, the field of actor training has remained largely fixated on earlier ideas and techniques. In the last decade, we have seen a vast increase in academic research into the cognitive perspective on performer training and audience perception through groundbreaking publications by researchers including Rick Kemp (2012), Rhonda Blair (2008), John Lutterbie (2011) and Bruce McConachie (2011). Yet, in the context of cognitive and psychological research, the Meisner technique remains an unexplored landscape — the technique is still, to some extent, shrouded in a sense of mystery. Of all the publications on the Meisner technique, few go into any depths regarding the psychological impact the technique has on the actors' ability to sustain concentration, and not more than one practitioner relates the work to self-consciousness specifically. This thesis is therefore indebted to the research of Louise Mallory Stinespring, whose PhD thesis *Principles of Truthful Acting: A Theoretical Discourse on Sanford Meisner's Practice* (1999) provides the sole example I have found of a practitioner exploring self-consciousness in Meisner technique. Stinespring's account is focused around 'truthful acting' and primarily presents how self-consciousness is damaging to the actor and why Meisner technique seeks to eliminate it. This enquiry, however, will go further in investigating how the exercises work in this context. Stinespring's thesis, although not formally published, has been an invaluable accompaniment to my own research and will be referred to throughout this investigation.

Meisner technique develops the actor's ability to listen and act on impulse, and ultimately brings the actor back to the practical aspects of training and process. It is an experiential technique — one learns by doing more than by thinking or talking. However, in order to fully grasp and communicate the process as an instructor, it is vital to form an awareness of the psychological functions at play, particularly those that make the students less self-conscious. By dissecting and pin-pointing that state

referred to as 'in the moment', the intention is to learn how to reach this state with the use of attention and perception, as well as how spontaneity and instinct are enabled as a result. By explaining how the Meisner technique works in relation to self-consciousness in the context of psychology of attention, this research will not only deepen the understanding of the Meisner process, but also result in knowledge that could be applicable to actor training in general.

Flow is a well-documented area within creative cognition and positive psychology. The main contributor to the field is Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi, who coined the term in his research into *optimal experience*. The research surrounding flow has mainly been applied to sports, health and education models, but the flow state also strongly relates to what actors call 'being in the moment'. Flow psychology includes investigations into areas like concentration, attention and creativity, but also considers the use of play and motivation. Within his research, Csíkszentmihályi has presented a popular diagram (1990: 74) charting the possibility of flow with regards to challenge versus skill during a task — an aspect that will be explored further in Chapter 3. This diagram also offers surrounding emotional states like anxiety or worry, which are deemed to prohibit the state of flow. As one of the more significant outcomes of achieving flow is the loss of self-consciousness, it seems pertinent to relate the flow state to the Meisner process in order to discover ways to enhance the flow experience in Meisner technique.

Interestingly, Meisner did include analytical elements in his training — many directly derived from Stanislavski's system. However, the key to ensuring that the actor remains present with attention directed outwards, towards the action and the other actors, lies in the way the training is outlined. Within the Meisner training, students follow a rigorous foundational process in which they are conditioned to re-train their attention on and perception of the environment — allowing for more academic elements to be added to the training successively without causing the attention to turn inward, which could be damaging to spontaneity and instinct.

For this thesis, I have chosen to focus on Meisner's three beginning exercises: Repetition, Activity and Knock on the Door. These were chosen because they are widely used and directly address the concern of self-consciousness and redirected attention. In these foundational processes, the actor starts to train their mind to direct their attention outside of themselves, to allow discovery of triggers and

impulses in their partners' actions, and to subsequently begin to divide attention between two outside sources — partner and activity — whilst allowing themselves to be affected by each moment. Within these three exercises lie a multitude of psychological processes. The aim of this research is to frame the exercises through the psychology of attention, to better illuminate the potential of the Meisner technique with regard to self-consciousness, and facilitate more accurate teaching and transmission of the process from teacher to student.

### Scope of this work

As previously stated, Meisner's exercises house a range of psychological processes, and as with all human interaction, many of those processes are determined by personality, background and environment. In order to sufficiently explore the key aspect of the technique — the redirection of attention and its effect on self-consciousness — other aspects have been left out of this thesis.

I have chosen to investigate the Meisner technique from the perspective of psychology of attention, rather than for example from developmental or social psychology, because while the Meisner technique is in many ways a developmental tool for increasing perception, it is first and foremost designed to redirect attention to the partner in order to enhance spontaneity. Actors use the exercise to change who and what they observe in their environment, and as a result, practice challenging social norms and transcending barriers. Similarly, although the technique is based on interaction between two people, it is not designed to promote social interaction, but rather to allow actors to practice staying in the present moment.

Neither does this thesis examine social roles within Meisner's process, which the types of exercises being investigated open ground for questioning. How does self-consciousness within the exercises change when working closely with the opposite sex? What effect do cultural differences have on the exercises, and in which way do those differences affect self-consciousness levels in the students? How do gender differences and social norms change between different cultures, and might this in turn have an impact on the work? Albeit a very interesting idea in anthropological terms, and a useful concept within a multicultural society, the different cultural aspects of self-consciousness are outside the scope of this enquiry, which is focused on exploring the psychological aspects of attention in order to understand how the

Meisner technique diminishes self-consciousness and enhances spontaneity actors. It should also be noted here that this thesis focuses on Meisner training in the UK, particularly in terms of observations and student feedback, with theoretical input from US sources.

This inquiry will however touch upon social psychology with regard to flow, self-consciousness in a training actor, and the detrimental effect social barriers can have on the concept of spontaneity and exploration. The reason for this inclusion is due to the difficulty students can face in the beginning of this work — because of politeness and social etiquette — often creating an initial hurdle for the students to overcome, and hence something that is pertinent to address from a training point of view.

Further, in terms of the impact this study can have on areas outside the remit of actor-training, there are clear indications that further research within this domain may provide help and guidance in the field of mental health and behavioural therapy. Through my teaching experience I have noted that the Meisner process has had a marked impact on students with issues relating to high anxiety and depression, which has led to a drop in anxiety levels and increased confidence. Moreover, students with a diagnosed non-neurotypical disorder such as Autism and Asperger's have also experienced improvements in ability to sustain eye contact and release of bodily tensions. Although this thesis does not focus on these findings, it demonstrates the wide scope of future research this work can provide, which could have a significant influence on the field of wellbeing as well as mental health.

### Thesis outline

Chapter 1 introduces Sanford Meisner's practice, the origin of the technique and its relation to Stanislavski's system, in an attempt to fully explore the extent to which the process might have been misunderstood and convoluted when introduced to the UK. The chapter provides a thorough examination of the available literature on Meisner technique — such as Meisner's *Meisner on Acting* (1987), Esper's *The Actor's Art and Craft* (2008) and Moseley's *Meisner in Practice* (2012) — are presented alongside a variety of practitioners' views on the process. The chapter also establishes the lack of analytical, psychological and cognitive research into this area, demonstrating that an investigation into how and why the technique works is a needed addition to present scholarship.

Chapter 2 introduces and defines the different types of self-consciousness that are explored in the research, their effect on spontaneity, and the way in which they can negatively affect the actor. The chapter will help differentiate between public and private self-consciousness and provides the reader with a clear understanding of what type of self-consciousness is referred to throughout the thesis. Due to the nature of self-consciousness and its relation to self-awareness, it is important to make this distinction as not all aspects of self-focus necessarily impact negatively on the actor.

Chapter 3 provides an in-depth understanding of the Repetition exercise from the perspective of Meisner himself, as well as from practitioners like Esper, Silverberg, Hart and Moseley. It begins by establishing the premise of the Repetition exercise, presenting the exercise step-by-step, and introducing common problems encountered in the beginning of the Meisner process of actor training. This is followed by a section where the exercise is viewed from the angle of psychology of attention — in particular research into attention models, flow state, and the notion of mind wandering — in order to discover insights into how and why the exercise works. This is done specifically through pinpointing the different types of attention involved and how the exercise hones each. Moreover, the use of attention in achieving a flow state is discussed particularly with regard to the importance of balancing skill and challenge, and how this concept relates to the layering of the Repetition exercise. Lastly, the concept of mind wandering is explained in relation to how it causes self-consciousness and ways in which Repetition can prevent mind wandering from occurring.

Chapter 4 establishes the pedagogical aspect of this thesis by exploring the Repetition exercise from the teacher's point of view. The chapter is structured to reflect my position as an actor trainer within the research project by focusing on my own developments of the technique and how the research acquired has contributed to the adjustments and additions to the exercises. This chapter will highlight the conditional aspect of using a process, incorporate student feedback, and present common obstacles and ways to overcome them. The last section of the chapter introduces the notion of politeness, its relation to self-regulation and inhibition, and how increasingly strict social conventions can be detrimental to spontaneity and the actor training process in general. The chapter includes ideas on how to best tackle this issue, in particular the proposal that prolonging the initial stages of the



Repetition exercise can ease the students into the work and combat the challenge of politeness. This section will also introduce the idea of using directed attention to counter-act self-regulation and inhibition, due to the attentional capacity drawing on the same source as self-regulation. In other words, the Repetition exercise works towards impulsivity by reducing the amount of self-control one can use.

Following on from the practical developments of the Repetition exercise, Chapter 5 introduces the next phase of the training: Independent Activity and Knock on the Door. When the Repetition exercise becomes increasingly embodied and automatic, it does not make the same demands on the actor's attention, as in the beginning stages. Hence, the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door both use motivation, and high stakes, in order to direct the attention outwards towards a task, and thus avoiding increased self-focus. This chapter mirrors Chapter 3 by introducing the exercises first, before explaining and examining the main principles from a psychological perspective. The first section lays out the exercises through the analysis of Meisner himself, along with those of practitioners including Esper, Moseley, Silverberg and Hart, focusing on the psychological reason for this stage in the training and the key elements involved: difficulty, urgency, plausibility and specificity. The second section sees these key elements investigated further, particularly in terms of how they affect the attention, the motivation and the self-consciousness of the actor. Finally, different types of motivation are explored in order to determine which one can be most useful for the actor in raising stakes, attentional demand, and sustaining the attention to task.

Just as the chapter on Repetition was followed by a chapter on personal pedagogical developments, Chapter 6 again addresses my own advancements and expansions to the teaching of Independent Activity and Knock on the Door. As a result of this research, adjustments to the exercises are suggested which enable the training actor to gain maximum benefit from the process, as well as allow a clear path towards application to scene and textual work. Each exercise is explained and rationalised and followed by an overview of possible problems that may be encountered using case studies. Lastly, the chapter includes a section dedicated to my previously published article (Strandberg-Long, 2018), which investigates the difference in impulsive reaction and Stanislavski's notion of counter-action (as seen in Active Analysis). Here, I approach the research from the perspective of an actor and apply my own experiences to provide a different angle to the argument. This section

explores how instinct is still vital even when motivation compels the actor to suppress their initial reaction, and how a struggle between inner and outer needs can induce emotional build up through the interaction with others.

On the whole, the thesis is a deep, thorough investigation into the workings of a technique built on the concept of non-intellectuality and instinct. The research question of how Meisner's training process diminishes self-consciousness and enhances spontaneity in actors is explored through a logical, step-by-step approach — which mirrors the technique itself — taking the reader through a journey into the psychological processes at work in a process based on changing the actor's perspective away from the self, towards the present.

## **Chapter 1: Meisner in context**

Sanford Meisner's name does not seem to carry the same familiarity amongst the European public, or indeed performers, as some of his contemporary acting practitioners. Any recognition is often associated with one of his core exercises, the *Repetition exercise*, or his sometimes-provocative demand that actors "get out of their heads" (Meisner, 1987: 45). However, Meisner's influence on twentieth century American actor training has been vast, and his technique has become increasingly visible within British drama school training over the past decade, due to its inclusion in most conservatoire acting curriculums. Yet, the discrepancies in the introduction to the process has meant there are differences of opinion about how the technique should be taught and at what point in the actors' training it should be introduced.

This chapter will aim to introduce Sanford Meisner as a practitioner, his status in America, and now in the UK, where the technique has been developed as well as reduced because of initial misrepresentations mainly in regards to its origin.

Further, there will be a presentation of how the Meisner technique is related to the Stanislavski system and how its inclusion in the processes labelled *method acting* could also have resulted in assumptions about the practice, along with the view that it is not based on (or an integral part) of Stanislavski's work. A judgement that might have delayed the technique's inclusion in British drama schools, forced modifications of the process, and created two strands of Meisner training in the UK: the "purist Meisner school" training and the Conservatoire training.

There are several books that include (relatively small) sections on the Meisner technique, including Alison Hodge's *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (2000), Bella Merlin's *Acting: The Basics* (2010), Mel Gordon's *Stanislavsky in America* (2010)<sup>2</sup> and *A Field Guide to Actor Training* (2014) by Laura Wayth. What most of them have in common is a description of Meisner's initial foundational exercises, which evidences that Meisner is known for striving for the instinctual 'in the moment' responses from his actors — through the placement of attention on the other — which he believed would bring spontaneity and emotional connection to the actors' work. This is often

---

<sup>2</sup> Due to different Russian-English transliterations there are two spellings of Stanislavski — either an "i" or a "y" at the end. The first English translations of his material, by Elizabeth Hapgood, used the Franco-Polish spelling Stanislavski, which is the spelling I have chosen throughout the thesis — unless when referred to by other people.

presented as the *raison d'être* behind his technique and/or highlighted as the key difference between Meisner and other practitioners. This review will challenge the misconception that Meisner's technique is confined to the first foundational exercises and highlight the importance of the process element of his method.

Further, this review will present the need for a thorough investigation into the psychological workings of each exercise. The current body of literature focused exclusively on Meisner's work ranges from fly-on-the-wall documentation (such as William Esper's (2008) *The Actor's Arts and Craft*) to practical explanations of the different exercises (i.e. Larry Silverberg's (1994, 1997, 1998 & 2000) "Workbook" series). Yet, while Meisner's exercises are both critiqued and praised within this literature, and while some works — such as Victoria Hart's 2006 essay "Meisner Technique" — highlight the intentions behind the exercises, the exercises are rarely dissected. There is yet to be a substantive investigation into *how* and *why* his technique works.

Furthermore, the chapter will argue that the premise and style of Meisner's own book, *Meisner on Acting* (1987) — a common inspiration for other writing on the subject — may have contributed to the exclusion of teachers who did not train directly under Meisner, resulting in a sense of 'guru-ism'. Finally, the limited inclusion of Meisner technique in the modern literature on cognition and actor training will be presented in support of the assertion that a thorough exploration of the psychological workings of the fundamental exercises, as well as the conditioning that underpins the process, is beneficial for researchers as well as practitioners and teachers of the Meisner technique.

## **1:1 From an American institution to a European revelation**

### **Meisner and the Method**

Sanford Meisner was part of the Group Theatre in New York in the 1930's, working alongside well-known practitioners such as Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg and Robert Lewis (Krasner, 2000b: 142). While the Group Theatre worked mainly as a repertory theatre company, many of its members had a keen interest in actor training (Meisner, 1987: 36). Disagreements on the best way to shape an actor's development marred the group for several years, and the Group's eventual dissolution in 1941 resulted in the development of three noteworthy acting schools: The Actors Studio (Lee

Strasberg), The Stella Adler School of Acting (Stella Adler) and The Neighbourhood Playhouse (Sanford Meisner), three schools and techniques that have “dominated text centred actor training in the US ever since” (Blair, 2008: 10). These three practitioners are credited with shaping and developing the American interpretation of Stanislavski’s system — also referred to as ‘the method’ (Shirley, 2010: 199; Halba, 2012: 127; Zazzali, 2016: 28-29). Even though their techniques differ in modus operandi and prioritisation, they all viewed actor training as a craft in itself, “emphasising pedagogy over directing” (Krasner, 2000b: 129).

Although Meisner was seen as one of the creators of the method practice, he was never as well-known as his counterparts — especially in the beginning of their careers. In the mid 1980’s this started to change, as Rosemary Malague acknowledges:

In 1985, while a great deal had been written about Strasberg and Adler, little was known about Sanford Meisner outside the confines of the Neighbourhood Playhouse School Theatre. That was about to change. Meisner’s milestones were celebrated that year with a commemorative documentary, appropriately titled “Sanford Meisner, the theatre’s best kept secret” (Malague, 2012: 111).

Around the time of the documentary, Meisner’s reputation within US theatre training circles slowly started to rise and, in time, began to eclipse those of his rivals. His book, *Meisner on Acting*, was published in late 1987; even after his death in 1997, his popularity has continued to reach beyond the United States, making his technique more well-known and practiced than during his lifetime (Ibid.).

The Meisner technique, along with its fellow American method schools of acting, was derived from Stanislavski’s system (Halba, 2012: 127; Shirley, 2010: 199).

Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) was the first practitioner in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to code a system for acting, a set of tools engineered to help the actor engage both mentally and physically with a role — what Carnicke describes as “a grammar of acting” (2000: 13). He did so by drawing on scientific and psychological research into human behaviour, and his theories were mainly based on the pre-Freudian

psychological theories of Ivan Pavlov<sup>3</sup> and Theodule Ribot<sup>4</sup>— Ribot's *affective memory* was the foundation of Stanislavski's early work (Krasner, 2000b: 135; Merlin, 2003: 16; Carnicke, 2008: 162-163; Whyman, 2008: 248-253; Page, 2019: 2). Stanislavski was rigorous in his commitment to understand and explore their work, and used his First Studio as a laboratory for actor-training developments whilst directing and producing commercial plays.

Stanislavski's prominence within actor training is likely due to the fact that he developed his system in response to witnessing the challenges of actors wrestling with new types of plays with the advent of naturalism. For example, Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1895) demanded a more naturalistic delivery of the text, as well as a need for emotionally connected relationships. This prompted Stanislavski to create a technique that emphasised the actors' "inner truth", allowing them to engage with the imaginary circumstances on a personal level, rather than concentrating on the audience's perspective (Gray, 1965: 138). He wanted the actor to move away from performativity and instead towards the creation of emotion and relationships: "love the art in yourself, rather than yourself in the art" (Stanislavski, 2009: 558).

Though the Group Theatre focused mainly on the psychological aspect of Stanislavski's work, his system was the primary influence on the development of their actor training methods (Carnicke, 2008: 7). American method practitioners chose to focus on Stanislavski's psychological theories (rather than physical aspects) in part due to World War II delaying English language publication of Stanislavski's second part of the system: *Building a character* (1949) by over a decade<sup>5</sup>, resulting in half his system appearing as the full system (Carnicke, 2008: 73). This meant that all three actor training systems (Adler, Meisner, and Strasberg) focused primarily on an actor's thought process and the pursuit of "some form of truthful and motivated goal" (Page, 2018: 1). These are all elements that were part of Stanislavski's early work and on which the Group Theatre predominately based their training sessions. Adler, Strasberg and Meisner homed in on, and developed, different aspects of

---

<sup>3</sup> Ivan Pavlov studied reactions and motivations in dogs. This work was related to physiological conditioning, which he then associated to human behaviour and the nervous system (Krasner in Hodge, 2000: 148).

<sup>4</sup> Ribot's theory of *affective memory* included how re-living or re-imagining a situation could produce the same or similar emotions as when the incident occurred (Carnicke, 2009: 155).

<sup>5</sup> The date shown is the date of the English language publication.

Stanislavski's technique with Stella Adler focusing on the sociological, Strasberg on the psychological, and Meisner on the behavioural (Krasner, 2000b: 129).

In her book *The Actor, Image, and Action* (2008), Rhonda Blair describes the strong impact these teachers had on US actor training in general, and the varied ways in which they appropriated and dismissed parts of Stanislavski's work, while applying their own behaviour and psychology methods (10). Blair claims that Strasberg, Adler and Meisner "manipulated principles of action, imagination, attention, and affective and sense memory to help the actor reach for what Stanislavski called the inner creative state — a complete engagement with the work" (2008: 40). She also suggests that, to a certain degree, all three method teachers misunderstood aspects of Stanislavski's work (Ibid.: 26), yet, emphasises that, despite the differences in approach among the three they had a common goal: to create tools to help the actor engage on a psychological level with the imaginary circumstances (2008: 10).

Nevertheless, whilst these practitioners are linked through the Group Theatre and their interest in the psychological motivations of the actor, one could argue that the fact that all three methods were derived from different aspects of Stanislavski and working towards a sense of emotional, physical or psychological "truth" (Blair, 2008: 39-40) does not create sufficient synergy to place the three methods under the same rubric. Combining the three under one name does little to differentiate the three separate strands of/approaches to Stanislavski's system that these teachers emphasised and could lead to pre-conceived ideas about the focus of Meisner's process. The word *method* does not necessarily have immediate connotations with the Meisner technique, as a more common view is that it was a creation by Lee Strasberg based on his notion of *emotional recall* (Wayth, 2014: 49).<sup>6</sup> Strasberg's emotional recall was derived from Stanislavski's early work on Pavlovian training and Ribot's notion of affective memory, which he combined with Vakhtangov's work on performative emotions (Krasner, 2000b: 135).

A strong difference of opinion over the validity and importance of Stanislavski's affective memory split the three teachers. The argument came to a head when Adler, through meetings and classes with Stanislavski himself, argued that the creator of the

---

<sup>6</sup> *Emotional recall* involves the use of one's own memories in order to trigger or evoke a certain emotional response to a scene. Krasner suggests that Strasberg insisted on the emotions being remembered rather than happening in the moment, as he argued the latter would render them out of control (Krasner in Hodge, 2000: 136).

system had abandoned the concept in favour of action-centric techniques. Strasberg refused to acknowledge this development, which resulted in the three teachers going their separate ways. This feud has been acknowledged by several practitioner-researchers in different ways. Rhonda Blair frames it with consideration, stating that Strasberg was “rejected by Adler and Meisner for more than a few reasons, but particularly in regard to his emphasis on affective memory” (2008: 44), while Mel Gordon puts it more bluntly: “even from the beginning Meisner resisted Lee’s preoccupation with emotional recall, which to him seemed unnecessary and, worse, didactic hocus-pocus” (2009: 177). Although Meisner is commonly mentioned in American scholarship as one of the method-acting creators, the Meisner technique “radically deviates from the affective memory-based techniques usually associated with the method” (Halba, 2012: 127). Meisner’s process “radically deviates from the affective memory-based techniques usually associated with the method” (Halba, 2012: 127). However, his work has been generally “understated” and less explored compared to fellow method creators Strasberg and Adler (Shirley, 2010: 199), which seems to have led to confusion in the UK regarding his stance on emotional recall, a technique that Meisner never relied on (Meisner, 1987: 10) and rather shied away from (Gordon, 2009: 177). In *The Philosophical Actor* (2010), Donna Soto-Morettini refers to Meisner as an advocate of emotional recall, stating that “Hagen, Meisner and Stanislavsky were concerned with the use of past memory to aid the actor in understanding the depth or urgency of the dramatic moment” (Soto-Morettini, 2010: 141). She elaborates on how Meisner asked his students to recall emotional events and emotional situations, implying that this was the core of Meisner’s *Emotional Preparation* (2010: 132-135).<sup>7</sup> Soto-Morettini continues to point to Meisner and Hagen as representatives of the technique — which relies on inducing emotions from personal lived experience — but interestingly, avoids mentioning its main advocate Lee Strasberg, whose technique is anchored in this concept. Referring to the actress Eleonora Duse<sup>8</sup> Soto-Morettini questions whether she imagined a “trigger object, as Hagen might suggest, or think of something in her past that made her blush before the scene started, as Meisner might have advised” (2010: 140).

---

<sup>7</sup> Emotional preparation will be explained further in Chapter 5, section 1 (5:1) and Chapter 6, section 1 (6:1), specifically in relation to the exercise “Knock on the Door”.

<sup>8</sup> Eleonora Duse is mentioned often in *Meisner on Acting* as well as in literature about him; the actress was rumoured to be able to blush on cue.



Soto-Morettini continues the critique of what she sees as Hagen and Meisner's systems, arguing that it is not enough to "simply recall feeling sad", but that the actor must revisit the situation in which they felt sad (2010: 135). In this, she refers to the cognitive psychology behind memory recollection, and more specifically the theory of 'cue-dependency' (Godden & Baddeley, 1975). Cue dependency posits that memories are not easily recalled by thinking about them, but rather accessing a memory requires a recollection of the surrounding circumstance which could live in other parts of our memories as well and make it harder to access the emotion desired (Soto-Morettini, 2020: 135). Whilst highlighting this, she encourages the use of imagination, rather than emotional memory, as a preferred tool, arguing that this would be less likely to make the actor internalise excessively or end up with a general emotional state (Soto-Morettini, 2010: 141). Interestingly, Meisner's technique actually agrees with Soto-Morettini's stance on imagination — his *emotional preparation* was completely reliant on the imaginary rather than memory. Meisner described it as "the device which permits you to start your scene, or play, in a condition of emotional aliveness," (Meisner, 1987: 78). The exercise in emotional preparation takes the form of an imaginary daydream which is crafted at home and brought to class to induce the appropriate feelings for the beginning of a scene. It is a technique relied upon only for the first moment of interaction and exists to make the actor enter the scene in an emotionally charged state (Hart, 2006: 67).

The mistaken assumption that Meisner preferred memory over imagination could result from him being referred to under the method label with Adler and Strasberg, or from the lack of full investigation into his work. As previously mentioned, several published accounts acknowledge Meisner's aversion to emotional recall which, resulted in the subsequent fall-out with Strasberg. This was even highlighted in the beginning of *Meisner on Acting* (1987) where it is clearly noted that "affective or emotional memory plays no role in the system Meisner has evolved" (10).

Nevertheless, it wasn't just emotional memory that set the three American method practitioners apart. For example, the basic notion of placement of attention in Strasberg's and Meisner's methods sets them significantly apart in their approaches to actor training, as Jonathan Pitches observes in his book *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition* (2006):

Where the psychoanalytical bias of the Strasberg method encourages his actor to focus inward, on their neurotic past, the behaviourism of Meisner trains the actor constantly to concentrate on the external signs of performance as they shift and evolve through the play (109).

It is perhaps for this reason that Meisner described Lee Strasberg as someone who made the already introverted even more so (Meisner, 1987: 36), and that producer Robert Brustein declared that “the Stanislavski system bears about as much relation to the Strasberg method as caviar does to hotdogs” as “the Strasberg actor listens intently to himself while the Stanislavskian actor listens to his surroundings” (Brustein in Pitches, 2006: 123). Actor trainer and academic Brant L. Pope (2000) concurs, accusing techniques relying on emotional recall (affective memory) of “conjuring up emotions for their own sake” and “ultimately devoid of the dynamic quality that Stanislavsky calls action, communion and adaptation” (154).

To conclude, although the three different techniques (Meisner, Adler and Strasberg) have similarities in that they all based their teachings on aspects of training that they believed were crucial to an actor’s craft, they differ vastly in their approaches, and the common name adds to the confusion as to where one ends and another begins. This is especially significant when viewed outside of the US where — as stated previously — the method is often seen as synonymous with Strasberg’s work. Meisner’s inclusion in the method acting clan likely adds to the misinterpretations of the fundamentals of his process (as in Soto-Morettini’s case), as well as fuelling prejudices based on the compared legitimacy of method approaches versus Stanislavski’s work. This only further demonstrates the importance of an investigation into the foundational principles that underpin Meisner’s work, in terms of both its origin and its psychological impact.

### Meisner’s rise in Europe

While Meisner technique has remained a cornerstone of American actor training, this has not been the case in British actor training. Actor trainer and researcher David Shirley is the only one to date to have thoroughly explored Meisner’s contribution to British Drama School training. As a founder of Conference of Drama Schools and former Chair of Federation of Drama Schools, he has a vast understanding of British conservatoires. Shirley (2010) points out:

Given his remarkable contribution to the development of acting technique in the USA and his undoubted influence on some of the world's most celebrated performers, directors and writers, it is somewhat surprising to discover that, until relatively recently, the work of Sanford Meisner remained virtually unheard of in Britain (199).

Due to its relatively late arrival in the UK, questions about the origins and pedagogy of Meisner's teachings still lay firmly over his legacy, causing many practitioners to carry differing views and understandings of his process. As I lay out the literary evidence of his technique in an effort to answer some of those questions and examine the myths, I believe it important to start at one clear point where the premise of the technique has become blurred — its introduction to the UK.

David Shirley's article on Meisner technique and its inclusion in British drama school training examines the recent influx in establishments offering training in the technique, specifically focusing on the years between 2000-2010. One of the reasons he suggests is the change of focus within the industry, from stage work to acting for camera, an acting strand generally seen as homing in on the ability to react and listen. Shirley proposes that "the emphasis on truthful interaction, coupled with naturalistic, spontaneous behaviour" could make Meisner technique a very fitting process for the "exposing demands of the camera frame" (2010: 204). Shirley's observation regarding the usefulness of the technique in acting for recorded media is validated by the increased inclusion of Meisner technique following the shift in drama school training (which has itself been the result of an industry offering increased opportunities within television and film).

Shirley adds that although the reasons for the demand of the Meisner technique increasing are worth investigating, even more interesting is the fact that there are indeed disagreements among Meisner practitioners in the UK around their understanding of how the technique should be taught (Ibid.: 210). Yet, whilst Shirley acknowledges the existence of discrepancies in teaching methods within the Meisner community, his account of the way Meisner technique was introduced to the UK provides some explanation to its underlying reasons. Shirley credits actor trainer and director Scott Williams with bringing the technique to Britain through his work with the Actors Centre in 1996 (Ibid.: 208). He then, however, adds that Scott indeed teaches a version of Meisner's technique only using the foundational exercises:

Scott Williams prefers to focus almost exclusively on Meisner's own exercises and teaching methods, arguing that the approach is so self-contained that the need for actors to identify objectives/super objectives etc. becomes redundant (Ibid.: 210).

Shirley's revelation makes us aware not just of Meisner's *own exercises*, but by highlighting that Williams *prefers* to focus on those, indicates other elements existence within the technique which, when neglected, must render it reduced in its entirety. I recall a workshop I attended during my master's degree studies, where Williams stated that: "there is no character, and there is no objective",<sup>9</sup> which would significantly set the technique apart from the commonplace Stanislavskian training. Due to the authority that Williams' Meisner teaching held in Britain, when the technique was first introduced, many current Meisner tutors studied his version of the process. Although modifications will be present in most teachers' work — often made in good faith to simplify teaching and encourage learning — when introducing an established method such as Meisner's, the unintended consequence of reducing a process can be damaging, risking the technique to gain a reputation as one-dimensional and 'gimmicky'.

Even though Williams stresses that he indeed teaches *his version* of the Meisner technique, his provocative statement regarding the lack of an objective in the process would make the technique difficult to establish within British actor training institutions that still rely and focus heavily on the Stanislavskian tradition. Any such worries, however, would easily be diminished by closer inspection of the complete training. When Shirley questions Williams' argument regarding the redundancy of identifying objectives and super objectives in the Meisner process, there is no evidence of this idea's origin in Meisner's technique. Shirley notes that although Williams "stopped short of attempting to argue that this was a view shared by Meisner himself, it is worth noting that very little space is given over to this aspect of Stanislavsky's work in Meisner's own book" (Ibid.: 210).

With regards to this statement, it is important to note that *Meisner on Acting* (1987) is heavily focused on the first year of the two-year training. Hence, Shirley is correct in observing that the exercises presented are predominately Meisner's own

---

<sup>9</sup> Quote taken down in person at workshop facilitated by Scott Williams at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, November 2010.

creations. However, it would be incorrect to assume that that is the extent of the process, as the second year holds many additional aspects of the technique, including work closely related to and derived from Stanislavski's system. This might be seen as one of the first profound misunderstandings of the technique as it has been practiced in Britain, particularly as an examination of the American literature on Meisner technique does indeed present the notion that Meisner included more analytical elements in his training, albeit at a less preparatory stage than his contemporaries. In the next section, the challenges with UK dissemination of Meisner's second year of curriculum will be examined, particularly through the analyses of Krasner, Soto-Morettini, and Esper.

## **1:2 Exploring the full technique**

### A two-year process

As presented by Mel Gordon, Meisner established a two-year acting curriculum, with the first year dedicated to his own improvisatory exercises focused on listening, reacting and responding impulsively (2010: 178). Meisner believed this was an important foundation for any actor to master before they could begin to work on script analysis and character work, which would be predominant in the second year of training. The placing of the improvisational exercises before analytical engagement is key to Meisner's process, as he wanted the actors to master the art of "behaving naturally" before embarking on the second year. This is confirmed by the curriculum at the Neighbourhood Playhouse Theatre School in New York, where Meisner began his career as a teacher and which has kept the training true to its founder's wishes. In Krasner's *Method Acting Reconsidered* (2000), one of Meisner's teaching disciples, C.C. Courtney, comments on the wide range of disciplines the students are exposed to after the foundational year, which includes work on scene analysis and character work to name a few:

The second year is even more cramped than the first; it is here that character work comes into the fore [...] Script analysis is intensified and styles are introduced, including work on Shakespeare and other classics [...] performance techniques and advanced speech and voice techniques supports these investigations (2000: 293).

The variety and depth that the training reaches after year one make it neither one-dimensional nor difficult to integrate into British conservatoires; one could argue that the misconception that Meisner's book presents the totality of his technique has reduced its scope in the UK and forced Meisner teachers to adjust the assumed Meisner practice to fit in with British drama school training.<sup>10</sup> As Shirley adds in his article: the technique's inclusion in British drama schools has not come without problems for conservatoire training:

Whilst it would be foolhardy to deny the influence of the method on UK-based training practice, such influence has tended to be shaped and adapted in order to meet the demands of British performance traditions rather than replace them entirely (2010: 207).

Another view seems to be that Meisner technique does not encourage character work, again something that could have been presumed as a result of the lack of published work pertaining to the second-year training. Both Shirley's description of Meisner as "less interested in the notion of character than in the need to establish credible and dynamic scenic relationships" (2010: 201), and Soto-Morettini's assumption that he "probably didn't see character as an essential property" (2010: 207), are typical examples of this stance. Meisner himself was not always straightforward when it came to explaining the use of character to his students, due to his beliefs that character would come from the self and that the emotions induced by circumstance would be the main basis for character development:

In one way you never begin character work. In another way, you've already begun to do characters because character comes from how you feel about something. So every time you get up and do an exercise, you were playing a character, though the word wasn't mentioned (Meisner, 1987: 97).

Looking at this statement, it is easy to see how one might discount character work as a non-vital component of the technique, but doing so disregards the elaborations and detailed work of the second year. As previously mentioned, Meisner's pedagogic practice was anchored in allowing the first year to focus on interacting instinctively

---

<sup>10</sup> It is mainly the idea of having no objective, actions or super-objectives that have been flagged as difficult to incorporate into British Drama School training, and has made teachers have to adjust the exercises to sit better alongside Stanislavski (Shirley, 2010: 211). However, as will be explained here, these are all elements that are incorporated into the full Meisner process.

from the self. As Victoria Hart (2006) notes, “the actor begins from himself — how he responds and behaves in an imaginary circumstance”, a process that is allowed considerable time in the first year, but in the second year “he must begin with the play or its equivalent and the character he will be bringing to life” (52).

These postulations that Meisner technique would be a somewhat reductive process compared with Stanislavski is unsurprising, considering the clear shortfall of literature exploring the second year. William Esper, whose book *The Arts and Craft of Acting* (2008) concentrates on the first year of the process, recognised the lack of publications highlighting the extended technique. He wrote his second book *The Actor’s Guide to Creating a Character* (2014) with this in mind, focusing on the second year of the training and even going as far as to state in the prologue that: “Actors who nurture a vision of themselves as true theatre artists will want to push their talents further. They’ll know that they won’t be able to bring the greatest roles ever written to life using the first-year work alone” (2014: 6). Esper’s second book is a continuation of the first and encompasses many examples of how Stanislavski’s system was deeply ingrained in the Meisner technique. Esper introduces both actions and particularisations,<sup>11</sup> and clarifies that these will not impose on the spontaneity of the first year training due to the embodied skills the actors have received, and reinforcing that the added elements of the second year training are just as important to the process (Ibid.: 201).

As a result of the way Meisner technique has been presented in the UK, its strong links to and origin in the Stanislavski system have been overlooked. It is important to understand that, although the preliminary focus may be different, Meisner’s process does not go against Stanislavski’s principles. In Rebecca Schneider’s book *Theatre and History* (2014) Meisner — again seen as the creator of a technique solely comprising of the anti-analytical exercises from his first-year curriculum — is presented as someone who not just adapted but was often seen as *reducing* Stanislavski’s work (Schneider, 2014: 34). It is not surprising that ideas like this contributed to the delayed inclusion of Meisner technique in British drama school institutions and conservatoires, which for the most part advocate a Stanislavski-based approach. As can be seen in this section, the Meisner process encompasses both practical and analytical components, many linking straight back to Stanislavski’s

---

<sup>11</sup> Particularisations are a second year Meisner technique exercise used to personalise a circumstance or action for the actor, and work in the same way as Stanislavski’s “as if”.

work. With this in mind the next section will explore in more detail how the Meisner process took inspiration from the Stanislavski system.

### Meisner and Stanislavski

The similarities between the techniques may be apparent, and it is no secret that Meisner did get his inspiration from Stanislavski; the relationship between the two is explored and clarified by many key practitioners and researchers, including Bella Merlin, David Krasner, and Rosemary Malague. In an interview with Paul Gray, Meisner claims to have been inspired by Stanislavski, whose system he was introduced to through elaborate accounts by his friend Stella Adler (Gray, 1964: 139). He also admits to getting inspiration from Stanislavski’s two co-directors Sudakov and Rapoport. Their work introduced him to the concepts of the reality of doing,<sup>12</sup> action based work, and placement of attention in order to avoid self-consciousness (Cole & Strasberg, 1960: 35-81).<sup>13</sup> The table below outlines the ideas and theories of Sudakov and Rapoport that are most closely linked to the concepts underpinning Meisner’s stance on training, and thus most likely to have inspired the development of the process:

<b>Rapoport</b>	<b>Sudakov</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outward attention = less self-consciousness and more presence</li> <li>• Important to train listening, observation, and perception in actors</li> <li>• Real emotional root within fantasy = finding connection easier</li> <li>• What and why are conscious decisions, but the how should be involuntarily</li> <li>• Living relationships have to be built ‘in the moment’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action is the basis of the creative state — feelings stem from action</li> <li>• Action comes from a spontaneous reaction</li> <li>• The creative state is destroyed by self-consciousness</li> <li>• Diffused (or internal) attention leads to inability to act</li> <li>• The reality of doing is a practical engagement, not just intellectual</li> <li>• Complex psychology, reduced to simple physical action = concrete behaviour</li> </ul>

(Figure 1: Table showing the ideas and concepts of Rapoport & Sudakov that inspired Meisner’s process, Cole, 1955: 33-38, 42-43, 51, 57, 71-76, 80-84, 87)

<sup>12</sup> Meisner would define the foundation of acting as “the reality of doing” (Meisner, 1987:16).

<sup>13</sup> In Toby Cole’s book (with introduction by Lee Strasberg), *Acting: A Handbook of the Stanislavsky Method* (1955), Sudakov and Rapoport lay out their ideas about acting. The use of attention, observation, self-consciousness, action and reality of doing are explored.



Regarding Stanislavski's direct influence on Meisner's technique, Bella Merlin (2010) argues that close inspection of Meisner's foundational exercises reveals the likelihood that he was inspired by Stanislavski's communicational and interactive notion of 'communion' (183). Merlin goes on to say that this "tool" is evident in the way Meisner's technique channels the actors' "energy into detailed observation of each other with the quality of dynamic listening" (Ibid.). Merlin refers to communion in her book *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (2003) as "irradiation" or energy that is exchanged between stage partners involving "connecting to your partner through brain, heart and body and identifying a desire driven activity, not just an intellectual one" (70). Merlin states that communion is still about allowing actions to come from an inner emotional connection, but that attention placement is directed outwards towards the other actors and not inwards towards the self (Ibid.: 64).

As previously mentioned, Meisner opposed the increasing intellectual and "inward looking" exercises initiated by The Group Theatre and Lee Strasberg in particular (Meisner, 1987: 36), and instead concentrated on devising ways to tap into the actor's inner instinctive impulses. Working off impulse and partner was something that Stanislavski himself spent the latter part of his life exploring (Carnicke, 2008: 14) as he moved towards a more action-centric process. David Shirley (2010) states that Meisner's agenda was similar to the conclusions Stanislavski drew towards the end of his career, and notes that Meisner's "shift in emphasis away from the emotional interiority and intellectual introspection chimes with Stanislavski's own deliberations on the system and his subsequent development of what became known as the method of physical actions" (201).

Shirley's assertion that Stanislavski's intention behind the method of physical actions was to move towards a more spontaneous and reactive action-based technique is even more evident in Stanislavski's very last invention: *active analysis*. Active analysis is a technique, which due to its censorship and consequent banning by the Soviet state, did not surface within actor training establishments until the 1960s (Sternagel, Levitt & Mersch, 2012: 323). Further, the main texts on the subject — written by Stanislavski's apprentice Maria Knebel — have yet to be translated into English (Merlin, 2007: 9). The technique was supposedly suppressed due to its holistic approach, as the technique brings mind, body and spirit into textual analysis, and works by combining study of the dramatic dialogue interspersed with

improvised études,<sup>14</sup> focusing on action and reaction and using your fellow actors as the basis for your response. This strong emphasis on focusing on your partner suggests that ‘communion’ was also the starting point for Stanislavski’s analysis, which, similar to Meisner’s work, was a rehearsal process and not a performance technique. Active Analysis is similar to the method of physical actions, but, as Bella Merlin states, is “more spontaneous and has the ability to create more illogical and erratic results due to the fact that it’s wholly dependent on the actions of your stage partner” (Merlin, 2003: 143).

Active analysis does not just encourage communication between stage actors, but also creates an indirect communion with the audience by making actors directly communicate and work off each other. As Merlin argues, spectators become involved and empathise when they believe there is genuine communion between actors — only when there is an uninterrupted exchange of thoughts and actions will the spectators be convinced by what they see on stage (Merlin, 2003: 64-65). This notion of the action of the scene resulting from communication and attention on the partner is the very foundation of Meisner technique, as Merlin notes:

Although I haven’t trained extensively in Meisner technique, I find Meisner’s words strike so many chords with my own experience and understanding of Stanislavsky’s Active Analysis, his principles are gold dust (Merlin, 2010: 183).

Meisner’s work might not have been as well-known as the other method practitioners, or indeed as Stanislavski himself, but it warrants its own place in history as it can be argued the system Meisner devised was closely linked to the type of action-based improvisational work Stanislavski himself spent his later years developing:

Meisner reconstituted Stanislavsky’s system of acting, founded on the principle of psychological realism, into his own methodology. Meisner’s work rests on the premise that any performance that yields psychological realism

---

<sup>14</sup> The word *étude* is derived from a short musical composition, usually difficult to master and developed in order to practice a certain musical skill. In Stanislavski’s work, as Sharon Carnicke explains, it is a non-scripted scene performed by actors based in certain circumstances or facts. An *étude* can be created and explored with the actors’ own words or silently (Carnicke, 2008:173).

will not result as self-will but emerge through the actors' reactions in performance (Stinespring, 2000: 98).

The suggestion that all the method practitioners, including Meisner, “misunderstood aspects of [Stanislavski's] work” (Blair, 2008: 26), was understandable at the time of the writing of Blair's book, as not until very recently have we understood the underlying core of Stanislavski's later work — active analysis — and its similarities to Meisner technique. Communion's position as the starting point of both Meisner's technique and Stanislavski's active analysis strengthens the link between the two creators and their view on acting and actor training. This becomes evident when you consider that although active analysis was banned by the Soviet state, resulting in Stanislavski's ideas regarding an interactive rehearsal approach not surfacing for decades, Meisner chose to focus on the same aspect of the system that Stanislavski himself had concluded was the key to a more spontaneous and action-based technique.<sup>18</sup>

Further, some see Meisner's development of his technique as something Stanislavski himself did not achieve entirely — a fully logical, step-by-step process which can be seen as more of a “system” than Stanislavski's own set of tools. As Natalie Crohn Schmitt points out in her book *Actors and Onlookers* (1990): Stanislavski never succeeded in making his system fully systematic (95). Malague believes it is Meisner's unique system, and the fact that it is repeatable, that is a key reason for his continuing and ever-expanding popularity (Malague, 2012: 116), and what sets him apart from the other method practitioners (Ibid.: 212). This is a sentiment that is also echoed by Clayre Checcini Holub, who Malague cites as saying that the main reason for Meisner's widespread appeal was the absence of systematic, teachable, step-by-step procedure in Strasberg's and Adler's approaches (Checcini Holub in Malague, 2012: 116-117).

Stanislavski did refer to his method as a system, however he was open to the actor's own interpretations of it and wanted his work to become led primarily by the actors' own individual needs. Stanislavski himself stated that the system was more of a guide for the actor to seek help and advice from, rather than a philosophy (Stanislavski, 1990: 371). He encouraged the actor to use the work at home and

---

<sup>18</sup> The similarities between Active Analysis and Meisner technique, and in particular the concept of ‘counter-action’, will be delved into further throughout Chapter 6:2, where I explore how the two techniques complement each other and where they might differ.

“forget about it on stage”, as the system reflected human nature (Ibid.). Stanislavski’s statement gives a lot of scope for interpretation and allows the actor to find his own way within the basic principles. Yet, as helpful as this can be, it can also be daunting for a novice actor looking for a strong guide to follow. The importance of the process in Meisner’s method will be returned to later on in this chapter, however, the links between Stanislavski and Meisner further support the strengths of Meisner technique when approached fully — despite any potential misinterpretations of Stanislavski’s work he may have made.

### Impulse above intellect

In terms of Meisner’s own developments, the evidence of misinterpretation of any of Stanislavski’s principles is not clear-cut. As presented earlier, due to Soviet publishing restrictions, parts of Stanislavski’s theories were overlooked at the time Meisner engaged with the work, however, to assume that he misunderstood aspects of the technique could be seen as misrepresentation in itself, as it infers disregard rather than deliberate selectivity and extension. In fact, according to Kim Durham (2004), an actor trainer and researcher, Meisner’s process “is an attempt to bridge the gap between Stanislavskian will and the revelation of the unwilled spontaneous reaction”, meaning that by being open to stimuli in your environment, the actor can have a need and will, and still be present and reactive to what is happening around them (152). Out of all the method practitioners, Meisner focused most on the communication between actors, and the impact this present interaction had on their spontaneity (Krasner, 2000a: 24). Rose-Mary Malague (2012) argues that Meisner, by honing in on this instinctual reaction — rather than simply interpreting Stanislavski’s work — stands out as a visionary due to the creativity and scope of his own exercises (112).

The Repetition exercise is the most documented of all of Meisner’s own exercises and has (as previously alluded to) become synonymous with Meisner’s process, sometimes leading to the presumption that this is the full extent of the technique.<sup>19</sup> Repetition encompasses the basic principles of the technique and lays the foundation for the actor’s understanding of Meisner’s concept the *reality of doing* (Hart, 2006:

---

<sup>19</sup> This exercise will be explored in detail throughout Chapter 3:1.

52). It is only, however, the beginning of a rich process aimed at encouraging the student actor to react instinctively:

The Meisner technique is a sequential series of exercises designed to disconnect actors from dialectical thought processes and to reconnect with what [Meisner] regards as the more basic instincts. Meisner's stated goal is to teach actors to respond spontaneously to outside stimuli, to act on impulse. And since outside stimuli frequently emanate from one acting partner, Meisner aims to connect actors with one another (Malague, 2012: 112).

Meisner was aware of the focus on the self that had dominated Stanislavski's earlier teachings, and believed that, rather than self-generating actions, a good actor was able to authentically pursue their character's objective through reacting to his/her surroundings (Hart, 2006: 52; Malague, 2012: 112). Reacting can therefore be said to be the foundation of Meisner's Repetition technique (Krasner, 2000b: 146).

The Repetition exercise encourages the actors to deeply listen and react to their partner and surroundings whilst repeating their observations between them, tapping into their use of attention to develop instinct and improvisation ability. This form of communication was developed to surpass the pressure of intellectual creativity, in comparison to other improvisational techniques. Meisner was unimpressed with the improvisations carried out by the Group Theatre, going as far as to call it "intellectual nonsense" which ran the risk of redirecting the actors' attention away from interacting with each-other in the moment, and onto the actors' own ability as performers:

I decided I wanted an exercise for actors where there is no intellectuality. I wanted to eliminate all that headwork, to take away all the mental manipulation and get to where the impulses come from. And I begin with the premise that if I repeat what I hear you saying, my head is not working. I'm listening, and there is an absolute elimination of the brain (Meisner, 1987: 36).

Although an "absolute elimination of the brain" could be seen as a rather drastic and inappropriate description, in this case, one could say that "brain" stands for analytical thought. Meisner is well known for demanding that an actor "gets out of their own head", in order to be fully connected to their emotional life (Meisner, 1987:

47). This notion that has been widely adopted by actor trainers and directors alike, not necessarily because of their familiarity with Meisner's work, but because of the importance of the underlying message of the metaphor. As Aileen Gonsalves writes in John Abbot's *The Acting Book* (2012), "what we're trying to do is to get [the actor's] focus away from themselves and onto someone else, so they can respond without thinking. They need to get out of their heads" (172).

Equally, there have been numerous accounts criticising Meisner's choice of words with regards to the literal meaning of not involving the "head" in the actors' work, and in the encouragement of a non-intellectual technique. This critique is mostly based on the impossible notion of an actor 'stopping thinking', which, for someone who is already prone to analysis, could be a counterproductive request. In fact, the literature on this is passionate, almost combative in tone, on both sides of the argument. Malague criticises Meisner's non-intellectual approach, as well as the consequences of a teacher who asks an actor not to think or analyse the situation they are in. She particularly expresses concern over a process that conditions the actors to follow the instructor's lead without hesitation or analytical engagement accusing Meisner of mystifying his own technique by not explaining the theoretical and psychological premise behind it:

Meisner's determined anti-intellectualism extends beyond his admonishments that actors not think; he goes so far as to disavow critical thought and theoretical process, claiming that he refined his technique chiefly through instinct. This mystification of his own theory functions like a "keep out" sign defying attempts to analyse or interpret the ideological implications of the Meisner technique itself (2012: 112-113).

Malague criticises Meisner's lack of transparency with regards to how he developed his technique, yet Meisner never publicly expressed an inclination to analyse the theoretical aspect of his exercises. It would be reasonable to presume he had less interest in self-analysis of the work, and came to his conclusions through experiment and experience. For example, one would not need to understand the theoretical evidence of gravity in order to be able to kick a football into a goal; physical practice and observation would be sufficient experience to be able to engage with the problem faced. Further, Meisner's admission of having developed his process through instinct does not stop others from analysing it. Malague's frustration with

the lack of process-theory could be the result of a distinct lack of published works analysing the theories behind Meisner's work, or indeed on *how* impulsive behaviour is reached in this manner and why *reacting* rather than *acting* would make an actor less self-conscious and more in touch with their impulses. This enquiry seeks, in part, to challenge this lack of process-theory.

More critique surrounding the metaphor of 'getting out of your head' comes from Rebecca Schneider and Evelyn Tribble. Schneider, in *Theatre and History* (2014), introduces the problem of "the venerated acting teacher inspired by Sanford Meisner, whom unwittingly fuels anti-intellectualism" (Schneider, 2014: 33); Tribble, in her chapter of Blair and Cook's *Theatre, Performance and Cognition* (2016), acknowledges that actors often fear being in their heads and intellectual approaches to acting. Tribble goes on to state that "such discourse is often the result of contradictory binary concepts such as inside-out versus outside-in and mind versus body" (136). Yet, proving this is a complicated matter, she justifies Meisner's use of words in part, whilst simultaneously disagreeing with their validity:

In theories such as [Meisner's], the body, the instincts and the emotions are arrayed against the mind, reason, mentality, the head and cognition. But this point is probably meant to be as much a prompt or a heuristic as a literal description against intellect; nevertheless, the idea that the performer who eschews thought is someone more authentic than the performer who is in her head is an enduring myth (Ibid.).

Whilst Tribble's statement regarding a thinking performer is valid, the type of thinking Meisner suggested was detrimental to an actor — attention directed towards the self and away from the action of the play — is a different concept to eschewing *any* thought. Meisner did not ask his performers to disengage their minds completely, as most parts of the Repetition exercise would be impossible to do if the actor did not have conscious engagement with their immediate surroundings. For example, Meisner asks his students to interpret someone's silence and respond from that interpretation of the partner's behaviour (Meisner, 1987: 29, 32). This would be impossible without a form of thinking. As David Krasner states in *An Actor's Art and Craft* (2011): "Actors often think that listening to one's partner on stage means staring at him and not thinking, however active listening means that the actors' inner

monologue and thoughts are processing the words and gestures of the other actors with awareness” (94).

The Repetition exercise exists to stop the actor analysing what he or she should say or do as an actor on stage; in order to be fully connected to the present moment his exercise demands full concentration on the behaviour of the partner, a reality that keeps changing along with the partner’s behaviour, which triggers impulses in the actor and should not be censored or analysed outside of the given circumstance.

In *Play, But Don’t Play Games!* (2012), Hilary Halba compares the actor’s engagement in the exercise as a “participant in a fast moving sport”, in which the action-centric and focused actor responds before thinking about which response to make, “metaphorically batting the ball back before he/she can consciously analyse what he/she is doing” (134). Action preceding analysis goes for both analysis of the action and the situation, though the situation will have an impact on the impulsive reaction. Esper explains that it is our impulses that are being developed, not our minds, hence we do not think our way into a change of observation — we instinctually change it when we see a shift in the other (2008: 39). He warns about the problem of overthinking in the Repetition exercise by stating that “you must respond to what you hear from your partner without analysis. Anytime you engage your mind in Repetition, you mask your true impulses and it can throw yourself off the exercise” (Ibid.). While both Esper and Halba argue for the importance of ‘acting before thinking’, they differ in their approaches: Esper’s knowledge comes across as more observational in comparison to Halba’s, which deliberately analyses Meisner technique from the perspective of play theory and presence.

Action versus analysis — external versus internal attention — and its impact on attention is a concept very relevant to — and yet to be explored fully in association with — the Meisner technique, especially in regards to *why* the technique combats worry and anxiety as well as self-consciousness. Merlin’s statement about the use of attention in Meisner’s process alludes to the power of such work:

Whatever you’re doing is always in response to your partner, because you’re really listening to them. And this quality of attention instantly achieves two things: your interaction with your partner is incredibly alive, and you feel less self-conscious because your consciousness isn’t on yourself (2010: 184).



However accurate Merlin's acknowledgement is, simply redirecting the attention takes a lot of practice, and the success of the technique relies on the procedure it follows. In this thesis, I aim to explore the psychological process underlying Meisner's foundational exercises, with the intention of explaining how and why the technique does indeed make the actor more present and less anxious on stage, as well as reinforcing the importance of continued exposure to the exercises. The creation of the Repetition exercise was the first step in a process which layers the learning in a way so that the actor must master one step before moving onto another. Mastering one element fully before progressing removes the possible worry and anxiety that can be felt about increasing the difficulty too quickly. Worry and anxiety play a large part in directing our attention to ourselves, resulting in self-consciousness. Meisner's technique was created to work against those feelings to allow the actor a sort of freedom from making choices "by removing the pressures of being clever, interesting or exciting and instead just concentrate on the partner" (Courtney, 2000:292). While its importance is often overstated, the Repetition exercise and the imperative to move through the process one step at a time evidences Meisner's focus on attention over intellect.

### A process — not a toolbox

The Repetition exercise is also the exercise that is easiest to simulate in a classroom, which has led to it being seen as a training tool for any teacher who is or isn't familiar with the training as a whole — resulting in some believing that, in contrast to Stanislavski, a teacher with experience of the technique is not a requirement (Gordon, 2009: 176); the primary difference between Stanislavski's system and Meisner's process is that Stanislavski's system (as currently taught in the UK) is built up of several tools,<sup>20</sup> which can be taught in varying order and called upon as and when needed,<sup>21</sup> whereas Meisner's system is dependent on the preceding exercise informing the next.

The exercises can be deceptive because of the apparently simple starting point; however, this is not an indication that an untrained teacher has the knowledge and vision to guide the actors to a place where the exercise has a positive impact. When

---

<sup>20</sup> In Merlin's *The Stanislavsky Toolkit* (2007) she explains that some tools are clustered together due to the benefits a holistic approach would give, and other tools stand alone. (9).

<sup>21</sup> This is not the same for his later system of active analysis, which *does* follow a step by step method.

stating that Meisner's technique works as a system (Schmitt, 1990: 116), it means that every step needs to be adhered to in order as presented to reach the full benefits of the method, rather than be treated as an ad hoc toolbox. Merlin warns of treating the Meisner process as individual components. She argues that because of the simplicity of the exercises one could be tempted to "pluck them out of the book and try them straight away". However, she continues by noting that this should only happen if the teacher understands the order of the exercises and the reason behind them as "otherwise it'll short circuit the process" (Merlin, 2010: 184). Bella Merlin's acknowledgement of the importance of the order of — and reason behind — the exercises points to a system that, although simple, needs to be seen as a whole, particularly in terms of its psychologically conditioning effects.

This is not to say that Meisner's exercises cannot be explored and introduced in the classroom, but that unless the tutor understands and explains to the students the time needed for real results, the exercise could suffer negative representations. As Gonsalves points out: "this exercise takes several sessions to fine tune, but once it is understood and introduced properly it can be practiced not unlike barre-exercises in order to improve the results" (2012: 174). In *Method Acting Reconsidered* (2000) playwright and actor trainer C. C. Courtney reiterates this aspect of Meisner technique further by stating that "the complete Repetition exercise cannot be taught in a few classes or even in a semester" (292). Courtney emphasises this by presenting the amount of time set aside for this exercise at the Neighbourhood Playhouse: "basic repetition alone is the only exercise in acting class three hours a day, five days a week, for the first several months" (Ibid.). This clearly indicates the many layers there are to the Repetition exercise and the fine-tuning of perception skills the students receive through engaging with each other over a longer time. A factor that — due to the time restrictions institutions adhere to — has possibly added to the past reluctance to integrate the method into British drama school training.

Regarding the literature surrounding Meisner, there is a strong emphasis in publications on the very beginning of the Repetition exercise. This is the part where one actor faces another and starts by observing something physical. These initial observations could range from clothing, to physical attributes such as: "you have a black t-shirt" or "you have long hair". This part of the technique is referred to so frequently in literature that this initial stage could be seen as disproportionately represented, where in reality, it is a small part of the Repetition exercise designed to

alleviate intellectual analysis on the part of the observer as they voice what they see without much thought. It is merely a vehicle to allow the actors to slowly connect with each other through subtext, and will be discarded as soon as the actors start to comment on each other's physical behaviour, which is in constant flow and continuously offers the actor an anchor to the present moment. This aspect of the Repetition will be explained further in the Chapter 3:1 and Chapter 4:3.

There is a risk in this work that an actor might point out something that would cause offence, a possibility which is highlighted when there is limited understanding of the importance of each stage of the exercise in the progressive development of the actors. In *An Actress Prepares* (2012) Rosemary Malague criticises the start of the Repetition exercise for running the risk of causing offence, relying on instigating conflict, the possibility of being sexist and inhibiting actors more than freeing them (127-133). The specifics of Malague's concerns will be presented in the relevant chapters of this thesis.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to point out at this stage that Malague admits in her book that although she was educated about the technique in theory, she had not experienced it herself, and her intention was never to "engage in a semester of work on Meisner, but to experiment with the foundational level" (2012: 130). It is likely that the choice to take one exercise out of context of the full process contributed to Malague's concerns. Yet, it is not surprising to read critique regarding the initial stages when there is a clear lack of theoretical and psychological exploration and explanation of the process element of the full technique in the publications available.

## **1:3 Meisner in focus**

### **Main publications**

The obvious place to look for information on the Meisner technique would be Meisner's own book *Meisner on Acting* (1987). The book, which Meisner wrote in collaboration with his former student Dennis Longwell, is a fly-on-the-wall-style narration following Meisner himself and a class of actors through the first 15 months of training. It introduces not just the exercises, but also the students and their individual concerns and journeys, and at the end of each section includes Meisner's

---

<sup>22</sup> Malague's critique regarding causing offence will be further presented in the Chapter 4:3, whereas the concern regarding the conflict element will be noted in Chapter 5:1.

own feelings and thoughts on the training. The possible downfall here is that the only time we hear Meisner speak, outside of his classroom, is in the conversations between himself, the co-writer and the assistant, recorded after the lessons. Although the conversations among them are engineered to give us an insight into the daily workings and progress of the class, the fact that both the assistant and writer are former students of Meisner's results in a tendency to discuss the training with inside knowledge of the process; it becomes clear that Meisner has taught his classes in the same way for decades.

In *Acting: The Basics* (2010), Bella Merlin discusses the way Meisner's book is written and compares it to the other method practitioners' publications, with the view that the book is a testament to his dedication to his teaching practice:

This isn't a 'how to' book like Adler's book; this isn't a thought through presentation like Strasberg's; this isn't a semi-fictional class like Stanislavsky's; or collected thoughts like Meyerholds'. This is a notated daily journey through an actor-training program with a man who says that he only enjoys himself and feels free when he is teaching, and who understands that the teaching of acting is an art form in itself (184).

Merlin is right in her acknowledgement of how the book gives a good insight into the relationship Meisner had with his students (and former students) and of his absolute devotion to teaching his own technique. Yet, seeing as this is the only book he wrote on the subject, one can easily see the origins of the confusion regarding the extent of his technique. Meisner himself was highly sceptical towards any textbooks about acting, as he did not believe his work, or the development of an actor in general, could be grasped through literature in the same way as one could gain knowledge of law or architecture through reading about it (Meisner, 1987: xvii). He argued that the tool of acting is different to that of other jobs, as the tool is the self; hence, it would be different for everyone and there is "no universal rule applicable to any two actors in exactly the same way" (Ibid.).

There is a defensive quality to this statement which is apparent in parts of the book as well. Examples can be seen when Meisner accuses other acting teachers of having no vision, stating that "there are no teachers of acting technique around. They are all fakers" (1987: 186). Further, he diminishes other teachers for lacking in a clear, logical, step-by-step approach — a real clue as to why he set out his process in the

way he did. At one point in the book it becomes clear that Meisner handpicked the students he wanted to train to become teachers of his technique, evidencing his desire to control how the teachings were spread, and to avoid misinterpretations of the process (185). That said, hindsight demonstrates that it would have been well worth him including the full year training in his book, which could have prevented confusion in later years.

William Esper's book *The Actor's Art and Craft* (2008) is presented in a very similar fashion to Meisner's. However, here we follow a fictional class, each member created from Esper's accumulated years of experience and introduced individually in the beginning of the book. This book can be seen as including the pedagogy of the teaching within the narration — *how* Esper talks and interacts with the class and the individuals becomes almost as important as the process itself, feeding into the notion that there is a particular way that Meisner *should* be taught. Esper, similarly to Meisner, accuses other acting teachers of offering merely “helpful hints and anecdotes”, compared to Meisner's logical system, which according to Esper “[t]akes an artist as raw material and builds the skills necessary for him to excel at his art from the ground up” (Esper, 2008: 6). Esper is set out immediately as a “master teacher” of the technique (Ibid.: 3), and someone who has both refined and extended it (Ibid.: 5). He acknowledges early on that, although Meisner “[w]rote a wonderful book”, because of time constraints and his personal energy “it is incomplete” (Ibid.: 9). He goes on to explain that he would like to introduce the areas left out of *Meisner on Acting* because “the proliferation of Meisner technique has led to the dilution of it”. Esper does add several exercises in his book like “the Action Problem” (Ibid.: 142) and “The Domestic Exercise” (Ibid.: 234), elaborative improvisations with different types of stakes and interactions. In comparison with Meisner's book, Esper does include more details on the presented exercises, however, as with Meisner the book is co-written with former student Damon DiMarco, and is similarly to Meisner's book a documentation of the first year.

Another noteworthy aspect of both books is that, by not speaking directly to the reader, their discussions with their former students gives the impression that the reader is on the outside — fuelling the perception that Meisner technique is exclusive to its participants. This, it can be argued, has contributed to a sense of ‘guru-ism’ amongst the teaching process and of reluctance to further develop the technique. As David Krasner notes in his book *An Actor's Art and Craft* (2011):

There is a lucrative “industry” of actor training, particularly in the United States, that requires “certification” to teach a prescribed technique — as if learning to be an actor is a timeless art form fixed at a particular juncture of history, successful only if one pursues a paint-by-numbers approach and validated solely by designated gurus (2-3).

There is a case to be made that the reason Meisner has been overlooked or, to an extent, excluded in certain publications, stems from the Meisner community itself; there is a perceived hostility towards anyone trying to teach this technique without having been formally trained by Meisner or one of his disciples originating from the importance lineage still plays in American acting institutions. In their introduction to prospective students, schools make an effort to highlight their relationship to Meisner himself, and often go out of their way to convince readers that their school carries the strongest link to the pure Meisner process (The Sanford Meisner Centre, 2018; The William Alderson Acting Studio, undated), something David Shirley has noticed happening in the UK as well.<sup>23</sup> He describes in his article how one British-based Meisner School makes claims on their “permission” to teach the technique, stating of one of their teachers: “Tom is one of only three Sanford Meisner acting students in the world to be granted permission by Meisner himself to teach the Meisner technique independently” (2010: 210).

This attitude is often found in so called ‘purist’ Meisner schools and could be seen as a main contributor to the sense of so-called guru-ism, often followed by suspicion and reluctance towards the development and modification of the Meisner technique. The trend of the guru started with Stanislavski’s disciples in America and, according to Mel Gordon’s *Stanislavsky in America* (2009), it was “Maria Ouspenskaya’s savage criticism of student work, consciously or unwittingly, [instilling] the next generation of Stanislavsky gurus with a thoroughly toxic attitude towards the untested or inexpert performer” (23). Gordon goes on to suggest that Strasberg, Adler and Meisner all had traits of Ouspenskaya’s “scathing wit or iconic status” and goes on to

---

<sup>23</sup> This includes schools like The Sanford Meisner Centre in Los Angeles, whose website describes its head teacher as “one of the fifteen trained teachers of the Meisner Technique personally chosen by Mr. Meisner to carry his technique to the next generations (Meisner Centre, 2018) and William Alderson School of Acting, where the introduction to the school includes a history of Mr. Alderson’s close lineage to Meisner himself — both schools reiterating that they teach the ‘pure’ technique (The William Alderson Acting Studio, undated).

suggest that it was the introduction of Stanislavski's system in America that introduced the archetype of the meticulous and "merciless instructor" (Ibid.).

However, the Meisner technique is not the only technique to still suffer from this mentality. Krasner states that the implementation of guru-ism — the sense of seeing teachers as deities — has damaged actor training significantly, especially in terms of development of and adaptation of acting processes:

Ideas and techniques involving the instruction of any art form evolves over time; every teacher modifies his/her descriptions and methods; and no single way of doing art creates certainty of excellence. Actor training is based on *ways* of working, not *the way* of working. As individuals vary, so methods of improving vary (2011: 3).

Some of the so-called master teachers' stances on the technique not being changed or developed may have contributed to negativity about the process being taught outside of such institutions. At times, these views border on aggressive, and could add to the reluctance of a teacher's motivation to become versed in the technique with a view to teach it. William Alderson, a renowned Meisner teacher, writes on the website for his studio that the Meisner technique "is a rock solid technique and doesn't need to be improved upon or extended into another teacher's personality so that they feel comfortable" (William Alderson Acting Studio, undated).

As much as the sentiment about the technique's effectiveness is a clear selling point, the statement is immediately contradicted when Alderson alludes to the ideas of Stanislavski's disciples Sudakov and Rapoport influencing and motivating Meisner, who hence amalgamated their two schools into his own process. Moreover, in an interview with Paul Gray (1964), Meisner himself states that nobody teaches the exact Stanislavski technique because of the need of adaptation to era and type of student. Interestingly, Meisner refers to the ability to adapt a technique as a creative skill:

Where the Stanislavski system has been taken over literally from his books, it has failed, as all imitations always do (...) The creative teacher in America finds his own style, that is to say his own method, as indeed every artist must. Otherwise he is a copyist. Copyists and creators are mutually exclusive (Meisner in Gray, 1964: 140).

This view is echoed — this time about Meisner’s own process — by Brant L. Pope, who writes in Krasner’s *Method Acting Reconsidered* (2000): “Nobody but Meisner himself taught the Meisner technique” (145). He goes on to explain that instead, at his institute, Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training in Florida, the faculty have used the founding principles of the technique and extended it. Pope goes on to say that adapting and extending the technique should not be viewed in the same way as “using it superficially and inconsistently without understanding the value of the principles behind this transformational and radical process” (Ibid.: 147).

Hearing Meisner’s initial thoughts on the subject of adaptation creativity, one might think that he would have a positive view on the developed evolution of a process. Later in life, however, Meisner would contradict his earlier sentiments and recommend the closure of the Neighbourhood Playhouse after his death, as it “would have done its work” (1987: 186). In his article *Acting on and Off* (2004), Kim Durham comes to this conclusion:

With such a conviction, Meisner was unlikely to find much value in a synthesis between his own methods and those of others. Nor are those who wholeheartedly propagate his teaching practices likely to maintain a critical reflectiveness as to their efficacy. Yet it is precisely this critical awareness that is needed to overcome the approach’s inherent pitfalls (2004: 162).

The inherent pitfalls of the technique are bound to become more obvious as a process is expanded, especially to reach other cultures. Teachers in the UK, do not seem to carry the same reverence for Meisner’s system, and do adapt and modify it to make it fit into British drama school training; the predicament instead becomes about how much information and knowledge of the full technique’s process they possess, and what has fallen by the wayside in the process of adapting it. Through the theoretical explanation of the process, this thesis aims to provide a unique contribution towards the building of a more complete body of writing around Meisner’s work.

There are few elaborate instruction manuals on the Meisner technique. The four volumes included in Larry Silverberg’s *The Meisner Approach Workbook* series (1994, 1997, 1998, 2000) are some of the prominent few. The books take the reader through different stages of the technique with the first, *An Actor’s Workbook* (1994), exploring the Meisner technique’s fundamental principles and the Repetition



exercise. The second book, *Emotional Freedom* (1997), tackles emotional preparation and the third, *Tackling the Text* (1998), brings the reader to the textual elements of Meisner's technique. In the fourth and last book, *Playing the Part* (2000), Silverberg explores characterisation, actioning and spinal work.

The books guide us through potential issues within each exercise, and although they show us the full technique, they do not explain why and how any given exercise would work. The way the books are written suggests that Silverberg does not necessarily deem it essential for a trained teacher to be present for the technique to work. On the whole, the books take the reader through an extensive process with an emphasis on Silverberg's teaching style, which is full of positive encouragement and emotive language.

The books are presented in a colloquial style, guiding the actor through the exercises with an almost intimate directness. In places, Silverberg's books take on qualities not dissimilar to a self-help manual — starting the book by ensuring the reader that they are “magnificent and unique” and that the Meisner technique is “miraculous” (1994: xv-xvii). Silverberg, speaking directly to the reader, does not try and hide his bias towards the Meisner technique and its effect on his own life. Whilst instructing the actor in the fundamentals of the Meisner process, he intercepts his encouragement and reiteration of the basic concepts with diary-like thoughts, seemingly with the intention of inspiring, empathising with and mimicking what the actor might be feeling at that point:

This work is about continually “letting go of” and being *right here, right now*. In other words this work is UNCOMFORTABLE. It's about living in the unknown... TERRIFYING — OH MY GOD! And there is nothing to do. So what do you do when you are there at the door and you are feeling so uncomfortable you could scream? You scream, THIS IS UNCOMFORTABLE! (1994: 52 — italics and capitals as in original).

As this passage shows, Silverberg writes as he would speak to his students, and these workbooks are indeed meant to be used as a guide in the absence of a teacher. At times as exercises are set up, Silverberg even adds breaks for the actors to go and explore something and then return to the manual. He instructs both the actors working and those observing, sets homework at the end of each session, and always ends a section with blank pages for note taking, making these manuals interactive

rather than theoretical. Again, highlighting the lack of theory-based contributions in this field.

The only other practical guide to the Meisner technique comes in the form of UK published *Meisner in Practice* (2012) by Nick Moseley. Moseley's account of his teachings stands out in terms of objectivity and the introduction of the pitfalls and potential problems arising through the work — and the reasons behind them. This does not come across as critique; Moseley's voice is full of belief in the technique, and he presents the honest view of someone who has no allegiance to a certain school of Meisner, nor a direct lineage to its creator (which can sometimes result in clouding objectivity). He shows an understanding of the fundamental principles, as well as a sense of his own explorations of the technique. Moseley questions and poses ideas, many of which have come out of personal observations in the classroom and includes new developments where he has discovered a need for them. For example, he adds the objective "I want to gain a deeper knowledge of this person" to the Repetition exercise in order to maximise focus on the other (2012: 29). Although Moseley's observations are valid and progressive in looking for ways to improve the exercises, his insistence that Meisner technique is not a complete actor training process but instead a "useful complement to Stanislavski-based training elements" (2012: viii), hints at the possibility that he came by his knowledge from a source unfamiliar with the full process.

Meisner teacher Victoria Hart, whose chapter "Teaching the Work of Sanford Meisner" represents the technique in Arthur Bartow's *Handbook of Acting Techniques* (2006), has a somewhat different approach to other American publications on the subject. Instead of creating a practical "how to" book with Meisner's exercises or presenting the work in anecdotal fashion, she dedicates the chapter to an extended justification and vision of the process — the full process, including both the first- and second-year training. Instead of describing all the different elements in detail, admitting that she leaves much out and that the exercises are merely touched upon, Hart unpacks the concepts behind the through-line, and how they set Meisner apart from other practitioners. Although this chapter clarifies the extended process, and at times gives us the answer as to *why* we do an exercise, there is no investigation as to *how* the exercises deliver — the tone is that of 'trust that it works'. However, the account is extensive, gives greater understanding of the mechanics of Meisner technique than the documentary-style publications, and is more direct in its

narrative — moving the reader from one concept to the next swiftly — in an attempt to make sure the full extent of the work is covered.

While these works are extensive and — for the most part — address different aspects of the technique, there is yet to be a complete investigation of the foundational Meisner exercises from a theoretical standpoint. By applying a psychological perspective to the theoretical exploration of the Meisner technique, this thesis intends to address the gap of knowledge within the published works on Meisner's process.

### Meisner and cognition

Recent adaptations and adjustments of acting techniques in general have come in part out of new research into the science behind human behaviour:

While text-centered actor training in the US has tended to remain grounded in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century versions of Stanislavsky-derived approaches, the science on which these approaches were premised has continued to move ahead (Blair, 2008: 10).

Although Performance and Cognition have reached unprecedented interest in the last decade, there is a distinct lack of literature on this subject that includes any inquiries into Meisner technique. Ground-breaking publications such as McConachie's *Performance and Cognition* (2006), Kemp's *Embodied Acting* (2012), and the publication of *Acting; Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process* (2013) by Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes, do not even mention Meisner's process. These works study the notions of embodied mind, non-verbal communication, self-consciousness and enactive acting, to name a few subjects targeted. Publications such as Donnellan's *The Actor and the Target* (2005)<sup>24</sup> and Cormac Powers' *Presence in Play* (2008) surprisingly also omit Meisner from their writings, even though their books focus on the actor's need for spontaneity, attention placement and the ability to stay in the moment — all cornerstones of Meisner's theories and the basis for his technique. In *Performance and Cognition* as well as Shaughnessy's *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science* (2013), none of the essays refer to Meisner whilst discussing

---

<sup>24</sup> Although Donnellan's book would theoretically not be included within the genre of 'performance and cognition literature', his use of psychology to explore the ideas of attention, action/reaction, lying and identity make his writing of interest in terms of the omission of Meisner technique.

extended or enactive cognition — a process that relies on the *doing*. The 2019 publication *Psychology for Actors* by Kevin Page similarly leaves Meisner out of the practitioners analysed. Yet, it not the case that the books exclude *all* practitioners; Michael Chekhov and Stanislavski, among other practitioners, are recognised in the majority of the books, and even Strasberg is mentioned in a large part of the performance and cognition literature. John Lutterbie's book *Towards a General Theory of Acting* (2011) does refer to Meisner in terms of the *Emotional Preparation* he encouraged before an actor entered a scene, yet hardly mentions the other aspects of the process, nor investigates anything in detail. The few investigations that do concentrate on Meisner's technique are focused on his Repetition exercise. In Blair's *The Actor, Image and Action* (2008), she uses Steven Pinker's computational model of mind to illuminate our understanding of the Repetition exercise,<sup>25</sup> which she describes as “the cornerstone of Meisner's method” (2008: 43). By using Pinker's model, Blair reveals the important aspect of self-censoring, or a “firewall” as Pinker refers to it (1997: 412), and highlights the need for it to be diminished in order for the actors to be able to access emotional connection and impulsive behaviour:

[...] the repetition exercise can facilitate immediacy and emotional specificity in a relationship and help the actor to penetrate what Pinker describes as an evolutionary “firewall” between “reasonable” and “emotional” behaviour, allowing the actor to break through habituated conditioning and behave with emotional and theatrical spontaneity (Blair, 2008: 43).

This is an interesting angle and does add insight into the exercise, as it presents us with Meisner's intention: acting on impulse and letting go of what inhibits us. There is, however, scope for a deeper explanation of this idea of a firewall as a filter that makes us analyse our behaviour and keeps us from acting spontaneously. Blair admits that Meisner's process is effective in moving the actor from an intellectual place to an instinctive place, and that rather than thinking of Meisner as anti-intellectual, his method should be seen “as giving priority to action and given circumstance, rather than to planning” (2008: 43); this idea justifies the necessity of finding a way around the firewall. In his book *How the Mind Works* (1997), Pinker

---

<sup>25</sup> Steven Pinker is an American cognitive scientist, linguist and psychologist. He writes about his theory of computational models in his book *How the Mind Works* (1997), where he summarises the meaning of computational theory of mind thus: “The mind is a system of organs of computation, designed by natural selection to solve the kind of problems our ancestors faced in their foraging way of life, in particular, understanding and outmanoeuvring objects, animals, plants, and other people” (21).

describes the firewall as a necessary, built in function to control our emotions and passions. He goes on to say that our intellect is not an enemy of our passions, but rather it keeps our passions under control and enables us to both defend ourselves and attract an outside source (412). He states that our control will relinquish to our passions when said passions have been guaranteed to make a difference (413), for example generate another tactic in order for us to get our goal. However, in acting we also try to achieve an instinctual reaction to a situation, which we know is imaginary, hence it would suggest that the evolutionary firewall would be even stronger, or indeed layered. Blair proposes that “[a]n actor’s job is to get past this physically encoded — not merely psycho social — firewall on cue” and that “Meisner, Adler and Strasberg developed their methods as a means of negotiating an end-run around the cognitive and limbic system’s firewall” to thus generate impulsivity (Blair, 2000: 215).

It is clear from Blair’s investigation that the brain’s firewall system — or self-control — must be targeted in order to allow the actor to experience the same kinds of instinctual responses they would in reality, and that this is the core of Meisner’s process. However, knowing that there is a filter-system in the brain does little to explain the Repetition exercise. If we do not understand how the firewall works, how do we understand what the Repetition exercise actually does to weaken it? Even though Blair’s research is significant in terms of pin-pointing the actual problem with reasoning versus impulsivity — and presenting its links to Meisner’s work — an investigation into the practical elements of Repetition, the use of attention, and motivation are required in order to fully comprehend how the exercise delivers spontaneity.

Blair continues her exploration of the method practitioners through Pinker’s models, and determines that through such a lens they have embraced the formulas of the brain that point to the direct correlation between information and behaviour. She argues that the relationship among *objective, action, given circumstance* and *imagination* are parallel to the psychological pattern between *desire, behaviour, information* and *belief* (Blair, 200: 206). She comes to the conclusion that, seen through this theoretical framework, the reason method acting has received such a following is because it mirrors how the human being works, and that key parts of the method are “fundamentally Darwinian”:

If this theory is correct, it means that the appeal of the method is due not necessarily to the hegemony of many of various kinds of realism and habits of representation and mimesis, but to the fact that it reflects how we function organically (Ibid.).

Blair's observation that the method processes tend to work in an organic, active-reactive pattern is important because it demonstrates that the training is based on human functionality and instinct and would benefit from research based in human psychology. Looking at Meisner's work in particular, there is a lack of investigation into the *communion* aspect of his process, the way attention is placed on the other and how it affects our reactions. Current research into self-regulation, mind-wandering and action-perception theory would create a helpful platform from which to understand the Repetition exercise. Similarly, the notions of motivation and flow could shed more light on the process' impact on self-consciousness and over-intellectualisation.

In the article *Play, but Don't Play games!* (2012), Hilary Halba looks at the Meisner technique from a more fluid angle of play theory. In the article, she lays out the argument that, by focusing the attention to such an extent in order to exclude everyday stimuli, the actor enters into another realm — that of the playing field — which primes its players for creative engagement and motivated action. She relates Meisner's use of external focus to the notion of flow by stating that this is the same “process of absorption and transportation experienced through creative activity played by the playing, the autotelic enterprise whose end is the playing itself, that the Meisner training elicits from the actor” (131).

The notion of something being autotelic means that the process itself is the goal, relating back to Meisner's Repetition exercise having the process in itself as an objective — the doing in itself is the reward (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 67). Halba goes on to mention how the absorption necessary for the act of playing is the same as the notion of flow — a state characterized by psychologist Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi in which “people are so involved in an activity that nothing else matters” (Halba, 2012: 128). Throughout the article, the main argument places Meisner technique firmly within the frame of play, as opposed to a rule-based game, highlighting that the Repetition exercise is neither real life nor a truthful representation of everyday interaction, but rather “the imaginary creation of a playing-field beyond the

quotidian where the actor lives moment by moment through responding to their partner” (Ibid.: 129). In doing this, Halba introduces the idea of the organically driven, active-reactive communication of a technique that has a strong experiential and creative dimension. Further, she presents Meisner technique as the process that could harness the real impulses within the imagined circumstances:

Much of the actors’ practice is framed by this self-contradictory proposition that their embodied responses within the frame of any performance-event are simultaneously both actual and imagined [...] The focus on this cognitive synergy of the real and the imagined takes us into the realm of the meta-communicative exchange at the heart of the Meisner technique (Ibid.: 132).

Halba is using cognition to redefine an element of the technique that is often ignored in terms of the Repetition exercise: Meisner’s definition of good acting — “to live truthfully within imaginary circumstances” (Meisner, 1987: 15). She further engages with the idea of meta-communication, one of the underlying foundations for listening and reacting to behaviour, with behaviour in itself the essence of non-verbal communication.

Halba’s article raises important questions about the Meisner technique, such as, what happens when we practice it? How does it affect the actor? And why does it ultimately make us more free and spontaneous? Human connection and communication, particularly the notion of self, can be multidimensional, elusive and hard to pin down with science. Yet, the mystery of the technique — the quality of the technique that makes it experiential rather than theoretical — still needs psychological exploration. Through Halba’s research into play theory she has discovered links between the play element of the Meisner technique and creative flow, but this concept has yet to be fully investigated (2012: 134). If flow is conducive to learning, experiencing and creating, is this affecting the impact the exercises have on self-consciousness? Is the creation of the next moment through communication with our partner explained fully by Darwin’s active-reactive pattern, or can the psychology of attention unlock another dimension of the technique?

Questions like these sit at the core of my enquiry into self-consciousness and the Meisner technique. Throughout this chapter, my intention has been to illuminate the issues that the technique has encountered, due to historical factors surrounding English publication, differences of opinion and teachings, confusion about the

technique's origin and influences, and the lack of psychological perspectives in the literature. This research into the foundational exercises of the Meisner technique, will reframe the process with a view to explain how and why it works through the lens of psychology of attention. From this standpoint, neither origin nor lineage becomes essential due to the concrete investigation and understanding of the actual workings of the technique. My intention is to resolve the misunderstanding of the exercises, highlight the conditional aspects of process-based training and dispel any sense of mystery about the psychological elements at play — knowledge which will benefit both actors and teachers alike, and offer a pedagogic analysis based on research applicable to actor training on a larger scale.

As this thesis is focused on the way that Meisner technique diminishes self-consciousness and increases spontaneity, it is important to understand the different aspects of self-consciousness and how it differs from self-awareness. Chapter 2 will seek to clarify which type of self-consciousness is referred to throughout this thesis, and why it is detrimental to an actor in the first place.



## **Chapter 2: The battle with the self**

As indicated by the title of this research project, self-consciousness can have a negative effect on the actor's performance and training and this affects spontaneity, impulse and flow. In this section, as well as throughout the thesis, both Meisner's perspective and those of other practitioners will be considered regarding this phenomenon.

### **Becoming self-aware**

One could say that a person's attention is either focused on stimuli external to the self, such as another person or the immediate environment, or is focused on some aspect of the self (Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975; Evans, Baer & Segerstrom, 2009), such as emotions relating to their own person. When the attention is on the self it could be in terms of how one is feeling ("I am cold/hungry"), in terms of how we evaluate ourselves in comparison to others ("I am as competent as the others in this room") or how we think others see us ("they think I am over-dressed") (Csíkszentmihályi & Figurski, 1982:15). Although these types of thoughts can be differentiated, they all stem from a focus on the self and derive from forms of self-awareness (Ibid.).

In 1934 sociologist George Mead (Morin, 2011: 807) introduced a fundamental distinction between paying attention to the environment (consciousness) and paying attention towards the self (self-awareness). Self-awareness means having the ability to focus on oneself, and as oneself as an object in the environment. Being able to reflect on oneself and see oneself as an object is seen as a distinguishing feature between humans and animals within evolution: "When an individual is able to apprehend himself or herself consciously as an object, thus becoming both the knower and the known, a new stage of cognitive complexity is reached" (Csíkszentmihályi & Figurski, 1982:15). Self-awareness entails identifying, processing and storing information about the self (Morin: 2011: 807) and is a concept that we develop over time during early childhood. According to developmental psychologist Philippe Rochat, there are six levels of self-awareness (0-5) that we go through in our early developmental stages:

**Level 0 — Confusion:** In this stage the person shows no awareness of the self, nor their mirror reflection — which instead is seen as part of their environment.

**Level 1 — *Differentiation*:** We understand that the mirror is reflecting things and that there is a difference between the mirror image and the surrounding environment of the mirror.

**Level 2 — *Situation*:** Here the individual starts to recognise the link between their own movement and the mirror image, and that we as individuals control the image.

**Level 3 — *Identification*:** At this stage we understand that we do not just control the mirror image, but we *are* the mirror image, we now see this as our self and identify with the mirror image.

**Level 4 — *Permanence*:** We can now identify ourselves beyond the mirror, in photographs, even when looking younger or different. A ‘permanent’ self-image has been reached.

**Level 5 — *Self-consciousness (or “meta” self-awareness)*:** We now realise that we are not just seen by ourselves, but also by others. We start to realise others might think about us or have opinions on us. (Rochat, 2003: 719-722).

As we reach that fifth stage, feelings such as pride or shame become part of our vocabulary, and we start to attend to how we are perceived by our environment. We also start to be able to use our imagination in order to understand what others might be thinking of us (Rochat, 2003: 728). As adults we do not always remain in the fifth state, we move between stages of self-awareness depending on what we are doing: sleeping, public speaking or losing ourselves in a film or book (Ibid.: 729).

### Self-awareness — a blessing or a curse?

Being able to understand our motives, desires and opinions is an important foundation for establishing a sense of identity, developing responsibility and for social growth (Diener, 1979). However, self-awareness can also be seen as something negative which can affect self-esteem, creativity and enjoyment (Csíkszentmihályi & Figurski, 1982:16). In the 1970’s, psychologists Duval and Wicklund developed one of the earliest “self-theories”, which they named *objective self-awareness theory* (Silvia & Duval, 2001: 230), based on the two alternative forms of self-focus: objective and subjective (Duval & Wicklund: 1972:1). In this theory they recognised the dichotomy within the concept of self-aware attention and how it can be bi-

directional — towards or away from the self. Subjective self-awareness is a state where we are focused on aspects external to our own consciousness, personal history or body, however we are still aware that we are the ones focusing on these aspects, as well as our opinion on what we perceive. This is in comparison to the objective self-awareness, where we focus exclusively on our own feelings, thoughts and body, or any other personal aspect of the self (Duval & Wicklund, 1972: 2). In other words, in the first the attention is outwards, whereas in the second it is directed inwards.

Subjective self-awareness is thus different from consciousness as we are aware that we are the ones perceiving and engaging with the environment, and that we become the source of perception and action (Silvia & Wicklund, 2001: 230). Further, Duval & Wicklund claim that these two types of attention cannot happen at once, however they can change from one to the other so rapidly that it can feel as if we are directing attention towards the self and the environment simultaneously (Ickes, Wicklund & Ferris, 1973: 202).

Duval & Wicklund’s study into self-focus showed how placing individuals in front of cameras, mirrors or an audience, could result in heightened objective self-awareness, due to the intensified aspect of being perceived by others (Morin, 2011: 808). Their way of differentiating between these two attention-states includes how in the objective state, as self-evaluation and reflection occur, we become more passive and introvert. This is in comparison to the subjective self-awareness state, which is more active and perceptive, and said to be lacking in self-focus (Ickes, Wicklund & Ferris, 1973: 202).

<b>Type of self-awareness</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Objective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-evaluation</li> <li>• Self-reflection</li> <li>• Passive</li> <li>• Introvert</li> <li>• Internal focus</li> </ul>
<b>Subjective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active</li> <li>• Perceptive</li> <li>• External focus</li> </ul>

(Figure 2: Table showing characteristics of objective and subjective self-awareness)

This dilemma of being the subject and object of our own attention, is seen by many as necessary for the science of psychology, for therapy and for gratifying living (Silvia & Duval, 2001: 230). Being able to reflect on our own thoughts, success and failures gives us the ability to either appreciate or change aspects of our lives. However, despite this necessity, the theory infers that focusing on the self initiates an automatic, spontaneous process by which we evaluate ourselves against either our own standards (Ibid.: 236), or the presumed standards of others. The standards we hold ourselves to may be unrealistically high and if we do not meet them we may dwell on this and find it distressing (Csíkszentmihályi & Figurski, 1982: 15). Even when we exceed our own expectations we then quickly raise the bar and again experience distress if we do not achieve this even higher standard the next time.

During one study, psychologists Csíkszentmihályi & Figurski (1982) examined the mood of the participants when their attention was focused on the self, and compared this to when it was externally directed. The mood of the contestants during different types of external or self-directed attention was scored and categorised into three categories: *affect* — “happy, cheerful, friendly”, *activation* — “alert, active” and *involvement* — “wish to do something else (WSE)”. They found that thinking about the self had a particular effect on the participants’ mood, namely that it was on the whole an unpleasant experience. In fact, thinking about the self ranked lowest in making the participants want to get involved, but highest in the aspect of ‘wanting to do something else’. Further it proved to result in lower levels of activation overall (Csíkszentmihályi & Figurski, 1982: 20).

This would imply that self-focus would not be a desirable state for anyone and when the theory was created, Duval & Wicklund saw objective self-awareness as a mostly negative experience. However, this has since been re-evaluated to acknowledge that although self-focus can lead to psychological distress (Ingram, 1990; Thomsen et al, 2013) and negative mood states (Wood et al, 1990), when people are congruent with their set standards, objective self-awareness can be a positive thing (Trudeau & Reich, 1995; Silvia & Duval, 2001: 231). This is often referred to as the ‘paradox of self-consciousness’ (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999).

In this section the notion of external and internal attention has been presented, along with arguments for how internal attention might be a negative or positive experience. In terms of this thesis, it is the type of self-consciousness that hinders the

actor in the moment of performance that is being explored, hence it is important to differentiate which type of self-consciousness refers to those circumstances — when we are being evaluated and watched, not just by ourselves, but by others as well.

### Private and public self-consciousness

Within psychologists Carver & Scheier's *self-regulation theory* (1981), there is acknowledgement that self-awareness leads to the realisation of a possible gap between the personal state and where one aims to be (Carver & Scheier, 1981: 203). This could range from an awareness of situations that causes bad habits or negative feelings, or an awareness of how far we are away from a personal goal. This realisation is necessary in order to close that gap, change our behaviour, or reach that specific goal — and so does not necessarily lead to an aversive experience (Csíkszentmihályi & Figurski, 1982: 17). At times that evaluation can lead to negative feelings towards the self, which can be the result of our personal expectations (Carver & Scheier, 1981: 203), however other times the aversive experience is not necessarily the effect of self-awareness, but rather the personal tendency to think about the self, or a “chronic disposition to be self-attentive” which is known as *self-consciousness* (Carver & Scheier, 1981:17).

The terms self-awareness and self-consciousness are sometimes used synonymously, however, these are two distinct concepts. Self-consciousness can be seen as the trait version of self-awareness (Evans, Baer & Segerstrom, 2009: 379), meaning that qualities within the individual can make them more prone to experience self-consciousness when they are in a state of self-awareness — or it can be induced by the environment or the situation we are in, for example being watched by an audience or being filmed. There are two forms of self-consciousness: *private* and *public* (Fenigstein et al., 1975). Recently, numerous scholars have focused on the distinctions between private and public self-consciousness in their studies of face-to-face interactions, mirrors, inner speech (Morin, 2011), mindfulness (Evan, Baer & Segerstrom, 2009) and motivation (Franzoi et al., 1990). Private self-consciousness signifies awareness towards one's own feelings, thoughts and motivations, whereas in public self-consciousness that awareness is directed at ourselves as a social object

(Evans, Baer & Segerstrom, 2009: 379).<sup>26</sup> Private self-consciousness encompasses both self-reflection and self-rumination (Morin 2011: 809),<sup>27</sup> whereas public self-consciousness is the form of self-consciousness that occurs in situations where we can be seen and judged by others (Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975) — focusing on qualities that would constitute our public identity such as our looks, behaviour, mannerisms and physical abilities (Scheier & Carver, 1985: 687).

Public self-consciousness can also induce social anxiety, which intensifies the self-focus and self-judgement in social situations. During social anxiety we are focused on how others evaluate us and doubt that we measure up to social standards. Hence social anxiety can be an outcome of public self-consciousness, rather than an attentional state. The table below shows examples of the difference between the three aspects:

Private self-consciousness	Public self-consciousness	Social anxiety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying to figure oneself out</li> <li>• Paying attention to one's inner feelings</li> <li>• Thinking about one's reasons for doing something</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caring about how one presents oneself to others</li> <li>• Being self-conscious about the way one looks</li> <li>• Being concerned about what others think of oneself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding it hard to work when someone is watching</li> <li>• Being nervous when speaking publicly</li> <li>• Getting embarrassed easily</li> </ul>

(Figure 3: Table showing the differences between private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness and social anxiety; Source: Scheier & Carver, 1985: 687)

Public self-consciousness can make one perceive other's behaviour as a constant response to oneself, which can lead to imagining they are judging us which in turn changes our behaviour (Fenigstein, 1987: 545). Cognitive scientist Keith Stanovich makes the suggestion that self-consciousness may be rooted in the functional

<sup>26</sup> This distinction has been criticized (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1987), but this theory is mainly supported by researchers who separate private and public self-focus (Franzoi et al., 1990; Grant, 2001; Eichstaedt & Silvia, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> *Self-reflection* and *self-rumination* are both aspects of self-focus but with different effects. Self-reflection can allow for an interest in the self and the self's feelings and attitudes and thoughts, which is often linked with positive outcomes such as self-knowledge, self-regulation or improved mental health. In contrast, during self-rumination there is a negative judgement of the self in comparison to others and is mostly linked to low self-esteem, fear of failure, and anxiety (Morin, 2011: 809).

distinctions between intuition and analysis (Stanovich, West & Toplak, 2011: 104), which would imply that when we suffer from public self-consciousness we analyse our behaviour, suppress impulses and start to act differently to how we would 'normally' behave. This type of self-consciousness, and its impact on behaviour, is what will be referred to throughout this thesis, as it can be a concern for actors during performance.

### Self-consciousness and the actor

One early observation about the impact of self-consciousness on performers came from German dramatist Henrich von Kleist, who in his 1810 dramatic essay "On the Marionette Theatre", depicts the phenomenon as 'an invisible and inexplicable power like an iron net seemed to seize upon the spontaneity of his bearing, and after a year there was no trace of the charm that had so delighted who knew him" (von Kleist, 1972: 25). These observations by von Kleist describes something most actors have experienced: times when self-consciousness has been a hindrance to "acting naturally" and to the ability to "be in the moment" (Jackman, 2016: 106). Stanislavski also alluded to the fact that awareness of the audience could have a big impact on even the smallest acts, and make them "fall apart" (Stanislavski, 2008: 93). Further, he describes the actor as, upon facing an audience, finding it hard to behave "in a human way", whilst a compulsive need to please the audience preoccupies the mind (Ibid.: 296). Drama professor Jerri Daboo elaborates on Stanislavski's standpoint thus:

Being 'self-conscious', can lead to being distracted by the awareness of the presence of the audience. This results in excess physical and mental tension, leading to restrictions in psychophysical action and spontaneity on stage (2013: 162).

Generally, when actors start to focus inwards, and their attention is on themselves, they are no longer committed to the dialogue and interaction on stage, and as a result can lapse into self-consciousness. During this time their thoughts could be focused on a number of things including the fact that they are being watched and possibly judged, their performance ability, lines or what they should be doing. Self-consciousness can then result in the manifestation of unwanted physical behaviour (or tensions as described above), diminished listening and poor performance in general (Stinespring, 1999:41). It can also have a profound effect on our spontaneity

and ability to fully embody a situation, as our body can feel like “an estranged object of attention instead of a coherent medium for action” (Jackman, 2016: 108). In extreme circumstances the critical evaluation of oneself can even lead to stage fright (Merlin, 2016, xxi).

In sport psychology over-thinking your actions can lead to ‘choking’, which often results in drastically lower performance levels than one’s normal standards. Choking is sometimes referred to as ‘paralysis by analysis’ and occurs mostly in situations fraught with performance pressure. The demands of the situation make us pay too much attention to something we normally do automatically, which raises self-consciousness levels and disrupts performance (Beilock & Carr, 2001: 701). Interestingly, in highly skilled sports the link has been made between poorer performance and rising above level 3 in the self-awareness developmental scale. This is noticeable on occasions when athletes start to reflect on themselves objectively, or the specifics of their movements — rather than their goal — there tends to be a sharp decline in their performance. As Rochat notes: “There is nothing worse for tennis players than self-reflecting on the shape of their backhands” (2003: 729).

This was also reflected in sports scientist Bradley Hatfield’s research, who found that there was less activation present in the brains of expert athletes, than in that of novice athletes (Hatfield, et al., 2004: 144). If you try to think about what you are doing, while you are actually doing it — for example when you are riding a bike in the park, if you start to focus on the motions of the wheels and how you are staying up — you might fall down (Eustis, 2008: 19-20). This is a well-established idea that refers to both sports and acting (it is also relevant to the notion of *flow*, which will be explored further in the Chapter 3:2).

Actors fear “being in their heads” as there is a strong emphasis placed on not involving thought and intellectual engagement in actor training in general (Tribble, 2016: 136), which can be confusing for novice actors, and sometimes have the opposite effect.<sup>28</sup> Of course, the actor has an awareness of the fact that they are a performer re-enacting a scenario in front of an audience. The actor is not expected to enter a state of delusion without awareness of the situation; however, it should not be their main focus whilst on stage. It is not unheard of that actors, or any artists,

---

<sup>28</sup> This aspect of intellectuality and acting was referred to in Chapter 1:2, and will be further presented in Chapter 3:2.



involved in the act of creating will forget about the audience and fully commit to the creative task. As Stinespring points out: “it is the actor's capacity to lose himself in what he is doing which is at issue here. The self-conscious actor will hold on tight to his awareness that he is being watched by his audience” (1999: 41). However, merely telling someone to ‘stop thinking’ or ‘forget about the audience’ is not going to teach them what to do instead. Hence, we are in need of teaching methods and acting processes that discourage excessive self-focus and makes the actor more spontaneous. Utterback suggests that it is not enough to consider how the training alters the actor's performance, but we need to also take into consideration how it alters the actor's consciousness within that performance (Utterback, 2016: 109). This is a sentiment that has been at the forefront of eastern acting traditions for centuries: how, as an actor, you deal with a “squirrel like mind” (Zarrilli, 2013: 43) that could be prone to self-consciousness.

Rochat holds that Eastern meditation processes often reflect the need to control our tendency to slip from one sense of self-awareness to another (2003: 729). Meditational techniques, such as mindfulness, lovingkindness meditation and breath awareness, have long been seen to train the non-judgemental and non-discursive aspects of one's own perceptions, thoughts and feelings and some acting practitioners, such as Stanislavski and Zarrilli, do use meditational and yogic aspects in their processes. However, there are differences between attention training and attention *state* training (see fig. 4). Attention state training is said to have originated in Asian traditions (such as mindfulness, meditation and integrative body-mind training) and is designed to achieve a state leading to better self-regulation. Attention training is seen to have derived from methods developed in Europe and the USA, (often concerning digital computer game tasks using joysticks and predictions) and fosters improvement and alterations in the attentional networks (Tang & Posner, 2009: 222). Soto-Morettini puts it very simply: in attention state training there is a focus on achieving a present and open mind, compared to the attention training where concentration on a specific object is key (2010: 214). See below table for a more detailed explanation of both concepts:

## Attention Training

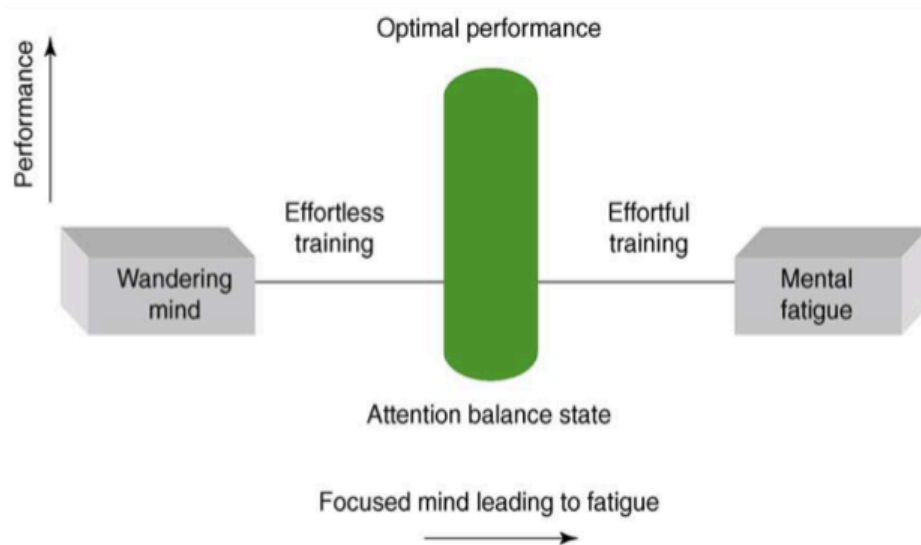
- Practice in tasks involving executive control mechanisms.
- Often using repetitive trials that involve executive control or, in some cases, use curricula designed with the goal of exercising control mechanisms.
- Requiring directed attention and effortful control
- Trains executive attention networks
- Produces mental fatigue

## Attention State Training

- Uses certain forms of experience such as meditation or exposure to nature.
- Produces changes in mind-body state
- Requires a combination of effortful and effortless exercise
- Aims to achieve a relaxed and balanced state

(Figure 4: Table showing the difference between Attention Training and Attention State Training; Source: Tang & Posner, 2009: 223,226)

Further differences between the two forms of attentional training are highlighted in the below diagram (fig. 5). This image shows how effortful exercise, although prone to produce mental fatigue, is furthest away from the possibility of mind wandering, which can induce self-consciousness. The following chapters will explore the links between mind wandering, attentional networks and self-consciousness in greater detail.



(Figure 5: Graph showing the relationship between effortful focus and mind wandering; Source: Tang & Posner, 2009: 225)

Actor trainer Donna Soto-Morettini has linked the two different types of training to acting practitioners Sanford Meisner and Philip Zarrilli, and the way these two practitioners propose to train the actor's attention. She proposes that Meisner's technique — by developing the actor's concentration through use of observation in the Repetition exercise — trains the actor's attention. This is in comparison to Zarrilli, whose focus on embodied practices, breath and flow, trains the actor's state of attention (Soto-Morettini, 2010: 214).

As this thesis will focus on Meisner's way of training attention, it is important to highlight the differences between the different forms of training attention and presence, and the type of attention training Meisner used in order to re-direct the actor's attention from the self onto the partner — the type of attention training that diminishes the possibility of mind wandering the most. According to Pope, this shift in perspective between self-consciousness and other-consciousness changes the entire conception of the acting process (2000: 148), and this thesis seeks to explain in what way that happens.

This shift in focus is highlighted early on in the training, as the foundational stages of Meisner's process uses the actor's self, rather than a character, in the exercises. At this phase the actors only have themselves to refer to — no script, no story, no relationship — there is nothing to hide behind (Moseley, 2012: 91). This can increase self-consciousness, as we feel exposed to our partners. As the process moves on, the responses, emotions and behaviours are coming from the self under imaginary circumstances rather than a specific character (Hart, 2006: 52). Meisner saw character being achieved by the layering of given circumstances and obstacles onto the self, as the self was the only one that truly existed on stage. Our character is therefore defined by how we behaved, and the behaviour would alter along with the different circumstances (Stinespring, 1999: 176). As Meisner teacher Nick Moseley says: "You may have changed your way of speaking and moving, but in the end it will still be your body, your thoughts, your emotions and your impulses the audience sees" (2012: 91).

## Conclusion

In this section, I have explained what self-awareness entails and how it can have both positive and negative effects on the human psyche. I have differentiated between self-awareness and self-consciousness and further between the private and public-

self-consciousness. This has pinpointed and clarified which type of self-consciousness I will refer to and examine in the rest of the thesis. As public self-consciousness is linked to performance pressure, social anxiety and inhibitory behaviour, it is a clear choice of focus for this thesis, and what Meisner's training aims to diminish. While self-reflective practice is on the whole a positive notion, it is beyond the scope of this research project. Instead the focus of this study is on how self-consciousness affects the actor in the present moment (not after the event) and how it can be diminished, specifically by the re-direction of attention to an external source.

The intention behind Meisner's Repetition exercise is to focus the actor's attention away from him/herself and onto the partner. In the next chapter the Repetition exercise, its separate stages, and the importance of the process element will be presented in detail. This will be followed by a theoretical and psychological exploration of the concept of *attention*, and why the Repetition exercise's use of attention could result in diminished self-consciousness.

## **Chapter 3: On Repetition and attention**

This chapter will introduce Meisner’s Repetition exercise, the underlying concept of re-directed attention and its effect on self-consciousness — principally from the findings of Meisner, Esper, Hart, Silverberg and Moseley. It will explain how the exercise is established in the classroom and the common problems and obstacles faced by students at the separate stages. Further, the importance of the process, and the different phases of observations — from physical attributes to physical and emotional behaviour — will highlight how the exercise develops from the simple to the profound.

This section will be followed by a thorough investigation into the use of attention in the Repetition exercise, starting with a brief outline of the different attentional models that have influenced the current research into attention. This will be followed by a presentation of the types of attention that the exercise trains and which stage of the Repetition exercise each form of attention relates to. Following this, there will be an examination of the notion of Flow: its relevance in terms of the Repetition exercise, the significance of task-based attention and the importance of the skill-challenge balance. Further, the concept of ‘mind wandering’ will be explored from a psychological angle, especially from the perspective of how mind wandering can contribute to self-consciousness, its effect on presence and how it can be prevented.

### **3:1 The Repetition exercise**

One of the core concepts of the Meisner Technique is known as *the reality of doing*. This is what Meisner defined as the difference between *actually* doing something and *pretending* to do it (Meisner, 1987). For example, if the script required you to read something on stage, you must actually read it instead of pretending to read it — if you do something you really do it (Meisner, 1987: 16). Reading is a task, something that is *done*, if we can engage with it authentically our attention will be on what we are reading, if we are pretending to do it, our attention will be elsewhere. Meisner believed that if an actor was not fully invested in the reality of doing, he would suffer from self-consciousness (Stinespring, 1990: 81). He also believed that listening and conversing are tasks that can be *done*, and the Repetition exercise allows the actors to engage fully in doing these. Listening and communicating are both activities that are associated with applying focus on the external environment; to listen attentively

and communicate truthfully, the actor's attention has to be on the scene partner and the action of the scene, anywhere else and they are not actively engaged. Meisner was disillusioned with people's listening skills in general, he believed that authenticity on stage was a direct result of being present, and presence could not be found until actors could fully listen to each other. This belief is the basis of the initial exercises in his technique (Jarrett, interview, 2016).

Over the course of a six-decade career, Meisner devised a series of exercises that train the actor to become more observant, impulsive, and present which in turn means they are less self-conscious (Shirley, 2010: 121; Jarrett, 2016). The focus of these initial exercises is to direct the actor's attention outward, away from the self and onto the partner, gradually replacing self-consciousness with responsiveness to the acting partner and the present moment (Durham, 2004: 153). This is because, as Meisner scholar Stinespring notes: "The focus on the external is necessary, for if an actor places any of his attention upon himself, then he will stand to engage in false acting rooted in self-consciousness" (1999: 87)".

The first and most well-known exercise is called Repetition. This exercise exemplifies the core ideas<sup>29</sup> behind the Meisner technique and helps students understand the principle of the reality of doing. Although the exercise creates the foundation for the later work, it is commonly (and mistakenly), believed to be the full extent of the technique. Rather, the Repetition exercise serves as a pathway into a deep process and a whole new way of perceiving what good acting is. This exercise is designed to be abandoned by the actors once the main elements are embodied (Hart, 2006: 52; Esper, 2008: 63,).

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Meisner technique is distinctive in the way it guides the student through a defined, step-by-step process.<sup>30</sup> Each part of the training can only effectively be undertaken when the student has achieved a full understanding of the previous part (Hart, 2006: 53). This makes the process easy to understand, and, just as in the acquisition of many other skills, the fact that practice is broken down into small chunks makes the work more manageable, and mastery of the art easier to acquire. As the students are effectively training their perception

---

<sup>29</sup> These exercises are aimed at redirecting the actor's attention away from the self by increasing powers of observation, communication and spontaneity (Shirley, 2010: 121).

<sup>30</sup> This concept is also explored further in the Chapter 4.

skills, it is important for them to be given the time to be exposed to the process for an extended period of time, as they are changing the habit of looking inward to looking outward (Moseley, 2008: 128, 2012: 8). Though the practice may seem basic in the beginning, layering skill on top of skill eventually results in the emergence of something greater than the sum of its parts. This process does not need to be explained in the beginning, but will become clear through the practice, as Meisner notes: “This will go further than you may suspect at the moment. That’s alright. It will unveil itself. It will reveal itself gradually. It is the basis, the foundation of acting” (Meisner, 1987: 25).

### First stage: Mechanical Repetition

Just like the technique as a whole, the Repetition exercise is also a gradual process with several stages to it, the first often being referred to as *Mechanical Repetition* (Silverberg, 1994: 11; Moseley, 2012:14).<sup>31</sup> Here is a summary of the first stage:

1. In this exercise two actors, **A** and **B**, face each other either standing or sitting on chairs.
2. **A** makes a truthful observation about **B**, ideally the first thing **A** recognises, e.g. “You have brown hair”.
3. **B**’s task is to listen attentively and then repeat exactly what they *heard*
4. **A** then repeats back what they *heard*, and so on...

Initially, the observation is not supposed to change, however the actors must listen carefully to each other in order to repeat exactly what is being said. Meaning *if* the text does change, for example by mistake, it then becomes the *new* observation that is repeated. Taking turns prevents the actors interrupting each other. Repeating exactly what is *heard* pushes each one to listen and focus on the other in order to not miss anything. This also stops the actor from anticipating or assuming but keeps them engaged ‘in the moment’ (Durham, 2004: 153). For Moseley, “The beauty of the first exercise lies in its simplicity,” as the task is “well within your scope, yet requires enough of your attention to keep you interested and engaged” (2012:15).

---

<sup>31</sup> There are two versions of this beginning exercise; here the version Meisner proposed is explained, another version will be introduced in Chapter 4:2.

## Initial problems

The beginning of the Repetition exercise is deceptively simple, which can mean that new students fail to achieve its main objective, which is to place their attention on their partner (Moseley, 2008: 133). Complacency can lead to failure to master the Repetition exercise; students understand the basics of the exercise quickly, but then lose concentration and start overlapping each other because they anticipate what they *think* they are going to hear, rather than what they *actually* hear, sometimes resulting in speaking at the same time. The repetitions must be performed at the right speed — not so quick that it is difficult to hear, but quick enough to not have time to *think* about the response (Hart, 2006: 54).<sup>32</sup> This type of anticipation will prevent students from recognising the changes in the repeated observations. While changes should not occur, it does not mean they don't. One of the actors might stumble on a word, and yet his partner repeats the original word, which means he was not listening properly as they should always be repeating what was *last uttered*. Perhaps his thoughts were on himself, or possibly on getting the exercise right, nevertheless failure to notice changes are a direct result of a lack of focus on the partner. At times an actor will start to impose emotions onto the exchange that were not found in the interaction organically. This is often the result of trying to work out the intention of the exercise and wanting to achieve this result faster. It needs to be reiterated here that there is nothing that is 'supposed to happen' in these exchanges. The point is to learn to listen and respond to the partner, which allows for the communication to be emotional rather than intellectual (Esper, 2008: 79).

Another difficulty at the beginning of the process is the risk that the actor observing someone else will be concerned with how closely he himself is being observed — resulting in self-conscious thoughts and feelings (Stinespring, 1990: 106). This often occurs at this stage and the only way to move past this is by continued exposure to the exercise, which will make the actor accustomed to his partner's scrutiny and able to focus on his own task (Moseley, 2012: 49). This, again, highlights the importance of allocating sufficient time for this exercise.

Sometimes during the Repetition exercise, actors start to mimic one another physically or vocally, or try to endow some literal meaning to the transaction. For example, they may begin emphasising different words in the observations to form

---

<sup>32</sup> The importance of speed will be explored further in Chapter 4.



intentions and conversations. However, at this stage the actual words are not the important part of the exercise. When mutual listening and reacting occurs, the actors begin to communicate with each other on a different level to the literal meaning of the verbal exchange — through non-verbal behaviour. Non-verbal behaviour, in a narrow sense, refers to communication without speech, such as gestures, facial expressions, postures and body-movements (Birdwhistell, 1952; Mehrabian, 2017: 1). However, in the broader sense non-verbal behaviour also includes a range of expressions like speech errors, pauses and sarcasm (Mehrabian, 2017: 2). The Repetition exercise helps actors become sensitive to non-verbal behaviour (Carlson, 2000: 93) by *doing*, rather than intellectually engaging with the concept. The students are first taught to observe, speak, listen and repeat, and secondly to “transform the repeated utterance into a subtly or radically different utterance by paying close attention to paralinguistic communication” such as vocal tone, facial expression and gestures (Carlson, 2000: 91).

### Second stage: *Repetition with Point of View*

In this next part of the process, Meisner makes the repeated exchanges more personal and less mechanical, in an exercise that he calls *Repetition with Point of View* (Meisner, 1987: 23). The start of this exercise is the same as the last, but instead of actor **B** repeating back *exactly* what is heard, he must change the text to make it truthful from *his point of view*. For example:

**A:** “You are wearing a necklace”

**B:** “I am wearing a necklace”

**B** changes “you are” to “I am”. With this simple change the statement now becomes more personal, the response reflects the truth of the observation and the actors begin to actually communicate about something, rather than just performing automatic repetitions in order to train focus (Silverberg, 1994: 21). A corollary of making **B**’s response an instinctive reaction to **A**’s comment, is that the way in which **B** repeats it back will inform us of his attitude towards what was said — his opinion on the statement (Hart, 2006: 55).

## From physical attributes to impulsive behaviour.

The subjective form of the reply, along with the ability to modify the words creates a process for developing behaviour in the moment. Meisner believed that the actor's talent lies in the ability to be instinctive, and that the Repetition exercise trains the actor to access his/her internal impulses (Meisner, 1987: 28). Shirley explains that:

Meisner was committed to the idea that repetition leads to internal 'impulses' that become manifest in physical gestures and actions. He therefore encouraged his students to develop the ability to tune into and read human behaviour in such a way as to maximise the potential for 'instinctive' (Shirley, 2010: 202).

The rule about repeating the exact observation is relaxed, but not completely; the technique does not grant the actors licence to say whatever they want to. The words must still be an observation of the reality in the moment, and the speed must be maintained to ensure that the attention remains on the other, leaving less time to censor a response. For example:

**A:** "You are wearing a necklace"

**B:** "I am wearing a necklace"

**A:** "You are wearing a necklace"

**A:** "Your eyebrows rose"

**B:** "My eyebrows rose"

The technique actively encourages the actors to observe each other's evolving impulsive behaviour during the cycle — Meisner called this 'riding the river of impulses' which indicates communication based on feeling rather than thought (Hart, 2006: 55). Some of the physical changes can be very small, and sometimes unclear, meaning that the actor must be hyper-aware of their partner in order to register those changes. This type of focus allows for very little attention on the self (Shirley, 2010: 202). Meisner is clear here that "Whatever you do doesn't depend on you, it depends on the other fellow" (Meisner, 1987: 34). In other words, if you try to invent and comment on something that isn't there — an assumption that you haven't seen manifested — the exercise will not work as the change will come from you, not from the actions of your partner. You have to wait until the other person does something that gives you the *real* impulse to comment on it: "Don't do anything until something

happens that makes you do it” (Ibid.). At the heart of the exercise lies the need for the actor to make the other person more important than himself, it is the action of *doing* — of reading something so fluid as constantly developing behaviour — which works against the possibility of self-focus (Alderson, email interview, 2016).

### Reading behaviour

Although noting these physical behavioural shifts is important to the process, the way they develop and manifest is more important as this reveals a lot about *why* the actor is behaving that way (Esper, 2008: 57). Meisner was clear about the fact that he was more interested in the *why* than the *how* when it comes to behavioural observations. *Why* is she smiling? *Why* did she raise her eyebrows? *Why* did her voice sound different? The physical behaviour is a non-verbal cue revealing the actor’s psychological state. We instinctually will look for the reasons behind those manifestations (Meisner, 1987: 29), for example the observation “you smiled” could lead to “you liked that I said that”, or “you raised your eyebrows” could become “you were surprised by that”, depending on the actor’s opinion. Meisner practitioner Jim Jarrett agrees that “cold factual observations” are a necessary starting point, in order to start placing focus on the partner, however he emphasises that the objective is to get “into the inner life and what’s really going on” (Jarrett, email interview, 2016).

In Meisner’s process, this was simply a logical progression within the Repetition with Point of view<sup>33</sup>; however, some Meisner practitioners call this stage of Repetition *Psychological Repetition* (Moseley, 2012: 55),

### Stages of Repetition:

1. **Physical attributes** — “You have brown hair”
2. **Physical behaviour** — “Your eyebrows raised”
3. **Emotional behaviour** — “You were surprised by that”

Some hold the view that the actors need to become comfortable and in turn less self-conscious about being observed before moving into observations of emotional states (Moseley, 2012: 57). However, it is necessary for the defence mechanisms to be triggered in order for us to overcome these barriers and in this way become more open to other’s views and observations about our inner life. Until something personal

---

<sup>33</sup> This will be developed further in the chapter on Process and Practices.

is being explored, not all barriers will be visible and manifest themselves in the exercise. On the other hand, moving too quickly into the Psychological Repetition might force the actor into their intellect, as they try to think of the way to define an emotion. By letting them have some time to become used to being observed and observing physical behaviour, moving the exercise onto the subjective is a crucial progression (Carlson, 2000:91). This means that the actor starts to process and accept their personal response to what is being said, as Esper notes: “the prized response is always the subjective response” (2008: 51).

As the students become more adept at seeing (and commenting on) the effect the interchange is having on their partner, the more impulsive it becomes and the faster the observations change (Carlson, 2000:91). The reading of the instinctive, non-verbal reaction drives the verbal exchanges and helps the actors develop authenticity and honesty in their work. This allows for further deviation from the rules of repeating exactly what you hear. For example, if the statement uttered by your partner is not true in your eyes — perhaps you were *not surprised*, or your hair is *not blond* — the sheer repetitiveness of having to repeat that statement over and over again can cause an impulse in you to change the Repetition. If your impulse is strong enough to change the words at this point this is allowed (Esper, 2008: 38).<sup>34</sup>

Here is an example of that:

**A:** “You were surprised by that”

**B:** “I was surprised by that”

**A:** “You were surprised”

**B:** “I was surprised”

**A:** “You were surprised”

**B:** “No I wasn’t surprised!”

**A:** “No, you weren’t surprised”

The exchange is now completely fuelled by behavioural observations of our partner. The actors can no longer anticipate the next stage and are therefore forced to keep full attention on their partners and the present moment, or risk losing the next

---

<sup>34</sup> Although it is important to allow the impulses here, I am careful about when I introduce this to my students, as they would often deflect or disagree with sensitive observations out of habit, not allowing themselves to really take on board what is being said to them. I deem this kind of change of the Repetition to be more valuable in the later stages, as opposed to the beginning stages when we are still addressing defensive habits.

impulse. The task element has reached a more immediate phase, demanding our focus. This means, “before they know it, they stop paying attention to themselves, lose their self-consciousness, give up feeling awkward and begin to play” (Hart, 2006: 54).

### Overcoming hurdles

The participants of these exercises quickly understand that being forced to react on impulse diminishes the ability to inhibit the instinctive reaction, and this shift to honest interaction can sometimes be seen as negative. Forcing actors to concentrate fully on their partner, instructing them to call emotional as well as physical reactions, exposes them to the consequences of saying the ‘wrong’ thing. Making personal observations on another person’s inner life leaves you open to attack, or praise, or offence. For example, actors can become guarded if a personality trait is commented on that they thought was invisible. Whatever the reaction you will be listening attentively to understand how they took your insight. Conversely, surrendering to the truth of the moment can be therapeutic and help the actor go some way towards engaging without pretence. The honesty encouraged through the exercise can help to both realise and reveal the self. This “self-formation”, which is gained through observing and being observed, combined with active doing, starts to influence our motivations (Krasner, 2000a: 25).

The quick and instinctive observations encourage the actors to open up to the subtext of the conversation. By not allowing them time to filter their thoughts, the exercise grants them the privilege to be freer in their expressions. If you say something hurtful or insensitive, then it can be blamed on the Repetition process. Indeed, observations do often come out that would never be heard in standard exchanges even within the safe, creative zone of the acting studio. Then again Repetition is not real life, it is not as logical as we try to be in real life, nor as socially graceful as we hope to be in real life (Meisner, 1987: 33). Meisner believed logic placed your attention in your head, whereas his exercise created real emotional reactions (Ibid.: 47).

### Conclusion

The Repetition exercise is a rich process, gradually increasing in difficulty and demand on the actors. It challenges both stamina — in regards to attentional focus

required, and habits — in terms of changing our perception and defence mechanisms. This introduction to the main workings of the Repetition exercise has revealed several concepts: the outward attention, the importance of process and the problem of politeness. In the following chapters all of these elements will be explored in terms of their place in Meisner technique and their effect on self-consciousness.

### **3:2 Attention-models, Repetition and flow**

The Meisner technique assumes that attention directed towards the self breeds self-consciousness, which in turn hinders presence and spontaneity. The aim of this chapter is to present the reader with different ways attention is used in the Meisner process to bypass self-conscious thought. As well as the different attentional models it also explores the flow state, and its relation to the Repetition exercise and creativity in general.

Rather than an intellectual approach to acting, Meisner wanted to bring the actors back to their instinctive reactions. He wanted to create an acting technique that was rooted in action and ultimately designed to trigger the actors' emotional impulses and release their spontaneity (Meisner, 1987:37). This is an important concept for an actor; as psychological studies have shown, when impulsiveness manifests as spontaneity it can bring a freedom and vigour to human interactions (Dickman, 1990; Hansen & Breivik, 2001). Stopping and regulating the action might disrupt the impulses and result in different behaviour than the instinctive response (Carver & Scheier, 2017). The Repetition exercise works because our capacity to pay attention is limited; if all our attention is being directed towards our partner and our task, there is very little left to direct at ourselves. As Stinespring points out:

Truthful acting occurs when the actor avoids audience-awareness by placing his attention outside of himself on what he is doing, which uses up, if you will, the attention he would place on himself as a result of his awareness of being watched by the audience (Stinespring, 1999: 60).

The way we are able to focus attention, whilst blocking out distracting stimuli, can be seen as mostly automatic. However, our ability to actively choose to focus our attention on one thing over something else is very complex. Our attentional system allows us to tune out certain aspects of our environment by focusing more closely on other aspects. In Meisner technique this focus is directed firstly towards your

partner, and secondly on the task, with the intention of paying less attention to distracting thoughts or the audience.

### Types of attention involved

It is difficult to look at attention as a single construct as so many cognitive mechanisms are involved in the process. To explain what happens when we attend to something different models of attention exist — focusing on different components of attention. In modern psychology three specific theories relating to attention selection have been particularly influential and impactful for the development of the research into the psychology of attention. These are Broadbent's 'early selection model' (1958), Deutsch & Deutsch's 'late selection model' (1963) and Treisman's 'attenuation model' (1964), all of which will be summarised and compared below.

Selective attention relates to what stimuli we attend to, even when we are exposed to other surrounding stimulus. The main reason for selecting what to attend to is linked to our motivation or task — we choose what is relevant to us in that present moment and ignore or filter out the rest. Donald Broadbent's landmark book *Perception and Communication* (1958) is a theoretical account of many experiments, influenced by the psychological phenomenon of informational processing (Driver, 2001:54). In the early selection theory Broadbent posits that all the information from the environment is perceived and processed briefly, before being directed to a selective filter that removes the irrelevant information at an early stage. The remaining information is then assigned meaning and subsequently moved along to other cognitive processes that produce a reaction or response to that information (Broadbent, 1958: 42-43). This is known as a 'filter theory' and was the first of its kind, paving the way for the development and refinement of the idea.

J. Anthony Deutsch and Diana Deutsch developed a 'late selection theory', in response to Broadbent's theory. They questioned the idea of filtering happening before meaning is assigned — due to our ability to switch our attention to something more salient during a conversation. For example, if we hear our name mentioned in a conversation we are not engaged in, our attention tends to move to that conversation, rather than the one we are in. This is known as the 'cocktail party effect' (Cherry, 1953: 976), and was among the studies that instigated the late

selection theory (Deutsch & Deutsch, 1963: 80-1).<sup>35</sup> This theory proposed that instead of the selection filter removing irrelevant information before we know what it means, we assign meaning to everything before the filter selects what is valuable to us in that moment — which is then passed on to cognitive processing (Deutsch & Deutsch, 1963: 83-84). Rather than a perceptual rejection early on, instead it is a “rejection from entry into memory or into control of deliberate responses” (Driver, 2001: 58). This theory did accrue a lot of questioning and one of those looking to adjust the theory was Anne Treisman — Broadbent’s PhD student.

Treisman’s attenuation theory counters the late selection theory — as well as the early selection theory — especially in terms of why we would spend energy assigning meaning to everything only to discard most of the information. She proposed a less drastic version of Broadbent’s filter model, taking into account the findings that unattended stimuli were sometimes processed in a more profound way than expected (Driver, 2001: 58). Treisman’s theory places an “attenuator” between the stimuli and process of assigning meaning. The attenuator weakens the information of the stimulus not directly related to our task, and it still gets assigned meaning, but is filtered into a lower priority channel. If the low priority information becomes important, the attention switches to that source (Treisman, 1964: 454-455). This sophisticated position became foundational to many essential ideas within the psychology of attention such as partial information and priming.

All three selective attention theories used aural research as the basis for the models. In terms of visually selective attention, a spotlight metaphor has been widely used and relied on in the field. This metaphor was suggested, and explored by, Posner, Snyder & Davidson (1980) — however the ideas surrounding using a spotlight as a way of understanding selective attention was also used by Norman (1968) and Eriksen & Eriksen (1974), and its origin may go back much further. The theory is derived from the idea that like having a flashlight, or a spotlight, we are aware of a greater environment but not able to focus on more than what the light illuminates. As other senses react to shifts in our surroundings, we can move the attention (spotlight) around and focus on it as a reaction to new stimuli (Posner, Snyder &

---

<sup>35</sup> Other studies that influenced the response to Broadbent’s early selection theory included Speith, Curtis & Webster’s (1954) study into humans’ ability to respond to simultaneous messages, Sharples & Jasper’s (1956) study into habituation to auditory stimuli in cats, Sokolov (1960) and Sokolov & Voronin’s studies (1960) into human arousal to specific meaning of words (Deutsch & Deutsch, 1963: 81).



Davidson, 1980: 172-173). Things in our environment that we do not attend to consciously will feel foreign to us the next time we see it, not because we didn't see it, but because we didn't process it fully. The spotlight model states that we can only attend to a small selection of perceptual input at a time, even though our senses might be aware of them on some level. A variant of the spotlight-model is the 'zoom-lens' model, which was proposed by Eriksen & St. James (1986) and argued that the attentional field can be adjusted depending on the task (239). Further, this idea supported the notion that as the attentional field increases, the ability to process the entire field decreases (Ibid.). What this means is that multi-tasking (divided attention) is difficult and takes a lot of effort for the human mind. This will be explored to a greater extent in Chapter 5:1, which will introduce Kahneman's theory of effort (1973) in relation to the Knock on the Door exercise.

As stated previously, attention is a complicated subject relying on many multifaceted ideas to explain the processes involved. In terms of Meisner's process it is useful to explore the notion of evaluating and training the attention, as the previous chapter suggested — the technique can be seen as a form of attention training (Soto-Moretini, 2010),<sup>36</sup> used to develop different aspects of our attentional abilities. Within clinical psychology attention training is used to develop and evaluate different aspects of the attention in children as well as adults, often with focus on those with impaired attentional ability like ADHD or brain-injuries.<sup>37</sup> Although I am not working with those types of participants, the clinical models' way of separating the types of attention in order to evaluate them is suitable to use when investigating Meisner's technique. The reason for this is because of the training and process aspect, as the foundational exercises in Meisner's approach successively increases the challenge on the different attention types one by one.

There are several models which outline the fundamental neurological structures and components of attention.<sup>38</sup> It is hard to categorise distinct components of attention, as there are overlaps between factor analytic, cognitive processing and clinical models of attention. However, most models regardless of the theoretical framework

---

<sup>36</sup> Attention training is based on the premise that we can improve attentional abilities by activating, and repeatedly stimulating, certain attentional components — which ultimately changes our attentional functioning (Cicerone et al. 2000; Sohlberg & Mateer, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> See for example Kerns, Eso & Thomson's 1999 study on ADHD. For studies on patients with brain injuries, see Sohlberg & Mateer, 1987, 2001 and Dvorkin, et.al, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> These include Sohlberg & Mateer (1987), Posner & Peterson (1990), Mirsky, et al., (1991), Kerns & Mateer (1996), & Sturm et al. (1997).

used refer to separable components of attention (Sohlberg & Mateer, 2001: 103).

These include:

1. **Focused attention** — the ability to direct the attention to relevant stimuli (external or internal).
2. **Sustained attention** — the ability to focus on a specific attention-demanding (sometimes repetitive) task for a continuous amount of time without getting distracted,
3. **Selective attention** — focus on one activity or stimuli over other present stimuli.
4. **Alternating attention** — alternate back and forth between different tasks.
5. **Divided attention** — focus on two or more tasks simultaneously (can be referred to as “multi-tasking”). Different from alternating as you pay attention to two things at once.

Of these it would be very hard to single out one above another as most important in the Repetition exercise. One could even argue that all the types are in play at one point or another. In terms of the Meisner technique **focused and sustained attention** definitely plays a part in the Repetition exercise as we first learn to focus the attention on the partner, rather than other external stimuli, or internal thoughts. Further we develop the ability to continually sustain that focus for long periods of time, whilst executing the somewhat repetitive task of listening, observing and repeating. This is a crucial element as the Repetition exercise requires our full concentration so we have to be able to sustain our external attention when engaging in the exercise.

The Repetition exercise also uses **selective attention** as we willingly choose to focus on our partner, rather than the audience or ourselves, even when other stimuli are presented. The way that I choose to teach parts of the technique involves several pairs working at once in the same space. This exposes the students more thoroughly to the selective attention element as they also have to tune out surrounding voices in order to focus on their partner. We also select which of our partner’s attributes to pay attention to: their physical features, their behaviour or emotional state — the choice will be dictated by which stage the exercise is at.

**Alternating attention** is present in the exercise as the students shift their attention between making observations about their partner, listening and repeating and

reacting to what their partner observes in them. This requires them to be constantly attentive to what they see and hear, they are actively watching but also actively listening whilst speaking. However, the goal here is to make these elements ingrained enough that we would use **divided attention**. We are constantly multi-tasking in the Repetition exercise, especially as our listening and reacting skills become honed and more automatic and so we are able to stop alternating between them and engage in those elements simultaneously. As this happens our attention becomes absorbed by doing these to the point of very little attention being paid to our own behaviour, and we become less self-aware (Stinespring, 1990: 106). This attentional component becomes even more evident when the Meisner process moves on to the activity stage — where one partner is trying to complete a difficult activity whilst engaging in Repetition with the other partner. While an element of alternating attention might appear here as the actors stop their activity in order to observe their partner, divided attention is needed for the exercise to truly succeed. This aspect is explained in more detail within Chapter 6:1, (178-179).

In Sohlberg & Mateer's clinical model (1987) these components are hierarchically structured — one being the lowest and five the highest — based on the amount of effort required (cognitive load) for each attention state. The lower levels like focused attention and sustained attention only involve one set of stimuli, whereas the higher levels involve being able to switch between stimuli and even attend to two simultaneously (Kerns, Eso & Thomson, 1999: 274). The higher the level, the more cognitive effort and attention is used to engage with the task(s). In their attention process training attentional load is increased gradually and systematically to ensure successful development of each component (Sohlberg & Mateer, 2017: 83). In terms of the Meisner technique these components, and the hierarchical structure, relate to how the Repetition exercises are layered and slowly increased in difficulty. This aspect will be further explored in the section on Repetition and flow and the following chapter on Activity.

### Controlled and automatic attention

Since all the forms of attention discussed above relate to what John Sweller has termed 'cognitive load' (1988), it would be beneficial here to briefly explain what this entails. The theory of cognitive load refers to working memory, and what we can pay attention to at any one time. He distinguishes between the novice and the expert, and

the theory is built on the premise that as our expertise increases with practice and knowledge, the less cognitive effort is used up whilst engaging with the task (Sweller, 1988: 259, 261). The more adept we are at something, the more automatic the process becomes, which means it uses less of our limited attentional resource. Attention is commonly categorized into two distinct functions: *bottom-up* or *automatic* attention and *top-down* or *controlled* attention (Kinchla & Wolfe, 1979; Egeth & Yantis, 1997: 271).<sup>39</sup> Bottom-up attention is driven by external factors that grab our attention in the present moment — making it stimulus driven and reactive, and requiring less effort. Top-down attention is stimulated from internal motives, where we seek out information in the environment depending on what we are trying to achieve — making it deliberate, goal directed and more cognitively expensive (Katsuki & Constantinidis, 2014: 509).

The more adept we become at a task also has an effect on which type of processing is at work (Diamond, 2013: 137). We are able to engage more effortlessly once we have mastered something and it starts to happen automatically, thus some tasks can move from being a top-down (controlled) process to a bottom-up (automatic) because of repeated exposure and skill levels rising. For example, when actors learn lines the initial process involves more controlled attention, as the actor's attention tends to be on the script and the act of reading the lines, locating the correct part and following stage directions. Even as the actor tries to engage with their fellow actors their attention is distracted by not knowing what to say next and how to respond, in this way the more controlled type of attention overpowers the instinctive and reactive. It can also have an impact on physical movements that can become small and limited and lack spontaneity due to the effort it takes to focus on the script. As the actor becomes more and more familiar with the script the lines become more automatic and the focus can instead be shifted towards interacting with others, listening and working off impulses. This means that we can focus our attention deliberately on something, whilst being reactive to changes in the environment — the control of attention is simultaneously automatic and controlled (Glass & Holyoak, 1986: 47-48).

The same process occurs during the Repetition exercise. As the students become more adept at simultaneously observing, repeating and listening, these aspects of the exercise then require less effort. There is then a danger of more attentional capacity

---

<sup>39</sup> William James (1890) distinguished between passive and active attention., However in modern day psychology this is referred to as bottom-up/top-down, or stimulus-driven/goal-directed attention.

being freed up which may drift towards self-critique or audience awareness. Meisner's exercises are therefore carefully layered to increase difficulty and engagement incrementally. They are designed to keep the student's maximum focus on the partner and task.

### Repetition and flow

The idea of balancing the skill-level with the challenge directly corresponds to the notion of flow. Flow is a concept coined by the psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi and falls under the rubric of positive or optimal psychology. Csíkszentmihályi's book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990) is widely recognised as the authority on the subject of flow — a concept that has been researched in a variety of domains including sport, gaming, educational settings and the arts, and appears to enhance learning and creativity as well as diminish self-consciousness.<sup>40</sup>

Csíkszentmihályi's flow state — colloquially referred to as 'being in the zone' — is described as a state of concentration where, due to realistic goals and skills matching the required action, one is so invested in a task that one momentarily blocks out all other stimuli (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 6). Csíkszentmihályi himself has played an integral role in much of the research into this area in the four decades since he first defined the concept, and the definition of flow has had very little adjustments made to it.

In Csíkszentmihályi's book (1990), he reports on his research into optimal experience and the striking similarity of the feelings participants reportedly experienced during such moments, even when activities differed widely. Through interviews, Csíkszentmihályi was able to narrow down and determine the predominant elements present during a flow state:

- Merging of action and awareness
- Full concentration on the task at hand
- The paradox of control

---

<sup>40</sup> Recent advances in the research have been directed towards the measuring of flow and towards other related areas, such as computer-human interactions (Liu et al, 2009) and marketing and consumer behaviour (Drengner et al., 2009).

- Loss of self-consciousness
- Transformation of time
- A challenging activity that requires skill
- Clear goals and feedback

(Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 49-66)

Flow has been referred to within many different fields and topics, ranging from Buddhism and Daoism to hyperfocus, ADHD (Hallowell & Ratey, 1994; Ashinoff & Abu-Akel, 2019), trance (Hytonen-Ng, 2016), and mindfulness (Kee & Wang, 2008). The particular aspects of flow explored in this thesis are the notion of flow as a quality of attention, and the way in which the concept of *skill-challenge balance* can be used as a training tool for directing and sustaining the actor's focus.

### Flow as a quality of attention

During flow, attention is directed outwards at its full capacity. Given that attention is a limited resource, directing the focus outwards consequently diminishes inward focus, thus diminishing self-critical observations (Carver & Scheier, 2012: 35). Flow is a state of full concentration on and commitment to the task. Various studies into the psychology of athletes and flow-experience support this notion of external focus as an integral part of enhanced performance (Baumeister, 1984; Jackson & Csíkszentmihályi, 1999; Beilock & Carr, 2001; Beilock et al., 2002; McNevin, Shea & Wulf, 2003), and experience sampling among athletes shows full concentration to be the most highlighted of all characteristics of flow (Swann et al, 2015).

Csíkszentmihályi states that when a person's complete attention is focused on the task, no 'psychic energy' (attention) remains for any extraneous concerns. This, in turn, leads to spontaneity in the sense that deep involvement in the present task engages the impulses. Assessment of the situation happens instinctively rather than analytically, and action follows automatically (Csíkszentmihályi & Jackson, 1999). In the Repetition exercise, the action becomes spontaneous because it cannot be anything else; the student is obliged to respond to the present moment — both their perception of it and someone else's perception of them — whilst retaining a subjective point of view. In other words, both partners have to attend to each other for the exercise to induce a flow state. As Stinespring stresses: "it becomes a venue for total freedom of spontaneous self-expression" (Stinespring, 2000: 106). Should

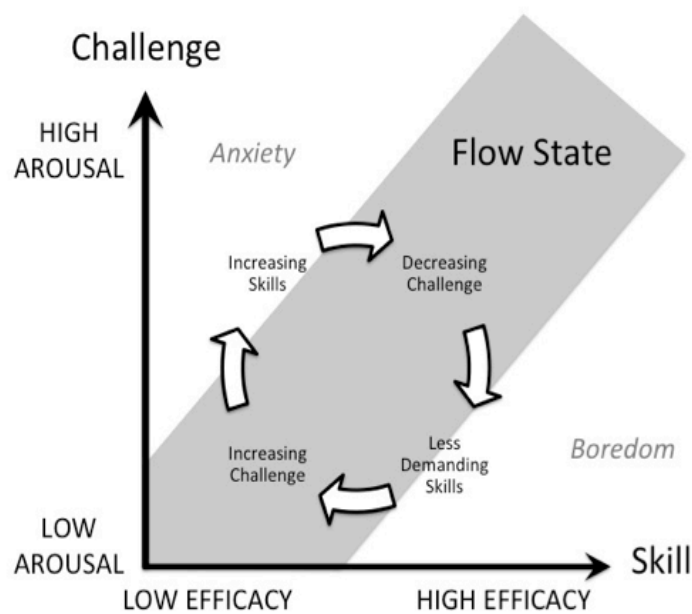
the attention be diverted, either inwards or towards an external source other than the partner, the connection between the partners is lost. I encourage my students to notice when their attention wavers, and when it does, to redirect their focus back onto task or partner. The Meisner technique trains the actor to sustain attention, and to redirect it when they lose presence or move onto thoughts unrelated to the task. As Esper notes: “Fortunately, the placement of your concentration can be controlled by your will. You can place your concentration where you want it to be” (Esper, 2008: 47). Controlling attention is one of the key objectives of the Meisner technique. The process teaches the actor to use an element of self-control to direct their focus onto their partner instead of themselves (Esper, 2008: 45; Moseley, 2012: 68).

During the flow experience, goal- or task-directed attention is such an important factor (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 58) that researchers into flow state have argued that training one’s ability to focus may be beneficial for initiating the flow experience (Harris, Vine & Wilson, 2017: 114); being able to control attention could play a vital role in achieving flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 30-40). Attentional control allows one to use will to re-direct attention towards the relevant stimuli, which can also balance the competing top-down and bottom-up attentional processes. The top-down process allows thoughts to stay on target and task, whereas bottom-up processes are more open to distracting stimuli which disrupt task attention and performance and makes one more prone to anxiety (Eysenck et al., 2007). This means that if one can take control of conscious thought through the direction of concentration, one can regain the state of flow. As mentioned previously, in order to prevent the attention to the partner being directed to the self in Meisner’s Repetition process, the task’s complexity is increased incrementally, which in turn strengthens external concentration. Balancing skill and challenge helps the actor to sustain their attention to task, which in turn trains the ability to control attention, in direct relation to the concept of skill-challenge balance found in flow theory.

### The skill-challenge balance

The skill-challenge balance is a key condition for obtaining flow (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2002) and has been used in experiments that endeavor to induce the flow state (Kawabata & Mallett, 2011). When one masters a skill, one’s attention to task is freed up and it becomes increasingly important to find challenges that keep the focus external and not on the process of the task (as this could lead to self-

consciousness and diminished performance) (Baumeister, 1984: 610; Beilock & Carr, 2001: 701). One way of regulating attention in terms of staying on the task is the skill-challenge balance (Csíkszentmihályi, 1988: 30; Harris, 2017: 10). As shown in the flow diagram below (fig. 6), there is a small window of opportunity in which flow can occur. This window is dependent on an ongoing flexibility within the balance between skill and challenge. As skill is procured through exposure to and repetition of the task, the challenge needs to be adjusted accordingly. Csíkszentmihályi makes it clear that the kind of challenge involved in the activity has to be right for the personal skill level — too great a challenge, or indeed too small, will create either anxiety or boredom.<sup>44</sup>



(Figure 6: Flow Diagram; Source: Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 74)

Through the research into this thesis, I have become more aware of the skill-challenge balance in my teaching of the Meisner technique. As previously mentioned, the Meisner process aims to direct the actor's concentration to an external source, where self-consciousness is neither part of the interaction nor dictating the actor's actions or intentions. When training actors are first introduced to the Repetition exercise, the concept of being observed often initially brings about a level of worry and self-consciousness. However, when they start to observe their fellow actors — out loud and in detail — this worry starts to diminish. Due to the actors engaging in

<sup>44</sup> Apart from Boredom and Anxiety, there are five other emotions that surround the flow tunnel: Arousal, Control, Relaxation, Apathy and Worry (Massimini & Carli, in Csíkszentmihályi 1988:270). This extended flow diagram will be referred to in the practice section of the thesis.



this new activity, coupled with the difficulty of simultaneously keeping the Repetition exercise going, the attention they can pay to themselves is limited (Stinespring, 1999: 106). For example, as the students start to become accustomed to repeating exactly what the other person says whilst making simple external observations like: “You have a nose,” the task difficulty increases.: first, the teacher demands more specifically behavioural observations such as “You laughed,” or “You furrowed your eyebrows.” As this skill develops and becomes more automatic, the teacher requests psychological reasons behind the behavior such as “You are nervous,” or “You are confused.” As the students’ skill level gradually develops from exposure to all the levels of the Repetition exercise, Meisner increases the difficulty by adding challenging activities fueled by imaginary circumstances and motivation. This correlates with Kahneman’s work on effort, which states that attention levels increase along with the rise in difficulty or demand of the task (Kahneman, 1973: 13). (However, as this primarily relates to the activity phase of Meisner training, it will be explored further throughout Chapter 5.)

The importance of having a ‘challenging activity’ is included in an overwhelming proportion of reports into optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 49). As part of the flow experience, Csíkszentmihályi also specifically mentions activities that, in addition to being challenging, have clear rules that are particularly attention-demanding. In everyday life, memories, worries and daily struggles frequently enter one’s mind and diminish situational enjoyment because of the lack of demand for concentration (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 58). The type of activities that enable flow state demand full concentration, which daily activities and home life may not require. This strongly relates to the sense of *extra-daily*<sup>45</sup> concentration used in the Repetition exercise, either when observing one’s partner or engaging in one’s own activity. The Repetition exercise stretches the limits of the student’s attention, which in turn forces them to disengage with any part of consciousness not relating to the present task. This is due to the way Meisner set up the exercises; apart from the observation and response element, the fact that the observation has to be made about your partner, and not about yourself, keeps the attention external. Additionally, the demand that the partner keeps repeating (without pauses) throughout the exercise also prioritizes the *doing* aspect and ensures that attention does not turn inward. The

---

<sup>45</sup> The term extra-daily was coined by Eugenio Barba when referring to aspects of performance where the actors applied techniques in a different, or more elevated manner than in everyday life (Barba, 1995: 15).

fact that the Repetition must be continuous whilst keeping a sense of openness to the partner's observations leaves little attention available for questioning or diverting from task. Csíkszentmihályi emphasizes the importance of total focus on the task in regards to flow, as it means there is less attention to be allocated to doubt and questioning (of the activity or oneself) which create hesitation and self-consciousness, prohibiting flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 54).

### Loss of self-consciousness

The loss of self-consciousness in flow is another central argument for using flow as a training tool. In Csíkszentmihályi's view, the loss of self-consciousness during flow is a direct result of the attention being used up in the task and the assessing of the present external environment, to the point where awareness of the self and one's thoughts are diminished (1990: 62). Worry often occurs with regard to an event that is about to happen or could possibly happen; the attention rests on an attempt to anticipate the future. Striving to predict something forces one to rely on memories of past experiences, which means attention is not on the present moment, whereas being engrossed in a task that demands one's full attention forces one to focus on the now.

In the Repetition exercise, although the task is to direct focus to the environmental stimuli, the fact of another person looking back can quickly turn the attention back to the self. Psychologists Carver and Scheier note that the very act of being watched by one or more people often results in the subject feeling self-conscious:

There are also external stimuli that are encountered in the normal course of life whose nature is such that they redirect attention inward to the self. An example is the presence of one or more onlookers. The presence of other people who are observing us reminds us of ourselves (2012: 54).

Csíkszentmihályi asserts that the reason we focus more on ourselves when we are scrutinised by others is the self feeling threatened (1990: 63). This is an internal threat rooted in emotional vulnerability, which can turn the attention inwards and generate feelings such as worry, anxiety or defensiveness (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 84).

In the Repetition exercise, the act of being observed and commented on can, in the

beginning, activate this internal threat and lead to the students feeling exposed and defensive. This can take their attention away from the task at hand — observing the other person — and instead turn it to themselves. However, through training and balancing skill and challenge, the student can slowly begin to master the skill of focusing on the other while remaining accepting and responsive to their partner's comments. When this skill is mastered, it has the reverse effect on self-consciousness. Meisner teacher Jim Jarrett believes that the Repetition exercise is key in re-directing focus from oneself:

There are incredible benefits to working [Meisner's] way and one of the greatest is that for an actor to be present his focus must be off himself and if his focus is off himself all nerves and self-consciousness melts away. In fact, it's impossible to even be nervous if your focus is off yourself (Email interview, 2016 — see Appendix 1 for full interview).

Jarrett's enthusiastic words stem from years of teaching this technique and seeing the benefits of such training on the confidence of the students. His observations follow the premise that loss of self-consciousness aids flow, which in turn diminishes anxiety. Observing the process from the outside, it is clearly visible when a student stops concentrating on him or herself and starts to interact fully with their partner: they relax physically, start to breathe fully and engage emotionally in the exchange. They enter a state where nothing matters but their partner and the current interaction, not dissimilar to how Csíkszentmihályi describes the state of flow:

You are completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved.  
(Csíkszentmihályi, *Wired Magazine*, 1996).

### Experiencing flow

Another aspect frequently encountered during the flow state is the transformation of time (1990: 67). This temporal element has had much support from investigations of flow in sport psychology (Jackson, 1992; Swann, 2012) and Csíkszentmihályi found that a significant amount of people described the flow state as “hours feeling like minutes”, “getting lost in the activity” and “real time-lapse experiences” (1990: 66). Conversely, there are also mentions of time-perception slowing down (Ibid.), where a

person feels like they have been doing an activity for a longer time than they have.

Whilst engaging in the Repetition exercise, my students frequently recount both types of time distortion. When the actors master the attention element of Repetition, I often let them work in pairs all working at once in the space. The lack of immediate scrutiny that would come from an audience evokes playfulness and a freedom in the exercise, which takes more focus off the actors themselves. At this stage, I allow the Repetition to go on for longer than I would normally, up to 15-20 minutes in some cases, and am always met with astonishment when the students are informed of the length of the exercise. Most participants perceive the duration as a quarter of the real time, a sentiment shared by other Meisner teachers (see for example Moseley, 2006: 132). Similarly, when a student first experiences the vulnerability and intimacy that Repetition can bring about, they often have a sense of having participated in the exercise for longer than they actually have. They feel that something profound has taken place and there is almost a sense of being cheated when I make them aware that the session has lasted mere minutes. This evidences not only the time-lapse aspect, but also the enjoyment of the state and process. An example of this will be explored in Chapter 6:1, Case Study 7, (199).

Although one of the driving forces of flow is a goal-oriented mindset, the sustained concentration which is its hallmark also depends on enjoyment of the process, not just the end result (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990:67). Motivation in the form of stakes and commitment directs the focus, but the pursuit and execution of the goal becomes a goal in itself; an event referred to by Csíkszentmihályi as an *autotelic* experience.<sup>46</sup> The key element of an autotelic experience is that it is an end in itself, referring to a self-contained activity that is performed not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward — also called intrinsic motivation (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 67). Parallels can be drawn between the way Meisner's exercise works and the autotelic aspect of the flow state. Just as in flow states, the Repetition exercise does not look to the outcome: the process *is* the goal even when motivational elements are added.

Further, engaging in mutual attention creates an information exchange where one

---

<sup>46</sup> "Autotelic" is derived from two Greek words, *auto* meaning self, and *telos* meaning goal. (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 67).

experiences being part of the same reciprocal system as others, which affects one's goals, goal-directed behavior and ability to find flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). The Repetition exercise is centred in allowing one's own actions to be dictated by the partner's actions, no matter how small, so that what you observe in your partner (be it behaviour, intonation or movement) is only reason to change what one is doing (Shirley, 2010: 202). In order for this to happen, one has to be open to being affected by the partner's words and actions, as responses will come out of impulsive reactions within the exercise. This involves opening oneself to external stimuli so that one's reactions are formed through impulse and instinct rather than learned behaviour and habits. Such a state — where the student is receptive, yet not passive — forms part of what Csíkszentmihályi refers to as having an “autotelic personality” (Csíkszentmihályi, Rathunde & Whalen, 1993: 82). An autotelic personality balances reception and action, has an openness to the immediate environment and makes one more prone to both flow experiences and creativity (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 88; 1997: 53).

The idea of the creative state taking place in a moment when our attention is external to ourselves strongly relates to the Meisner technique. Neither flow theory nor Meisner technique has creativity as the ultimate goal, but both demand a commitment to the ongoing process with the purpose to remain in the moment and presently attuned to one's surroundings. The Repetition exercise does not seek to foster creation of anything specific; rather the focus lies on training the mind to place attention on another person, and so the verbal interactions are found in the observations of the other (Durham, 2004: 153; Shirley. 2010: 201). However, it could be argued that allowing yourself to fully act on instinct and react and respond to what is given, will ultimately lead to the creation of something in the space, whether that something be an atmosphere, a dialogue or an exchange of emotions.

Meisner himself believed that encouraging the actors to follow their inner impulses in the Repetition exercise was “the source of all creativity” (Meisner, 1987: 37). This is echoed by acting coach and Meisner practitioner Hilary Halba, who sees the Meisner technique, and the Repetition exercise in particular, as a fertile setting for creative, impulsive explorations to take place. She proposes that switching the attention onto the partner encourages playfulness and creativity in actors (Halba, 2012: 131).

Konstantin Stanislavski also agreed with the notion of attention placement playing a part in the creativity of the actor. He spoke of the 'actor's inner creative state' as the place one enters where one's attention is fully on the action of the play and one's fellow actors. Stanislavski described this state as the place where instinct takes over and the actor experiences the play moment by moment (Stanislavski, 2010: 295).

### Motivation in flow

Although flow is seen as an autotelic process, finding a suitably challenging activity which will sustain attention by extension requires "clear goals and immediate feedback"; in other words, the actor must have clear motivation so they can tell along the way whether or not they are achieving their goal (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 54). The achievement aspect requires constant focus on progress, which keeps the attention on the present moment. For example, if one were climbing a mountain, part of one's attention would be focused on getting to the top (as that is the ultimate goal), but to get there, most of one's attention would be directed to achieving each step, and the feedback in relation to the success of each step is crucial (Ibid.).

The motivational aspect of the Meisner process becomes prominent in Meisner's Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercises, which will be further explored in Chapters 5 and 6. However, the lack of clear goals and feedback in the initial stages of Repetition might be of interest to address, if doing so could provide a way to allow students to reach a flow-like stage quicker. It could be argued that there is a place for some form of motivation to be included in the exercise beyond the objective of listening and repeating the partners' observations. This question has led me to experiment with the introduction of simple objectives during the early stages of Repetition. Instructing the students to focus on objectives such as "I want to know what my partner is feeling," or "I want to know my partner better," does not contravene the intention of the Repetition exercise, and in practice, this addition helps the actors become less defensive and self-conscious as they become more engaged with the other person. In my experience, using an objective has aided the exercise both in terms of deepening the interaction as well as increasing the ability of the actors to sustain it. Some students can quickly start the interaction but, without an objective to anchor them to the moment, run out of steam along the way. Meisner practitioner Nick Moseley describes the need for a motivational force in Repetition:

There must be a level of engagement with the other actor, or the exercises

quickly become meaningless. To engage with someone from whom you want nothing from feels false — at best a social game, at worst a social gaffe.

(2012:18)

He goes on to explain that including an objective relative to understanding the other person does not go against the premise of the Repetition exercise. As our next action is dependent on our reaction to the other actor, understanding that person must become the most important task in that moment (Moseley, 2006: 19). The idea of adding motivational elements to the Repetition exercise — both in terms of physical objectives as well as more complex emotional objectives — will be further explored in Chapter 4:1 (127-128)

As described in this section, there are a multitude of ways in which the Repetition exercise intersects with Csíkszentmihályi's concept of flow, assuming that the exercise has been mastered and is working in the way it is intended.<sup>50</sup> However, finding flow and sustaining flow are two different challenges. Although the majority of research into the flow state still uses Csíkszentmihályi's theory as the principal knowledge on the subject, more studies into the area are emerging, specifically regarding the elements present in flow (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008; Engeser & Schiepe-Tiska, 2012). These studies into the flow state have focused less on the intrinsic motivation and autotelic experience, and more on the challenge-skill balance and the achievement aspect. Both studies argued that the skill-challenge balance was a crucial factor in finding flow, but only if the participant had sufficient motive for engaging in the task (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008: 168; Engeser & Schiepe-Tiska, 2012: 5). Skill-challenge balance and motivation are also the two elements of flow most prominently used in throughout this thesis in terms of using the theory as a training tool for attention. As previously mentioned, there is great value in looking at strength of motivation in sustaining attention in the Meisner process, as well as asking what it is that determines or enhances one's ability to keep one's attention on a task. Equally important is the exploration into what happens when the actor is not motivated enough, the task is too difficult, or they get distracted and allow their mind to wander. The next section will examine the impact of mind wandering and distraction on flow and ways in which the Meisner process tackles this.

---

<sup>50</sup> In Chapter 4, which focuses on the practice, I will compare the other emotional outcomes surrounding the feeling of flow, and relate them back in turn to problems that can occur in the Repetition exercise.

### **3:3 The effect of mind wandering**

This section will present the notion of *mind wandering* and examine the ways in which mind wandering reduces flow and enhances self-consciousness. Following this there will be a discussion of neuropsychological studies of brain activity during flow states and mind wandering and how this informs approaches to encourage presence and flow in actors.

What prevents the actor from being present, and instead ‘go into their own heads’ — or as Meisner put it: become more introverted (1987: 182) — is the mind moving away from the task and onto other subjects such as past problems, performance or the audience. The psychological phenomenon of mind wandering appertains to the times when our thoughts de-couple or drift from the task at hand, towards something internal. Until relatively recently, mind wandering was a rather un-researched subject and ill-defined concept,<sup>51</sup> especially the notion of self-generated thoughts and how they differ from task-unrelated thoughts and goal-directed thoughts (Henriquez, 2015: 17). Mind wandering can occur both intentionally and unintentionally, (Giambra, 1995: 2) and sometimes without us realising until later that we are not focusing on the present moment. During the times when our mind wanders, we are moving away from the present and are more likely to think about the future, or to ponder personal issues rather than engage in unfocused day dreams (McVay, Kane & Kwapil, 2009: 860). Giambra noted that during times when the external world, or the task at hand, did not demand our full concentration — or use up all available cognitive capacity — the excess attention is directed inward (Giambra, 1995: 1). Our attentional resources are therefore redirected from the task to the maintenance of internal thoughts. The Repetition exercise exists to continually re-focus the actor’s thoughts towards their partner or activity in order to stop the mind from drifting to the self (Meisner, 1987: 24; Durham, 2004: 194; Shirley, 2010: 201) and consequently resulting in self-consciousness.<sup>52</sup>

As our attention is moved from the external task onto ourselves, our perception skills

---

<sup>51</sup> The concept has been explored under many different terms, such as: “temporary attentional lapses” (Weissman, Roberts, Visscher, & Woldorff, 2006), “stimulus independent thought” (Teasdale et al., 1995), “inner speech” (Morin, 2009), “task-unrelated thoughts” (Smallwood et al., 2003) and “spontaneous thoughts” (Christoff et al., 2009).

<sup>52</sup> In this instance I am focusing on how the Meisner technique tackles this phenomenon, however there are of course other techniques and ways, both within acting and everyday life that endeavors to make us more present. These techniques can include mindfulness and all forms of meditation.



diminish and we do not take notice of our environment in the same detailed way as when we are focused outwards (Smallwood & Schooler, 2006: 947). We might be able to see and engage with the outside world during mind wandering, but this interaction will be less reactive and perceptive. This is because when our attention is self-focused it interferes with our processing of sensory information. Studies have shown that mind wandering reduces not just our ability to complete a task (Smallwood et al., 2008: 464) but also shows a reduction in visual and auditory engagement with the environment (Kam et al., 2010: 466; Braboszcz & Delorme, 2011: 3045): in other words, we react less to what we see and hear. In terms of the Repetition exercise this would explain how some students seem unable to observe aspects of their partner when they have entered into a self-conscious state. This is often accompanied with the inability to hear the changes in the Repetition. Their minds are de-coupled from the external perception and so they miss nuances in the environment due to the amount of attention being taken up by internal thoughts. At times I have asked why someone didn't repeat the new observation their partner had made, and their answer is often: "I had no idea it changed". Likewise, when asked why someone didn't make any observations about their partner, they often respond that they did not register any behavioural changes. Occasionally they have even struggled with observing simple external traits of their partner.

These moments of internal focus are a common occurrence in the beginning of the training and can result in events such as:

1. The student not being able to process what is being said to them, hence having no opinion on or reaction to their partner's statement.
2. The student not making observations about their partner as they struggle to perceive changes in them.
3. The exchange slowing down.

An important distinction to make is the difference between mind wandering and externally induced distractions. When our attention is re-directed due to an environmental factor — such as someone entering a space or a phone ringing — we are momentarily focused on something other than our primary task. However, this is a different phenomenon to mind wandering; our thoughts are still directed away from ourselves during these lapses, but the fact that we get distracted by outside forces is more related to our attentional control ability (Stawarczyk, Majerus, Catale

& D'Argembeau, 2012: 33). These attentional lapses occur frequently in our everyday life as we are predisposed to react to sensory information relating to outside dangers or events. Both mind-wandering and external distractions affect our task-focus, however one is directed by exteroceptive perceptions and the other by interoceptive sensations (Ibid.: 26).

Cognitively these also differ in the types of control we employ in order to rectify both types of distractions. *Proactive control* refers to the times when we exercise a sustained control in order to achieve our goal, focusing on why we are doing the task and remembering the stakes of the situation. *Reactive control* on the other hand helps us get back to task when something in the environment distracts us by allowing us to quickly remember why something is important to achieve. One stops us reacting to outside stimuli in the first place and the other helps us return to the task when we do (McVay & Kane, 2010: 192-193) — both are linked to the stakes and urgency of the situation. In terms of the Repetition exercise both of these situations have a tendency to occur, however they have a slightly different effect as attentional lapses due to something in the environment is less likely to inhibit the actor in the same way as the effect of self-conscious thoughts. At times one can follow the other, as a laugh or reaction from an audience member (an externally driven lapse in attention from the task of observing your partner) can generate self-rumination. This is why in the Repetition exercise we train both sustained and selective attention. The concept of proactive and reactive control will be explored further in Chapter 5:1, in relation to Independent Activity and Knock on the Door.

Psychologists Todd Handy and Julia Kam found that during periods of mind wandering, not only is our attention to the external diminished but our ability to use selective attention is dampened (Handy & Kam; 2015: 184). However, the same study also revealed that during tasks that had become automated and needed less attention by the participants, such as driving a car or walking, the impact of mind wandering was less noticeable on their ability to complete the task (Ibid.: 185) — although it is also more likely to occur (Smallwood et al., 2004: 675). This indicates that there is more risk of mind wandering when the task is not challenging enough, or our motivation is not based on high stakes, as the frequency of mind wandering is relatively high during low demand, easy tasks and correspondingly decreases when task-difficulty increases (McKiernan, D'Angelo, Kaufman, & Binder, 2006; Smallwood & Schooler, 2006). This parallels the skill-challenge balance and supports how

Meisner carefully layered his exercises to become more challenging as and when they started to demand less focus from the students.<sup>53</sup> Boredom during a task would inevitably free up the attention to drift. One can also make the assumption that if the skill level was too low for the challenge of the task, anxiety would also create a place for the attention to drift onto inner evaluation or negative thoughts about one's performance. As Csíkszentmihályi & Nakamura note: the feeling of anxiety has the tendency to direct the attention away from the task and instead onto the one's "task-related shortcomings" (2002: 92). They state that this creates "a state of mind that is extremely self-conscious and prevents the performer from experiencing flow" (Ibid.).

The question then arises: if the skill-challenge balance is imperative for flow and external attention — and the tipping of that balance tends to promote mind-wandering — does all mind wandering promote self-consciousness and is thus detrimental to flow?

### Mind wandering and self-consciousness

Mind wandering is specifically focused on internally generated thoughts, and hence instrumental to self-rumination and self-critique (Smallwood & Schooler, 2006; Schooler et al., 2011) both of which play a large part in self-consciousness. Studies into mind wandering's effect on our mood have shown that when the mind drifts during a task that is not yet completed, this is often followed by negative feelings relating to the ability to do the task (Smallwood et al., 2007; Smallwood et al., 2009; Poerio et al., 2013). When mind wandering happens while we are performing a task, it can warp our perception of how well we are executing it. For actors this may mean how well they are seen to execute the task of acting or performing.

The notion of mind wandering as a de-coupling of our attention from the external world is valuable for understanding the Repetition exercise and the Meisner process in general. As attention to the external is diminished, it can lead to self-critical thoughts and lower performance ability. This resonates with the foundation of the Meisner-technique: to keep "limitless attention on the partner" (Merlin, 2010: 121) and consequently away from the self. Meisner encourages the actors to work from impulse, which is possible by choosing not to reflect or dwell on your own responses,

---

<sup>53</sup> Examples of how to gradually increase the difficulty of the Repetition through the introduction of new elements and perspectives in order to sustain the outward attention can be found throughout Chapter 4:1.

or what you are going to say next, but rather to act before you think (Meisner, 1987: 31). Meisner used Repetition to strengthen the actor’s ability to concentrate on the external; he believed this would unlock their emotional resources, through allowing the partner’s behaviour, rather than the self, to inform the next action (Meisner, 1987: 35-36).

The idea that the re-direction of attention away from the self allows for emotional impulses to come forward is clearly supported in literature and psychological theories. It is often said that thinking and doing are incompatible factors during any type of performance — particularly within the fields of sport and theatre — thoughts regarding our own ability or conscious evaluation of our actions are regarded to be a hindrance to performance outcome as it curbs flow (Tribble, 2014: 136) and thus increases self-consciousness. However, the Meisner imperative to “stop thinking” might well be an unfortunate instruction here, as not all mind wandering produces the type of self-consciousness that negatively affects perception and takes our thoughts off task.

Although the quickly expanding research into mind-wandering was mainly based on Smallwood and Schooler’s review of concepts such as ‘task-unrelated thoughts’ and ‘stimulus independent thoughts’ (2006), the advancement in the field has meant that there is a need to refine the concept of mind-wandering (Seli, Risko, Smilek, & Schacter, 2016: 605). Several recent studies have shown that there are two types of mind wandering: *deliberate* and *spontaneous* (Seli, Carriere & Smilek, 2015: 750) which in turn produce two types of self-consciousness: self-reflection and self-rumination (Vannucci & Chiorri, 2018: 58). In the diagram below I have separated and summarised the two types of self-consciousness:

<b>Self-rumination</b>	<b>Self-reflection</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maladaptive, persistent, inflexible and inappropriate self-consciousness</li> <li>• Motivated by neurotic motives such as perceived threats and losses to the self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptive kind of inspection of one’s own thoughts and feelings.</li> <li>• Motivated by curiosity or epistemic interest</li> </ul>

(Figure 7: Table showing the difference between self-rumination and self-reflection)

A recent study concluded that spontaneous mind wandering negatively affects our creativity and originality, whereas deliberate mind wandering does not (Agnoli, Corazza, Vannucci and Pelagatti, 2018: 48). The difference here is in how we engage with the mind wandering: it either comes to us spontaneously against our will, or we have some control over it and use it as we please (Vannucci & Chiorri, 2018: 57). Deliberate mind wandering refers to the times we use memory, imagery or reasoning to help with our task. This state is also said to be non-reactive to personal inner experiences that are un-related to the task — as our attention is still very much in the present moment — although momentarily directed inwards in order to find a solution or work something out (Ibid.: 58).

Self-consciousness and self-rumination can clearly be categorised with spontaneous mind wandering, as they allow for stronger emotional reactions to inner thoughts and experiences than deliberate mind wandering does. Spontaneous mind wandering is said to switch our focus unwillingly and is therefore often an un-wanted distraction from the task at hand. This indicates that motivation plays a part in both types of mind wandering: if we are not fully motivated to complete or engage with the task, spontaneous mind wandering may cause us to dwell on our own performance, or *how we are seen* to perform our task. This invites a more critical view of the self rather than supporting creativity and problem solving. Evidence from the field of psychology and emotion, has shown that negative mood has an effect on the frequency of mind wandering and self-rumination (Smallwood, et al., 2009: 274), suggesting that current life concerns also have an impact on how inclined we are to engage in the spontaneous type of mind wandering. If we are going through a difficult time in our lives or have un-fulfilled personal goals that mean more to us than our task at hand, we are more prone to this type of self-consciousness and self-critique. In situations like these it is even more important to find the right skill-challenge balance and motivational stakes in order to avoid spontaneous mind wandering and keep attention on the task.

The differentiation between these two types of deliberate and spontaneous mind wandering can also shed light on the Meisner technique's concepts of 'getting out of your head' and 'don't think — act'. When observing and assessing another person, it is necessary to engage some internal focus, as Dixon et al. note: "Mentalizing and perceptual processing may sometimes operate in concert, as perception of body language, facial expression, and eye-gaze often inform the inferences we make about

others' thoughts, and vice versa" (2017: 644). This is the case in the Repetition exercise, when the actors try to work out the meaning behind the behavioural signs and decipher their partner's emotional state: the attention is briefly directed inwards, but they are still focused on the task. In this thesis, this particular stage is referred to as *Psychological Repetition*, and will be presented in more detail in Chapter 4:1, (118-119)

The Repetition exercise demands that the actors place their full attention on their partner as they observe, listen and repeat their partner's observations. However, even though the exercise stipulates that one has to wait until a reaction is triggered by an outside source (the partner), just placing attention on the partner is not sufficient as there has to be an intellectual engagement in terms of processing both what is being said about you and what you see before you. It is not enough to just hear the observation, it must be responded to in a different way to just mechanically repeating the words, meaning that the observation has to be mentally processed for a genuine reaction to occur. If we stand back and observe and listen and put our attention on our partner but block our response to what they are offering us, we are filtering our perception. We are perhaps commenting in our minds on what they are doing, but we are not allowing ourselves to share that opinion, and without our subjective take on it interaction is hindered.

This shifting between inner and outer attention shows how during Repetition we cannot completely disengage the internal thoughts and 'stop thinking'. However, these thoughts can be distinguished from spontaneous mind wandering as they are still helping us achieve the task and do not detract from the ultimate goal of keeping self-consciousness at bay. As a teacher of the technique I believe that the ability to use deliberate mind wandering, without it causing a self-conscious state, is something that becomes easier as the training progresses. When a student is new to the process I try to encourage them to just move on to the next moment if they are not sure what they see, which avoids the pitfall of self-reflection leading to self-rumination whilst the student tries to learn the exercise.

Therefore, I argue that thinking is a desirable — and crucial — part of the Meisner process — as long as it is deliberate and related to the task of observing and reacting, without any intentions of performing or entertaining. With the aim of further illuminating this issue and pinpointing the difference between the two states of mind

wandering, the next section looks at the neural networks at play during these moments of attentional decoupling and what they can tell us regarding our external attention, finding flow and decreasing self-conscious thoughts.

### Neural networks and their impact on our attention

A significant amount of the scholarship into mind wandering discusses the underlying neural networks at play during the phenomenon<sup>54</sup>. Mind wandering has been shown to activate the brain's *Default Network* (DN) (Raichle et al., 2001: 676), which becomes engaged when the mind is in a rest state, i.e. not engaged with a task, or when attention is directed away from the external task (Mason et al., 2007: 394; Christoff, et al., 2009: 8722). As this network is also linked to self-referential thought such as self-reflection, autobiographical memory and future event simulation (Northoff et al., 2006), it is the network that becomes activated when we enter a self-conscious state. Others have suggested that whilst the Default Network is engaged executive resources and functions are disengaged, or at least diminished, from the current task — which is what happens during mind wandering (Mason et al., 2007: 394; Christoff et al., 2009: 8722; Smallwood et al., 2012: 66).

The *Dorsal Attention Network* (DAN), on the other hand — although conceptually related to the Default Network — is the network in operation when we engage fully, and voluntarily, with an externally stimulated task (Fox et al., 2005: 9674). The DAN is also known as the “task-positive network” and is implicated in directed attention (Corbetta & Shulman 2002: 202) and working memory (Fox et al. 2005: 9673). Understanding the nature of the interaction between the DN and DAN is critical for explaining how attention is allocated between internal conceptual thoughts and external perceptual information (Dixon, et al., 2017:641).

These two networks (DN and DAN) are generally found to be anti-correlated: as one diminishes the other increases and vice versa (Fox et al., 2005; Chai et al., 2012; De Havas et al. 2012; Fornito et al., 2012; Josipovic et al., 2012; Yeo et al., 2015; Spreng et al., 2016). Yet, some researchers have found that during some external tasks both networks work together when a task requires previous knowledge and understanding to solve a current situation (Spreng et al., 2014: 14111-2). This

---

<sup>54</sup> Out of the 15 most cited articles on mind wandering, 13 relied on research into the neural networks.

suggests that a co-operation between the two networks is at times necessary as long as the internal thoughts are related to the present activity. Positive correlation between the DN and DAN involves thoughts that refer to the past, present and future experiences *linked to the current activity* — what we have previously referred to as deliberate mind wandering. A negative correlation, however, means that the aspect of the DN network that is activated during task comprises of thoughts regarding more abstract self-related issues, which distances the self from the present perceptual environment — which was previously referred to as spontaneous mind wandering.

It has also been argued that the Default Network can become activated if a task is too practiced and does not involve or demand enough attention (Gilbert et al. 2007: 43) Since these two attentional networks compete for the limited capacity of the attention resource — and are engaged and disengaged depending on how much attention a task requires — it is apparent that an understanding of the challenge-skill balance seen in the flow diagram would help keep the DAN activated for a sustained amount of time. When we apply this knowledge to the Meisner technique, it clarifies the reason for the layering of the exercises. The challenge for teachers of the Meisner process lies in the fact that due to automaticity setting in once the skill level grows, the engagement of the DAN network is a fluid concept that needs to be tended to and adapted for each individual. However, having an understanding of how these two networks compete with each other — as well as how small amounts of deliberate mind wandering can still be used in a task — can allow us as teachers to appropriately balance the challenge level of the training.

### The brain and the flow state

As it is a common understanding that mind wandering leads to activation of the Default Network, rather than the Dorsal Attention Network, it is useful to find out whether this relates to the neural activity during flow. Only a handful of clinical studies have been conducted on the psychology of flow and creativity. However, there has been neurological research into what happens in the brain during creative flow as well as on attention placement during such a state. Some key studies of the neurological aspects of flow and creativity have focused on musical improvisation and the brain activity of jazz musicians during improvisational play (López-González & Limb, 2012; Donnay et al., 2014). As the research into this area has at times been



contradictive, the next section endeavours to explain how the knowledge in this subject has progressed and evolved over the years.

The kind of improvisation referred to here is the immediate, un-planned decision-making that a jazz musician employs when he/she creates music in the ever-evolving present moment (Torrance & Schumann, 2018: 256).<sup>55</sup> López-González & Limb's 2012 study refers to brain imaging that was conducted whilst subjects freely improvised over a pre-recorded accompaniment or reproduced memorised jazz-sequences. Findings revealed activation of a part of the brain called the *medial prefrontal cortex* (MPFC), whereas activity in the *dorsolateral prefrontal cortex* (DLPFC) was reduced while in a state of spontaneous generation of impulsive behaviour. Surprisingly, the medial prefrontal cortex (which saw an increase in activity in this study) is linked to the Default Network (DN) (Beatty et al., 2015), and is associated with cognitive processes such as future planning, error detection, and memory retrieval. The DN, as mentioned earlier, is also integral to self-generated thought such as self-critical, internal and task unrelated thoughts. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (which saw a reduction in activity in the study) on the other hand is linked to the Dorsal Attention Network (DAN) (Spreng et al, 2016: 149), which is connected to external perception and task.

If we compare the neurological research with the mind wandering research discussed above, it would be remarkable if the flow state would happen during the activation of the network supporting internal attention and off task engagement as López-González and Limb suggest. However, it is crucial to note that their research focused on internally channelled improvisations — when the artist is working alone and generating new melodic tunes and sequences. They suggest that the combination of deactivation of the DLPFC and internally generated self-expression (via the MPFC) would result in a state that would intensify free flowing musical ideas in an individual working alone, which would explain their conclusions. As a Meisner teacher I would expect that such type of improvisation would engage a part of the brain that would be more evaluative and not as externally perceptive. This aligns with Meisner's own view on verbal improvisation, which was that it made the

---

<sup>55</sup> In regard to cognitive processes, improvisation can thus be defined as the spontaneous generation, selection, and execution of novel auditory-motor sequences. Since musicians must generate a potentially infinite number of contextually meaningful musical phrases by combining a finite set of notes and rhythms, researchers consider musical improvisation an optimal way to study the neural underpinnings of spontaneous creative artistic invention (López-González & Limb, 2012: 3).

introvert more inward focused. He argued that this was due to the cognitive aspect of producing lines, which he referred to as “intellectual nonsense” (Meisner, 1987: 36), rather than just reacting and responding to the environment and externally induced impulses.

A later study conducted by the same authors alongside other colleagues (Donnay, et al., 2014) showed the difference between improvising on your own and what happened when they allowed the test subject to interact with other jazz musicians and improvise together as a quartet. Although in the first experiment the deactivation of the DLPFC was attributed to the state of flow in a solo improvisation, when the subjects were allowed to improvise with others — and their attention was focused outwards — the result was switched around as there was a deactivation of the MPFC and subsequently an activation of the DLPFC (Donnay et al., 2014: 7). Again, this resonates with Meisner’s work, where the attention-placement on the partner emphasises the external. The authors ascribed the contradictory conclusions to the social and somewhat restrictive aspect of working with partners, which they believed was the reason for the activation of the DLPFC that does favour self-control and goal directed behaviour, before spontaneous inner idea generation. However, the strong association between task focus, intention and flow shown in other studies (Ulrich et al., 2014; Ulrich, Keller & Grön, 2016) would seem a more likely reason for the DLPFC to become activated during partner improvisations, and for the attention to have a stronger external focus. Ulrich, Keller and Grön’s more recent investigations into brain activation and flow align itself with the deactivation of the MPFC and thus the Default Network during the flow state (2016: 497). In their article they highlight that diminished Default Network activity is reflecting one of the main indicators of flow — decreased self-reflection and self-referential thought. The decrease is also seen to be key to a reduction in negative feelings about oneself — another key element to the flow state.

The neurological aspect to this psychological investigation has served mainly to highlight the links between the state of flow, skill-challenge balance and mind wandering, and the effect these have on self-consciousness. By inviting another dimension into the discussion of what happens when our attention is directed inwards, two points are becoming increasingly clear: firstly the adjustment of demand in order to keep focus on task is imperative, which also reflects the

importance of the motivational aspect.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, that deliberate mind wandering is not conducive of self-consciousness, and hence does not need to incur the same stigma as spontaneous mind wandering — meaning that the demand to ‘stop thinking’ is an unhelpful insistence as it rules out task-related processing. Moreover, as small amounts of deliberate mind wandering are central to the Repetition exercise, the negative connotations that are associated with all thinking involved while performing, could in actuality lead to increased self-rumination as any thinking occurs, which would have an adverse effect on the desired outcome.

Furthermore, as this chapter focuses on how Meisner technique uses redirection of attention to reduce self-consciousness, it is important to understand the negative effect of self-conscious thoughts on actors, and how we can train the actors to diminish the occurrence of such thoughts. The reduction in self-negative thoughts and anxiety during flow can be explained by the task positive network’s (DAN) role in proactive and reactive control, which are both dependent on sustained attention (Foster et al, 2015: 609). A deficit in sustained attention will diminish both proactive and reactive control — something that has been implicated as factors that lead to anxiety. One theory is that the limited resource of executive control means that when it is taken up by sustaining and maintaining our attention to something (a task) the attention allocated to worry about something else (task unrelated thoughts) is lessened, hence being able to control such attention means less anxiety (Ibid.: 612). The way that the Meisner process trains our sustained attention and uses the actor’s full attention directed towards an external source ties directly into this concept.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have firstly presented the Repetition exercise, its use of attention and the step-by-step approach that should be followed when teaching the technique. Secondly, I have aimed to present to the reader how the psychology of attention can develop our understanding of the different aspects of the Meisner technique that were covered, highlighting the history and complexity of this research in general. Thirdly, the importance of the challenge-skill balance was introduced and explored in relation to how a concept of a flow state can be used within the Meisner technique, in order to keep attention external. Further, theories regarding mind wandering and its effect on external attention and flow were presented, followed by an investigation

---

<sup>56</sup> The motivations aspect will be explored in full in Chapter 5:1.

into how this related to the attention networks in the brain, highlighting the links between mind wandering and self-consciousness and the importance of motivation and task-engagement.

Through research into the psychology of attention, this chapter provides a strong argument for the motivational aspect of attention to be considered more in teaching of the Meisner technique, which could lead to development of this area. In particular, linking the notion of an objective to the initial stages of the Repetition exercise bridges the gap between observing and listening and the later stage of Independent Activity and Knock on the Door. This could allow the students to find an easier way to engage their full attention on the external task, and in turn alleviate mind wandering and self-consciousness. As outlined earlier in the chapter, proactive and reactive control is engaged through motivation, which is dependent on sustained attention. An inability to use sustained attention will induce mind wandering; however, as a task becomes more automated, sustained attention alone will not be enough to keep the attention on the task — which is where the challenge-skill level is crucial to keep the thoughts task-based. This signifies not only the importance of seeing this state as something fluid, needing constant re-evaluation and adaptation to the individual, but also as a something that should be adhered to in any forms of vocational teaching and development.

The next chapter will present the significance of the process element in more detail and the importance of understanding this aspect. Further it will introduce personal developments of the Repetition exercise, which have been reached through the emphasis of the conditioning factor, time-limitation, research and individual pedagogical needs. Following this there will be a section addressing the problem of politeness, the hindrance of students fearing causing offence, and how it impacts on spontaneity.

## **Chapter 4: Process, practices and problems**

In this following section I will explain the process element of the technique, and highlight the importance of sufficient time being allocated for this training — in order for the practice to have proper effect on the students' self-consciousness levels. Further, I will lay out the programme of teaching to which I adhere, in terms of the foundational aspects of the Repetition exercise.<sup>57</sup> This programme is adapted to the amount of time the institution allocates for the technique as the exercises can be repeated and the students exposed to each stage for as long as possible. It could be argued that if the time was insufficient for all the exercises, using fewer elements and repeating them more, would be more in line with the technique and benefit the students more. This is a pedagogical aspect that can be reconsidered for each group of students as all groups are different and develop at different speeds. The type of personal work that the Meisner technique engages the students in has to be re-evaluated in each class and flexibility in the scheme of work is crucial to allow for real improvements, not just exposure to all exercises.

Having found reason to modify aspects of the training, I will present my own modifications and developments of the Repetition, and the rationale for deviating from the structure set by Meisner. This section will also cover differences in opinion on the teaching of certain exercises, feedback from my own students, and my own introduction warm-up to the Meisner work. The final section will be assigned to the considerable problem of politeness, which is becoming an increasing issue when teaching this technique. The notion of causing offence, cultural trends and the over-use of self-control and its effect on impulsivity and self-consciousness, will be discussed and related directly to the Repetition exercise.

### **4:1 Process, process, process**

For many, Meisner technique is synonymous with Repetition (Hart, 2006: 52, Gonsalves, 2012: 172), the exercise he is best known for and which could be seen as his strongest, most unique, contribution to actor training. As described in earlier chapters the main aim of the Meisner technique, and in particular the Repetition exercise, is to direct the attention to an external source, in this case your partner

---

<sup>57</sup> Regarding the next part of the technique — Independent Activity and Knock on the door — there will be a full presentation of those exercises in Chapter 5.

(Pope, 2000: 148). This redirection of attention will in turn stop the actor over-analysing and thinking self-conscious thoughts (Merlin, 2010:185).

What becomes important however, as stated in the opening chapter, is the acknowledgement that the Repetition exercise is not a 'quick fix' — it relies on a prolonged process of training the attention and ability to listen (Gonsalves, 2012: 174; Moseley, 2012: 7). "But nothing worth learning comes quickly. Sandy said this, and I've always upheld it: it takes 20 years to become a master of acting" emphasises Esper (2008: 28).

As stated earlier, Meisner's increased popularity has resulted in more British drama schools adopting the technique in one form or another, making Meisner technique part of the mainstream conservatoire curriculums. While this is positive for the recognition of the technique, and for the students who are exposed to Meisner's teachings, limitations on time and inadequate knowledge (or misunderstandings) of the process-aspect of Meisner technique can sometimes lead to problems with the delivery. Meisner practitioner C.C Courtney notes that a workshop, or a couple of days of Meisner technique, would be reductive in terms of what it aspires to achieve, which relies on exposure to the process over time (Courtney, 2000: 292). Personally, I will always make the institution, and the students, aware that a workshop can at most introduce them to the concept of Meisner technique and the mechanics of the Repetition exercise. However, the benefits of such training cannot be measured over such a short period and should not be seen as adequate time to make a judgement about whether the process works for the individual. Moseley concurs, stating that: "if well taught, it can permanently affect the way an actor works in this space, often without the actor really being conscious of the changes taking place" (Moseley, 2012: 8).

Conversely, inadequate exposure to the technique could make the students feel more insecure in the space as they will not have had sufficient time for the process to make these changes. The initial stage of the Repetition exercise can often have the opposite effect, as we are not used to being watched so intently and commented on. Every small detail of the participant's behaviour is exposed and included in the exercise, which can lead to the students feeling more self-conscious (Silverberg, 1994: 12). The students are forced to face all the barriers and layers they put up, which sometimes they might not be conscious of themselves, or know to be visible. This can

be an uncomfortable stage as they start to realise “this is what I give off” (Esther, student, 2019: see interview in Appendix 2). As the process continues, they are challenged to observe their partner in greater detail, which means the attention on themselves diminishes. However, this happens over period of time, as one of my students discovered:

It was really weirdly slow, but because it was such tiny increments at a time, it sort of unlocked things a lot, emotionally. It was massive. Breaking down barriers in myself, the gradual process of it made it harder, but made the revelations larger (Nina, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Today’s educational climate, with increased tuition fees and reduced contact hours for vocational training, seems to lead to a tendency to want to include every possible aspect of training in order to satisfy every need of every student. There is an unfortunate trend of this technique being used as a *box ticking* exercise. “Doing a little Meisner” within the acting classes is not sufficient for the technique’s intended purposes (Pope, 2008: 147). In my own experience all students develop differently during the process, some will see a significant difference after only a couple of sessions and some would take a full term to fully get to grips with the technique and its benefits. Generally, I begin to see a difference after 4-5 two-hour sessions. Meisner structured his exercises with a longer process in mind. As the exercises increase in difficulty, they also gradually move towards imaginary scenarios and scene work, which ensures that the work becomes applicable to the actor (Hart, 2006: 53). Repetition is seen as the foundation work in the Meisner technique; to reduce the training to solely Repetition would leave a gap their professional practice and their text work — a sentiment expressly shared by Esper who writes:

If the foundation of a house isn’t properly laid, the entire structure will eventually collapse under its own weight during the first good wind. In Meisner technique, we uphold this analogy by practising a regimen of exercises, which creates foundation, a stable floor upon which we build our craft (Esper, 2008: 6).

Due to the different nature of British conservatoire training and American drama school training,<sup>58</sup> and the time constraints of Meisner tutors in Britain, it is inevitable that adaptations and reductions, as well as additions to the full technique occur (Shirley, 2010: 211). Meisner himself understood that a complete imitation of a training system often fails as it does not take into account the era, the students or any cultural differences (Gray, 1964: 140). Thus, actor trainers adapt certain elements in order to find ways to connect their students and individual circumstances to the concepts (Krasner, 2011: 3). However, it is imperative that before a teacher reduces a process, leaves out certain aspects, or indeed adds exercises, he or she understands the full process, and the reasoning that underpins the progression that is necessary in order to build “genuinely accomplished actors” (Esper, 2008: 9).

### Warm up and introduction to the concepts

Before starting the initial stages of the Repetition exercise, I will introduce the students to the different concepts we will be touching upon, through three specific games and warm up exercises. The notions of *impulse*, *task* and *observation* are corner stones of the Meisner process and I find that a playful way of introducing these elements is preferable to going straight into Repetition.

#### 1. Impulse: The impulse circle

In the impulse circle the participants stand in a circle facing inwards, the objective is to send a clap, which can travel in any direction, around or across the circle. I encourage the students to be ready mentally as well as physically so that they can focus on receiving and sending the clap. In the beginning the exercise can be slow, I normally stop it and encourage them to be more focused and will the clap to come to them. Like the Repetition exercise this exercise is layered in a step-by-step fashion, which incorporates the notion of skill-challenge balance in the training right from the start.

The next step of the impulse circle is to clap towards somebody and as you do so start to walk across the circle to take their space. Before you get to their space they need to clap to somebody else and start to take their place. Once the exercise reaches a regular pace, it is sped up by jogging, which is followed by running. The clap is then

---

<sup>58</sup> British drama school training tends to have a broader spectrum of approaches rather than honing their training to one or two practitioners. This came out of the repertory system (Shirley, 2010:207).



removed and replaced by eye contact only, first at a walking pace, then jogging and running. As the weeks (or the sessions) go by I remove the walking pace in the 'eye contact only' phase, which means we go from running with the clap to running with eye contact only.

The Impulse Circle exercise focuses the minds and bodies of the students and makes them aware of the room. The speed of the exercise lets them act on impulse, as there is no time to think about where they are going, they make a choice in the moment. Several students<sup>59</sup> commented on the speed being one of the main factors that allowed them to not feel self-conscious during the exercise as “there was no time to think about yourself at all” (Stephen, 2017: see Appendix 3). The exercise is also motivational because the students can see the improvement each session, and they get motivated as a group to improve and work together as an ensemble.<sup>60</sup>

The Impulse Circle can also be modified in various ways to add to the learning outcomes of the exercise. For example, to add a “You”, as the participants approach each other, will encourage the intention and direction of where they are going, it makes the exercise more precise. Students can also just send the word “you” around the circle without moving, this is very fast as it does not involve any walking and encourages complete attention on the exercise. Fast pace aids the concentration to task, however as the training progresses and the students develop their concentration skills, speed becomes less important. The “you” will then be followed by the response of “me” — this slows the exercise down but encourages reaction and allows the students to accept offers in the space. It should be noted that the Impulse Circle is an exercise I use in the beginning of all my sessions throughout the term(s). The exercise homes in on the concept of *impulse* and speed, however as the new elements are added it also supports learning around the response aspect.

## 2. Task: Count to three

The second warm-up exercise that I always use in the first session, but not thereafter, is the count to 3 exercise.<sup>61</sup> Each pair divide themselves into A and B, all the A's stand

---

<sup>59</sup> Stated specifically by students Georgina, Steven and Tilly in the feedback questionnaires, see Appendix 3 for details.

<sup>60</sup> Two students (Helen and Steven) described this exercise as being the one that made them feel the most motivated in the beginning of the sessions.

<sup>61</sup> This exercise has been developed from a similar exercise used by Complicité Theater Company as a warm up for clowning.

in line and all the B's stand in line facing their partners. The pairs work individually and they are asked to count to 3 together, not at the same time, but taking turns:

**A: 1**

**B: 2**

**A: 3**

**B: 1**

**A: 2**

**B: 3**

The counting carries on and every couple shows the rest of the couples their ability. I gradually exchange the numbers for physical actions, one at the time:

**1** = a curtsy

**2** = a jump

**3** = a clap

Once they have mastered the replacing of the number with physical actions, they go back to just counting to three together and the improvement is often remarkable. This exercise is placed here, not only to aid concentration on the partner and working together, but also to show you that — like Meisner technique — sometimes increasing demands on attention can have a positive effect. The first challenge of counting to three improves without actually practicing that particular exercise, but rather by training the same muscles in the brain that are involved in the counting. This shows that by training the perception in many different ways ultimately aids the initial objective — to listen and react to your partner.

### 3. Observation: See and be seen

The third and final essential exercise the students are taken through in the first session is an exercise I have developed called See and be Seen.

In this exercise the partners face each other, and their task is to study each other's faces in enough detail to be able to imagine that face in the same detail when they close their eyes. This carries on for approximately 1-2 minutes before they are asked to close their eyes. No talking is involved, although laughing and giggling can be present, which is fine as long as the task resumes. The exercise is done in order to desensitise the participants to being scrutinised, and it is repeated three to four

times with different partners. As explained in Chapter 3:2 (84-85), the very act of being watched by one or more people often results in the subject feeling self-conscious (Carver & Scheier, 2012: 54), which can turn the attention inwards and generate feelings such as worry or anxiety (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 84). In See and be Seen, some students do feel self-conscious when they realise that they are being scrutinised the same way as they themselves are scrutinising their partner.<sup>62</sup> When their attention considers what the other person is attending to, it moves inwards and can turn into ruminations. However, as this exercise has a clear task, they can see that as soon as they start to feel self-conscious, it has an impact on the motivation of the task, which may even be completely forgotten about. As presented in the previous chapter (97-98), when we re-direct our attention from the task, the Dorsal Attention Network (task-positive network) is deactivated (Fox et al., 2005: 9674), and the Default Network activates (Mason et al., 2007: 394) — which can, in turn, lead to self-consciousness (Northoff et al., 2006). The only way to overcome your self-consciousness in that moment is to return your attention to that task. Several students noted that when they did try to achieve their task, they forgot about being watched: “I was focusing so much on trying to remember the other person’s features that I over time completely forgot about myself” (Michael, 2017: see Appendix 3).

The exercise also tends to elicit intense emotions, such as intimacy and surprise, as it is such a contrast to how we interact in everyday life, particularly in terms of how little we actually look at each other. Students stated that although it was different to have someone look at you so intensely, it was interesting to be allowed to look at someone else in such detail.<sup>63</sup> This is another reason for doing this exercise — it gives the students permission to watch each other and to feel comfortable being watched.

Once these exercises have taken place, and the seeds of impulse, task and observation have been sown; the students are ready to start the Meisner work.

---

<sup>62</sup> From feedback from students Georgina and Michael, see Appendix 3 for details.

<sup>63</sup> From feedback from student Tilly, see Appendix 3 for details.

## **4:2 Practical perspectives: developments of the Repetition exercise**

### **1. Mechanical Repetition**

This first stage of Repetition, as referred to earlier in the chapter, was described in terms of Meisner's way of starting the Repetition. There are, however, different ways to introduce it, and differences in how teachers do so. One way is that the observer states something they observe about their partner, using only one or two words, which then gets repeated between the partners for example: "Brown hair". The other way (and how Meisner started his work) is that the observation is preceded by "*you have brown hair*", which then is repeated word for word between the partners. It is interesting to note the difference in delivery of several high profile Meisner teachers. William Esper chooses to start the way Meisner did, but quickly moves the students on to the *Repetition with Point of View*<sup>64</sup> in order to keep the observations "honest" and "truthful" (Esper, 2008: 36). Nick Moseley chooses to start with using only one or two words, however he urges the students to copy each other's intonation, volume and pronunciation exactly as they do so (Moseley, 2012: 14).<sup>65</sup> Larry Silverberg also uses one or two words, but does not allow his students to mimic the way it is said. He is a proponent of using the words to describe "the first thing" you notice about your partner (Silverberg, 1994: 10),<sup>66</sup> which then gets repeated back and forth without imitation. As Silverberg reiterates at this stage it is simply about repeating what you hear, rather than imitating the quality of how it is being said (1994: 12). Personally, I choose to start the exercise in the same way as Larry Silverberg.

### **Rationale**

The reason for starting the exercise with one or two words is firstly that the technique is heavily reliant on the truth of what you see in front of you in the moment. Like Esper, I am reluctant to have the partners repeat an untruth. By this I mean if one partner observes that the other has brown hair ("You have brown hair"),

---

<sup>64</sup> As explained in the Chapter 3:1, Repetition with point of view is when the first observation starts with "you" and is answered with "I", for example: "You have brown hair" "I have brown hair".

<sup>65</sup> In comparison to this, Moseley encourages his students to not adhere to the imitation of sounds and pronunciations as the exercise moves on to Repetition with Point of View — or what he refers to as "Simple Repetition" (Moseley, 2012: 23).

<sup>66</sup> "Turn your head back and say out loud the very first thing you actually notice over there on your partner. This must be physical observation. For example, if the first thing I was aware of as I looked at my partner were her eyes, I would say 'eyes' or if it was her green sweater I would say 'green sweater'" (Silverberg, 1994: 10).

this observation will then be repeated about the observer as well, even if that is not the case. As we move on in the process, the students are encouraged to react to untruthful observations and change observations that have become untruthful, for example if someone has stopped smiling and the repeated sentence is still “You are smiling”. My argument in starting with just one or two words is that the instilment of true observations should start from the beginning. Further, by holding back the personalisation of starting the sentence with “you” or “I” we can focus on what this first stage is first and foremost about: establishing contact between the pair and learning how to really listen to what the other is saying.

Additionally, the use of only one or two words makes the interaction faster, an important component when moving the students away from focusing on the self (Silverberg: 1994: 23) as well as editing their responses (Hart, 2006: 51). The speed of the exercise, just like the impulse circle, makes the challenge greater and thus the focus stronger. This is emphasised by Silverberg who notes that:

At this point in your work it is vital to repeat immediately, as you hear what you hear. In this way, if you allow it to, the Repetition will take you to what you know to be true, rather than you figuring it out. Figuring it out puts you right in your head. And being in your head is the death of your acting (Silverberg, 1994: 23).

During the research workshops, the speed of the Mechanical Repetition was mentioned as a reason for loss of self-consciousness and audience awareness. In fact, 6 out of 8 participants noted their loss of audience focus during mechanical Repetition.<sup>67</sup>

Further, it is essential here to discourage the students from imitating the way their partner says the words in order to free the individual impulses. The participants are not trying to act like someone else, but to allow the moment and the other person to influence their own instinctive reactions — using the repeated observations as the only words. This is the basis for the Meisner technique and adhering to it from the beginning lays the foundation for Repetition with a Point of View, which comes later.

---

<sup>67</sup> Feedback from Workshop 1, second research study on “Automatic Repetition”, see Appendix 3 for details.

## 2. Mechanical Repetition with call-out

Mechanical Repetition with call-out is the first addition I have made to the process. Instead of going straight into the Repetition with a Point of View,<sup>68</sup> I have created a bridging exercise. The premise of this exercise is the same as the first; however, this time, as they are repeating the one to two word observations between them, I intermittently call out the name of one of the participants. When they hear their name being called, they have to observe something new about their partner, which then becomes the new repetition.

### Rationale

I have added the call-out to the structure for two reasons. The first is that I want them to be pushed to voice what they see in the moment without censorship, and to act on impulse. Students will often try to pre-empt what they are going to observe next and use that when they hear their name, this is visible due to the lack of thought process before the new observation, if the new observation has exactly the same dynamic as the preceding one, a new moment has not been added. It is also visible in how the person holding on to another thought engages in the Repetition. If they are using part of their attentional capacity to remember the next thing to say, they are not fully engaging in the Repetition and there is more tension in the interaction. As explained in the previous section, Chapter 3:3 (90, 97), if one is thinking about the future or engaging in planning, the Default Network activates (Northoff et al., 2006), which means one is not present or engaged with the current task (McVay, Kane & Kwapil, 2009: 860). When this happens, I usually call their name a second time in quick succession to get them to respond to a real in-the-moment observation, rather than a memorised one. The memorisation of observations is often caused by the fear of offending your partner. Many participants voice this initial worry and link it to the feeling of self-consciousness:

I wasn't self-conscious about what the other person was observing, but more on what I was saying. It is very difficult to not think of something to say in advance, and then I'd panic, not wanting to say something that others would

---

<sup>68</sup> This is the stage where you observe something about your partner starting with "you" and they answer with the same thing except that it starts with "I": "You have a blue shirt", "I have a blue shirt".

judge me by or possibly be offended by (Georgina, student 2017: see Appendix 3).

Like Mechanical Repetition, Mechanical Repetition with call-out needs to stay fast paced as keeping the speed up diminishes the thinking time and encourages the instinctive. At this stage the reflex to censor our spontaneous reaction is still strong (Silverberg, 10994: 23) and this exercise is one way of allowing the students to experience “acting before thinking”. This can present a sense of anxiety for some participants, not just in terms of what they will say about others, but also what others will say about them — it is a fear of causing and taking offence (Culpepper, 2011: 9), which will be explored in greater detail in the third section of this chapter (130-131). At this stage of the process worry and self-consciousness levels can often rise as they are being exposed to honesty and impulsivity in an unpredictable way. Again, these feelings reiterate the importance of the process element of this technique, as persistent exposure to the work will desensitise the participants and thus lower the self-consciousness factor over time.

The second reason I add this exercise is that I want students to understand what it is to sustain their attention on their partner for a longer time. The previous exercise had them repeat the same thing, which could change if the word changed involuntarily which would mainly be picked up aurally. However, by adding this exercise the students are pushed to sustain their attention visually as well. Since creating this exercise I have become aware of Larry Silverberg using the same method, but introducing it simultaneously with Repetition with point of view. His reasoning behind the exercise very much echoes my own in that it is primarily to get the partners used to switching the observation and not anticipating the moments (Silverberg, 1994: 31). My reasoning for not waiting until Repetition with Point of View (to use call out), was that when we change the exercise to start with “you” the communication becomes more direct and personal and the dynamic changes. I wanted this to be the main focus in that shift, not the changing of observations. However, by adding the concept of only changing the observations on impulse (Repetition with point of view below) as well as starting the exercise with “you”— can create a gap between the exercises that I have often experienced as awkward and Silverberg’s way might be successful in terms of closing that gap. After trying Silverberg’s proposed way, there was a smoother transition into the impulsive changes (which will be described in more detail below), however as suspected the

personal aspect did suffer, due to the students focusing more on the observation, rather than fact that they were now using personal pronouns (You — I). I found the way around this was to first using mechanical Repetition with call out, which hones in on the actors constantly observing in the present moment. Then, as a second part to this exercise I added the point of view aspects — which did allow for the more direct and subjective interaction.

### 3. Repetition with a Point of View

After the mechanical Repetition with call out, the students move onto Repetition with a Point of View — which means that they start the observation with “You have/are...” and the other person answers with “I have/am....”. The content of the observation stays the same however the sentence is modified to accept the observation and make it true in the context.

**A:** “You have eyebrows”

**B:** “I have eyebrows”

At this stage they are also encouraged to change the observation on impulse, meaning that either of the partners can observe something new about the other, if they have the impulse in the moment to do so. This new observation then becomes the new repeated sentence. As stated previously, the changes to the repeated observations — starting with “you” and responding with “I” — also makes the communication more personal, as you are not just stating a fact but you are endowing that fact on the other person. In observing something about the partner, the partner then has to accept the observation about themselves, which when starting with I, makes it less abstract and open to reaction and response. You observe and repeat from *your point of view*.

I try to encourage the observation to steer more towards physical behaviour in the other, as these are fluid states that will appear in the moment, rather than static facts like physical attributes. I also encourage observing facts from your own point of view — in terms of making a judgement on what you see i.e. “You have a nice smile”. This kind of subjective interaction, which is used extensively by many Meisner practitioners (Meisner, 1987: 21; Silverberg, 1994: 42; Esper, 2008: 36-37) after the mechanical stage, encourages a more subjective communication as you are placing



small judgements onto the observations which in turn causes more instinctive responses.

#### 4. Three-moment exercise

Literature regarding the Three-moment exercise, which is used differently in the United States, is very limited. In fact, the only published works that even discusses this exercise is Larry Silverberg's *The Sanford Meisner Approach: Workbook 1* (1994: 27) and Nick Moseley's *Acting and Reacting* (2006). In the original American version A asks B a provocative question or offers a provocative statement about them. B has to repeat this question or statement immediately from their point of view, followed by an observation by A of what they saw in B's behaviour in that moment:

**A:** "Do you think you're a good actor?"

**B:** "Do I think I am a good actor?"

**A:** "You laughed nervously"

Or

**A:** "You have gorgeous eyes"

**B:** "I have gorgeous eyes"

**A:** "You're blushing"

It is important to acknowledge here that the question is never answered, nor are we focusing on what the answer could be; we are interested in the behaviour the question/statement generated (Silverberg, 1994: 29).

The other version is explained by Moseley (2006: 128-30) and was also introduced to me by UK based Meisner practitioner Scott Williams,<sup>69</sup> and is a version which homes in on changes in physical behaviour rather than emotional behaviour or emotional reactions. In this version A observes something concrete about B, which can be a physical trait, feature or behaviour. B repeats this observation back and then A observes which behavioural changes they observed in that moment:

---

<sup>69</sup> Workshop at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, November 2010.

**A:** “You have long hair”

**B:** “I have long hair”

**A:** “You nodded your head”

Or

**A:** “You’re smiling”

**B:** “I’m smiling”

**A:** “You leant forward”

As Moseley states, this version is intended to start with “purely factual” observations in order that the students do not fall into the trap of manipulating or inventing the responses in order to create reactions in their partner (2006: 129). It also pin-points the detail in the partner’s behaviour, as the exercise dictates that the observations change rapidly. This means that the three-moment exercise has a tendency to become intense because, as Moseley notes: “you will always be looking to seize upon the reaction you observe and articulate it as immediately as possible” (Ibid.: 130). In my own practice I use both exercises, at different stages.

### Rationale

My belief is that they are good training tools at different stages of the Repetition. I use the more physical behaviour orientated exercise right in the beginning, when the students’ perception is being trained. I place it straight after introducing Repetition with a point of view. As Repetition with a point of view allows the students to change the observation on impulse it is important that they start to make note of the changes occurring in front of them. The introduction of this exercise forces them to notice any change in reaction and behaviour in their partner. In terms of the skill-challenge balance, as the students are acquiring a new skill in reading their partner’s changing behaviour, this exercise slows down the process and gives the student a chance to master the skill in order to successfully apply it to the Repetition with a point of view — without causing worry or anxiety. The three-moment exercise is usually introduced and performed by one pair at a time. Whilst I agree that this is the best way to establish the exercise and iron out any issues individually, I also let the students gain confidence in it by working with a partner in a large group all doing the exercise simultaneously. This is to enable the extra freedom and exploration that not being watched allows for, especially when trying to master this skill.

In terms of the provocative statement/question exercise, I find it a very useful exercise to use to help the students understand what physical behaviour means in terms of how their partner is feeling, or what they are thinking. The exercise exists in order to encourage the participants to understand what lies behind the physical behaviour. By provoking a reaction, feelings will manifest more strongly in physical behaviour and give the partners something to assess. Since the partner only repeats the question/statement back there is no answer or response, except for a behavioural one. Conversation between observations is also discouraged. As the Repetition exercise progresses the observations will become deeper and extend to their partners' emotional states.

One difficulty with the provocative question/statement exercise is that if it is used too early the students can become blocked as they are still censoring their interaction with their partners and start to overthink the questions and statements. By experimentation with the placement of this exercise I have found that placing it right at the end of the Repetition process, just before moving onto the activity phase, achieved a braver and more provocative question from A whilst B had a more open response to the question/statement.

I follow this stage with asking the students to let the third moment (the observations about the partner's response) form the start of the Repetition exercise:

**A:** "Do you love your parents?"

**B:** "Do I love my parents?"

**A:** "You're getting emotional"

**B:** "I'm getting emotional"

**A:** "You're getting emotional"

**B:** "You feel guilty"

**A:** "I feel guilty"

At this stage of the process the students were able to allow themselves to connect to the provocation and in turn let it fuel the rest of the Repetition. This changes the atmosphere and develops a relationship stemming from a provocative circumstance, which is fitting before the activity stage.

By bringing the work back to the Repetition with point of view after every exercise, we can see how the training of the visual cues has informed and improved the Repetition exercise.

## 5. Psychological Repetition

The only literary work that mentions *Psychological Repetition* specifically is Nick Moseley's *Meisner in Practice*:<sup>70</sup>

The name I give this type of repetition is my own. As far as I know, Meisner himself did not distinguish it from Standard repetition, and other Meisner practitioners I have worked with actually disapprove of it (Moseley, 2012: 55).

In the above quote Moseley claims that other Meisner practitioners disapprove of this stage of Repetition. However, this is not my experience of the Meisner method. Moseley may have coined the name Psychological Repetition, however, the part of the Repetition exercise where the actors start to read the emotional states behind each other's physical behaviour is very much part of the American Meisner process:

As actors gain confidence in repetition, their insight deepens with respect to the other member of the scene. In other words, rather than saying "You're staring at me", they begin to address the feelings that lurk behind the stare. Actors no longer take inventory of the other actors superficially, but observe the scene partner's emotions, feelings and thoughts (Krasner, 2000b: 144).

This stage comes gradually and changes from one class to the next depending on how they are taking on the initial stage of the exercise, however I tend to move them over to this form of Repetition within 3-4 sessions. It is important here to keep a close eye on the skill-challenge balance; if the task proves too difficult at this stage, the students will become more self-aware and start to overanalyse, which can result in feelings of inadequacy and anxiety (Csíkszentmihályi & Nakamura, 2002:92; Smallwood et al., 2007). If that is the case, returning to the physical behaviour observations can give the students more time to develop their skills.

---

<sup>70</sup> When the observation of the actors focuses on the other actors' psychological state, i.e "You are feeling nervous" or "That surprised you".

Psychological Repetition is such a crucial part of the Repetition exercise because it is so applicable to acting. Body language and behaviour is irrelevant if there is no interest in what lies behind it. If an actor has an intention on stage, usually involving the other character, by understanding what the other person is feeling they can adjust their tactics in order to get what they want. That is the fundamental aim of the Meisner technique: to take your cue from the other person, even when we have an objective of our own. In these instances, it is natural that more inward attention occurs, as memory and perceptual processing are needed to analyse what the body language and physical behaviour is telling us about our partner (Dixon et al., 2017: 644). However, as explained in Chapter 3:3 (96) this type of “thinking” or deliberate mind wandering does not necessarily have a negative impact on the actor’s presence as the attention is still task-based (Vannucci & Chiorri, 2018: 57).

The next three exercises are my own creations and developments of the Repetition exercise and are situated one after the other in my scheme of work.

## 6. Back to back Repetition

In this exercise the pair are sitting in the floor, back to back, facing away from each other. Their backs are touching and their eyes are open. The Repetition exercise starts by one of the partners making an observation about the other, the same as the regular Repetition exercise. As before the observation can change at any point that one of the partners get an impulse to change it. In this exercise the students are encouraged to place their attention on their partner’s behaviour in terms of bodily tensions, adjustments, breathing, tone of voice, rhythm and even silences.

### Rationale

I have added the back to back Repetition exercise for several reasons. Firstly, it trains their auditory perception. When we communicate, the *way* someone says something carries a lot of information. When we train the visual perception, auditory perceptions can sometimes be ignored as the visual can be so powerful and detract from our other senses. By placing attention on someone’s tone of voice and vocal intention we can create a fuller evaluation of someone else’s inner life:

I sensed a lot more emotion with my partner by listening and feeling their movements and their intonation than I thought I would. You had to

completely engage with your partner and put all your effort into understanding them and observe their behaviour and make sense of the reason behind it (Daisy, student, 2017: see Appendix 3).

Student, Nina, concurs and adds that “feeling them breathe helped me connect to that person, which broadened my perception so much” (Nina, 2019: see Appendix 2). Since it is more difficult to observe someone this way, the challenge is greater and again more attention is moved away from ourselves in order to achieve the task. This decreased self-consciousness often means that the students don’t feel such a strong need to be polite in the interaction, they are not looking the person in the eyes, and they find it easier to engage impulsively.

Similarly, by removing the intense gaze of the partner, which can often lead to self-consciousness and the inability to fully concentrate on our partner, it lets the student experience placing full attention on the other person and really listen. In the feedback for this particular exercise, seven out of eight participants noted “very little” or “none at all” in terms of feelings of self-consciousness. It was highlighted by one participant that by removing the intense eye-contact their listening skills improved dramatically, as they were not as focused on what their partner was looking at.<sup>71</sup> As presented in Chapter 3:3 (90-91), self-consciousness diminishes perceptual skills and one’s ability to observe the environment fully, as the inward focus interferes with one’s sensory information. Student Nina admits thinking that “not seeing someone would close everything off” but in fact she realised “it was actually the opposite”. She goes on to state how surprising it was to her how much they could both pick up on each other’s emotions in this exercise: “I didn’t think I was that perceptive, but maybe we all are, when we stop thinking about other things” (Nina, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

It is also the first time bodily contact and breathing has been part of the exercises and it tunes the students into understanding the importance of these factors in communication. Lastly, by practicing the exercise without using the visual observation, when we go back to the regular Repetition exercise the student’s observational ability often increases due to the amount of cues and changes they can

---

<sup>71</sup> Comment by Jane, student, 2017: see Appendix 3 for details.

physically see. By making it harder we have in effect made the original exercise easier to do.

## 7. Repetition with physical actions

In Repetition with physical actions the students are working in pairs, all at once, in the space. They are taken through three specific physical positions that they have to endeavour to keep and continue Repetition throughout. As the position is changed from one to the other, the students are encouraged to not to chat or break focus until they start the Repetition again.

### 1. **Pushing**

The students are asked to find a balance point between them pushing their hands together and upwards. They have to make sure they are giving each other part of their weight to add to the challenge. Repetition is maintained throughout and the exercise is continued for 2-3 mins.

### 2. **Leaning**

The second position involves the students finding a balance point between them by holding hands, placing their feet close to the other's and leaning away from each other. Repetition is maintained throughout and the exercise is continued for 2-3 mins.

### 3. **Holding hands**

The last position sees the students sitting down, cross-legged, holding hands. They are encouraged to relax their arms and find a comfortable position. Repetition is maintained throughout and the exercise continued for 7-10 mins.

## Rationale

I have developed Repetition with physical actions for two different reasons. Firstly, I wanted the students to experience a physical challenge during their Repetition in order to observe the changes in their partner when adding a different circumstance and energy to the pair's interaction. The physical action adds behaviour that is rooted in emotion and thoughts regarding the effort and challenge of the action. Students often find it easier to read this type of behaviour as they are in the same circumstance as their partner, experiencing the same kinds of obstacles and needing

something from the other.<sup>72</sup> As referred to in Chapter 3:2 (86-87), the mutual attention required from the exercises allows the partners to be part of the same ‘reciprocal system’, which can increase their ability to work towards a mutual goal and stay present (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). This is mainly in relation to the first two positions, as they are the more strenuous. However, the type of emotion coming out of each position has a tendency to be different: the pushing tends to create a slightly more aggressive or competitive atmosphere between the partners, and the leaning a more vulnerable and supportive energy. Additionally, the observations in the first two positions tend to focus predominately on physical cues and changes. This is consistent with the social-cognitive model of physical exertion and attention allocation (Tenenbaum, 2001: 810-820) — used within sport and exercise science — that maintains that above a certain effort threshold attention focus is dominated by physiological cues (Hutchison & Tenenbaum, 2007: 233-245).

Secondly, by making the students engage in effortful physical action before engaging in the third more relaxed position, where they sit down and hold hands, leads to a more intimate connection. Increasing the physical tension and then releasing it also releases bodily tensions that can restrict our ability to be open and fully engaged with our partner. Students have described it as “being too tired to keep a barrier up” which has allowed them to place full attention on their partner and in turn feeling less self-conscious. All participants in the research study commented on how comfortable they felt in this exercise, both physically, but also in terms of trusting their partner, being open and feeling less pressure in general.<sup>73</sup> I allow more time for the last position for this to happen. Similar to one of the flow conditions (see Chapter 3:2) this exercise often induces time-distortions, as students regularly fail to recognise that the time in the last position being longer than the first two:

I felt really in the zone doing this, my attention wasn’t on anything else in the room. I couldn’t hear or see anything other than my partner. I was so engaged with her and it felt really natural and as though we were just talking and observing. What I thought was 2,5 min exercise turned out to be 10 minutes — lost in it! (Helen, student, 2017: see Appendix 3)

---

<sup>72</sup> See feedback from workshop 3, second study in Appendix 3 for more details.

<sup>73</sup> See feedback for “holding hands Repetition” in third workshop, second study in Appendix 3.



## 8. Distance Repetition

In the Distance Repetition exercise the students start facing each other at opposite walls of the room, using the room in a way that allows the maximum space between them. A clap of the hands from the teacher will inform the students to take one step closer to each other. Repetition must continue throughout the exercise and not stop and start as the steps are taken. Observations are changed on impulse as in previous exercises.

### Rationale

Again, there are a few reasons for developing the Distance Repetition exercise. It allows the students to experience the difference in observations that is caused by the specific distance. The further away someone is the more physical the observations are. They can see the whole person and pay more attention to the body language as a whole, rather than just in the peripheral vision. We get a bigger picture of the physical behaviour of our partner. As the proximity decreases, the type of observations the students make changes to more psychological and emotional states and thoughts. When the distance is greater this exercise shows that we can still pay full attention to someone even though there is a lot of space in between them and us. It also challenges the intimate connection established in the regular Repetition exercise as we are more exposed to audience awareness, which is something the students need to get used to and overcome.

On the other hand, when the space decreases and instead becomes more intimate than we are used to, self-consciousness arises in a different way. By allowing the exercise to work inside our *personal space* it lets the students discover what such proximity does to an interaction and what happens when their attention on the other falters. The Distance Repetition exercise especially highlights the effect of social boundaries and gender dynamics, as the energy is very different if the students are of the same gender or opposite.

Another reason for performing this exercise is the effort involved in reading someone from a greater distance. By making the observations more difficult in the beginning, the student has to use more attention allocation to see what is happening with the other person. Thus, less attention is left for thoughts about the self. As explained in the earlier section on mind wandering (Chapter 3:3, 90-93), gradually

increasing the difficulty of the exercises prevents the student from becoming too adept at a particular skillset. Becoming too skilled too quickly could lead to automaticity and possibly boredom, which in turn increases the possibility of mind wandering (McKiernan, D'Angelo, Kaufman, & Binder, 2006; Smallwood & Schooler, 2006).

One student, Nina, had experienced severe challenges in shaking her persistent self-focus, during Repetition. She described it as a “hyper-awareness” of how she was being perceived by others, as well as how what she was saying was being judged (Nina, 2019: see Appendix 2). In this exercise the added difficulty meant that she used up more of the limited attention allocation, and hence had less ‘left over’ for herself. She explains it like this: “[I was] Trying so hard to focus in on the other person and see what’s going on with them, when they’re far away. It was more difficult to see and trying to do that made me forget about myself” (Nina, student, 2019: see Appendix 2). Nina goes on to explain that the connection to the partner was very strong in the exercise, and as it carried on this bond got stronger. She recalls a real balance between being affected and affecting someone else, making this exercise “the most memorable” in the Repetition stages, as it was the “first time when I started to really look at the other, as opposed to myself” (Ibid.).

As the exercise carries on for some time, in order to use the whole space of the room, the students are exposed to changes in several different dynamics over a prolonged time. Visual and auditory changes, audience, gender and social awareness, are all influencing their ability to place attention on their partner during the Repetition exercise. The length of time of the exercise, which normally carries on for up to 10 minutes, generally allows the students to acknowledge and often push past certain inhibitions and barriers. The prolonged exposure to someone’s observations can cause some students to become emotional as they struggle to sustain their guard whilst receiving and repeating. One student, Henry — who had struggled with a lot of physical tensions and mental barriers before this exercise — experienced such emotions during this exercise: “I remember getting very emotional about it. We were very close and I was feeling so many emotions I started becoming teary eyed, I didn’t know what was going on. I hadn’t felt anything like that before” (Henry, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Henry explains that he started to be affected by the other about halfway through the exercise, at a distance where the audience were no longer visible and the other person still not too close for comfort. He describes it as “a soft focus, and it just felt easy, like a release” and that “it didn’t feel difficult anymore”. Henry does mention that this was the first time his “barriers had started to really come down, and that as the exercise progressed and the pair got close to each other, he could start to feel them come back up, but not nearly as much as before (Ibid.).

### 9. Tap-in Repetition

During the Tap-in Repetition exercise all the students are working in pairs in a large group. They are facing each other and engaging in normal Repetition with Point of View. As the exercise gets underway, I ask two pairs (or more depending on how many are working at the same time) to stop repeating and instead go and observe other pairs. They are instructed to keep a distance from the two people working, and to not stand in the eye line of one of the partners. At any point they choose they can *tap into* the Repetition exercise. This means that the person they tap on the shoulder has to leave the Repetition exercise and they take their place. I ask the students to tap in when they see something in one of the partners that they want to comment on, instead of merely tapping someone out and waiting to be observed — thus breaking the energy build up.

### Rationale

As the term carries on and the students become increasingly comfortable with the Repetition exercise, Tap-in Repetition becomes a great way of warming up ahead of other exercises or before activity sessions. The way the exercise is set up allows the students to work with several different people in the room during a short amount of time. They are also experiencing some freedom within this exercise as it is not scrutinised by the teacher constantly and the audience is small. In terms of self-consciousness, for those who are still addressing that issue at this point, this exercise gives them a chance to experience the concept of fully attending to the other without a large audience. They also get to experience watching the exercises in smaller groups and see the impact their presence has on the other students’ self-consciousness. Henry explains that “the tap in Repetition is what really helped me with my self-doubt, because I can learn from watching first, and then tap in and have

a go myself. Also, it helps that not everyone is watching” (Henry, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

The other reason for this exercise working well towards the latter end of the first term is that the Repetition exercise is crucial to the rest of the work they are doing. Watching everyone do the exercise in pairs takes up a whole class, whereas this way keeps the regular Repetition exercise fresh in their minds even when we are concentrating on different aspects in the rest of the session.

### 10. Repetition with physical objectives

Here the students are faced with a simple activity and objective “To get the ball” (to get it if you don’t have it, and to keep it if you do), whilst doing the Repetition exercise. The ball can be introduced in a number of ways: starting in between the pair, being thrown into the space or given to one of the partners.

#### Rationale

Repetition with Physical Objectives is there to show the students how much a strong objective can take over our ability to pay attention to another person. When the exercise turns physical the students find it very difficult to keep the Repetition up and generally let the objective overshadow any attempts to observe (out loud) the other person. In the coming *Activity* and *Knock on the Door* exercise it is important to balance the objective with the observations, so that we still go by Meisner’s principle of not doing anything until something makes us do it. Further, they are encouraged to tactically use the observations of their partner to influence how they get the ball, only by knowing what the other person is doing or thinking are we able to determine the best way to achieve our own goal.

Additionally, as this activity will take focus away from the partner to some extent, on top of the need to achieve the goal, there is less attention left to pay to the self. Audience and self-consciousness are generally low in this exercise, and when they do happen, it is evident as either the motivation to get/keep the ball or the Repetition stops in those moments. As stated in the Attention chapter, this exercise shows us how attention is a limited source.

## 11. Repetition with emotional objective

As explained in Chapter 3:2 (89), introducing objectives such as “I want to get to know you,” or “I want to know what my partner is feeling,” throughout the Repetition process can be beneficial in sustaining external focus. The added motivational aspect creates clear feedback and goals which help the students become more engaged with the environment (the other person) and shift the focus away from the self (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 54). Additionally, as students become increasingly comfortable with the Repetition, I introduce an exercise called Repetition with Emotional Objectives. In this exercise the students add a different objective to their Repetition exercise — something they would want to achieve or change in the other person whilst performing Repetition. The participants are asked to decide on how they would like to affect the other person (this information is not shared with the other), or which emotion they would like them to feel. Otherwise the same premise for the exercise stands: one can only observe what is there and one has to repeat and take on board what the other person in turn observes.

### Rationale

After the ball exercise this exercise gives the students an opportunity to find the balance between a personal need and the ability to pay attention to the behaviour of the partner. As they are moving towards the Activity and Knock on the Door exercises it is important that they do not see the Repetition as a hindrance to communication. They need to experience that you can still affect someone even if you take the lead and impulses from their behaviour, and that in actuality it is important to read someone’s behaviour in order to affect them in a certain way and know that you have done so. There is also a complexity this exercise brings in terms of creation of a varied performance. As objectives are often juxtaposed, we do not always get what we want in a scene, and this exercise allows us to be open to being affected at the same time as striving to affect someone else. The result can take them down several different routes and the actors need to be open to explore those unknowns.

An alternative version to this exercise asks each of the participants to choose who the other person is to them (the relationship) which preferably should be entirely fictional. They do not communicate their ideas with each other it is only known by how they view the other person. They are encouraged to imagine specific details about the relationship before starting and as the Repetition exercise gets underway

to concentrate fully on the partner. This works as a segue into the Knock on the Door exercise in terms of adding something fictional to the situation. As they are asked to choose who their partner is and what they want their partner to feel (or how they want to try to affect them) there is a sense of given circumstance developing which in turn gives the students a degree of freedom in their interaction. There is a safety in adding this element as it removes them slightly from *real life* yet keeps them present and actively reaching for something within the imaginary circumstances.

### Conclusion

In this section I have presented the structure of the programme I follow to introduce the Repetition exercise, which allows the students to fully explore the possibility of each stage. I have explained the rationale behind the adjustments, choices and additions to the process, which helps the students explore the exercise from several different perspectives and gain experience of a stronger motivational element to the training — which benefits the subsequent exercises. Before introducing the next part of the training the last section of this chapter will focus on a particular problem that can cause significant delay in the process: politeness. This issue will be explored from the notion of social norms, cultural trends and its impact on Meisner technique and actor training in general.

### **4:3 “Fuck polite!” The problem with politeness in actor training**

Listen, you have some kind of cockeyed idea that acting is an imitation of life. You try to be logical, as in life. You try to be polite, as in life. May I say, as the world’s oldest living teacher, fuck polite! (Meisner, 1987: 33)

Actor trainers strive to support students to develop the freedom and confidence necessary to use their emotions, imagination and instinct to fully explore and embody their learning (Merlin, 2010: XIII). The aim is to instil both the notion of experimentation and failure as a part of the learning process as well as the importance of moving beyond the actor’s personal habits and socially acceptable responses. The job of the actor requires the student to fully investigate and commit to new situations and relationships. In order for that to happen we need to create an environment that encourages receptivity. The fear of offending or being seen as impolite has always existed to some extent. However, in my personal experience, this has recently escalated. Over the last few years, there has been a marked difference in

my students' ability to be open and honest with each other and a reluctance to evoke any negative feelings in someone else. This can prevent students from truthfully engaging with each other and can ultimately curb their learning.

So far, the evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates how Meisner's exercises, and in particular the Repetition exercise, enhance spontaneity and subsequently reduce self-consciousness. One of Meisner's main concerns was that politeness between actors prevented spontaneity, hence his urging his of his actors to "fuck polite". This section aims to understand the underlying social conventions that prompted Meisner's statement and that still have a strong influence on students today. It will also reflect on the importance of impulsivity in acting and suggest a response to the critique directed at this approach. These themes will be explored in several ways including ideas from modern social psychology, with a particular focus on the relation between social norms and self-control, the experience of Meisner practitioners, and documented feedback from personal research.<sup>74</sup>

### Social norms

The convention of politeness is best explained in terms of social norms, the unwritten rules of social behaviour (Kelley, 1955). These guidelines define expectations and limitations of our interactions and inform us about what is required in different social situations. There is no denying that social norms regulate the way we interact with each other in real life. In the acting space, however, this type of conventional politeness is problematic as it interferes with impulsive and instinctive behaviour (Silverberg, 1994: 24; Moseley, 2012: 66; Wayth, 2014: 94). The social norm of politeness causes self-censorship: in order to be liked or to conform to the standards set by society, people second-guess and analyse their own instinctive reactions. This in itself can be seen as a type of act. For an actor however, it becomes an unnecessary obstruction to connecting with the imaginary circumstance — which includes allowing the actor to be impolite.

Actor trainer Laura Wayth compares the concept of "too polite actors" to an epidemic (2014: 94). Politeness appears to sap the energy from actors and to even be

---

<sup>74</sup> The feedback used is from a research session that was carried out in four consecutive sessions, with eight students unfamiliar with the Meisner technique. The sessions included all the different stages of the Repetition exercise and extensive personal feedback was given at the end of each session. The students' anonymity has been protected and they will be referred to as student 1-8.

contagious — not just within one classroom but also throughout drama school establishments. Wayth laments this trend of talented young actors whose fear of being impolite impedes their impulses and ideas, leading to the stagnation of the rehearsal space. Her description of one particular student demonstrates the problem an actor encounters when second-guessing their instincts:

[The fear] of being impolite, too aggressive or unladylike, [means] that she is stuck in every scene that she does. Nothing happens. Scene work for her is a steady stream of squished impulses. You can watch brilliant ideas flicker across her face that are censored, then extinguished, and die (2014: 94).

What Wayth describes is a common manifestation of self-censorship which, despite the actors' understanding of its negative impact, is an ingrained habit that can be hard to break. According to linguist Jonathan Culpepper self-censorship stems from two sources: firstly the fear of causing offence (2011: 8); the importance of which has had an impact on both our education and the way we interact with others (Barrow, 2005: 266-267). The second reason is our desire to preserve the self for the sake of our own self-esteem; we have a fundamental desire to be viewed in a positive way, especially in terms of our appearance, capabilities and intelligence (Culpepper, 2011: 9). It is this shared desire to be admired and respected by each other that has contributed to the creation and upholding of social norms in our society. This type of reciprocal agreement makes us feel safe in the knowledge that we will act rationally and respectfully towards each other (Ibid.: 13-14).<sup>75</sup>

Research suggests that there has been a relatively recent societal change in regards to how we view taking and causing offence (D'Souza, 1991; Hentoff, 1992; Hall, 1994 ; Fairclough, 2003; Ravitch, 2003; Barrow, 2005; Hughes, 2010; The Equality Act, 2010).<sup>76</sup> This is also reflected anecdotally in an increased sense of censorship from students, where the clear motive has been the fear of being impolite. Does this increase mean that impoliteness has been redefined in our time? Culpepper states

---

<sup>75</sup> The notion of co-operation, in terms of positive social interaction, stems from research on "face" or "face work" by sociologist Erving Goffman, whose theories have been very influential within the subject of politeness. Goffman's term is derived from the English idiom "to lose face" and describes something that is emotionally invested, maintained and constantly attended to during interaction — by both parties involved (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 61). Brown & Levinson have carried on this work further developing the aspect of face-work into positive and negative face (Jaworski, A & Coupland, N, 2006: 312).

<sup>76</sup> This evidence ranges from articles on taking offence and political correctness, to actual government policies changing how we view diversity and equality.



that his view of what is considered as impolite has changed over the last decade. He formerly defined impoliteness as an intentional attack on someone's dignity or person (2005: 38), however his current definition is broader, as it is wholly dependent on whether someone has been offended by another person's actions, deliberate or not (2011: 23). This complicates the matter considerably as taking offence is highly subjective and can differ widely from person to person. This redefinition of politeness has had a significant impact on our education establishments where more focus is now placed on safeguarding students from offence. Philosopher and education specialist Robin Barrow claims that the emphasis our education establishments place on not causing offence has resulted in the current climate of political and moral correctness (Barrow, 2005: 266). However, the complexity that arises from our minds being different means that what constitutes as offensive varies from person to person (Ibid.). By defining offensive action as something that may cause another person to take offence, we have ultimately lost the objective ability to decide what is offensive, as almost any comment or action could potentially cause objection or upset (Ibid.: 267).<sup>77</sup>

While Barrow's argument regarding the ambiguity of causing offence was made in 2005, it signifies an important change in attitude within the UK education establishment, which explains current drama school students' reluctance to act on impulse. In terms of social rules, we tend to learn and be aware of the restrictions placed upon us within our own social group. However, as conventions stem from group mentality — in that we use them to belong to a collective — they also differ from group to group. As students move into higher education they will be exposed to different social groups and cultural backgrounds, increasing not only the potential to cause offence, but also making the students conscious of this fact. This heightened awareness, instilled in them from school, is having a clear effect on the students' ability to be honest and spontaneous in their acting work. In the Meisner technique there is no encouragement to be rude to each other, however efforts are made to allow the students the *permission* to be rude *if* that is what the moment presents.

---

<sup>77</sup> Although this chapter will not focus on the gender element of politeness and interaction, it is important to mention that recent acceptance of sexual harassment as a serious societal problem (Herrera, Herrera & Expósito, 2017: 1), along with the lack of clear definition in what constitutes such harassment (Ibid.), is bound to have an impact on male students' interaction with female students. Further research would be beneficial within this area — especially in terms of understanding the repercussions this societal shift will have on actor training.

As stated previously, the impact of social norms on actors can be significant in its restriction of impulsive behaviour. However, it is interesting to note that the potential to cause offence is not the only motivation behind such rules. Social norms are habitual: they become established and evolve through the habits of a social group. Compliance with such habits, or rules, equals politeness whereas non-conformity will be seen as impoliteness (Fraser, 1990: 220). Behaviour that is seen as regular becomes expected, which in turn brings certainty — people largely want to be able to predict what is going to happen next as it makes us feel safe and unchallenged (Culpepper, 2011: 16). In the Meisner work we are constantly working from impulse, pushing boundaries to let our instinctive reaction dictate the next moment. In doing that we are allowing the interaction to exist outside of the habitual and predictable, hence outside of our ‘comfort zone’ (Moseley, 2012: 26), which requires time and effort from the actor, as Moseley stresses: “Self-censorship is part of your social training, but even in your early adulthood it is so embedded that you have to train yourself to respond differently” (Ibid.: 66). In other words, the way these values are embedded means that the training needs to target these areas of ingrained social compliance in order to discover what our true responses might be. Meisner’s Repetition exercise is designed to do just that.

### The Repetition exercise and social norms

One of the key foundations in the Repetition exercise is *truth*. In this instance the truth is defined as a socially unfiltered communication between two adults (Hart, 2006: 56), meaning that the interaction should not be guarded by social norms but spontaneous and free. Meisner believed that human instinct was the basis for truthful behaviour (Stinespring, 1999: 72) and developed his process with the intention of bringing the actors back to their emotional impulses (Meisner, 1987: 6).

The Repetition exercise works by one actor observing something “tangible and present” (Hart, 2006: 53) about their partner, something they can physically see. That honest observation is then repeated back and forth until the impulse emerges to change the observation to something new. The intention of the exercise is to minimise the “thinking” (Wayth, 2014: 91) involved in the interaction,<sup>78</sup> hence not

---

<sup>78</sup> Wayth’s use of the term ‘thinking’ here refers to the intellectual thought involved in analysing the chosen words, both in terms of the creation of dialogue and evaluation of the reaction, rather than any thoughts involved in making the observations.

censoring the actors' perceptions and aligning them with social norms. It does not allow for fabrication, and so removes the pressure on the actor to produce interesting dialogue. Instead by only voicing what they actually see before them all the attention can be directed towards the partner (Ibid.). This necessitates less awareness of both the audience and of self-inhibiting thoughts, which suggests that the actor does not only become less self-conscious and analytical in their interactions but more impulsive as a result.

With regard to the Repetition exercise, the fear of offending causes the actors to analyse their responses for social acceptability which slows the process down, intellectualises it, and moves the actors away from their instinctive reactions (Durham, 2004: 155). This impedes the process, makes the exercise disengaging, and prevents the progression of the learning. The Repetition exercise could be seen to challenge the boundaries of social norms. While it is not necessary to be rude to each other in order for the exercise to work, it is important that all observations are *allowed* and nothing be censored. In practice, most observations are not rude, although social norms tend to perceive the act of commenting on each other as unconventional or even as uncivilised behaviour (Meisner, 1987: 30).

This unconventionality was apparent in the recent research workshops where students would become hesitant when their observations could be seen to be negative i.e. "you are nervous" or "you have a stain on your shirt". However, there are occasions when purely pointing out a fact about someone, i.e. "you have two ears" fills the observer with dread and shame due to the lack of social grace such a comment would carry. As one of the students pointed out during the workshops: "[Commenting on someone] felt judgemental at first and naturally this felt uncomfortable" (Steven, student, 2017: see Appendix 3).

Feelings like these often lead to students finishing the Repetition exercise by apologising for having possibly caused a negative emotional response in their partner. These instances might question their motive for attending acting class in the first place, if it is not to be affected and cause affect. It is interesting to note that it is mainly the observer, not necessarily the person being observed, who feels the most anxiety about being honest and open in the interaction. This suggests that the fear of *causing offence* is greater than the fear of *being offended*. Following the first session on Repetition, one of the students commented on the fact that they felt concerned

when their partner reacted to anything they'd said, as they worried it meant that they had caused offence (Paula, student, 2017).<sup>79</sup>

One could argue, regardless of the participants' motives, that by protecting their partner from any negative feeling, they are in effect sabotaging their progression and disturbing their process, which relies on desensitising the actor to the scrutiny of others. Meisner teacher Nick Moseley agrees that this type of guilt, which occurs after emotionally affecting a fellow actor, is commonplace and needs to be eradicated for the Repetition exercise to be successful (Moseley, 2012: 38). While he admits that this reaction could feel truthful to the actors themselves, he warns that by acting on those feelings we are in fact blocking the real truths that we see before us. This is why it is crucial to observe, in detail, all the behaviours the partner exhibits, to avoid falling into the trap of feeling guilty every time we get an emotional reaction from our partner (Ibid.: 66). This type of censorship will ultimately render the exercise useless.

Part of our real-life social training is the process of editing out— choosing not to comment on certain things we are observing others, and even pretending to ourselves that we haven't observed them ... This may be all very considerate and may create a very safe relationship, but it will also quickly turn the exercise into meaningless party game (Moseley, 2012: 38).

Although Moseley's observations are mirrored by the experiences of other practitioners, this can be challenging for the students. Being commented on, and having your behaviour scrutinised, is not always a pleasant experience and can indeed be initially unsettling. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is a common feeling at the start of a process that is designed to minimise self-consciousness and challenge habits. It also emphasises the necessity of an uncensored exchange, as every attempt to safeguard your partner blocks the impulse and stops the actors' development. Equally imperative is the recognition of this being *an exercise for actors*. Actors are required to use themselves and their personal experiences in order to inhabit roles and circumstances whilst being watched by an audience. For this to happen the actor needs to operate from a high level of openness. They are expected not to limit their responses to socially accepted ones and fake

---

<sup>79</sup> "The worry started when there was a big reaction [in my partner] and I was worried if they felt offended, which I didn't want to do to them." Quote from student Paula during second session on Repetition.

emotional states (Moseley, 2012: 51), which will curb their ability to empathise and connect with an imaginary situation, as well as react instinctively to offers made by other actors onstage.

The personal aspect of this work requires patience, from both student and tutor and the establishing of a *safe space* for this exploration to occur. However, a safe space must never be confused with a guarded, polite relationship between the actors (Ibid.: 66) where the boundary of the comfort zone is never pushed, which would be the opposite of what is needed. The broad use of the term 'safe space' within actor training refers to a place where the actors feel comfortable to experiment (and let go of social conventions) without it causing embarrassment, critique or reprimand. Additionally, these process-based exercises are dependent on time, increasing the importance of the step-by-step approach the technique demands in order to be successful. Due to our socially ingrained habits (Ibid.: 51) the exercises can feel unnatural at first, which is why the Meisner technique is not a quick fix but a process established over a period of time. Once the process has eliminated those initial fears and ingrained instincts students often experience a sense of liberty. There is a freedom and satisfaction in opening up to the partner and the room — a chance to reveal the self without inhibitions, defensive barriers and social restrictions. It is common for students to display relief when vulnerable behaviour is pointed out as they can let go of the tension created by the concealment of such emotions. This stems from a comfort in the realisation that another person understands you, which instantly brings a deeper connection and permission to share each other's truths. As Moseley points out this requires trust but also a strong will, as we have to find a determination to allow others to really see us (2012: 48). The absolute honesty required of students in the Meisner process carries significant support from Meisner practitioners, however due to the personal nature of this work it is not surprising that it also raises some criticism from within the wider teaching community.

### Critique of the process

Rose-Marie Malague, in particular, offers firm critique towards the hazards of speaking one's mind in the Repetition exercise and dedicates several pages of her book (*An Actress Prepares*, 2012) to dissecting this element of Meisner's technique. This section aims to respond to her main concerns and offer some reassurance with regard to this aspect of Meisner's process.

Malague's main worry lies within the very initial stage of the Repetition when the observations are based on the visual exterior of the other person e.g. "You have a nose". She stresses the danger of this honesty being exploited for controlling purposes, in addition to the risk of someone adding a personal opinion which might cause offence (2012: 128, 131-132). Further, Malague warns us of the possible moral dangers of commenting on such sensitive aspects as gender and race and challenges the idea that there can be anything like a neutral, factual observation regarding someone's physicality.

Firstly, by highlighting the "risks" of inviting personal opinions (128), Malague chooses to focus on speculative outcomes but overlooks the deeper reasons for truthful communication. Her arguments rest too heavily on the fear of causing offence — especially by not being politically correct about someone's appearance — and do not take into account the importance of allowing freedom of expression in the interaction. Secondly, it is crucial to note that Malague herself admits that the fears she voices about possible inappropriate observations are subjective and hypothetical; she has not actually experienced the inappropriate behaviour that she predicts in the Repetition exercise:

I felt fearful that my students would voice aloud my own impulsive observations— at the same time I felt certain that they would not. They did not. Now, my observations are obviously a reflection of my own subjectivity; it is possible that not everyone looking at these two actors would see the same things I did (Malague, 2012: 131).

The above quote implies that the objective of Malague's session was not to encourage impulsivity and honesty, but rather to harness it. She goes on to question whether it was "instinct" that led her students to protect each other from harm or whether she had not been successful in establishing the safe space that a Meisner trained teacher ought to (131). Unfortunately, in allowing her own fears to impact on her teaching of the Repetition exercise, the failure to create a safe space for her students to explore this sense of inhibition could be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Thirdly, Malague admits that her intention was never to engage in a whole semester's work but to merely experiment with the foundational stage (130), meaning that the exercise was never given the time and conviction it needed to work. Although experimentation within acting techniques should be encouraged and brings many

advantages, one of the pitfalls can be that an exercise that is part of a longer process gets taken out of context and thus incorrectly interpreted. If this is the case it would give a plausible explanation to Malague's negative reaction to the exercise.

Furthermore, it is questionable why Malague would choose to engage with this work when she opposes the fundamental principle of reducing self-censorship to the point where she argues that it should be avoided between actors in the first place (2012: 128). As Hart points out, the initial stages of the Repetition exercise need strong guidance from the teacher, in order for the students to stop editing their observations and subsequently start responding instinctively (2006: 54). Consequently, anyone teaching the Repetition exercise would need a certain level of motivation and commitment to the process as well as to the end result.<sup>80</sup>

Malague's conflict between using this technique and following social norms is understandable, however, one might question whether pointing out someone's gender or race would cause offense to an actor. Surely the benefits of exploring the links between self-censorship and impulse, in the relatively safe context of an acting class, are more important to most would-be actors than any imagined offence that might be caused. As a teacher of the Meisner technique, it is rare to encounter offensive observations. Some comments evoke surprise, bemusement or embarrassment due to the sheer honesty behind them, however for most students, the biggest hurdle to get over is the simple act of commenting on another person. This is the reason why this technique is a process, as it allows the training to sink in gradually and challenge those socially ingrained perceptions.

In response to Malague's chapter, there are two general points about the Repetition exercise, which would benefit the reader when considering the critique:

Firstly, the stage where the actors comment on the exterior of their partner is very short. It acts as training wheels for *Repetition with Point of View*, which is focused on observing *behaviour*. The reason it exists is to allow the actors' sense of observation to strengthen by commenting on purely visual cues, moving them away from having to intellectually engage too much with their surroundings. The student actors need

---

<sup>80</sup> Malague admits that while she is educated *about* the technique she is *not trained in it herself* (2012: 130), which could have an impact on the belief in the process. The "doing" aspect of the process is crucial and personal experience could add more confidence and guidance to the teaching of the exercise.

time to adjust to the actual act of observing another person before they are ready to analyse their behaviour, hence we start off with tangible observations such as clothes or features. The objective is always to get the actors to move towards observing behaviour, as that is much more relevant to reading another person than their exterior features. This can go on for a while, depending on the students' ability in observing each other, however it can also move quickly towards physical behaviours and the motivation behind them. As Meisner teacher Jim Jarrett describes: the move from physical observations towards the emotional inner life can happen within the first session:

Cold factual observations are the beginning of course - it's where we have to start but it's ALL about going underneath the obvious to get into the inner life and what's really going on, and that actually happens very early on in the first session IF taught properly (Jarrett, email interview, 2016)

Jarrett's explanation implies that this stage of the Repetition exercise, where external observations are used, has a clear practical motive and not lingered upon once that motive is met.

Secondly, this technique is specifically designed for the training of actors and developed with the fictional space in mind (Moseley, 2012: 26).<sup>81</sup> Ultimately, the Repetition exercise is a tool that exists in order to bring out impulsive and spontaneous behaviour within a training environment, not a benchmark for how one should behave in everyday life. People are often less than truthful in real life, due to possible consequences of tactless behaviour. However, when we are acting the premise is different as it is not considered real life, consequently we cannot, and should not, be confined by the same values (Esper, 2008: 54-55).

One could argue that what we teach actors is *extra-daily*; <sup>82</sup> it is beyond the every-day situations and daily interactions and instead focuses on emotional turmoil, high stakes circumstances, and conflict. Meisner tutor Elizabeth Mestnik asserts that

---

<sup>81</sup> The fictional space refers to the invented and imaginary circumstance that actors enter into in actor training situations. This can be anything from games and exercises to scenes and full productions.

<sup>82</sup> Theatre practitioner and director Eugenio Barba coined the term extra-daily. Barba made a distinction between this and the daily use of our bodies, which he saw as minimum effort and unconscious processes. He acknowledges that a performer uses more effort in their movement and emotions and called this extra-daily behavior. He mainly makes these claims based on physical works, but also refers to Stanislavski's work on emotions as an extra-daily technique. (Barba, 1995: 15-16) (Barba & Savarese, 1991: 189) (Barba & Savarese, 2006: 7).



audiences expect to see events and conflicts beyond the mundane, which requires actors to connect with each other in a different way to daily life. She suggests that acting needs a stronger and “more truthful” approach than what we are used to in our daily social interactions.<sup>83</sup> She points out that the higher the stakes, the more direct and honest our actions become, which is the required level of communication for actors (Mestnik, June 2011).

Meisner believed that an actor’s talent lay in his ability to follow instincts. He saw the tension created by trying to control those instincts as the opposite of the spontaneous behaviour he sought (1987: 30). Ultimately actors are taught to listen and react honestly within an imaginary circumstance (Ibid.: 16), whilst knowing that the situation is indeed imaginary. This honesty is in itself is difficult and requires an extra-daily sense of vulnerability, emotional awareness and open interaction. The challenge lies in finding out how we would interact with our partner if we could say or do what we wanted, hence finding a truer sense of self without social restrictions informing the behaviour. It is important that the students are made aware that even though Repetition demands the use of the self, due to the fact that they have been instructed to perform a certain exercise within the training space, it should not be considered real life. The emotional connection that can develop between two people doing this exercise reaches beyond their relationship outside of the classroom and can often surprise the participants. This is due to the very nature of breaking down social barriers, that are designed to restrict the interaction, and in doing so revealing yourself to another person.

As highlighted earlier, being made to feel a whole range of emotions in acting class is not only typical — it is necessary for the development of the actor’s emotional availability and ability to link the fictional to the self. As Moseley observes, the acting space gives license to explore situations and characters beyond the dictations of the playwright and director. This same freedom should be explored in the Meisner space, allowing the actors the same kind of permission they would have under an imaginary circumstance (2012: 26). The actors have to learn to separate their training from their social life, and a fictional circumstance from their own reality. It is only then,

---

<sup>83</sup> What Elizabeth alludes to here is that we are not always acting upon our true feelings in real life. We often hide our instincts and stop ourselves before we act impulsively to uphold social conventions. In this work we want to let go of those defenses and respond and interact on true impulse, hence “more truthful”. As Elizabeth writes in her article *Basics of the Meisner technique* (June, 2011): “All good acting stems from actors’ instincts — by honouring impulses and not intellectualizing the work”.

that they can start to be truly present and affected by the interaction. In order to learn how to listen and respond instinctively, we have to open ourselves up to our own vulnerability which can sometimes be uncomfortable and exposing. The Meisner technique offers a way for actors to explore that side of the self within a clear, developed process.

### Self-monitoring and self-control

In the question of the Meisner technique's ability to enhance impulsivity, Malague not only challenges the actual possibility of reaching beyond social norms, but also opposes the assumption that this would reveal a "truer sense of the human being" (2012: 111). So far this chapter has presented how social norms impact on impulsivity, however to address Malague's analysis it is equally important to understand what is involved in following social norms and whether this can be altered.

When we over-ride an impulse, inhibit a response or adjust our behaviour — in order to follow a rule or achieve something — we assert *self-control* (Skinner, 1953; Norman & Shallice, 1986; Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989; Barkley, 1997; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Social psychologists DeBono, Shmueli and Muraven draw strong links between the ability to exert self-control and the ability to adhere to social rules, reinforcing the idea that the two are interdependent (2011: 137). From this we can surmise that people with a strong sense of self-control are best equipped to follow convention.

While the idea of self-control driving social norms is of great value it is also particularly interesting to consider the behaviour that would result without the assertion of self-control, as Psychologists Debono, Shmueli and Muraven suggest: "Without self-control, an individual would engage in impulsive, automatic, present-focused behavior with little regard to long-term costs or expectations" (2011: 136). *Impulsive, automatic and present-focused* are all behaviours that are desirable and constitute the main purpose of the Meisner technique. DeBono et al.'s suggestion that people with low self-control in general are more impulsive reinforces Meisner's idea of politeness obstructing instinct. They argue that the less self-control a person possesses the more likely they would be to act on their immediate responses (2011: 137). This implies that the instinctive reaction would be the more true to the self. In fact, Baumeister and Muraven go as far as stating that the use of self-control self-

regulates our behaviour, emotions and thinking — which in effect changes the self (2000: 248).

In terms of the Meisner technique, self-recognition is one of the main the purposes of the Repetition exercise; to not just reveal yourself to others, but to accept your own instinctive responses and attitudes as well. Meisner teacher William Esper explains the significance the Repetition exercise can have in this context:

You bring a lifetime's accumulation of defences in order to prevent yourself from displaying true selves. Many of your past experiences have, to a greater or lesser degree, sealed your true self away from the world to a point where you may have lost all awareness of who your true self is. Repetition can cure this: because Repetition demands spontaneity, and spontaneity can unlock the thick door of reservations that keep your true personality imprisoned (Esper, 2008: 56).

The notion of unlocking the self became evident in the feedback after the fourth research session on the Repetition exercise. One student recognised the change she had encountered in herself, following the Meisner training, not purely in terms of revealing her emotions but also her own acceptance of those feelings:

This is the first time I've felt unafraid and opened up to my partner. My partner observed nerves in me but I didn't find it intimidating when she said it, something has just got much easier. I just feel more open and more ok with who I am and what I am feeling. It's really liberating (Daisy, student, 2017: see Appendix 3).

This was a considerable change from the beginning of the sessions when the same participant stated (in both the first and second week) that they felt “worried, insecure and self-conscious” during the Repetition exercise. Interestingly, according to psychologist Adele Diamond, more effort is needed to exercise self-control in comparison to acting on impulse (2013: 136). This may contribute to the sense of ease and liberty actors feel when breaking through those barriers. An example of this will be presented in Chapter 6:1, Case study 3 (183-186).

Repetition works by directing our attention towards our partner, rather than ourselves. Being made to voice our own observations, as well as our partner's,

interferes with our ability to analyse our thoughts and second-guess their validity, hence the ability to act on impulse is enhanced. This ability develops over time, which is why the exercise is part of a step-by-step process. One particular discovery about the flexibility of self-control provides us with another reason for the Repetition exercise to be performed a multitude of times. This aspect is called *depletion of self-control* (Muraven, Tice & Baumeister, 1998; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000) and indicates that self-control can decrease under certain circumstances. Psychologists Muraven and Baumeister's research into self-control suggests that self-control strength is limited and that all forms of self-control draw on one common resource, which can easily become depleted (2000: 248).<sup>84</sup> They claim that the source is used for multiple functions and so directing the self-control towards one particular goal will diminish its power in other areas. This resonates with the workings of the Repetition exercise as the demand on the actor's attention will diminish the level of self-control they can spend on impulse-inhibition. Additionally, research suggests that depletion occurs in all individuals (when engaging in activities demanding self-control) and is not necessarily dependant on initial self-control strength (Muraven, Pogarsky & Schmueli, 2006: 272-273). This suggests that the Meisner training would be beneficial to a range of individuals, regardless of self-control levels.

There have been differing views on the effect of depletion of self-control on politeness. While Aarts & Dijksterhuis argue that people follow social norms automatically and without effort, even when otherwise preoccupied (2003: 19), Goldberg & Grandey suggest that politeness and manners are demanding and requires emotional regulation consistent with self-control (2007: 301). This discrepancy prompted DeBono, Shmueli and Muraven to conduct experiments exploring this concept. One of their experiments consisted of the participants being split into two groups: the non-depletion condition and the depletion condition. Both groups completed a typing task consisting of two neutral paragraphs about behavior and cognition. In the non-depletion condition the participants typed both paragraphs normally, whereas people assigned to the depleted condition group were not allowed to type the letter *e* or use the space bar, hence one group exerting more self-control than the other (DeBono et al, 2011: 142). After the completion of the tests, the

---

<sup>84</sup> Self-Control is a form of *inhibitory control*, the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts and behavior. Executive functioning skills associated with inhibitory control include self-control (behavioral inhibition) and interference control (selective attention and cognitive inhibition) (Diamond, 2013: 136).

experimenters measured the level of verbal politeness each participant demonstrated during the recognition of someone holding a door open for them. They secretly counted the times the participants said “thank you” or “thanks” whilst passing through the doors. The participants who had stated that their task required a large amount of self-control were less likely to interact politely after the event whereas those who participated in the other task did. The researchers concluded that the levels of self-control could be altered through greater use, which subsequently had a significant impact on the ability to adhere to politeness norms, which in turn suggests that self-control is needed to follow social norms (DeBono et al. 2011: 142). By subjecting the participants to frustration, urgency and challenge, the importance of self-control lessened and the participants became more direct in their actions. These findings imply that even though social norms are ingrained, they are dependent on our ability to administer self-control, which can be affected by outside influences. One can argue that the theory of self-control connects current research with two of the main concepts of Meisner’s technique: the instinctive self being a truer version of the self, and the effect of outside stimuli on impulsivity; thus supporting Meisner’s ideas regarding politeness interfering with instinct.

### Conclusion

The intention throughout this last section has been to demonstrate the impact politeness can have on actor training and in particular its effect on spontaneity and instinct. As we endeavour to create actors that are brave, vulnerable and open, the emphasis placed on young people to adhere to strict social conventions (albeit well-intentioned) has led to a generation of students afraid to fully connect with each other in an honest way. This increases the need to abandon politeness in the acting classroom, by making it more challenging.

It is through understanding the reasons behind this behaviour, and the social norms dictating it, that we can start to tackle it in the acting profession. The Repetition exercise is dependent on the freedom to express oneself and reciprocally acts as a tool to achieve that openness. The difficulty lies in tutors themselves allowing the fear of impoliteness to restrict them in their teaching; acting on impulse does not necessarily lead to offensive behaviour. The importance of impulse-work, as well as an appreciation of the acting space as different to everyday life, should over-ride any concerns a tutor would have in this respect.

Finally, through identifying the aspect of self-control — its ability to inform the way we follow social norms and ways it can be depleted — we can start to understand how the Meisner technique tackles self-censorship and inhibition. In particular, the concept of a single, limited self-control source has major implications for analysis of the Repetition exercise as it connects the use of attention with the increase in instinctive behaviour. *Attention* and *self-control* are two of the core Executive Functioning skills which use the same supply of self-control. This suggests that the intensive use of attention in the Repetition exercise would effectively lower the ability to exercise self-control, and thus make the participant more impulsive. Acknowledging that link leads to recognition of the role of executive functioning skills in planning and analysing, which are two major hindrances to reaching a state of flow (as discussed in the previous section of this chapter). Taking all this into consideration, Meisner's demand to "Fuck Polite!" not only addresses the unwillingness to assert one's own opinions in the face of social conventions but is also significant in terms of the actor's ability to reduce self-consciousness on stage.

So far the Repetition exercise has been explored through published accounts, including Meisner's own words, through the perspective of psychology of attention, from my own investigations and adaptations of the work, and from the viewpoint that worrying about causing offence is detrimental to the success of the training. The next chapter will introduce the next stage of the foundational process: *Independent Activity* and *Knock on the Door*. These exercises will be laid out from the perspective of Meisner practitioners as well as the underpinning psychological processes involved, in order to further the understanding of the workings of the training and the effects on attention and self-consciousness.

## **Chapter 5: Upping the ante — adding the activity**

This chapter sees the introduction of the subsequent phase of the training, which — through the addition of motivation — goes even further towards drawing the actor's attention away from the self and strengthening the commitment to the reality of doing. Firstly, the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercises will be introduced through the analysis and perspective of Meisner himself, along with other practitioners such as Esper, Silverberg, Hart and Moseley. This presentation will provide the reader with the intention behind this stage of the process, and an understanding of the key elements involved in the exercises. This section will also demonstrate difficulties the students might encounter, as well as respond to critique raised about the work. Secondly, said key elements will be explored in terms of the psychological processes involved, attentional and motivational aspects and its relation to flow — in order to further bring about a thorough explanation for how and why this training increases spontaneity and decreases self-consciousness.

The Independent Activity and the Knock on the Door exercises are two parts of an improvisation exercise designed to place the actor's attention on a physical task, whilst maintaining a dialogue with his fellow actor. They are a natural extension of the Repetition, in terms of the actor's development, bringing movement, intention and given circumstances into the process (Hart, 2006: 56). These exercises are devised in order to allow the actor to apply the skills acquired in the Repetition and respond emotionally and creatively to a situation, readying them for later work on text (Moseley, 2012: 95).

### **5:1 Independent Activity and Knock on the Door**

#### **The Independent Activity**

The first step of the Knock on the Door exercise is the Independent Activity. Working independently, the actor has to prepare a real, physical activity; nothing mimed or pretended (Meisner, 1987: 39; Esper, 2008: 59), with a clear end to it (Silverberg, 1994: 64).<sup>85</sup> The activity must be intricate and *difficult* to achieve, it must be *plausible* within the context of the imagined circumstance, and there must be a *specific reason*

---

<sup>85</sup> Both the actor and audience must be clear on when the task is completed, i.e. it cannot be in your head.

for it to be done at that time.<sup>86</sup> Meisner believed that with these three elements in place, the actor was forced to commit to the task and place their full focus on it, although he did emphasise difficulty of the task (Meisner, 1987: 39) as the most important component. The difficulty of the task ensures that the actor's full concentration is placed on the activity (Esper, 2008: 59), which ultimately trains the attention (Meisner, 1987: 39). The more intricate the activity, the more focus it demands of the actor in order to complete it, as Esper notes:

Once an actor places that totality of his concentration on the accomplishment of some concrete, specific, and truthful goal, he cannot help but react truthfully, from the core of his self and experience. In this manner, the activity becomes a real workout in the reality of doing, and the actor becomes emotional in spite of himself (2008: 71).

The plausibility and the specificity of the task is where the actor's imagination comes in. Meisner was clear that these circumstances should be imaginary and help exercise the actor's imagination skills (Hart, 2006: 56). Placing the focus on recalling a prior event will confine the attention and impulses to an already lived situation and limit the spontaneity and exploration of an imaginary circumstance, as Esper puts it: "Life can never be as terrible or as wonderful as you can imagine it to be" (2008: 100). By demanding that the students craft a new scenario every time they work, the exercise strengthens and expands their imagination and creates freedom to explore ideas that expand on their literal reality (Hart, 2006: 59). This is the first step into the imaginary world in the Meisner process and signifies a big step towards the given circumstances of later scene work. The specificity of the reason should help with the connection to the circumstance and the need for the task to be done right here, right now. If the reason is too general, we will not be as invested as if the reason was specific and meaningful to us. Esper gives this example:

"Going to a party" is too general [...] If you say the party is for my husband/mum/boyfriend who finally has made a promotion at work after

---

<sup>86</sup> Some practitioners, like Bill Esper and Victoria Hart, start by just having an intricate activity which is difficult to achieve, and wait with the specific reason and urgency until the Knock on the Door (Esper, 2008: 81, Hart, 2006: 58), however Meisner himself did start with a specific reason straight away (Meisner, 1987: 39).



working their socks off for years — now that is specific and will fire you up inside (2008: 91).

Nevertheless, although that reason should be imaginary, it has to be plausible — something the actor can believe. The notion of connecting to, and investing in, an imaginary circumstance as reality — meaning that the actor can engage with the imaginary circumstances *as if* they were real to him in that moment (Esper, 2008: 94) — is often referred to as having “actor’s faith” (Meisner, 1987: 44) The actor is urged to find something that they personally can accept as within possible reach. The more outlandish the reason, the more imagination and willpower will be taken up in the actor’s mind just to commit to the circumstance, and if he fails to believe it himself the authenticity of the situation will suffer (Esper, 2008: 96).

The difficulties in this exercise often come from one (or all of) the above not being honoured. An actor might come up with a difficult activity but have no real way to justify it, and the activity becomes featureless and inconsequential as the struggle to believe the situation consequently turns the actor’s attention inwards. As Meisner stated: “The reason you do the activity is the source of your concentration, and eventually the source of your emotion, which comes by itself (Meisner, 1987: 39). At other times the activity is not difficult enough or not physical enough and the actor ends up *demonstrating* or *showing* the audience that he/she is trying to complete it, rather than just doing it. This in itself is self-consciousness at work and will result in the failure of the exercise and the authenticity of the display.

In all these initial exercises the actor is to use the self, not a character, and the scenario and activity has to make sense to *him/her* or a situation that could possibly happen to him/her. As stated in the chapter on self-consciousness: the use of the self is imperative in the early stages of Meisner’s work, as he believed the mind should not be occupied by anything but the elements of the exercises, and that the character develops from the self within imaginary circumstances. As Stinespring explains:

The actor is always himself at this stage, for in reality, who else really exists on the stage except for the human being who is acting a character? Truthful acting involves a mutual embodiment and meshing of actor and character. The character is simply a fictional layer superimposed on the actor's truthful behavior (1999:63).

Esper reiterates this concept and suggests that questions such as “what if this was true?” and “what if this happened to me?” brings the actor to explore and experience different scenarios and outcomes for the self (Esper, 2008: 87).

This becomes even more important in the second part of the exercise, as we then have to respond to the other, whilst doing our activity, and the response has to come from the self. The actor is encouraged to have an opinion on all that is said and observed about them and to take it personally — responding truthfully to what it means to them in that moment (Silverberg, 1994: 107; Esper, 2008: 77). However, the emphasis lies on the honest response of the self, as opposed to what we would do ‘in real life’. In social situations we might adjust our instinctive response, whereas here you must act on the instinctual emotional impulses and allow them to take part in the interaction (Hart, 2006: 62). It is common to take the easy option, but in these exercises the actors need to be constantly challenged to go down the more ‘uncomfortable route’ (Moseley, 2012, 105) and ‘living in the unknown’ (Silverberg, 1994: 52).

### Knock on the Door

In the second part of the exercise, the partner is introduced into the scenario, and this is where the actors will merge the Independent Activity and Repetition to form the Knock on the Door exercise. At this point the justification for the Independent Activity should be fuelled by a strong personal reason for completing the task, within the context of the crafted scenario. This should include a clear understanding of the consequence of a failed attempt, in other words the *stakes are raised*. Meisner often added a time constraint to the task making it more *urgent*, to augment the imagined reason and its immediacy, and therefore strengthen the commitment to the doing (Meisner, 1987: 50) and add to the intensity of the situation (Krasner, 2000: 144). As Victoria Hart writes: “The time element gives immediacy and so lifts the exercise to heightened reality that the actors are not prepared to experience” (2006: 58).

In order for the time limit to add a sense of incentive and repercussion, it needs to be reasonable. There must still be enough time for the actor to be able to believe that he might be able to complete the task — urgency cannot override plausibility (Esper, 2008: 103). The actor often needs to be coached to frame the reason in a way that creates a greater immediacy and need. For example, for an activity reason like “I have to piece together a shredded document that needs to be handed to the bank in 30

minutes” can be changed to “I have accidentally shredded an important document belonging to my mum/dad, and they are coming back for it in 30 minutes”. By including an innocent party, an *emotional root*,<sup>87</sup> the motivation is now fuelled by guilt and the need to rectify a situation, which leads to greater urgency and a deeper connection to the circumstance (Silverberg, 1994: 94).<sup>88</sup>

In the Knock on the Door exercise Actor A is in the room performing the Independent Activity, when Actor B comes to the door with a simple reason for wanting something from Actor A. The reason itself cannot feature in the dialogue since the rules of the exercise mean that the communication is through Repetition. However, it is still important that Actor B has a reason and justification to be there, or his mind may drift into questioning his presence in the scene, resulting in self-consciousness and lack of honest engagement. At this stage the reason for Actor B knocking on the door should be just enough to bring him to the room and stay for a while, but not strong enough to force Actor A to leave the room (Meisner, 1987: 57). For example, “I have to borrow money for my taxi that is coming shortly” is more fitting than “My mother is choking and you need to help me save her”. It should also be made clear that the actors do not converse or share their individually crafted circumstances with each other prior to the improvisation, as this can destroy the spontaneity and make the interaction less genuine. The actors will use the Repetition exercise to observe and react to each other’s behaviour and emotional state only (Krasner, 2000: 145).

Actor A will have already begun their Independent Activity as Actor B knocks on the door, at which Actor A is forced to interrupt his activity in order to open the door and start the Repetition. The Repetition starts with Actor A’s reaction to the knock itself — how it was done and what was behind it. The urgency and stakes of the circumstance will lead to Actor A swiftly resuming their activity. All communication from this point will stem from observations between the two actors and the conflict of the two needs. The main behavioural impulses originate from the predicament and the frustration of Actor A’s Independent Activity, coupled with dealing with their

---

<sup>87</sup> Emotional root — a real subject in the actor’s life that he/she uses to root himself/herself to an imagined scenario: “The real world and the imaginary world don’t mix, but you can use the meaning of actual people and actual circumstances in your work...using real people in your crafting is not unhealthy, psychologically speaking. You can hospitalise your mother, fall in love with your neighbour, wreak revenge on your boss, seek justice for your battered younger sister, punish your cheating spouse, and on and on. Any of these things may have real meaning for you, and the meaning is the part that’s real” (Esper, 2008: 102).

<sup>88</sup> The components of specificity, urgency, difficulty and plausibility, and their effect on the attention will be explored later in this chapter.

partner. The difficulty of Actor A's task demands the concentration in a way that makes every little interruption from Actor B throw them off balance and forces them into unguarded spontaneity (Esper, 2008: 104).

A common problem arises when Actor A becomes so engrossed in their activity that they do not engage fully in the Repetition, either by blocking out the other completely or by merely responding by rote and neither listening or processing Actor B's observations. This means that no impulses will be acted upon, moments are lost and the interaction becomes stale. As Esper emphasises:

Each moment from your partner will come as an interjection or interruption to the concentration you put on your activity. However, you must answer in each of those interruptions for what they mean to you, no matter how involved you are in your task (2008: 73).

The main challenge here is for the Repetition to be sustained throughout the interaction. Actor A must still engage with their partner even though the Activity is demanding their focus. This forcefully divided attention is what will make the interaction continuously impulsive, keeping the attention outwards and in turn making Actor A less self-conscious (Esper, 2008: 72) and less 'intellectually' engaged (Durham, 2016: 158). It is important to emphasise here that even though it might feel natural to drop the Repetition, this exercise requires continuous repeating and observing throughout (Silverberg, 1994: 77).

### Actor B's struggle

The situation for Actor B is slightly more complicated. When this exercise is performed for the first time two unhelpful things usually happen. Firstly, Actor B forgets his reason for being there and becomes a 'spare part' in the improvisation, which in turn directs his attention inwards where he questions what he is supposed to be doing, resulting in self-consciousness. In my opinion, the solution is an adjustment to his reason for being in the room; even though it cannot be too strong, it needs to be strong enough to not be immediately forgotten (even though it is never brought up in the Repetition). Just as for the Independent Activity, the justification for knocking on the door is engineered to assist Actor B's imagination and keep them focused on the interaction and fully engaged with Actor A. More often than not both actors need some initial guidance to find a justification that raises the stakes but does

not overpower the interaction. For Actor B a reason like: “I want them to come with me to the cinema and our taxi is here” can be changed to: “My taxi is waiting downstairs, with the meter running, and I have lost my wallet”. Again, a small change but one which gives the actor a greater need to stay in the room and engage with the other person, rather than deciding to leave. Additionally, this enables Actor A’s interaction (or lack thereof) to have clearer personal consequences for Actor B to respond to. Some practitioners hold off longer with the urgent objective for the person coming in the door, as they feel it makes Actor B “push their agenda” (Esper, 2008: 132). This can be useful if allocated course time is not an issue, however it can often make actors feel like they have no reason to stay in the room and go against all their instinctive reactions when their impulse is to leave.

Another common problem for Actor B is an imbalance between observing the Actor A (and their activity) and their own objective. This can result in Actor B refusing to acknowledge Actor A’s activity, even if the reason for the knock is moderate, and starts telling Actor A what he needs to do. This is not conducive to the exercise as any dialogue in the Repetition that is not about, or stemming from, direct observation is disallowed. Neither should the Repetition be used to try to manipulate a conversation — it has to be focused on the behaviour of the other actor moment by moment, rather than trying to further a plot or scene (Krasner, 2000: 145).

Alternatively, the imbalance goes in the other direction and actor B becomes engrossed with the activity and the observations become confined to what Actor A is doing and how well they are doing it, rather than what they are feeling. Both of these go against what Meisner wanted to achieve with this exercise, that the actors must allow behaviour to be in the centre of any interaction. Meisner’s view was that acting was not about talking to the other person, but about reacting to their behaviour. It is the behaviour that awakens impulses in us, which then results in the words (Silverberg, 1995: 57).

### Critique of the Knock on The Door exercise

Actor trainer Kim Durham has criticised the limited value of the exercise for Actor B. Durham questions whether Actor B exists only as a facilitator of Actor A’s progression and highlights the dilemma of *acting on impulse* whilst having an objective you are not able to act upon (Durham, 2016: 158). Durham describes the idea of having a need that brings you to the door, and then forgetting about it, as

“nonsense” and encouraging of inauthentic behaviour (Ibid.). He states that real behaviour, according to Stanislavski, comes out of “the interplay of the circumstances that impact upon the individual and that individual’s pursuit of specific goals” (Durham, 2016: 158), and that by not adhering to this, Meisner would encourage untruthfulness. He goes on to argue that through his observations of the exercise, Actor B always looks more uncomfortable than Actor A, and so this exercise should be seen as purely for Actor A’s benefit.

In my opinion, Stanislavski’s idea that behaviour originates from the interplay between circumstances and the pursuit of the goal, does not conflict with Meisner’s view. The interplay is the interaction between the two partners and their differing circumstances and needs. Meisner was not interested in one person pursuing an objective regardless of what the other was doing and feeling, essentially cutting ourselves off from the other (Esper, 2008: 138). This would mean that the actions come out of an intellectual analysis of the personal goal, rather than an organic reaction to the other person. To counteract this, we must not let the pursuit of the goal over-shadow our ability to observe the other, but simply inform the interaction. The observations instead are filtered through the lens of what we need and how urgently we need it. This changes the observations and the intentions behind the comments. Ultimately, our need, alongside the actions of the other person, will bring about changes in our behaviour. These changes become the basis for the observations (Meisner, 1987: 42); the moment-to-moment interaction needs to be prioritised over the story (Moseley, 2012: 109). Usually a simple adjustment in B’s focus on his partner (made to the actor through post-exercise feedback) changes the balance in the exercise and brings the interaction back in line.<sup>89</sup> Making the other actor the indicator of whether you are succeeding or failing in your objective brings about a genuine focus on the other. We read signals from the other actor, which makes us realise what we have to do to get what we want, which connects the behaviour of the partner to the imaginary circumstances. As Moseley explains:

You are more likely to achieve an objective by focusing on the other person and responding to how they feel, than by any number of compensatory acts... as actors, you have to learn not to fall into the trap of doing everything except

---

<sup>89</sup> In the following section on “Knocking differently”, I explain how I have developed different instructions that I use in my exercises to prevent these pitfalls and keep the attention directed outwards.

the one really important thing, which is to engage with the other actor (Moseley, 2012: 128).

In the beginning it can be tricky to find the right balance between observing the other and your own need or want. Reading others' intentions can make our attention go inwards,<sup>90</sup> however keeping the Repetition going and responding to what is being said to us tends to keep us focused outwards. If observations are not made the attention will drift to the self. If the need is not essential or connected to the other, the attention will drift to the self. Equally if the need is stronger than the ability to observe the actor will become self-conscious and self-focused. When it is made clear to the actors that the Repetition takes precedence, but the objective influences the observations and the communication, the actors do tend to achieve this after a few sessions. Like the Repetition exercise, this is a significant adjustment to how we perceive the environment and training in this aspect takes time.

Durham also comments on Actor B looking uncomfortable during his observations of the exercise. There is no doubt that this kind of work can be uncomfortable, the role of Actor B is even intended to be uncomfortable. Not having a physical activity to concentrate on, paired with entering someone else's space, will inevitably make us vulnerable (Esper, 2008: 113). Defence mechanisms try to protect us from this vulnerability in many ways, (many of which I have described earlier in the chapter) all resulting in diminishing full engagement in the Repetition by either not observing the other or not listening to what they are saying. It is important for an actor to be able to handle feeling vulnerable and this exercise trains the ability to give up control to the situation itself.

In real life we pride ourselves on our ability to control our emotions or actions. However, these exercises are engineered to make us more impulsive and be less in control of the result of how we are being affected (Esper, 2008: 113). At times when the Repetition is not sustained, some students become physically tense and restricted, and emotionally inhibited, because of the inherent fear of certain feelings, like anger. Their anxiety over the possibility of losing control of their actions overrides their situational need and imaginary circumstances. Most of the time this fear is unfounded, since they would rarely have had a chance to act upon these kinds of feelings before. Therefore, it is a fear of the unknown, which couples with a

---

<sup>90</sup> This will be explained further in the later section on divided attention and theory of mind.

societal demand for impulses to be suppressed. William Esper notes that anger in itself is the source of a lot of tension which stops the actor from fully connecting to the situation, he states that “The only thing that happens when you experience anger is that you have a good old-fashioned bout of human emotion — avoiding it means that you are refusing to know yourself. That can kill your work as an actor” (Esper, 2008: 123).

Nobody should ever get hurt in the classroom but allowing ourselves to experience anger and frustration in a high stakes situation is crucial to the actor’s emotional repertoire (Silverberg, 1994: 96). The use of physicality and physical touch is also an aspect where we can censor ourselves due to personal restraints and social fears, which is where the actor’s belief in the circumstance, along with the high stakes, becomes such an important element in developing acting on impulse.

This skill of acting on impulse is dependent on the process and allowing the technique to have time to work, and re-train the actor’s attention. The Repetition trains our perception and listening, but when adding objectives, stakes and activity, the impulsive work becomes the focus of learning. Just as we feel vulnerable and self-conscious in the beginning of the Repetition, the Knock on the Door exercise requires just as much time for the actor to adjust to this, which cannot be rushed.

### Tipping the skill-challenge balance

At the point where the Activity is introduced the Repetition is becoming increasingly habitual, meaning the students have internalised the work and it requires less effort and attention to maintain (Esper, 2008: 62). This means that we need another aspect to concentrate on— the Activity — creating a ‘triangle of attention’ which in turn keeps the mind from wandering: “previous classes will have made repetition more reflexive, so that when she is struggling to do her very difficult task, answering her partner does not require her full attention” (Hart, 2006: 60).<sup>91</sup>

The difficult physical activity, as well as the need to listen, repeat, and observe the partner at the same time, keeps the focus outwards and leaves little attention left for self-reflection. Thus, the skill-challenge balance is adjusted by the introduction of the

---

<sup>91</sup> Actor A has two demands on his attention while Actor B has one, and this is what creates the triangle. As Actor A is focused on accomplishing his activity, whilst repeating, his repetitions are filtered through this struggle. Actor B, entering the room, is focused on Actor A, and his repetitions are caused by what he experiences as he takes in response to Actor A’s behaviour (Hart, 2006: 58).



activity. As the Repetition at this stage is becoming more automatic, the activity will demand more of the attention than the other person. The stakes of the situation, and the difficulty of the task, are also crucial elements to this redirection of attention. In my opinion, contrary to previous exercises, tipping the skills-challenge balance in this exercise no longer means the actor is not in flow when the difficulty increases, as long as the Repetition is kept up keeping the attention on the partner and the task. As the difficulty and urgency rises, frustration and anxiety will creep in due to the imaginary circumstances. However, this is not causing self-consciousness in the same way it does in the Repetition exercise, as these emotions come out of the struggle with the activity, thus they are inextricably linked, by the triangle of attention, to the given circumstances and the action of the exercise, not a self-reflective by-product.

When Repetition lapses more self-reflection does occur. However, for Actor A this mostly means that more attention is allocated to the activity, presuming the urgency and plausibility are present. If the imaginary circumstances are not strong enough or the actor does not fully believe it, the urgency reduces and the attention instead drifts from the activity onto the partner and the self. A different balance is now required, between the stakes of the activity and the other person. At this stage a more embodied Repetition is a prerequisite and should not require too much attention in itself, as emphasis in this exercise lies on being able to observe the partner whilst attending to the activity. After these fundamental principles have been introduced and practiced the actors may choose to strengthen their emotional connection to the context by going deeper in their justifications. A stronger emotional root and a well-established imagined circumstance could add to the significance and importance of the moment.<sup>92</sup> These elements lead to stronger connection to your partner, your activity and, ultimately, to the moment. When this layered process is applied successively over time, the actor's focus and listening skills improve markedly, which in turn allows them to pursue a need whilst maintaining connection with the partner and to live truthfully moment-to-moment, without interruptions of unwanted thoughts.

In this section I have established the main components of the Independent Activity: difficulty, plausibility, urgency and specificity — which, in combination ensure that

---

<sup>92</sup> For example, imagine your real sister telling you that she is suffering from an incurable illness. The only truth is the person; the circumstance is made up. The fact that the person is real helps us anchor the imagination to our emotion-center, which helps us to engage with the situation.

the actor's concentration is directed towards the task. The inclusion of imagination into the process was emphasised and explained in terms of its importance for the intention and stakes of the crafted circumstances, and thus the motivation behind the activity. This was followed by a presentation of the full Knock on the Door exercise, where it was made clear that the addition of the partner yet again stretches the actor's attention towards the external, encouraging limited self-focus. Further, the section also included common problems experienced by students, and critique raised towards this part of the training — both centred around the difficulty in finding a balance between the internal and external. The reasons for the exercises were presented through the perspectives of Meisner and other leading practitioners of the technique, who referred to the importance of the motivational aspect's effect on the actors' attention and emotional connection throughout their accounts.

The following two parts will provide a thorough examination of the psychological processes involved in these improvisation exercises, and their effect on the actor's attention. The key components of the Independent Activity will be investigated with the aim to explain why these factors are emphasised and requirements of the exercise. Moreover, the first part will have a brief investigation into how reading other's intentions can result in introvert attention, and how to counteract this possible problem. Further, there will be an exploration of different types of motivation involved and the reasons behind favouring one type above another. Finally, the findings will be related to the state of flow in terms of the differences between this stage, compared to the initial Repetition exercise.

## **5:2 The need for specificity, urgency and difficulty**

The Knock on the Door exercise is based on the present moment and the spontaneous interaction between two people within a set of demanding given circumstances. However, as presented in the previous section, the process can be complex and requires the balancing of several components in order to achieve the most successful results. While this section does at times refer to both of the actors involved in the Knock on the Door exercise, the primary focus is on the Independent Activity. This will be considered both in terms of the exercise requirements: difficulty, specificity, plausibility and urgency — and in terms of the type of attention and motivation at play.

## Divided attention and Knock on the Door

As stated in the chapter on Attention, the use of sustained and focused attention is crucial to the success of the Repetition exercise. Even going as far back as Broadbent's filter theory (1958) he stated that doing two tasks at once was not impossible, although the limited attention would mean that one task might fail, while the other might be adequately performed as there is a limit to the amount of "critical information" we can handle at a given time (1958: 34). To explain this Broadbent also reiterated the aspect of automaticity and its impact on multi-tasking — as when we are practiced at something the amount of information and feedback we need to take in decreases (Ibid.: 35).

At the time of reaching the Independent Activity and the Knock on the Door exercises, the skill of sustaining the attention will have improved after extensive training in the previous part of the process. Sustained and focused attention is still relevant for Actor B in the Knock on the Door exercise, however for Actor A the emphasis is on the use of *divided attention*. By dividing the attention between the task and the other person, the intention is that the limited attention resources are externally directed.

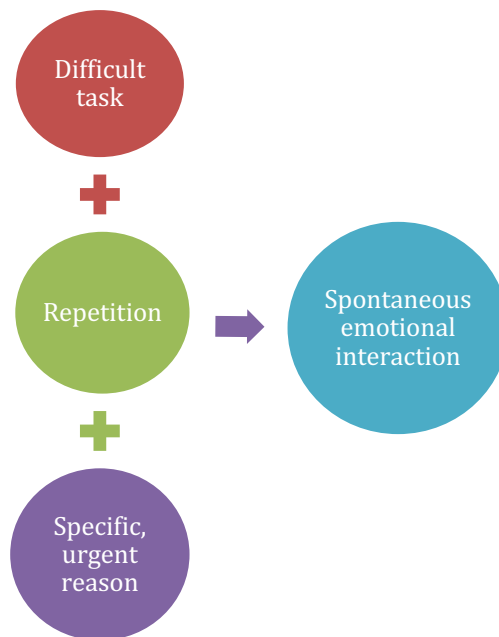
Further, this exercise stresses the importance of the instinctive reaction and the creation of an environment that is conducive to spontaneity. This is partly achieved by using high stakes situations and partly by limiting the self-control resources. Studies into our attentional control abilities have shown that dividing our attention tends to undermine self-control, as self-control requires focused attention (Schmeichel, 2005: 25, Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2010: 37).<sup>93</sup> Moreover, as previously described in Chapter 4:3: attention and self-control draw on the same resource, hence dividing the attention will lead to limited self-control, which manages our ability to manipulate conscious thought (Schmeichel, 2005: 2) and response inhibition (Kane & Engle, 2003). Yet, when the attention is no longer divided between tasks, the capacity to pay attention and maintain self-control are immediately brought back to full levels (Schmeichel, 2005: 2). This would account for the task-unrelated thoughts that occur when Actor A alternates their attention

---

<sup>93</sup> The studies mentioned here focused on visual attention focus, inhibition of writing tendencies, testing working memory, and interpreting emotional expressions (Schmeichel, 2005). Schmeichel and Baumeister's 2010 article focused on studies regarding visual attention focus as well as speed and accuracy in naming what you observe in the present moment.

between task and partner, rather than dividing their attention.

This same process is also said to limit emotional control (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2010:2), which would lead to difficulty in suppressing feelings that evolve throughout the exercise. In the Independent Activity we use a specific reason to create an urgent need (and thus the motivation) to complete the difficult task, at the same time as engaging in Repetition with the other, which forces the attention to divide — creating a spontaneous, emotional interaction (see fig. 8 below):



(Figure 8: Components of the Independent Activity)

The same process also supports the idea that trying to control facial expressions draws on the same depletable resource. This would mean that divided attention would limit the ability of the actor to try to hide their real feelings, by portraying another emotion (Schmeichel, 2005: 15). Therefore, their capacity to perform tactically in order to attain a particular goal would be curbed.

### Reading others' intentions

In the Repetition exercise, the observations are initially focused on physical behaviour, but become progressively geared towards what someone is thinking or feeling. Due to the added focus on *intention* in the Knock on the Door exercise, the actors are now faced with behaviour that stems from a concrete need and are now also trying to ascertain what someone wants. It is worth noting that one study into social perception found that the same neural network that is activated during flow

and task engagement — the Dorsal Attention Network (DAN) — is also engaged during ‘embodied aspects of social cognition’ such as understanding other people’s goal-directed actions and external biological movements and pain (Lahnakoski et al, 2012). However, reading others’ mental states is also part of a mainstream theory called *theory of mind* (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). Theory of mind is a socio-cognitive skill that enables us to attribute mental states, desires, beliefs and intentions to others as well as ourselves (Baron-Cohen, 1997; Calero et al, 2013: 1). It also allows us to understand that the mental states of others might differ from our own (Tsouklas, 2018: 38).

Theory of mind is divided into two aspects: *cognitive ToM*: mental states, beliefs, intentions of others, and *affective ToM*: emotions of others (Corradi-Dell’Acqua, Hofstetter & Vuilleumier, 2014: 1175). When we read others’ intentions, desires and emotions we utilise the past experiences both of ourselves and other people, which means that whilst deciding what we believe someone wants or feels, one of the parts that becomes activated in the brain is the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) (Blakemore & Decety, 2001; Denny et al., 2012; Isoda & Noritaki, 2013: 232).<sup>94</sup> The MPFC is assumed be activated during both cognitive and affective ToM tasks (Corradi-Dell’Acqua, Hofstetter & Vuilleumier, 2014: 1183-2) and, as stated in Chapter 3:2, is part of the Default Network (DN) (Beaty et al., 2015) which is activated during mind wandering (Christoff et al., 2009; Handy & Kam, 2015). This is because we often model others’ actions and expressions on our memories of such behaviour, which turns our focus to our past in order to understand what we are seeing. Hence, the activation of the MPFC could lead to mind wandering, which is conducive to self-consciousness — as discussed in detail in Chapter 3:2.

As also previously noted in said chapter, there are two aspects of mind wandering: spontaneous and deliberate (Seli, Risko, Smilek, & Schacter, 2016). Deliberate mind wandering can still be task-positive, meaning that we are still thinking about the task. In The Knock on the Door exercise the MPFC is likely to be activated during times when we try to determine the mental state of our partner, which as stated above,

---

<sup>94</sup> The literature surrounding the MPFC is dominated by its involvement in decision-making, and control of action. However, it also plays a key role in memory; recent memory, remote memory, long-term, short-term and the consolidation of memories (Euston, Gruber & McNaughton, 2012: 1057). The reason for the MPFC to be involved in all those types is suggested to be in order to associate between locations, contexts and emotional responses: “Thus, the ubiquitous involvement of MPFC in both memory and decision making may be due to the fact that almost all such tasks entail the ability to recall the best action or emotional response to specific events in a particular place and time” (Ibid.).

could lead to increased inward focus. However, the importance of the task and the situation is supposed to keep this in balance and not allow too much emphasis on mind wandering and self-focus as “the operation of working memory is restricted by the demands of the present moment” (Schmeichel, 2005: 2). For Actor B, it is crucial, in order to prevent mind-wandering that could lead to self-consciousness, to be constantly engaged in the Repetition, as this will keep the attention on the other and make any mind wandering deliberate rather than spontaneous. It should be noted that most experiments relating to reading other’s intentions have been performed in a passive environment, where the person deciding on the mental state of someone else is not actively involved in the situation and not trying to achieve something at the same time (Pelphrey, Morris & McCarthy, 2004: 1706).

Interestingly, and significantly for the Knock on the Door exercise, in experiments where someone’s perceived environment does not correlate to their understanding of the situation, the medial prefrontal cortex (Default Network) deactivates and instead the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (Dorsal Attention Network) takes over (Blakemore & Decety, 2001: 565, Cacioppo et al, 2014: 15). To me this means that as we struggle to understand the environment and/or the situation, the external focus is enhanced, as this in itself becomes a task. In the Knock on the Door exercise the partners do not confer about the circumstances, meaning that both actors are faced with behaviour that is surprising and, in some cases, inexplicable within their own imagined situation. This could account for difficulties in later stages in the training, where the actors do craft the circumstance together, and the exercise often suffers from an initial disconnection between the partners. In the first instance of a mutually agreed imagined circumstance,<sup>95</sup> focus on the other diminishes as we anticipate what we will encounter and the need for clarification of the situation becomes weaker which causes the disconnection. This will be presented through case studies in Chapter 6:1.

At the beginning of the Knock on the Door exercise it is crucial that the attention is externally directed, which is why the importance of the task is a vital element. So far this section has presented how having one partner engaged in an attention-demanding task whilst doing Repetition leads to divided attention, which in turn results in less self-control and emotional inhibition, thus making the actor more

---

<sup>95</sup> This relates to Knock on the Door exercise 4, which is explored in the chapter 6:1, in which I present how I have developed the exercises.

spontaneous and less self-focused. This external focus ensures that we do not become too involved in logical and intellectual thought regarding possible mental states and intentions of the other person. As presented, reading other's intentions (theory of mind) relies on memory and past experiences as well as possible future actions, and can activate the same neural network (DN) activated during mind wandering. In *Knock on the Door*, by forcing the attention towards a task and the other person, we keep the focus off the self and balance the external and internal attention through the imaginary reason. This balance is further assured by the partners creating separate situations, making it crucial to pay attention and understand the other's needs. However, the means by which the task is afforded such attentional demand is due to the urgency, difficulty and high stakes of the crafted situation.

The next section will explore how and why these factors force the attention outwards and why crafting a reason with the key components is so important,

### Using urgency and stakes to direct attention

Kahneman's theory of effort states that arousal influences our ability to focus and sustain our attention (Kahneman, 1973: 40).<sup>96</sup> Arousal is also believed to increase our attentional selectivity and can make us more susceptible to distraction (Eysenck, 2012:66). Arousal in this context relates to psychological arousal, which means alertness, or attentiveness, and is a necessary component for humans to meet basic survival needs. Increased levels of arousal can lead to anxiety, an emotional state that is also related to urgent, high stakes situations (Dennis et al., 2008:1). The anxiety state is in turn linked with the state of *alerting*, which can be described as "achieving and maintaining a sense of awareness, with a heightened readiness for perception and action" (Dennis et al. 2008: 2). In Kahneman's theory humans will not give their fullest attention to something unless the stakes are sufficiently urgent, in which case the arousal aspect of a task would over-ride the attention that might otherwise be paid to something else — or the self (Kahneman, 1973: 14).

---

<sup>96</sup> Daniel Kahneman's book was published in 1973, and although the year of its publication could make us question the relevancy in today's science, this is considered a canonical text on Attention and Effort and has rarely been questioned. "Kahneman's association of attention and effort has achieved the status of paradigmatic truth. With over 10,000 citations in literature, the idea that attention is correlated with effort has influenced research programs to the extent that researchers rarely entertain the idea that attention could be anything but effortful" (Bruya & Tang, 2018: 1,2).

Some people have associated reading intentions with urgent threat perception. During threat perception and defensive action we become focused on understanding the intention and possible action from where the threat is coming. It has recently been found that one part of the brain that is engaged in social perception and ToM tasks — the superior temporal sulcus — is also engaged during the evaluation of a perceived threat (Connolly et. al, 2016: 5373; Tsouklas, 2018: 49). In this way the urgency of a situation can balance the attention so that it does not disengage from the external environment, even when we evaluate behaviour, intention or the circumstance.

Our motivation and the stakes that surround our motivation have an effect on our arousal and anxiety levels. Situations that we perceive as threatening, either to our safety or our goals, increase these levels (Matthews & McLeod, 1985: 563; Fox et al., 2001: 683). Similarly, *time pressure* also has an accumulative effect on arousal (Kahneman, 1973: 25). By increasing the urgency and stakes of the Independent Activity, as well as adding the other actor, who is also experiencing a high stakes situation, the attention is focused towards the external and less likely to turn to the self. Further, the more the anxiety levels are elevated, the more we are likely to use divided attention, especially if the presence of someone else is posing a threat to our task or goal (Wine, 1971: 99; Fox et al., 2001: 686).

It is not surprising then, that the states of anxiety and arousal are linked with loss of inhibitory control, as the high stakes surrounding the situation overrides the ability to self-regulate (Fox et al, 2001: 691; Wood, Mathews & Dalgliesh, 2001: 175). This would make sense if self-regulation is drawing on the same resource as attention; simultaneously paying attention to a task, as well as your surroundings would not leave much capacity for inhibitory control. This process of paying fullest attention to the most urgent demands applies to the Independent Activity, where the sense of high stakes and urgency is a vital component for the exercise to work. When these elements are ingrained in the imaginary situations, it heightens the actor's sense of arousal, which in turn harnesses even more of the actor's attention and directs it towards the task and the partner, at the expense of self-reflection. It should be noted here, that it might seem contradictory that we would seek to induce a state of anxiety in the exercise, when we spent so long during the Repetition stage trying to eliminate that feeling. However, in this case the anxiety is not spontaneously brought on by self-consciousness, but by the imaginary given circumstances and the external



environment, making it less likely to cause self-consciousness. This concept will be explored further in the closing of this chapter.

Having looked at how urgency and time-pressure affects the ability to balance the internal and external attention whilst reading other' intentions — as well as dividing our attention and in turn encouraging instinctual reactions — the next section will focus on the other three key elements underpinning the Independent Activity in Meisner's Knock on the Door exercise: difficulty, plausibility and specificity.

### Difficulty, plausibility and specificity

The difficulty aspect is the other reason why the task is afforded such attentional demand. According to Kahneman's theory when there is a rise in the demands of an activity or task, this automatically causes a rise in arousal, effort and attention (1973:13). Numerous lines of research indicate that motivational arousal is linked to the difficulty of the exercise — we use more effort and attention if a task is complex (Brehm & Self, 1989: 129; Wright & Kirby, 2001: 280; Capa, Audiffren & Ragot, 2008: 859), which means motivational arousal tends to reach its maximal levels in tasks of the highest difficulty. (Gendolla et al., 2012: 434). Further, higher task demands are said to prevent the occurrence of mind wandering (McVay & Kane, 2009: 860), which aligns with Meisner's ideas regarding the importance of the difficulty of the Independent Activity. A task that was too easy to achieve would not have the same effect on the direction of the attention, nor on the actor working instinctively (Meisner, 1987: 39). As Esper notes about the difficulty of the activity in general: "The bigger the obstacle, the greater the struggle. The Greater the struggle, the more life we see" (Esper, 2008: 74).

As for the impact on emotions, the sensitivity to failure or success in a threatening or challenging situation is the precondition for affect (Sassenberg, 2015: 189). This means that the anticipation of either a successful or unsuccessful outcome, during high demand situations, will lead to *hot emotion* (Ibid.: 190). High difficulty of task is also linked to increased physiological reactions in terms of emotions, breathing etc. (Gendolla et al., 2012: 434), which are experienced as even higher under challenging rather than content circumstances (Ibid.: 435).

Interestingly, another study presented the notion that not just increased difficulty in the actual task but also difficulty in completing the task due to outside interference,

gives rise to an increase in motivation and effort (Brehm & Self, 1989: 119). However, this is only the case until that task appears likely to fail (Brehm & Self, 1989: 117). Meisner highlighted that the reason for the task has to be plausible both in circumstance and time-allocation (Esper, 2008: 108) to avoid reducing motivation if it is seen as bound to be unsuccessful. This means that time pressure must make it urgent, but not impossible, to achieve the task within the allotted time, otherwise the actor's faith would be affected.

Similarly, the reason for doing the task would also have to be specific (Meisner, 1987: 39), rather than general, in order to fully engage the 'actor's faith' and motivation. Difficult and specific goals are said to generate more effort and motivation than vague and general goals (Locke & Latham, 2002). The more specific the goal is, the more we understand what we have to do in order to achieve it, as there is less variation acceptable in performance in order to achieve the desired result (Capa, Audiffren & Ragot, 2008: 859).

When discussing the effects of possible task-failure, or the intensity of the need due to the specificity of the reason, it is valuable to explore different types of motivation, and how this knowledge can be relevant to the teaching of the Meisner technique. The next section presents some information regarding two different types of motivation: *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. This will then be linked to the Independent Activity and demonstrate the reasons for shaping the exercise in this way.

### **5:3 The motivation in the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door**

People do not just differ in levels of motivation, they differ in what type of motivation they have: intrinsic or extrinsic (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 54). We distinguish between these two types in terms of what motivates us and why. Intrinsic motivation refers to times when we do something because we find it enjoyable or interesting, whereas extrinsic motivation is characterised by a specific outcome (Ibid.: 55). The reason for doing the Independent Activity has to include stakes, as there must be a negative consequence for an uncompleted activity, or a rewarding outcome for a completed one. Because of this definition we are, at this point in the process, dealing with extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation means

that the driving force behind the task is externally motivated; the motivated behaviour is driven by goals outside the individual's own enjoyment.

Beyond childhood, as social demands increase, most of our activities are extrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 60). The majority of the tasks we do as adults are because of some sort of tangible reward or avoidance of sanctions, rather than purely for the intrinsic enjoyment of it. Lower-stakes activities, such as chores, or day-to-day duties, become more internal over time (Chandler & Connell, 1987). This means we often do them habitually, without the need to remind us of the external consequences, however we might not find enjoyment in them. Those tasks become powered by self-regulation, rather than rewards or enjoyment.

However, outcomes such as high-stakes incentives (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999), threats (Deci & Cascio, 1972), deadlines (Amabile, DeJong, & Lepper, 1976, cited in Ryan & Deci, 2000) and competition (Reeve & Deci, 1996) can, because of external pressure, diminish one's *long time interest* and enjoyment and thus internal motivation in a task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Yet, in studies exploring short-term tasks with external motivational gains — for example financial rewards — generally those that take part on a reward basis perform better (Robinson et al, 2012: 243). This is seen as a result of increased *attentional task focus* being applied due to the external incentive (Small et al., 2005). Further studies have found that incentives also activate brain regions consistent with goal-oriented attention and cognitive effort (Robson et al, 2012: 244), and increase perceptual sensitivity (Engelmann and Pessoa, 2007) and self-control — which significantly reduces reaction times and furthers the task (Robson, et al, 2012: 244). Other studies have found that overall sustained attention increases when rewards are given for short-term tasks, compared to if there was no incentive (Tomoporowski & Tinsley, 1996). Due to the nature of the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercise we are not looking for extended motivation, or long-term enjoyment, we are seeking the effect of high stakes external driving forces for a short time span, thus making extrinsic motivation integral to the work.

In some cases of extrinsic motivation, we might have an external force present, which increases motivation. For example, if someone is physically threatening us, or a parent or teacher is overseeing a child's behaviour, this is called *external regulation* (Deci & Ryan, 2000: 61). However, most extrinsically motivated tasks are done because we have an understanding of the importance of the activity. This means that

we decide for ourselves the personal *value* the task has to us, making the motivation internal because the external pressure or motivation has now become embodied (Ibid.: 60). Thus, we understand *why* it is important to do, without needing an external force present. This is sometimes referred to as *introjected regulation*,<sup>97</sup> and is also related to the times when we are motivated by the need to avoid guilt, anxiety or conflict (Deci & Ryan, 2000: 63). Introjected regulation has been found to lead to expanded effort, anxiety and poorer self-regulation, which are all common elements of the Knock on the Door exercise. In this exercise we are not looking for the motivation to create a sense of well-being, but rather to increase the effort and attention allocated to the external, making sure the focus on the self is very limited.

The idea that introjected regulation results in a stronger motivational force throughout the exercises makes it crucial for the student to really connect to the crafted situation. In the Independent Activity, the value of the task becomes embodied through the requirement of a specific, high stakes reason that motivates the actor. However, the motivation remains extrinsic as we are doing the activity to avoid a different outcome, rather than just for our own enjoyment. This acknowledgement reinforces the need for the students to believe fully in the circumstances in order for the reason for the task to be internalised, and in turn, for the student to instigate maximum effort to complete it. When we do not value an outcome we can suffer from *amotivation*, which is the state of lacking intention to act (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 60), and can result from not wanting the outcome enough (Ryan, 1995) or not feeling competent to do it (Deci, 1975). Just as Meisner highlighted the significance of the reason behind the Independent Activity, and the need for it to be plausible, this shows us that if we lose motivation these aspects might not be fully developed or developed in the right way. The following section will present research that will help with the development/crafting of the circumstance or reason, with the intention to create a stronger motivation and connection to the imaginary world.

### Developing the reason

Another potential reason for amotivation is not believing the task will succeed (Seligman, 1975), which links with the already mentioned notion that an activity that looks sure to fail can reduce motivation and effort (Brehm & Self, 1989: 117). As we know within the Knock on the Door exercises the engagement in the Repetition

---

<sup>97</sup> Both external regulation and introjected regulation are forms of extrinsic motivation

exercise with the fellow actor — along with the difficulty, urgency and time-allocation of the task — will make the Independent Activity extremely likely to fail. The issue then revolves around keeping motivation going even when success becomes unlikely. This is where the shaping of the reason comes into play.

In the incentive-based studies referenced earlier it was clear that the subjects motivated by rewards performed better. However, these were interspersed with punishments as well, meaning that some incentives would be in regards to “not losing something” rather than just gaining something (Small et al., 2005: 1855). In the beginning of the Knock of the Door exercises it is common for the circumstances to be crafted around the possibility of reward. Nevertheless, as the stakes rise, the more I encourage the students to make the imaginary situations about trying to rectify something or keeping the status quo; rather than gaining something new it becomes about not losing something important. The reason for this is to do with how we respond motivationally to different types of foci: more specifically to *prevention* and *promotion focus*.

*Regulatory focus theory* (Higgins, 1997) distinguishes between two regulatory foci: prevention focus and promotion focus. Prevention focus regulates the avoidance of punishment and the prevention of a negative outcome, whereas promotion focus regulates the attainment of rewards and positive goals. To put it simply the motivation is either powered by ‘the fear of failure’ or the ‘hope of success’. In the below table (fig. 9) I present examples of both types of motivational foci:

<b>Promotion focus examples</b>	<b>Prevention focus examples</b>
<p>“I need to win this race to get the gold medal and prize money”</p>	<p>“I need to stop this pipe from leaking or my house will be flooded and destroyed”</p>
<p>“I need to finish all my chores before a certain time, so I can go out tonight.”</p>	<p>“ I need to get to the hospital with my son as his temperature is dangerously high”</p>

(Figure 9: Table showing examples of the difference in promotion and prevention focus)

Prevention focus is likely to have a short-term perspective and sensitivity to social pressures, obligations, and to keeping the status quo (van Dijk & Kluge, 2004: 114-115). It also linked to extrinsic motivation (Ibid.) and makes people sensitive to failures and to the punishments that might result from poor performance (van Dijk & Kluge, 2004: 116). Further, within the prevention focus regulatory system, action is taken when receiving negative feedback on performance, as this system is actively trying to prevent negative outcomes. As van Dijk & Kluge states: “negative feedback (but not positive feedback) is congruent with prevention focus whereas positive feedback (but not negative feedback) is congruent with promotion focus (2004: 116). Thus, it is clear that during prevention focus we become more motivated when the task might be failing, as it drives us to work harder, whereas promotion focus tasks see a decrease in motivation if the activity is proving unsuccessful (Ibid.). This arguably means that in prevention focus more attention is used during negative feedback (Sassenberg et al, 2015: 189), in comparison to positive feedback.

Returning to the predicament described earlier — that motivation and effort tends to decrease once we realise the task is not going well (Brehm & Self, 1989: 117) — it seems likely that by crafting a reason that activates this regulatory system (prevention focus) is desirable during the Knock on the Door exercise. Meaning that if we choose a reason that is trying to prevent a negative outcome, rather than gain a positive one, the difficulty of the activity and the interruptions by the partner, should increase motivation rather than reduce it. The regulatory system used can be activated before the task even begins, as it is dependent on the circumstances surrounding the activity (Ibid.), meaning that the crafting of the situation in the Knock on the Door exercises can determine whether we use prevention or promotion focus.

In relation to this, in the very beginning of the Independent Activity it is more likely that promotional focus will be used as the actors are still trying to achieve something that will have a positive effect on their lives.<sup>98</sup> There is often no time limit in the beginning, nor a pressing reason from Actor B hence we are focused on the positive feedback throughout the activity and making headway in the task motivates us more.

---

<sup>98</sup> A reason with promotion focus could be: “I need to tape my audition song sheet back together after it accidentally got torn, because I want to do well in my audition”.

When Actor B enters the space with an intention of their own, Actor A starts to struggle to achieve the task due to the added obstacle created by the other person in the room. This means that if we are still looking for a gain — a promotion, rather than preventing something, the negative feedback will cause our focus and motivation to suffer. Hence by changing the Independent Activity to be the prevention of something or rectifying something, the negative feedback should not interfere as much with our motivation. When the stakes are raised, I often instruct my students to increase the importance or urgency of the task by doing it for someone else. By using an *emotional root* — someone real in their lives that has meaning to them — and creating a circumstance where they are trying to achieve something for that person, tends to increase the students' motivation. This is especially noticeable if the reason relates to the other person losing something,<sup>99</sup> which indicates that by increasing the prevention focus the stakes are raised. In Meisner technique, and actor training in general, stakes are a crucial part of the objective and task (Meisner, 1987: 40; Stanislavski, 2008: 281; Silverberg, 1994: 152; Cannon, 2012: 51) — the justification and reason why we do what we do. In Meisner's own book the attempts at Independent Activity he brings up to demonstrate failures in the exercises often involve possible rewards (promotion focus) (40), whereas when he advises students of a good activity, they are predominantly based on preventing something or redeeming oneself (prevention focus) (43). In the table below (fig. 10) I have outlined examples of possible Independent Activities motivated by promotion and prevention foci (further practical examples can be found in Chapter 6:1 (175-200)):

---

<sup>99</sup> An example of this type of reason would be trying to re-assemble a precious heirloom belonging to a relative, after you have accidentally broken it, or trying to complete a task you were supposed to have done for them a long time ago.

<b>Independent Activity Promotion focus examples</b>	<b>Independent Activity Prevention focus examples</b>
<p>“I need to tape this audition song sheet back together, so that I can leave for my audition in 10 minutes and get my dream job”</p>	<p>“I need glue together the heirloom vase I just broke, before my mother comes back home.”</p>
<p>“I need to do my make-up and hair perfectly in in 5 minutes for my date”</p>	<p>“I need to tape back together my dad’s work contract that I accidentally shredded, before he comes back for it in 10 minutes.”</p>

(Figure 10: Table showing examples of Independent Activities motivated by promotion or prevention focus)

Apart from high stakes, the sustained attention during prevention focus motivation can be explained by proactive and reactive control balance. As was presented Chapter 3:2, proactive control helps us sustain our attention on the task, whereas reactive control helps us return to the task once we have become distracted. As stated earlier, extrinsic motivation increases attentional task focus, which fosters both better proactive and reactive control (Stawarczyk, Majerus, Catale & D’Argembeau, 2014: 31) and ensures that mind wandering is occurring far less frequently, as the incentive to complete the exercise is high (Ibid.: 26).

In the Knock on the Door exercise, the times when our attention on task suffers is most likely because of the other person, and the Repetition forcing us to engage with them, in which case reactive control would direct the attention back to the task. As Actor B’s intention and stakes increase, this distraction would become more frequent, to the point where the use of reactive control would become more important than the initial proactive control. Although extrinsic and reward-based motivation does increase our proactive control ability (Locke & Braver, 2008: 100), in penalty situations and threat conditions this control switches dramatically towards an enhancement in reactive control ability (Qiao, Lei et al., 2018: 328). Meaning that as we craft the reason in the Independent Activity towards a prevention focus model, the distraction of the other causing negative feedback regarding our task will not only keep us motivated, but also ensure that we return to the task.



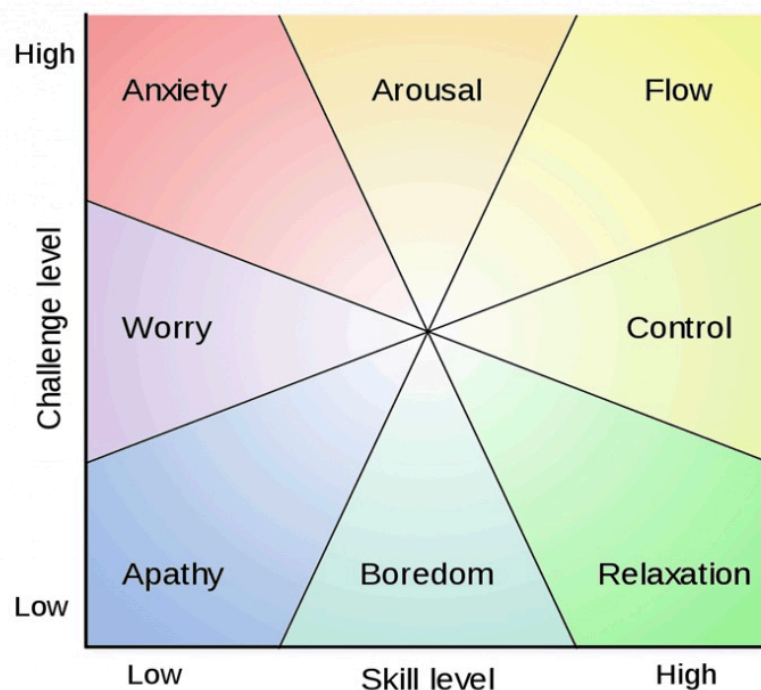
In view of this research I hold that understanding the psychological difference in type of motivational focus, can greatly aid the actor trainer or teacher in adjusting their students' objectives or inner motivations, in order to increase effort and external focus, and thus decreasing the self-consciousness. So far the last two sections have presented the effect divided attention can have on spontaneity and self-consciousness, and the need for increased challenge as the students become more adept at the Repetition exercise. By continuously tipping the skill-challenge balance with stakes and difficulty of task, the attention is kept external even when reading others' intentions — which could otherwise increase inward focus. Further, by understanding how extrinsic motivation, and in particular prevention focused motivation, can help sustain the intention through the obstacle-filled exercises, the students can begin to craft imaginary, high stakes circumstances that keep the attention onto both task and partner. However, based on the findings in this chapter — especially in terms of the argued importance of extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation — the question of the possibility of flow has to be asked. As the Repetition exercise becomes more automatic, the question now becomes about whether flow is even a desired state in the later stages of the process.

#### In the moment but not in flow

In the Repetition exercises, it was important to find that demand on our focus that allowed for the attention to be directed outwards and to find a balance between skill and challenge, which in turn decreased self-consciousness. The question whether flow would still a desirable state during this stage of the process, comes out of three findings from this chapter.

Firstly, research into the flow state reveals how explicit motives and fear of failure would not be conducive to flow in the same way as implicit and hope of success would be (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008: 165). Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi state that both extrinsic motivation and challenge exceeding capacities are non-conducive to the flow experience and more correlated to feelings of anxiety and self-consciousness (2009: 92), making the clear case for extrinsic motivation established in this chapter, difficult to correlate with flow.

Secondly, the balance of skill and challenge is an important part in determining a flow state, and should the challenge or difficulty exceed the skills, or vice versa, it is seen as lowering the possibility of flow (Engeser & Rheinberg, 2008: 167). In the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercise, the challenge of the task will always exceed skill in terms of the activities or tasks — or in the case of skill being present the time allocated will ensure that the challenge is still great. As can be seen in the skill-challenge diagram below, this would cause worry, anxiety and arousal — rather than flow — which are all desirable emotional outcomes from the Knock on the Door exercise.



(Figure 11: Flow diagram showing the emotions surrounding the flow state; Source: Csikszentmihályi, 1997:31)

Thirdly, at this stage of the training we are not looking for focused attention that is not distracted, in fact distraction and divided attention lies at the heart of this exercise and is what will cause the spontaneity and loss of self-focus that is desirable. Another area to take into consideration is the feeling of enjoyment during the activity, which in Knock on the Door is rarely present at the time, due to the high emotional stakes that are present, the high possibility of failure of task and the prevention focus used.

In light of these elements and this research, it would therefore be reasonable to assume that even though flow is desired in the early Repetition exercises in order to

establish the right circumstances for this later process, flow would not be the optimal state for the Knock on the Door exercises. The emphasis in the later stage of the training still lies with external attention and loss of self-consciousness. The divided attention, and the spontaneity that brings, coupled with the urgency and difficulty of task is meant to awaken strong impulsive emotions in the actors, which in turn leads to instinctive reactions. Just as in the flow condition the balance has to be struck between the task-positive and task negative networks (DAN and DN), however the distractors now lie externally rather than internally, and the Repetition is present throughout to keep that attention on the other, whilst engaging reasoning, memory and imagination. In terms of the flow preconditions we can still see the merging of action and awareness, the time distortion and the external attention as factors in the Knock on the Door, but the most important factor is now in having full presence and moment to moment interaction, rather than a specific autotelic state leading to rewarding outcomes.

### Conclusion

This chapter's aim has been to introduce the subsequent phase of the Meisner training, which by adding motivation strengthens the external attention and the actor's commitment to the reality of doing. In the first section, the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercises were introduced through the analysis and perspective of Meisner himself, Esper, Silverberg, Hart and Moseley, providing the reader with the intention behind this stage of the process, and an understanding of the key requirements of the exercises. The explanations were intertwined with difficulties the students might encounter, and answered critique raised about the work.

The second and third part of the chapter focused on the psychological processes underpinning the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercises. Firstly, describing the demand placed on the attention in the two exercises, and explaining the need for divided attention due to occurring automaticity and knowledge of the Repetition exercise at this stage. This was expanded on to present the effect of divided attention on mind wandering, spontaneity and self-consciousness. Further, the reasons behind the key requirements of the Independent Activity were explored, along with the importance of the inclusion of difficulty, urgency, plausibility and specificity into the crafted circumstances and tasks. Moreover, the third section

investigated the developing of the justification of the task from the perspective of extrinsic motivation, and in particular the distinction between prevention and promotion focus. This presented the argument that by using a reason that prevents something happening rather than looks for a reward, the stakes are raised and maximum effort more likely. Due to this discovery, the value of flow at this stage was questioned, and discovered to be a superfluous state during this part of the training.

In the following chapter I will lay out how this research has shaped and developed my teaching of these exercises, as well as helped me understand when something might be causing problems, or why an exercise works. By using the information presented in this chapter, intertwined with case studies, I will explain how a carefully directed step-by-step layering of the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercises can help the actors achieve the most beneficial outcomes.

## **Chapter 6: From impulse to action**

The previous sections have provided an in-depth analysis of the psychological processes involved in Meisner's foundational exercises, especially in terms of the placement of attention and the benefits of such work in relation to self-consciousness and spontaneity. This type of research is helpful in order to fully understand the ins and outs of the process and the potential problem-areas, but particularly valuable for teachers of the technique. Knowledge of the mechanisms concerned when developing the students' ability to direct their attention away from themselves, enables us to modify the exercises, adjust the wording, and personalise the training to suit the individual — instead of a 'one size fits all' approach. In the following chapter I present how this research project has inspired me to expand and layer my own practice, and the rationale behind it. Although the main reason for this inquiry has been to understand how the technique diminishes self-consciousness, as a practitioner, the application to the teaching of the process has to be emphasised and viewed as a central to this thesis.

### **6.1 The knock-on effect: Developed practice and case studies of the Knock on the Door exercise.**

As explained previously, it can prove difficult to find the right balance between the objective and the observation in the Knock on the Door exercise. The actors encounter a number of common difficulties at this stage including: the attentional demand of the Independent Activity; the need for divided attention in order to engage in Repetition simultaneously; and the balance of urgency and other-focus from Actor B. If one of these factors significantly outweighs the other, we risk the attention turning inwards and the possibility of self-consciousness. I have kept in mind the different psychological aspects explained in Chapter 5, when layering the exercises, and developed the balance of the factors gradually. By using simple instructions and making additions to each exercise I endeavour to address the pitfalls and keep the attention directed outwards. In this section I will present my way of establishing each exercise and explain how every new element helps address the balance of need and observation — along with a section of 'common problems'

relating to each step. Additionally, I will incorporate student case studies as examples of what can happen during this process.<sup>100</sup>

### Introduction to Independent Activity

In the first exercise, we do not make use of the door or create a fictional space. We simply use one table, two chairs and one activity. I use the same activity for all the students: the completion of a puzzle or the building of a house of cards — both intricate, physical activities that demand full concentration from the actor, rather than intellectual engagement. At this point the activity is void of underlying reason, apart from the sense of competition within the class. The student performing the activity sits at a table and the person doing Repetition with them sits opposite. This person also has no reason for being there but is instructed to sustain the Repetition throughout the exercise and to focus on the other person rather than the activity. In Meisner's teachings he added a reason for the student doing the activity straight away. I do this exercise once and then move on to Knock on the Door, where there will be reasons for both actors in the space.

Given that I have already introduced intention within the Repetition, this is not the first time in my process that the actors face the concept of trying to affect the other. In the 'emotional objective Repetition', the challenge was to keep the Repetition going allowing reactions and feelings to be influenced, even as the actor tries to change something in the other. Further, by introducing a physical objective, as in the ball exercise, the actors had a chance to experience sustained Repetition in a high energy environment, where a third point of concentration is present — the ball.

Nevertheless, it is still important not to go straight to Knock on the Door as this is the first time one of the partners is engaging in the Repetition whilst doing something which is distracting them from the other person. In the struggle for the ball or by trying to make the other feel something, both are focused on each other, and the goal (and the journey towards the goal) is dependent on the other person's actions and behaviour. By bringing in a second focus (in the form of an activity without surrounding circumstances), it gives Actor A a chance to get used to sustaining the Repetition, whilst simultaneously doing something else. This ensures that we are still

---

<sup>100</sup> This chapter sees student case studies in which the names of the subjects have been changed, and the approval has been given for their comments to be part of the thesis.

adjusting the skill-challenge balance gradually as the students start to understand the new demands, and effort, divided attention places on their focus and ability to do the exercise.

Meanwhile Actor B learns the difference between focusing on the activity and on the other person, as well as how to come to terms with placing attention on someone who is not reciprocating. The difficulty that normally ensues is rarely due to the commitment to the exercise, but rather to do with the ability to sustain Repetition whilst doing the activity. As can be seen in the below case study, this capacity can influence many aspects in the individual actor, which all work towards limiting the focus the actor places on him/herself.

### Case Study 1: Nina

In the case of acting student Nina, this exercise proved pivotal in developing her external concentration. Having done the distance Repetition and experienced the difference that varying the difficulty of task can have on the self-consciousness, Nina was still struggling with unwanted self-focus. As she began the Independent Activity (puzzle), we instantly saw many of the common problems encountered in early Knock on the Door exercises<sup>101</sup>. Nina at times forgot to repeat the observations back, instead staying silently engrossed in the task. Other times she would repeat the observations but this was often by rote, without allowing comments to land or fully engaging in what the other person was saying to her. She was completely absorbed in the activity and paid little attention to her partner in general, indicating that the difficulty of the task over-rode the ability to divide the attention at that point. However, when Nina reflected on this exercise her thoughts were positive. She remembered feeling slightly cut off from her partner in the first exercise, but the experience of placing all focus on the activity made her instantly more open to her impulses and instincts, and in turn less worried about performing, or the presence of an audience:

I was completely absorbed in the puzzle and it seemed frustrating for my partner, but up until then it was the least aware of myself I had been... it just took all the attention away from myself, it stopped me feeling insecure in

---

<sup>101</sup> See below Knock on the Door exercise 1 for the issues relating to Actor A.

what I was doing, and I felt more honest (Nina, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Due to the increased demand divided attention and difficulty of task placed on Nina's focus, less attention was available for the self and self-criticism. This indicated that the goal-oriented nature of the physical activity activated the 'task-positive' network — DAN — resulting in a sustained external attention. Due to this being the first encounter with the activity, no automaticity would have set in, allowing for this part to happen without motivational enforcement. Nina mentions the possibility of frustration for the partner, which is common as they are used to having the attention of the other. As Nina's struggles and progressions were introduced in the chapter on process and practices — specifically in term of distance Repetition — it is important to highlight that these difficulties can remain, albeit in more limited quantity, throughout the process. This solidifies the premise of this technique as a step-by-step method, rather than a 'quick fix'. Further, it shows that all components are working towards the same goal, but are reliant on the actor having experienced each element before the next is added. Again, this first exercise exists to create a way into the next exercise, where the partner also has an intention, fuelling the interaction.

### Knock on the Door exercise 1

My introduction to the first Knock on the Door exercise is very much in line with Meisner's process: Actor A is asked to craft a physical activity that has to be difficult to achieve, urgent and with a specific reason for completing it. Likewise, Actor B needs to have a reason for coming to the door. This reason has to relate to the other person, for example you need them to give you something or they need to come with you somewhere. The objective has to be strong enough to keep Actor B in the room, but similarly not so strong that you try to force Actor A out of the space. As in Meisner's exercise the communication only happens through Repetition.

Different Meisner practitioners have a range of approaches to what should be introduced first in this section. Bill Esper will at this stage introduce the Knock on the Door and the reason for Actor A, but not a reason for Actor B until at a later stage (2008: 109). Silverberg will start with the Knock on the Door, before introducing the activity, just by Actor B coming into the space and starting the Repetition based on the knock and the entrance (1994: 50). These are all valid processes, and individual to the practitioner. I favour moving forward faster, allowing more time for the actors



to come to terms with having underlying reasons for being in the space. As explained above, Actor B often finds it demanding to maintain the balance between objective and observation. By increasing exposure, in different variations (as will be described further in this chapter), the process of finding this balance will begin earlier. Below you will find issues that frequently occur in the beginning of this process. By bringing attention to the most common difficulties the students face in each exercise, it is easier to note how the next adjustments are added in order to combat these specific issues.

### Common problems in exercise 1

As described in the earlier section, the common problems when starting Knock on the Door exercises are mostly relating to:

1. **Actor A not sustaining the Repetition during the activity** — Often students justify this by saying that they would, in real life, just ignore someone else and carry on with their activity hence they are not engaging in the Repetition with their partner. It is important to re-iterate that this is an exercise that is dependent on the Repetition being present.
2. **Actor A doing Repetition by rote** — Engaging in Repetition but not observing the partner, merely repeating what they say without processing the comments.
3. **Actor A separating activity and Repetition** — There is often, in the earlier stages, a tendency to alternate the attention between activity and partner, instead of dividing the attention simultaneously (which is preferred at this stage). The student doing the activity will stop to observe their partner and similarly stop observing when doing the activity. I remind them that we do not have to look at our partner constantly in order to observe them, we can hear them and sense them whilst focusing on something else. As explained in Chapter 3:2 (76-77), alternating attention takes less effort than divided attention, and hence uses up less attention (Sohlberg & Mateer, 2001: 103). At this time, the Repetition is becoming more automatic, so the activity is there to ensure that mind wandering does not occur, therefore it must be adhered to. Similarly, if the Repetition is not being adhered to and they are left too much to their activity there is a risk that we do not stretch their attention and focus enough for their actions to become spontaneous.

4. **Actor B's objective overriding the observations** — The fact that we now have something we want to achieve from the other can easily push the actors into thinking they have to do everything to reach their goal, rather than allowing that need to exist and instead influence how we observe and interact with the other person.
5. **Actor B observing only the activity** — how it is being done, what it is and how well Actor A is doing it. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the activity is static and the exercise will lose energy when this takes over as no real communication relating to the psychological states of the partners will take place and the observations can become quite objective and lacking a real point of view. Actor B can often suffer from self-consciousness at this stage, as they are not being fully observed and their attention starts to drift towards themselves and how they are doing the exercise. If their attention is too much on their own objective, their attention is directed inwards, and if their attention goes too much on the activity there is not enough change to sustain the attention, hence it again drifts inwards.

### Knock on the Door exercise 2

In order to diminish the aforementioned problem areas 1-5, it is important make the other person a significant part of the exercise. The fact that they are present should matter, either because your need lies within their actions, or because your activity will suffer due to their presence. Thus, Actor A is asked to create an Independent Activity with higher stakes and with stronger emotional connection than before. My students are encouraged to use a reason that will try to prevent a bad outcome, rather than strive for a gain (promotion focus), as well as use an emotional root (an existing person in their lives), someone meaningful to them, and make the Independent Activity something they are doing for that person, rather than for themselves. I ask them to raise the stakes in relation to how this exercise affects them emotionally, to push themselves to use given circumstances that can be uncomfortable to imagine in order to achieve a stronger emotional connection to the task.

Actor B still has to have a need regarding the other person; however we are also adding a previous circumstance between them and Actor A. This can be intertwined with the need, or it can be separate, but it has to exist and influence the

interaction.<sup>102</sup> In Actor B's imaginary situation both parties know about the previous circumstance, even though at this stage all circumstances are kept from the partners and the only information they receive is what they observe in each other at the moment of interaction.

Firstly, by crafting the Independent Activity around a real person, the students find it easier to connect to the situation and its implications. They can quickly understand the motivation and it is one less imaginary element to attend to. I have discovered that doing the activity for someone else increases motivation, as it is harder to decide to give up if the outcome is not for you but for another party. Further, as explained in Chapter 5:3 (167-169), it is useful for the actors to create a situation where they are trying to prevent something or keep the status quo, or they might get punished or face a consequence if the activity is not done. This adjustment allows us to start using prevention focus, rather than promotion focus — which is often the case in the first exercise. Further, by using prevention focus the motivation will be heightened and sustained by negative feedback (van Dijk & Kluge, 2004: 114-116), preventing the urgency from dropping.<sup>103</sup> By asking the students to raise the stakes of the situation, they are more likely to pay the fullest attention to the task, rather than to the self (Kahneman, 1973:14), as well as find a balance between reactive and proactive control. This balance will ensure that we are still affected by our environment, but the stakes will ensure that we return to task once distracted.

In terms of problems 1-3, raising the stakes of the Independent Activity and maintaining the motivation throughout, means Actor A will start to use divided attention, rather than alternative attention. The reason for this is that the time urgency of the exercise makes them continue the Independent Activity whilst doing the Repetition to ensure success of the task. Further, by making the stakes higher and more important to Actor A, Actor B's continuous interruptions will produce obstacles, which will affect Actor A. This should help Actor A with having an opinion

---

<sup>102</sup> An example of this could be: "Actor B has to pick up actor A to go to the airport and catch a plane to their pre-planned holiday (need/objective). However, the previous evening they had a huge argument regarding Actor B's behavior during a party they both attended (previous circumstance)" The holiday and the behavior at the party would need to be specified, but this should clarify what is added to the exercise.

<sup>103</sup> Due to the interference of the other person, and the difficulty of the task and time frame, these activities are very rarely accomplished. Using a focus that increases motivation during negative feedback helps keep the motivation throughout the exercise, rather than allowing it to waver.

on Actor B's presence in the room, and allowing their impulses to influence the observations, preventing Repetition by rote.

As for Actor B, and problems 4-5, adding the previous circumstance allows them to have an emotional connection to Actor A as they will have an instant opinion on how Actor A is behaving. The previous circumstance will influence what and how they observe Actor A, which gives them another aspect to focus on, preventing Actor B from entering with only their own need in mind. This is the first time they are seeing Actor A since the previous circumstance occurred, so they will need to find out, by observation, how Actor A feels about them at this moment in time. The ultimate outcome is for this to be drawing Actor B's attention towards Actor A's actions, more than their own need, or Actor A's activity. As Actor B's observations about their partner will now include understanding their intentions (which we have learnt could induce mind wandering), adding a relationship and previous circumstance can keep the interactions from becoming intellectual and still task-based, as part of the intention will be to keep focus on Actor B — whom they will have a relevant relation to, which will affect them in that moment.

#### Common problems in exercise 2:

1. **Actor A and B having difficulty in connecting to the circumstance** — The higher stakes that arise in this exercise can affect both actors at this point. For Actor A, the stronger connection to the activity, together with the addition of the emotional root, can sometimes cause a struggle to connect to something that is too emotional, uncomfortable, or hard to envisage. This can either lead to inward attention — focusing on the circumstance rather than on the activity and the other person — or the connection to the imaginary circumstance can fail and the motivation for the Independent Activity suffer. For Actor B there can sometimes be a lack of trust in their own preparation, which will lead to a need to attend to the memory of their previous circumstance in order to remember, or think about, what happened between the partners. This results in moments away from Actor A, sometimes resulting in ceased Repetition or, moving aimlessly around the space.
2. **Actor A and B try to retain too much control** — This is a common occurrence, where, due to the higher stakes and stronger emotional connection to either Independent Activity or previous circumstance the actors

start to plan a scene, of which they have an idea of the outcome —which can be seen in the next case study. Seeing as this is still an exercise in allowing the actions of the other person to provoke your reactions, any planning in terms of storytelling will be detrimental to the process. At times an actor will try to steer the exercise in a certain direction because of their pre-planned scenario, or they will actively decide not to be affected by someone. This also happens when actors try to use tactics, thought out beforehand, rather than react in the moment. The next case study is an example of a student struggling with the release of such control.

### Case Study 2: Erica

Erica is an older student who had studied different variations of the Meisner technique before entering my sessions. She was keen to let this experience reflect in her work and prove to me that she deserved to be to be here (Erica, student, 2019: see Appendix 2). Erica had a tendency, in the beginning of the process, to add emotions or actions to the situation in order to make it more “watchable”. In the early Repetition exercises she would often react in ways that had not been organically induced but rather manufactured in order to create a story or make it more interesting for the audience. Sometimes this kind of work can look impressive to fellow students, as there are brave choices being made and the interaction often becomes emotional or heated. However, the Repetition is not about making choices, but allowing the impulses to be triggered by the other person, and in turn make the choices for you. Erica initially struggled with the critique of this aspect and became frustrated with herself and me as I continually asked her to not invent and to trust that she is enough. As she slowly allowed herself to let go of what she thought the audience needed, or the notion of impressing me as well as validating herself, she began to trust that a truthful reaction is often more watchable than a manufactured one. In her own words, this reluctance to let go of that control stemmed from fear:

I am much more aware now about my habits and the idea of “me being enough”. Unconsciously, I am always adding things on top because I am scared that I won’t be watchable, or be interesting enough...I think, unconsciously, I am scared of losing control and scared of feeling hurt. But it’s a cycle from all your experiences, and you realise that in acting you have to get free from that fear (Erica, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

As we approached the second Knock on the Door exercise Erica's need to control the situation did affect the outcome of the exercise. Erica was in the room doing the Independent Activity, as Actor B entered. Erica's situation was highly emotional, and she had gone to great lengths to connect with this circumstance and the need for the task. Actor B entered with a circumstance not relating to Erica's, and with a different energy to Erica. As Actor B observed Erica's reaction to them, they were clearly affected by this, resulting in them becoming upset and vie for Erica's attention. Instead of observing this behaviour and working out what Actor B was going through, Erica instead tried to steer the situation away from what her partner was giving, sometimes by not repeating her partner's observations, and other times by going back to default observations that stemmed from her own need, such as "you need to leave" or "you are not doing it right":

I was getting so frustrated with what [Actor B] was doing, and instead of blaming them for making me feel that way or just reacting to what they were doing to me, I tried to control that frustration. I should have just let it happen. When the exercise ended I cried because I let all the things I was feeling come out. But I could have let that be part of the exercise (Erica, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

By deciding not to let herself be affected and by having pre-planned idea of what she wanted the exercise to be, she ended up neither achieving her task, nor having an interaction with the partner. When discussing the feelings she experienced after the exercise had finished, she was aware that they had been present all the time. Instead of letting go of the control and allowing what was building up inside to be explored in the improvisation, she tried to direct it in a different way. By allowing herself the little 'time-outs' where the Repetition ceased, and not responding to some of the observations, she was able to block the emotions building up inside her. She notes in the interview how this need for control became the downfall of the exercise:

It was not going how I had planned it, so I was trying so hard to make it go the way I wanted, and it just ruined it... I was feeling everything but I was just blocking everything. In the exercise I was actually thinking "nothing is happening" but I had so much there that I was just not letting be (Erica, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Erica had a chance to repeat the second Knock on the Door exercise, with a different partner. This time the preparation was as rigorous, the activity as intricate, and the only change was that I instructed her to continue the Repetition continuously throughout the exercise, in order to keep the focus divided on the partner and her own task. This yielded a very different result. Erica was allowing the interaction to dictate what happened in the improvisation and we ended up with an unexpected and playful improvisation, where the two actors explored a multitude of emotions, were physically free in the space, and formed a relationship based on the other's behaviour. When questioned about this experience, Erica acknowledged that she "didn't care what happened" and that it had gone a different way to how she had expected, but instead of exercising control she had let it happen.

The change Erica experienced in the exercise, by sticking to the Repetition and not inventing anything, is paramount to this stage of the training. As discovered through the research (76-77), divided attention is more effortful (Sohlberg & Mateer, 2001: 103) and therefore uses up attentional resources quickly, leaving very little leftover for self-control. Additionally, since self-control draws on one limited source and can easily become depleted (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000: 248), dividing her attention helped Erica to not control her actions to the same extent. Giving up control and letting the other person's behaviour and actions be the impetus for your own actions can be difficult, but important in terms of not blocking instinctual impulses. The difficulties can stem from the fear of revealing personal views and traits, and the belief that your intellectual ideas would be more interesting for an audience. Yet, by creating these added nuances the actor's attention will turn inwards, rather than towards their partner, and the interaction will not be based on the present moment. Continuing Repetition proactively reduces this occurrence.

As presented in Chapter 4:3 (141), letting go of self-control and instead acting on impulse can feel very liberating (Diamond, 2013: 136), something Erica admits to having experienced in this particular exercise. Nevertheless, Erica also stated that although the experience felt freeing and comfortable, she had lost the perspective of the previous circumstance during the exercise (Erica, student, 2019: see Appendix 2). This relates to difficulty in connecting to the circumstance (problem 1) in the first place, and the possibility of it being forgotten about — when focusing on something else — if not fully present at the start of the exercise. The more effective the preparation is, the longer it will stay present in the body and affect the situation,

even when attention is turned to the partner. The next addition to the exercises will help the actor to form a stronger connection to the imaginary circumstance.

### Knock on the Door exercise 3

As the exercise progresses, both actors can use what Meisner referred to as 'Emotional Preparation'. In Emotional Preparation we allow ourselves to daydream about the imagined circumstance before entering the room to allow the actor a chance to fully, and in a short time, connect to the circumstances. It is a type of daydreaming about an imaginary scenario (not necessarily relating to the circumstances in the exercise) that will bring about emotions that the actor deems useful at the start of the scene. Meisner described it as "the device, which permits you to start your scene, or play, in a condition of emotional aliveness," (Meisner, 1987: 78).<sup>104</sup> In my third exercise the premise is the same as for the second, apart from the added preparation. Instead of daydreaming, the students will focus their attention on the imaginary circumstance they have crafted. In addition, they will listen to a piece of music of their choice and engage in a physical exercise engineered to aid the connection to the situation. In a similar way to Meisner's Emotional Preparation the students will decide on music and/or physical exercise that will be conducive to them starting the exercise full of a feeling suitable to their imaginary scenario.

Since I already add imaginary elements to the scenarios in my training process, I refrain from adding additional imaginary stories to avoid overloading the actors' imagination and dispersing their focus from the partner and situation. I have also found that thinking about a story unrelated to the imaginary circumstance of the exercise, has often confused students into reacting to that situation rather than the one they have crafted — seeing as that situation exists in their minds it could also risk mind wandering and internal focus. Meisner's type of Emotional Preparation, in my opinion, is more suited to use in a production where you have set lines and circumstances dictated by the playwright.

Using music and/or physical activity, however, can help connect the student to their imaginary situation in a psychophysical way. Moreover, as the students are asked to

---

<sup>104</sup> The purpose of the preparation is to not enter the space emotionally empty (Meisner, 1987: 78). This daydream is prepared at home and brought to class. The daydream is imaginary and is crafted to induce the appropriate feelings through the use of an emotional root and actor's faith. Emotional preparation is for the first moment only, and acts as a filter through which the actor sees his partner (Hart, 2008: 67).



not hang on to their preparations too tightly — but rather work off the partner — the use of physical and musical preparation usually means that they have sufficiently embodied these feelings, and do not have to attend to the imagination during the exercise. The next case study is based on the results of using this type of preparation in an exercise.

### Case Study 3: Erica and Marie

Following Erica's progress in the previous exercise, the addition of Preparation allowed for a calmer and more engaged start to this exercise. Erica's imagined scenario involved her making finger sandwiches for her father's wake, after the catering firm had failed to arrive. The urgency was brought on by the imminent arrival of a large group of people, which was intensified by the challenging emotional circumstance. Marie had created a previous circumstance where Erica was her estranged sister whom she had not seen for many years. In addition to this, her objective was to get Erica to agree to Marie staying with her, as she was currently homeless.

Instead of Actor B entering with a sense of heightened purpose (which sometimes results in them not properly observing Actor A) this exercise saw Marie (Actor B) taking time to observe Erica and her Independent Activity, because of the nature of Marie's objective and previous circumstance it was imperative that she spent time understanding Erica's feeling towards her — which drew her focus outward. In Erica's case the Independent Activity continued but there was a real awareness of Marie's presence in the room, which in turn affected her. The demands on the other ("You need to..."), that sometimes find their way into the Repetition, were not present and instead the attention was more obviously on the other person (and in Erica's case also her Independent Activity, which was urgent and emotional), resulting in them observing very small shifts in the other: "You're trying to hide your guilt", as well as truths about what was actually going on: "You have butter on your face". This specificity allowed the relationship to evolve and took the actors on an emotional journey of unpredictability and discovery.

I was not trying to create anything...it was so genuine what happened, we even started laughing. The circumstance just added a kind of background feeling of sadness, but everything else just happened from what we saw in each other. There was no need to push. We are bigger than we think, even a

very small thing can be really powerful if it's true (Erica, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Ultimately the more ingrained preparation allowed for more attention on each other, and as it fuelled their observations with emotions, in turn it instigated more behaviour, which was then mutually observed, creating a moment-to-moment exchange. This type of carefully, non-general, crafted exercise — where instead of worrying about being connected to the circumstance the focus is divided between the partner and the task — can see major shifts in the actors. Additionally, circumstances where the other person's reactions to you is of utmost importance, also ensures that the focus stays external, as seen in the next case study.

#### Case Study 4: Leo and Esther

In this exercise I took the decision to provide Leo and Esther with their individual circumstances. This was due to their prior work not going far enough in terms of truly connecting with something that was emotionally difficult.<sup>105</sup> Esther was Actor A and her Independent Activity was to tidy up her room after an abusive boyfriend had destroyed it. Leo (Actor B) entered with the previous circumstance that Esther had been telling lies about him being abusive towards her, and the need was to get her to admit to the lies. Both circumstances draw on the urgency and threat scenarios, which the discoveries from Chapter 5:2 showed to be conducive to external focus, allowing for the attention to stay outward even when evaluating others' behaviour. This type of scenario is also, as explained previously, prone to elevate stakes and anxiety levels and inhibit self-control, resulting in a spontaneous and instinctive interaction. In an interview they both describe the exercise as “liberating”. In Leo's opinion the reason for that exercise to have had such an impact on his training, was the uncomfortable place the emotional circumstance had pushed him into. He believes this circumstance raised the stakes and created a stronger sense of urgency in his objective:

It threw me off balance and it raised the stakes, it gave me so much drive. I felt it so strongly that I needed to understand why she had done what she did. It made listening to her and reading her so important. I am listening to you

---

<sup>105</sup> Even though these circumstances were dictated to them, the actors knew nothing about the other person's situation. Further, they still had to personally connect to the imaginary situation that was given to them and craft a preparation that would suit.

because I need to sort this out, I need to work out what is going on with you, and it was so powerful (Leo, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Further, he explains that the Preparation had helped him connect to something inside himself, which in turn made the connection with his partner stronger resulting him “doing things I never thought I would [do]” (Leo, 2019: see Appendix 2). He goes on to explain that there was no need for thinking or reminding himself of the scenario, it was embodied in him and resurfaced the moment he saw his partner. Likewise, Esther had an equally strong experience, which in her view came down to the fact that she had accepted the circumstances and believed what had happened: “The biggest thing for me was that I had accepted the circumstance. Then everything just happened. I felt like I was really invested” (Esther, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Both the connection Esther had found during the Preparation, and the urgency of the situation, created a struggle for attention between her task and her partner, the situation had an emotional effect on her. In the interview she remembers feeling overwhelmed by an urgent need to understand her partner and describes the feelings building inside her as an uncontrollable anger towards him brought on by his behaviour (Esther, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

### Common Problems in exercise 3

Although the case studies above demonstrate the successful effects of the Preparation, there are still some issues that occur at this stage of training.

1. **Actor A and B dwelling on Preparation** — This means that they are both affected by the previous circumstance, but enjoying holding onto those feelings rather than being open to the other person changing it.
2. **Actor B having a passive relationship to Actor A** — When Actor A does not have a clear idea of who Actor B is, and if Actor B does not have a clear agenda, or a passive objective, the interactions will amount to two emotional people looking at each other.

In the following case study both the issue of dwelling on preparation and passivity occurred, resulting in increased self-focus and inhibition.

### Case Study 5: Julia and Paul

In this case study Julia was inside the room mending a flowerpot belonging to her grandmother, which she had accidentally broken. Paul's objective was to "say sorry" to her, his girlfriend, because of something he had done in the previous circumstance. Due to the nature of the exercise, which prevents you from 'just talking' and uttering anything that isn't an observation or reaction to the moment, this objective became passive and problematic. Paul's pursuit of ways that he could communicate this to Julia resulted in him turning the attention inwards. Julia, on the other hand, seemed completely oblivious to his quest, yet instead of questioning why she was acting this way Paul instead looked for ways to achieve his goal. He spent a lot of his time silent, thinking about his own feelings and what he could do next. Although, as previous chapters have shown, small amounts of deliberate mind wandering can have a place within a task, if the balance is tipped too much in that direction we run the risk of excessive internal attention resulting in self-consciousness. By having an objective regarding a personal action — rather than to make something happen or change something in the other person — the structure of the exercise worked against him and the obstacles rather than a moment-to-moment exploration.

In order to see how a mutual relationship would change the interaction I asked the pair to redo the same exercise, with an addition to their circumstances, which would increase the interdependent attention and thus external focus. Julia was told that "Paul was her boyfriend, who had broken her grandmother's pot when he came home intoxicated the night before", whereas Paul was told to keep the imaginary argument they had had, "but since then he had found text messages on Julia's phone from another man and he wanted to find out if she still loved him". Again, they did not know about each other's changed circumstances. This tied Julia's Independent Activity to Paul, giving her an opinion on his presence, making sure the attention was divided between the partner and the task. Likewise, it gave Paul an emotional struggle, which could only be dealt with by observing Julia's behaviour towards to him and his actions — he could not achieve his objective of understanding her feelings without observing her fully. As the previous chapter presented, the act of reading someone's emotions or intentions can indeed create inward attention, however as Paul had his own high stakes circumstance planned and every nuance of Julia's behaviour was essential to his quest — his attention was kept on her at all times. These adjustments created a dynamic performance with much resemblance to

the exercise by Erica and her partner, in terms of the quick emotional changes, unpredictability and exploration of relationship. The improvisation created the emotional fluidity and vulnerability, which is needed to affect an audience (Esper, 2008: 113), and this was obvious when discussing the exercise with the rest of the class afterwards.

#### Knock on the Door exercise 4

Building on the previous exercise, which showed the importance of the relationship and other-focus, at this point the students pair up and craft an exercise together. They decide on circumstances, previous circumstances and relationship — the personal objective they leave to themselves. One person starts in the room with an Independent Activity, which now does not have to be extremely high stakes or with a strong emotional connection, but it has to still be something urgent they have to do now, not later. (For example, laying the table for a dinner party, getting dressed to go somewhere, tidying up the house before guests are arriving, packing to catch a train etc.). As before a Preparation is also added, to get them in the right place to start the scene, which could include music, physical exercise and imagination. The conversation continues to be through Repetition.

#### Common problems in exercise 4

When this exercise first starts, the observations of the other actor can suffer as the objective takes precedence. In the earlier exercises Meisner deemed it necessary to 'leave the objective at the door' (Meisner, 1987: 57), as there is a risk that it will take precedence over what is happening in the moment. The objective will become part of the interaction as we engage with the other actor, however if too much attention is on it, it will direct our focus inwards towards our imaginary circumstances and needs. In exercise four we bring the objective into the interaction, but again, a balance has to be struck, which is why so much work on the Repetition and outward attention is done before this stage begins.

Further, as the partners have now crafted their exercise together, the shared knowledge of the situation means there is less effort needed to understand the circumstance. As explained in the previous chapter, when we struggle to make sense of our environment or someone's behaviour, our task positive network (DAN) engages, which keeps the attention outwards, on the task. However, if we assume

that we already know what is going on, and what we see fits into that belief, the external attention can shift to a more internal drive and we stop scrutinising our environment in the same way. By allowing the students to craft the relationship and the previous circumstances together, it is no longer necessary to focus on why the other person is doing their task, who they are, and the reason they act the way they do. Students who prepare well, to the point that they do not have to think about or remember their circumstance during the exercise, are able to fully focus on each other and allow the journey of the improvisation to be spontaneous.

It is also noticeable that when two objectives are similar, there is very little motivation to change the other person, which means that as the attention on the objective decreases and attention on the partner increases, this will lead to short term externally directed attention towards the partner, however lack of objective makes the exercise under energised and flat. There is also a risk that when there is no objective that the attention turns to the self - as the actors struggle to see a reason for the interaction. Whereas when the objectives are different there is an increased energy in the interaction as conflict is created and the partners have something to work towards. These elements are all fighting for attention allocation at this point, and a balance between the outer and inner attention points is needed.

Additionally, if the previous circumstances are too complicated and take too much effort to remember — as shown in the next case study — the students can lose sight of the objective (as well as the partner's behaviour), which is the driving force of the interaction. The following case study will present an exercise that became problematic due to the complicated nature of one of the partner's scenarios.

#### Case Study 6: Leo and Esther

Students Leo and Esther worked together in both their third and fourth exercise, which led to two very different experiences. From having had a successful improvisation in the third exercise, they encountered a problematic fourth exercise.

The improvisation started with Leo doing the laundry and Esther entering the room. As Leo started to observe Esther's behaviour from his perspective of the situation, Esther seemed confused and reluctant to understand his point of view. She had a very different demeanour to Leo, as if they had not prepared the same circumstance. Esther rejected Leo's constant observations of this, as well as his attempts to reason

with her or affect her in any way. Further, she herself made very few observations about Leo, and those she did utter were not from the point of view of being confused about the situation, but almost an objective analysis of what she saw like “You are standing there looking at me with big eyes”. Her whole attention seemed to be on her own circumstance, which looked very different to Leo’s. Leo was becoming aggravated and frustrated by this behaviour and called out her resistance a multitude of times without any effect — it became a standoff with no one allowing the other’s offers to lead to something. The exercise went around in circles with the same observations, and apart from Leo’s growing frustrations nothing changed.

I stopped the exercise and questioned the pair on the situation. Leo shared his frustration over how Esther seemed completely oblivious to the circumstance, which was then explained. The crafted scenario had been of two friends encountering an emotional event the night before. However, Esther had decided that she was in denial about what had happened and had psychologically erased it from her mind. Her objective was to never talk about it again. It is clear to see how this could go wrong as all of Esther’s attention was placed on not being affected or react to the previous circumstances. By denying the preparation the pair had done together not only did she not move the exercise on to the next step, but also put herself in a position where she was choosing to not be affected by anything said — the opposite of what we do in the Repetition exercise. Her attention was on her obstacle and her own objective, which was something she was trying to do herself rather than changing something in the other. Her objective in turn became invalid, because if she really had forgotten or completely denied the circumstance her objective would already be achieved. Furthermore, if she had accepted that the circumstance had never happened, there would have been a different reaction to Leo’s behaviour towards her. This relates back to the plausibility of your circumstance, if it does not make total sense we will struggle to connect to it resulting in more effort and attention being placed on imaginative sources rather than external environment. When questioned about this afterwards, Esther agreed that the objective and her decision to deny the preparation was not conducive to the exercise, as she in fact ‘cut out’ the new premise — the mutually prepared circumstance:

[Denying the circumstance] is not helpful in any way, it just means you are never going to be in that moment because you’re playing a constant tactic, you’re adding layers onto what your reaction is. It would be so simple to just

have “we have both experienced this and now we are dealing with it”. But by denying it I just added another wall. I was thinking too much about what my responses should be (Esther, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Esther went on to explain how she had been thinking mostly task unrelated thoughts during the exercise, fixating on how she should play the situation. This became an internal monologue rather than a situation that unfolded moment to moment.

In terms of Leo’s predicament, he did not deny the circumstance and his feelings of frustration did come out of Esther’s behaviour. However, he did get restricted, as he seemed to continue to react to her initial behaviour instead of reacting to her moment-to-moment. Leo himself acknowledges that he did refrain from leaving that first moment of “surprise”, and instead of interrogating that behaviour, he left himself to replay that feeling over and over again. He explains in the interview that he did start to think to himself, not about why Esther would act like this — but about what he should be doing next. As we have discussed in the Attention chapter, inwards attention can be useful if the thoughts are about the external source (the partner), however when they start to determine our actions, or how well we are doing, they can stop any spontaneous interaction:

I just got stuck in that [first] moment. It was really difficult to stay in the moment, I just kept questioning why she did that first thing, instead of noticing what was happening all the time, I was just thinking to myself rather than observing her... It’s interesting when you start to think with your mind about your circumstance and the tactics that might work, you immediately drop out of it, out of the moment with the person. If you let your thoughts go to “You should be doing this and remember this” you immediately cut off (Leo, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

If Esther had accepted the circumstance, in the way she did in the third exercise, her objective would have been aimed at making Leo ‘stop referring to the incident’ (using a prevention focus based objective) and she might have been affected by his attempts to bring it up and his behaviour towards her. In turn, Leo could have worked harder to understand the reasons she could be behaving like this instead of being confused about Esther’s stance. He could have tried to see the situation from her point of view, and by doing so make her accept the reality of the situation. This shows how these



exercises are always about allowing the journey to happen through the communication, not through two people working individually to create a story.

Nevertheless, there are times when denying the feelings that are building up inside can work in the exercise. There are scenarios where the previous circumstances will make certain reactions less desirable due to the situation. Those reactions become obstacles in the improvisation, and although in Repetition we strive to accept any emotions that present themselves, there are situations, as in the next case study, where feeling something and doing something else can be very powerful.

#### Case Study 7: Louise and Andre

Both Louise and Andre had overcome hurdles in the Repetition phase. When Andre started the training he was very reluctant to act on impulse. His default position was to plan and question his actions, especially in scene work. In the interview he admits that until this process started, he wasn't aware of how much thinking preceded each of his lines or the impact of this on his presence. He describes the process so far as "an awakening to the way I work", and reflects on how he has gone from fighting the thoughts that surround what he "should be doing" and instead learnt to focus on the person in front of you and receive whatever is there, while accepting that that is the truth (Andre interview, 2019: see Appendix 2). He goes on to explain that another significant part of his process has been to allow himself to be affected by his partner's words and actions, rather than brushing them off:

You can hear something and, just hear it, but not let it affect you. The way it affects you creates your response. You know the impulse for the next line or the next comment, the next observation. If you don't let it land you are just saying things and there is no weight to it (Andre, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

In Andre's case the reason for not taking in the comments were often related to him trying too hard to focus on the other person, and mentally working out what was going on with them. Inadvertently this tunnel vision on the other made him inward looking, as he struggled to see what was in front of him and instead allowed his logic to take control.

Louise, on the other hand, had different reasons for not allowing herself to be affected by the other. Louise started the module with a strong defensive mechanism in place, seemingly nervous and worried about how the other would make her feel. Her progression in the Repetition exercises went from interacting with a constant, forced smile, to allowing herself to feel whatever she felt in the situation without judging herself. She said that the structure of the exercises gave her the confidence to let feelings form as reactions rather than decisions. In the interview she acknowledged that while this was exciting and liberating, it also felt scary in the beginning as it was impossible to predict where it would end up (Louise interview 2019: see Appendix 2).

In Louise and Andre's exercise, the pair had crafted a scenario as a struggling couple that had endured a string of arguments in the past few weeks and a particularly serious one that afternoon. Their objectives were neither disclosed to each other nor to the audience, however post-exercise discussions revealed Andre wanted to end the relationship, while Louise wanted to present a united front to her parents, who were to be arriving shortly. The exercise started with Louise in the space decorating the room for their anniversary party. Louise's preparation was a positive one; she started the exercise full of optimism, although it was visibly tainted with a slight struggle, it looked as if she was acting positive rather than genuinely feeling positive. Andre entered the room with a completely different energy. His was darker, with bitterness towards to the situation or what he perceived. As he started observing Louise, it was clear that he was resentful towards her and her actions, which was interspersed with bemusement at her positive stance and slight empathy as he observed her intentions. When asked about this Andre remembers acknowledging Louise's demeanour, which immediately started affecting him and "from then on everything just unfolded from us watching each other" (Andre, interview 2019: see Appendix 2). In this instance they had prepared the circumstance together, which can at times diminish the attention placed on the other, however as the students do not share their objectives before the scenarios, Louise's objective was far from Andre's allowing for conflict to ensue and for Andre and Louise to have a strong need to observe the behaviour of the other.

At first I noted that, although Louise's behaviour was causing reactions in Andre, Louise herself was not allowing for Andre's behaviour to affect her. She was not connecting to, or rather was deliberately refusing to see, what Andre was offering.

Yet, it was apparent that she was slowly failing to keep the positivity up. When I questioned Louise about this she admitted that her objective had made her change, or rather cover up, her reactions. She was acknowledging how Andre was making her feel, but she was determined “to not let him destroy the day”. Although this made her put on a front, she was allowing the effect of Andre’s behaviour to affect her, until it was no longer possible to keep up the act:

I told myself not to cry. Telling myself that I would not let this person do that to me. I found that interesting, because I was obviously very emotional. But I think that came from the circumstance. But I remember there was this inner thought to myself — you’re not going to let that happen, right now (Louise, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Louise’s behaviour began to frustrate Andre so much that he started to work very hard to affect her; testing and challenging the defences and emotional control she was exercising. Andre’s impulsive, strong action of throwing all the cupcakes and decorations off the table was met with indifference as she tried to not let his actions affect her. This caused an even stronger reaction from Andre, in which he overturned the whole table, making it impossible for her to carry on:

There was a moment just before I flipped the table, she kept saying the same thing, pretending she hadn’t heard what I said. It made me want to make myself clear and get her attention. Before this exercise, a few weeks back, I probably would have talked myself out of moving at all. I would have done something different. But this time I went with the first gut reaction (Andre, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Louise now started to observe Andre fully, and her tactics were replaced by instinctive reactions. Instead of being kept on one singular path, where one person is resisting and the other trying to get through, the threat of Andre’s actions and the urgency of the situation forced them to solely react off the other in the moment. This led to a rapid switching between strong actions such as *challenge*, *plead*, *accuse*, *seduce* — that were completely informed by the other’s behaviour. Louise remembers that the moment Andre pushed over the table, it led to the realisation that there was “no reason to keep pretending”. She explains that from that moment on everything felt “much more alive and quick”.

This improvisation escalated to an emotional and high stakes environment, which demonstrated the relationship, backstory and needs, all the while keeping full attention on each other in the moment. Neither Louise nor Andre recall having to remember the previous circumstances during the exercise — suggesting that these elements might have become automatic:

This is the first time that things were happening so quickly and I wasn't stopping myself. I believe some impulses changed because of the relationship history. But when you're in that moment, you are just living, the thoughts come so fast it's so alive (Andre, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Louise agrees that suddenly "it all felt very important", explaining it as if suddenly this was the most important conversation that had ever been had between the two, and nothing would ever be the same afterwards. She puts that feeling down to the stakes of the situation, and both Andre and Louise agree that a high stakes situation not only contributed to the loss of audience consciousness, but also to their perception of each other and emotional connection:

You are starting to notice the important things the higher the stakes get, because that's what you are looking for. And you are observing other things, because they are there, and they are seeing things in you because they are there, because you are letting yourself be. It can only be the truth; it's truth, right there (Louise, student, 2019: see Appendix 2).

Both actors posit that in order for the audience to believe what they are seeing, the stakes need to rise through the interaction, and not come from one person. In this case the effect on the audience was tangible as the impulsive nature and the high stakes made the scene very spontaneous and unpredictable.

This case study showed how a detailed circumstance and well-suited Preparation, with simple objectives, can help create a rich and emotional connection between the actors. The success of this exercise, in this instance, developed due the partners paying full concentration to each other, which in turn diminished self-consciousness and made the actors more impulsive and less restricted throughout. In surprising themselves, they also kept the attention of the audience. It should also be noted that the force of Andre's instinctive actions was the factor that re-directed Louise's focus within the scenario, which relates to the research on urgent and threatening

situations and their impact on external attention. In terms of flow — although using objectives with extrinsic motivations and admittedly feeling both anxiety and arousal during the interaction — the actors found several of the markers of flow introduced in Chapter 3:2 (79-87) in their scene, for example the *merging of action and awareness, loss of self-consciousness, focused concentration and time distortion* (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 71). Interestingly, the time distortion — described by Csíkszentmihályi as “hours feeling like minutes” (1990: 66) — was significant on this occasion. Both Louise and Andre reported a sense of the exercise taking between three to five minutes, whereas in real time they had been engaged in the improvisation for twenty minutes — demonstrating how full task immersion can distort temporal perception. This case is specifically interesting in terms of the time-element, as it ran for a longer period than the other case studies. Moreover, this case study also introduced the notions of how actions and reactions differ, and how motive can seek to change our initial reactions, keeping them from our partner due to our personal need, which in turn can lead to emotional build up, something that will be further explored in Chapter 6:2.

This section has introduced the development of my own process of the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door, presenting new ways to allow the students to progress within the exercises, inspired by both experience and as a result of research explained in the previous chapters. These modifications initially centre on the layering of new elements in accordance with the skill-challenge balance, especially when first introducing the aspect of divided attention between activity and Repetition. Further adjustments have focused on finding the balance between pursuing an objective and observing the partner. These have included the plausibility of the reason, embodied preparation, minimising the imaginative aspects — and thus the risk of excessive deliberate mind wandering, the use of preventions focus, threat situations and partner-focused objectives. Moreover, each part has included possible pitfalls and ways to tackle them, which has been evidenced through seven case studies.

Throughout the chapter it has become clear that in the Repetition exercise stage there was a definite need to balance skill and challenge, whereas in this part it is evident that it is the intention that needs to be balanced with the observation of the partner. All these adjustments have been incorporated in order to address this objective-partner balance, in order that the objective, including the circumstance,

does not out-weigh the external focus on the partner. Following on from the last case study, the next section will explore how instinctive reaction relates to the concept of counteraction — as found in Stanislavski’s Active Analysis — and their combined effect on affect. The discovery of emotional build-up due to suppressed instinct in case study 7 will be explored further in this section. Through the investigation of impulse, motivation and action-perception cycles, in relation to Active Analysis and Meisner technique, this part will aim to provide an explanation for this occurrence. As noted in the beginning of the thesis, the following section has been published as an individual article for the journal of Stanislavski Studies, and is based on a personal experience of Active Analysis.<sup>106</sup>

## **6:2 The reaction in counter-action: How Meisner technique and Active Analysis complement each other.**

During spring 2018 I travelled to The University of California for the international Stanislavski Acting Laboratory. My time at Riverside was spent working in a group consisting of theatre and acting practitioners from around the world, led by Stanislavski and Active Analysis expert Sharon-Marie Carnicke. Our quest, as a group, was to explore the difference between an improvisation and an improvisatory étude such as in Stanislavski’s Active Analysis.<sup>107</sup> The difference between these two aspects was an interesting concept and making this distinction is also important for someone teaching and researching Meisner technique — a process that can also qualify as a series of improvisatory exercises, distinct from improvisations. Meisner himself opposed the use of improvisations that were based on dialogic word games, like the ones The Group Theatre had engaged in and which were later popularised by Keith Johnstone (Gray, 2015: 727). Meisner instead looked to create exercises that took the actors away from being the intellectual creators of a script and emphasised the listening and reacting to the partner instead (Meisner, 1987: 36). Meisner believed that intellectuality created a sense of predictability that hindered real immediacy (Gray, 2015: 727). The most significant contrast to dialogical improvisations was that Meisner’s exercises do not seek to further the storyline in the way other

---

<sup>106</sup> Article was published in Stanislavski Studies, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Improvisations are often created spontaneously and without preparation, the actors become the creators of the script and are encouraged not to block each other’s inputs. Improvisation practitioners like Keith Johnstone often work from game structure in order to further the creative dialogue between the actors (Gray, 2015:727). For this laboratory we defined an improvisation as an interaction between the actors where the lines are improvised and the structure might be as loose as a set of given circumstances, or in the case of our group stem solely from the inspiration of an object.

improvisations do (Gray, 2015: 729), but instead he defines his improvisations as the actors co-creating a spontaneous, unpredictable, affective engagement in the moment (Meisner, 1987: 37; Esper, 2008: 39, 43). Although Active Analysis uses paraphrasing, it is similar to Meisner technique in that it ultimately tries to “break down the wall between analysis and embodiment” (Carnicke, 2008:195) to find a less intellectual and more experiential way of communicating based on the interactions between the scene partners (Carnicke: 196; Merlin, 2003:43). Although my own experience of one particular exercise will be highlighted, this section will not be dissecting our exploration of Improvisation and Improvisatory exercises as such, but rather one particular aspect of Active Analysis and its relation to Meisner technique: *Counter-action*.

### What is counter-action?

For Meisner acting was *reacting*, based on the motivation to keep the actor spontaneous (Zarrilli, 2008:17). As has been stated throughout this thesis, in Meisner’s process the students are encouraged to base their behaviour and actions on their instinctive reaction to the present moment. The driving force being their own, and the reading of their partner’s, emotional impulses (Stinespring, 1999: 119). This kind of reaction should be acted upon immediately and continuously throughout the interaction, allowing the impulses to bring about discoveries in the present moment, and not be suppressed. However, focusing on the notion of counter-action during the acting laboratory raised questions about how an instinctive reaction differs from a counter-action.

At the heart of Stanislavski’s improvisatory rehearsal tool, Active Analysis, lies the notion of action and counter-action. As was indicated in Chapter 1, Stanislavski created this technique in the latter stages of his career, with the intention of fostering a freer and more reactive way to approach a script. His earlier work on Method of Physical Actions had made him question whether actions alone were sufficient, as well as whether the notion of counter-action was the crucial element in producing conflict and dynamic performances (Carnicke, 2008: 200).

Counter-action can be seen as the force working against the main action of the scene, creating the contention and struggle, which is ultimately integral to a dramatic situation. As Carnicke notes, conflict is created when an “impelling action meets a counteraction” (2008: 212). She goes on to explain that this conflict can be direct as

in a physical fight, or more indirect as in passive-aggressive encounters (Ibid.). Throughout our sessions with Carnicke it became clear that it was important to try to clarify the differences between an instinctive reaction and a counter-action. Since the ultimate application of actor training would be to apply the technique to text, and the motives of that character, it raises questions about the validity of training the initial reaction and its usefulness to the actor's scene work. To be able to answer this, it is necessary to explore how Meisner's approach and Stanislavski's Active Analysis differ, and the effect of one on the other.

If a reaction is based on impulse, what would be the basis for a counter-action? Given that the action and counter-action in Active Analysis are based on the information from the text, the main focus in determining the counter-action would be the objective of the character in question (Merlin, 2003: 34). As the characters' needs and wants play out in corresponding actions, the main difference would seem to be the factor of the motivation. In an email interview, Carnicke agrees that, although she doesn't use the word *objective* specifically, counter-action and action is based on the given circumstances of the text — where we find what the characters *want* (Carnicke, interview, 2018). The question then becomes, how does motivation affect instinctive reaction, and why train impulsivity if the application to text would require a counter-action, which might go against the initial feeling.

### Impulse versus motivation

Impulses or urges can be seen as the immediate response to a situation, which people sometimes look to change or not act upon, whereas motivation would refer to a drive to do something in order to serve a particular want — or the need to achieve a goal. Depending on the strength of our motivation, we might deem our impulsive reaction to be an unsuitable course of action and the way to change this would be through self-regulation. Self-regulation has been referred to throughout this thesis, and concerns humans being's capacity to override and alter their responses (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007: 116). It can be seen as the key aspect that can help us suppress unwanted urges and control instinctive reactions, often in order to bring our behaviour in line with certain standards, or specific goals (Ibid.).

There is not always a discrepancy between our instinct and objective. If a person's instinctive reaction matches the motivation — for example if a building was on fire and the instinctive need was to get out — there would be no conflict between the



reaction and the want and hence no need for self-regulation. It is only in the circumstances where the instinct and motivation are in conflict with each other that we adjust our responses. These conflicts can occur in a multitude of situations but are often linked to how we want to be perceived by others. We might view our impulsive response to not be socially acceptable or make us look less favourable in the eyes of others, so we regulate our behaviour accordingly (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007: 119). In Active Analysis we see these regulations in the form of actions and counter-actions: of course a counter-action could be based on a reaction, but it is the motivation of the character that ultimately drives it. In light of this, how does Meisner's notion of training impulse apply to regulated actions and counter-actions, and why is training impulse still important?

As indicated in Chapter 1, Meisner and Stanislavski both based the development of their processes on the notion of *Communion* (Merlin, 2010: 183) — Stanislavski's concept of communication and energy flow between actors during interaction.<sup>108</sup> Active Analysis is similar to Meisner technique (and different to Method of Physical Actions) in terms of the attention being placed outwards, towards the partner, with the intention to enhance adaptability and presence in the actors (Merlin, 2003: 42). Although I acknowledge that my work with students on Meisner technique has enhanced listening, instinct and action selection, I was curious to find out how it would affect situations in which we regulate our actions, since a significant part of the training aims to diminish this aspect. In order to understand how action selection works I decided to build on my MA thesis research into Action-Perception cycles and the idea that reactions stem from our perceived environment.<sup>109</sup>

### Action-Perception

In my MA research I discovered that Action-Perception is ultimately a survival mechanism used by humans and animals in order for them to navigate the environment. We *perceive* by interpreting the information we receive from our immediate surroundings, and *act* on this knowledge with the intention of putting ourselves in a more advantageous place — that is to say that sensation and movement are intertwined, which creates an uninterrupted feedback-loop where the

---

<sup>108</sup> In this case I refer mainly to the creation and development of Active Analysis.

<sup>109</sup> The idea to look at Action-Perception theory in terms of the teaching of actioning in drama school was part of my MA Dissertation "Reaction in Action" 2012. Here the main exploration was how Meisner technique could be used to teach a foundation of actioning to drama school students.

environmental stimuli influence the action we take, which in turn create new perceived stimuli, and so forth (Fuster, 1990: 318). In other words, as we act we receive new feedback from the environment and from the action itself. This in turn generates new feedback about the future actions; we observe, act and evaluate.

Although this makes it sound as if there are three parts to this cognitive process: observing, acting and receiving feedback — later research suggests that action and perception follow each other instantaneously, and possibly simultaneously (Decety, 2004: 259). It was psychologist James J. Gibson's research into the ecological approach to visual perception (1979) that lay ground for Action-Perception research. His writings explored our interaction with the world visually; identifying how visual perception of our surroundings influences our physical actions as well as how we manipulate our surroundings with our actions (1979: 225). Gibson argued that the perception and judgment are not two components separated in a linear process — but that they happen at the same time — hence our actions are *instinctive reactions* to visual stimuli (Ibid.: 223). This was strongly contested by the philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists at the time (Giorelli & Sinigaglia, 2007:49). The belief was that the mind separated action and perception and was the main decider on which action to take. The cycle, as it was seen at the time, was perception-cognition-action. However, the view of this has in latter years changed in favour of Gibson's model.

Over the last years several neurophysiological studies have offered us a very different description of brain architecture and functions. These researches have changed the standard view of sensory motor system and the motor system, shedding light on the mutual relationship between action and perception (Ibid.).

This indicates that training our actors' perceptions of their surroundings, and how we evaluate those perceptions in the moment, would be integral to our way of deciding on an action. The foundation of Meisner's work is focused on letting the instinctive reactions form the basis of our interaction, however a large part of the initial training emphasises the placing of attention outside of ourselves onto our partner, in order to move away from the self-initiated action and allow the reaction to come from something outside of ourselves, in the present moment.

Interestingly, Gibson believed that self-consciousness and perception were two different constructs in that being conscious of the self leads us to identify the past

and the future within the present, however Gibson argued that perceiving in the present will automatically use memory and goals without consciously activating them (Gibson, 1966: 276). Further, Gibson suggests that information exists in the past, present and future, however the experience of “now” is the momentary sensation that comes out of the perception of our environment (Ibid.). Some of Gibson’s work was focused on the notion of *affordances* — a word coined by himself meaning the way we afford certain values and judgments to what we see around us (Gibson, 1979: 119). In turn these judgment values are instrumental for action-selection and are mostly drawn upon by visual or aural stimuli (Ibid.).

As the research into neuroscience and cognition has evolved, Action-Perception cycles have been reclaimed through the lens of social cognition.<sup>110</sup> Professor of psychology Jean Decety, applies Action-Perception cycles to his work on social interaction, and emphasises the intentions behind our actions and how this is influenced by other people’s behaviour towards us. His view is in line with Gibson’s discoveries as he describes the Action-Perception cycles as functionally intertwining action and cognition: “perception is a means to action and action is a means to perception” (Decety, 2004: 259).

There is a difference between interacting with other humans and interacting with inanimate objects. The interaction between humans is more intricate and creates a dynamic, instant, continuous feedback loop between people, which happens in the present moment — simply put: we observe the other, we get feedback from their behaviour and we act. Referring to this, Decety states that the Action-Perception cycle creates the internal stimulus that leads to both our perception of someone else’s action and our resulting *reaction*: “These [internal] representations not only guide our own behaviour, but are also used to interpret the behaviour of others, because they are shared across individuals” (Decety, 2004: 262).

Looking at this research, one can argue that focusing on training actors to stay present would be of importance. What the study of Action-Perception theory tells us is that these continuous feedback loops instigate our initial reaction and consequently determine our action, which happens in the moment. When the mind wanders from that present moment it enters a cognitive realm outside the Action-

---

<sup>110</sup> Social cognition is the encoding, storage, retrieval, and processing, of information in the brain, which relates to members of the same species.

Perception cycle. Naturally the cycle does not stop during this time, but some internal representations formed will not be true to the moment — due to being imagined or remembered — and for actors the consequence is that some actions may not appear authentic to the audience as they are not instigated by the present interaction. Meisner technique teaches the importance of paying close attention to your scene partner's actions in order to keep you focused and open to spontaneous responses.

As prevalent throughout this thesis, Meisner based his process on the idea that “What you do does not depend on you; it depends on the other fellow” (Meisner, 1987: 36). This notion closely follows the psychology of the Action-Perception cycle — his exercises capitalising on the natural way humans interact. The Repetition exercise trains the actors to base their actions on their impulsive reaction to their partner. The exercise also hones their skills in reading other people's behaviour whilst evaluating the reasons behind it. Thus, arguably, Meisner technique can be seen to train perception and by starting out in an environment free from other stimuli, we can learn to focus our attention on the dynamic force of the other actor. However, as Rhonda Blair notes: our behaviour is “adaptive, designed to allow the organism to prevent or accomplish something” (2007:41), in other words it changes as our intention changes meaning that the basis for our behaviour and actions is ultimately our objective. Now adding intention into the equation — the basis for counter-action — the following part explores how the notion of goal-oriented behaviour fits into the Action-Perception cycle.

### Reaction and counter-action

Patrick Haggard, from the Institute for Cognitive Neuroscience, differentiates between actions that are the result of an immediate reaction and actions that are driven by a clear intention (Haggard, 2003: 695). Besides the feeling of ownership with regard to initiating an intentional action, the brain processes engaged during these types of actions are set apart from those engaged during responsive actions (Ibid.). Recognising the distinction between intentional action and responsive action is vital in order to investigate fully how reaction and counteraction differ, and what part training each of them plays in actor training. Even though my main focus as a Meisner teacher is to bring about spontaneity and impulsivity in the actors' work, one cannot dismiss the fact that human interaction is often bound by intentions and

calculation, and the processes separating these types of action may be of significance for the teaching and directing of actors.

Further, Haggard flags up that neuroscientific studies into *intentional behavior* is a less travelled path than that of *conscious perception*. Nevertheless a consensus has been reached within the field that two types of action exist:

Human actions comprises of a spectrum extending from direct responses to immediate stimuli, to much longer ranging actions. The former often called 'automatic', whereas the latter may be called 'intentional' (Haggard, 2003: 291).

In terms of the current exploration, it would be appropriate to make the distinct link between automatic action and *reaction*, and intentional action and *counter-action*. However, it would seem that there is some contention here between the neuroscience and Action-Perception theory, given that *automatic* and *intentional* actions are seen as separate processes within the brain, although Action-Perception theory considers them as one. Gibson asserted that action was an integral part of perception; hence the information processing and the following decision-making would not be seen as separate processes. However, *intentional action* would appear to be following a more goal-oriented path, where *final desired outcome* would be part of the calculation.

Most desires need a string of actions in order to be achieved, even more so when involving the dynamic interactions of other humans. The action-sequence would start off with an intention — something that you want or need — whereas the following actions can only be determined by continuously evaluating the response of the other people in the present. Will they help you achieve your goal? Will they stand in your way? What other obstacles occur whilst you are interacting? Will the goal take a long or short time to achieve? When does my tactic stop working? This is one way of the reaction and counter-action working together to create drama. The audience can most likely tell the desires of the actors, they know where each actor want to get to, but the journey there is explored in the moment, creating dynamic performances. Since these two aspects do work together, are they both part of the Action-Perception cycle? Neuroscientist Joaquin Fuster argues that intention is not just part of the cycle — but the Action-Perception cycle depends on it:

The Perception-Action cycle is the circular flow of information from the environment to sensory structures, to motor structures, back again to the environment, to sensory structures, and so on, during the processing of goal-directed behaviour (Fuster, 2004: 143).

Fuster continues by adding that *automatic actions* — what I am referring to as a reactions — are situated in a different part of the brain cycle, to the more complex intentional *actions*, or counter-actions. However, both types of actions are connected by long fibers in the brain, making them equivalent in the executive rank and meaning that they are of equal importance during action selection (Ibid.).

### Reaction + counter-action = affect?

Reflecting on this information from the perspective of Meisner technique and Active Analysis, I can see the importance of both reaction and counter-action within an actor's approach to the script. Furthermore, during the workshops with Carnicke I had an experience, which made me question the notion of affect and how emotion can be generated through conflict of motivation and impulse. During the second stage of our improvisational laboratory we had aligned our improvisation with the Active Analysis structure,<sup>111</sup> which consisted of an action and a counteraction as well as a verb or tactic to play throughout the scene, as can be seen in the table (fig. 12) below:

<b>The setup of our improvisation étude</b>	
<b>Character 1</b>	
<b>Action:</b>	To get character 2 to admit she was raped by their boss
<b>Tactic/Verb:</b>	To push/probe
<b>Character 2</b>	
<b>Counter-action:</b>	To get character 1 to drop the subject
<b>Character 2 Tactic/Verb:</b>	To make light of

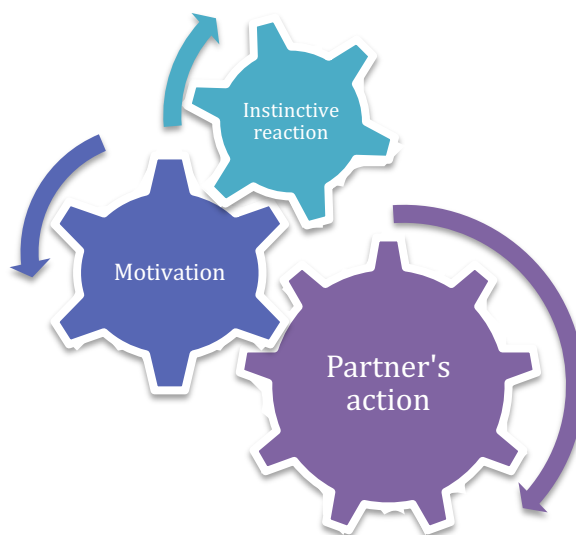
(Figure 12: Active Analysis étude setup)

---

<sup>111</sup> The first stage of the laboratory consisted of free improvisation stimulated from a chosen object. In the second stage we took the situation the first improvisation generated and structured it into characters with either Action or Counter-action and set verbs/tactics.

The scene concerned a sensitive and highly emotional subject, something my character had experienced. I considered whether I would be required to engage in any kind of emotional preparation in order for me to access those kinds of emotions, or even connect to the stakes of this situation, but for the sake of the laboratory I decided to rely wholly on the outlined structure and process.

During the *étude*, my inner reaction to Character 1's action was completely different to my chosen tactic, which in turn created a strong conflict inside me. The more she pushed me to tell her the harder it became to make light of the situation. This struggle in turn created a strong emotional connection to the situation and at one point I felt physical pain in my body due to this inner turmoil and how difficult Character 1 made it for me to maintain this facade. There was a strong sense of self-awareness in this scene, which was not hindering me as an actor, if anything it aided the situation. I was aware of everything I felt, as if I was really in this situation rather than as an actor playing a part. Self-consciousness became *character consciousness*, as I felt self-conscious as the person in this situation being watched and judged within the given circumstances — not by an audience. Character consciousness was a term used by both Stanislavski and Chekhov and referred to what happens when our imagination takes us from empathy or compassion to actually experiencing the feelings of our character due to the predicament of the situation. Chekhov referred to this as “a third I” — where we think, feel and pursue the same things as the character (Gillett, 2014: 123). In my experience at Riverside I felt extremely self-aware of my own behaviour, however it fully related to the circumstance and not to the fact that I was being watched, but rather to how I could hide my emotions. At no point did my fear, panic, sadness or awkwardness relate to my own performance as an actor, but only to how my partner was observing and behaving towards me. My feelings came out of the three-way struggle between my impulse, my motivation and my partner's action, as shown as an ‘action-reaction triangle’ in the below image:



(Figure 13: Action-Reaction Triangle)

When asking Carnicke about her thoughts in regard to this she told me that in his later work Stanislavski never asked actors to work on specific emotions. He increasingly deemed emotion to be a sixth sense that would appear as a result of what we do (Carnicke, interview, 2018). She added that Active Analysis presumes that if you are fully committed to a verb (provided it is well chosen in terms of the given circumstances and facts) emotional connection will follow — as had happened in our etude (Ibid.). Meisner also had thoughts along these lines when he stated that the motivation behind your actions should be the source of your concentration, which would generate the emotions by itself (Meisner, 1987: 39). This was clearly demonstrated to me in this exercise as emotions in turn create behaviour, which we observe in our partners and ourselves and evaluate from the perspective of our desired outcome. My experience reflected the integral connection between reaction and counteraction and in what manner they are strongly linked to affect. As Pinker states:

Behaviour is the outcome of an internal struggle among many mental modules, and it is played out on the chessboard of opportunities and constraints defined by other people's behaviour (1997:42).

What I experienced as 'character consciousness' came out of the interaction between my partner and me, coupled with how well I was doing in achieving my goal. This created a feedback loop influencing my behaviour and decisions and consequently



generating emotions. This type of emotional build-up, due to motivations and emotional suppression, is the same as what happened in the interaction between Andre and Louise in case study 7. I suggest that this is different to an actor experiencing self-consciousness if the changes in behaviour are the result of the motivation and the present communication that are firmly rooted in the imaginary circumstances.

At this point I return to the concept of self-regulation, as it also effects emotion. As stated earlier, when our instinctive reaction goes against what we believe to be the best action to achieve our goal, or the standard we have set for ourselves, we deploy self-regulation (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007: 117). Self-regulation needs some form of monitoring from the self in order to be initiated; hence the feedback-loop brings about a sense of self-awareness that is key to the interaction. There is always a feedback loop present in our interactions, however if there is not strong motivation the feedback revolves around the experience itself and it is evaluated from the perspective of past experiences and whether we want to change it or keep it the same (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2012:108-109). As self-regulation refers to our ability to control our urges rather than acting on them (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007: 116), motivation plays a crucial part in deciding whether we achieve this or not. The stronger the motivation to achieve something, the harder the person will work to over-ride instinctive responses that would counteract that goal. This also relates to what is at stake, as the higher the stakes of the situation the more effort we devote to overcoming the obstacles. If the instinctive response however is very strong there will be a struggle between urges and impulses, which could lead to a decreased level of self-control. Self-control draws on a limited resource pool encompassing a wide variety of executive functions, such as attention, inhibition and working memory (Diamond, 2013:136). As this is a limited capacity the more it is being used the more it will be depleted (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000:248). When this resource becomes depleted it is called 'ego depletion' and will affect our ability to change our behaviour (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007: 119).

An interesting point here is that this depletion also affects our emotion-regulation ability. As humans we have a primary initial emotional response, which is followed by a secondary emotional response driven by emotion-regulation (Koole, 2009: 22). Generally, the emotions regulated would be the less desirable ones like anxiety, anger, sadness or jealousy, which in turn would be more likely to occur in higher

stakes situations. Social psychologists Gailliot, Zell and Baumeister have tested and confirmed the hypothesis that those involved in situations that require the use of self-regulation do find it harder to subsequently regulate their emotions. Their findings were based on a study in which participants were required to use self-control to engage in focused attention, change their writing style or over-ride a habit. The participants were then presented with situations that would normally induce emotions such as anxiety, sadness or jealousy. The results showed that, compared to those that had not been involved in self-regulating activities, those that had exercised self-control felt the emotions in a stronger way (Gailliot, Zell & Baumeister, 2014: 10).

Further studies also suggest that emotions that are being regulated or worked against — using self-control to change how we are being perceived — will increase in strength as well as being harder to manage the longer the situation progresses (Turner & Stets, 2006: 31). These emotions are also known to transmute into different kinds of emotions due to the suppression of them:

When discrepancies between feelings and feeling-rules exist, the discrepancy generates a new kind of negative emotional arousal, above and beyond the emotions initially experienced. Thus, a person who feels sad in a situation demanding the expression of happiness may also become angry at having to appear happy, thus racking up the emotional intensity (Ibid.: 27).

This would explain the intense emotions I was experiencing during our Active Analysis exercise, where my instinctive reaction and primary emotions were being suppressed by my counter-action, whilst continuously working against an obstacle (my partner's action). This continuous three-way conflict, in a high stakes situation, would take a lot of effort to uphold and hence be very likely to cause ego-depletion and reduced self and emotional control ability.

## Conclusion

In this section I have attempted to investigate the main differences between the reaction in Meisner technique and the counter-action in Active Analysis, in order to understand the place of instinct and motivation within the acting process. Meisner technique is foremost an actor training process and Active Analysis a rehearsal tool, I therefore wanted to understand how the two concepts work together on text and the

validity of training impulse overall. Having had a particularly strong emotional connection to an Active Analysis etude, as well as watched the dynamic interaction in case study 7, I questioned whether this was due to the inner reaction and counter-action working together and resulting in affect.

Since reaction is based on immediate instinct I turned to Action-Perception theory in order to explore how natural action selection occurs. Action-Perception theory suggests that actions are instantaneously decided on, based on our perception of our environment, which relates to Meisner's notion of acting on impulse. However, given that the counter-action is seemingly based on motivation, this suggests that we do not always follow our instinct if we believe that our goal can be better achieved in a different way. Following this idea, I discovered that within Action-Perception theory there is an acknowledgement of two types of action: automatic and intentional, intentional being more goal motivated and less impulsive. Interestingly, these two actions are still linked inside Action-Perception feedback cycles and impact on one another.

During my own encounter with Active Analysis at the acting laboratory at Riverside — where both my partner's action and my inner reaction worked against my ability to perform my counter-action — I experienced the effect of this action-reaction triangle (see fig. 13) and the emotional connection that it manifested. As my investigation continued the discovery was made that when we alter our impulsive reaction to another action — depending on motivation — we employ self-regulation, which is a limited resource. It uses the same resource as emotion-regulation, which is the way we regulate mainly negative feelings as they occur. The discovery that these two regulatory functions use the same resource, and can become depleted, gave me an idea of what had happened during that exercise. My emotion regulation resource had become depleted due to using it to alter my immediate reaction to fit my counter-action, resulting in a stronger manifestation of emotion and the subsequent inability to keep playing my counter-action.

In conclusion this research has shown the importance of training impulse in actors and how instinctive reaction works in conjunction with action on text, and more specifically Active Analysis. Moreover, I would posit that the idea of the action-reaction triangle: inner reaction — counter-action — partner's action, can present actors with an effective way of accessing emotions which are wholly based on the

present, the given circumstances and attention to the partner. This opens up new realms of inducing emotions, provided that the training of impulse is fully embodied beforehand, so that the instinctive reaction has a chance to be formed, and felt by the actor, before allowing motivation to adapt it to the motivation and partner.

## **Conclusion**

This research thesis has investigated the psychological underpinnings behind Sanford Meisner's technique, in order to establish how it diminishes self-consciousness and enhances spontaneity in actors — specifically in terms of the foundational exercises Repetition, Independent Activity and Knock on the Door. Through this research, I have demonstrated how Meisner technique uses a step-by-step approach in training the actor's attention to be sustained towards external sources, in order to make the actor less self-focused and more instinctive and open as a result. As a trained actor and actor trainer, I began this research with an aim to clarify misunderstandings of the exercises, highlight the conditional aspects of process-based training, and dispel any sense of mystery about the psychological elements at play — knowledge that will benefit both actors and teachers alike, while offering a pedagogic analysis based on research applicable to actor training on a larger scale. What has become clear through this research is that the process must be respected, and sufficient time must be allocated, in order for the technique to work. Demonstrating how Meisner's exercises directly lead to reduced self-consciousness — through the lens of psychology of attention — validates the Meisner technique as an invaluable tool that should be included, in its entirety, within all drama school training.

This thesis addresses a knowledge gap manifest in the confusion and misinterpretation that the Meisner technique has encountered in its introduction and dissemination within the United Kingdom. As argued in Chapter 1 there is a discrepancy between how teachers of the technique have interpreted the work, and the original full process. This disparity ranges from ways of teaching the exercises, the time allocated to each, and most significantly, a lack of knowledge about the full extent of the work. This lack of knowledge often leads to the use of Meisner's exercises as intermittent tools, rather than as a longer process that requires adherence. These misconceptions and inconsistencies can be traced to a lack of published work that objectively analyses the technique, which arguably results from those with lineage to the creator making claims to the process or guarding it. By analysing the foundational exercises, this research has reframed the process through a psychological lens to explain how and why it creates a less self-conscious and more spontaneous performer. By bringing in a new, more concrete perspective to the workings of the technique and the psychological mechanisms supporting each

exercise, lineage-based questions and controversies can essentially become redundant, and through this thesis objective information becomes available to practitioners who can then develop and teach the process from a place of knowledge.

As stated in the introduction, part of the reason I was compelled to conduct this research was due to personal challenges with the language used around spontaneity when training actors, which is problematic and ill advised. Logically impossible commands such as 'stop thinking' and 'get out of your head' remain under-interrogated; especially as these widely used demands seldom provide adequate support or direction to the student in question. This thesis has analysed what such demands mean and how research into attentional networks, the flow state and deliberate and spontaneous mind wandering can be used to reframe this type of vocabulary in ways that can be more helpful to the students. By presenting how thought is always involved in impulsive performance, but needs to be balanced between inward and outward attention, this thesis opens up the interpretation of actors 'intellectualising' and gives the actor trainer a clear perspective from which to help the performer. Similarly, the research has demonstrated how the actor's thinking can be adjusted to sustain motivation, particularly regarding how we frame an objective in terms of gain vs. loss — a concept found within motivational theory on prevention and promotion focus.

### Reflection and summary

In Chapter 1, the history, origin and full scope of the Meisner technique was presented through a thorough examination of the literature available on the subject. This helped to highlight the Meisner technique's introduction to the UK and the subsequent misinterpretations to which the technique has been subject as a result of that process. It became clear to me in writing the chapter, however, that the lack of published works regarding Meisner's process, particularly from an analytical and psychological point of view, has been a significant contributing factor to the discrepancies that exist within the Meisner community. This acknowledgement established the importance of this thesis in terms of the available scholarship and the gap in knowledge an enquiry such as this would fill.

Chapter 2 analysed and compared self-awareness and self-consciousness in order to pinpoint the significant attributes of self-consciousness and bring clarification as to why self-consciousness is an issue for the actor. This research helped differentiate

between public and private self-consciousness and provided the reader with a clear understanding what type of self-consciousness would be referred to throughout the thesis. It also established why public self-consciousness — which is linked to performance pressure, social anxiety and inhibitory behaviour — is the clear choice of focus for this thesis, and that which Meisner's training aims to diminish.

Chapter 3 provided an in-depth understanding of the Repetition exercise from the perspective of Meisner himself, as well as from practitioners like Esper, Silverberg, Hart and Moseley. The exercises was also viewed from psychological angles — in particular research into the flow state, attention models and the notion of mind wandering — in order to discover insights into how and why the exercise works. The first section of the chapter examined several ways of introducing the exercise and its main purpose: to redirect attention from the self to the other through sustained observations and interactions. The following section explored literature on the psychology of attention in order to explain how and why the Repetition exercise works and the effect of the exercise on self-consciousness. The chapter revealed the Repetition exercise as a rich process, gradually increasing in difficulty and demand on the actors, challenging both stamina — with regards to attentional focus required — and habits, in hope of changing our perception and defence mechanisms. This critical reframing of the main workings of the Repetition exercise revealed the significance and fluidity of outward attention, the importance of process and the problem of politeness. The importance of the challenge-skill balance was introduced and explored in relation to the Meisner technique to keep attention external and avoid mind wandering. This highlighted the links between mind wandering and self-consciousness and the ways motivation and task-engagement combat this issue. The framing of this chapter through the psychology of attention, provided a strong argument to further consider the motivational aspects of external focus within the teaching the Meisner technique, which could lead to development in this area.

Following this in-depth analysis of the Repetition exercise, the first part of Chapter 4 focused on my own developments of the Repetition exercise process and an analysis of their effects on not just the actor, but also the actor trainer. This chapter was informed by my own practice and experience teaching the technique, coupled with knowledge derived from this research, which allows me to apply new awareness to the process through adjustments and additions. Many of the exercises have come about by adjusting the challenge-skill balance, which has also worked as a barometer

when deciding the order in which to introduce exercises in the process. It is crucial to understand that no matter how many times one works through the order of a process, the current student group will dictate the pace; lesson plans and schemes of work must be fluid so as to acknowledge and accommodate this. Further, it is only by applying the same attention to the students that the Meisner technique advocates in general that the teacher will know what works for each individual — challenging the tutor's sustained attention ability as well.

The second section of Chapter 4 focused on how the increasing problem of politeness in the classroom affects actor training in general, and the Meisner process in particular, as well as how my proposed developments combat this issue. Here I have shown how increasingly strict social conventions have come to result in the decline of spontaneity and instinct, while anxiety regarding potential offense has climbed to illogical levels. As stated in the chapter, this is something that, in my own experience, has increased in the last five years to become something that must be factored into Drama school training, as it often takes students longer to feel safe or comfortable in the space and truly act on impulse. This societal change demands that the instructor establish the studio as a separate, safe space earlier and with more effort than may have been previously necessary. Self-regulation draws from the same well as attention, which is why the Meisner technique works with such attentional demand that self-regulation and control suffers. In the beginning, because of the current nature of social conventions, this effect might be reversed, but this can be bypassed by making the exercises demand more attention. In this chapter I have proposed a prolonging of the initial stages to ease the students into the work and combat the challenge of politeness as a direct result of this research and observations.

Closing the focus on the Repetition exercise, the first two sections of Chapter 5 turned to the workings of two exercises, Independent Activity and Knock on the Door, both by exploring how the intention and key elements of the exercises are presented in Meisner specific literature as well as an investigation of the exercises through the lens of psychology of attention. By describing the demand placed on attention, it became clear that divided attention was employed at this stage, due to the automaticity that set in when the students started to master the Repetition exercise which — as described in Chapter 3 — strongly impacts on self-control, mind wandering and spontaneity and hence self-consciousness. Moreover, when Repetition has become embodied sufficiently to release total demand on one's



attention, the elements of difficulty, plausibility, urgency and specificity all work towards directing the attention outwards. The final section of Chapter 5 investigated the different motivational aspects of these exercises, and in particular how moving from promotion focus to prevention focus can sustain motivation even through failure while increasing effort applied to the task. Due to this finding, the value of flow at this stage was re-interrogated, and discovered to be a superfluous state during this phase of the training.

Finally, Chapter 6 mirrored the fourth chapter, by presenting my own developments of the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercises based on the results of this research. This chapter also interrogated how motivation and instinct can work together to create emotional connection. The developments and additions to the exercises and process were initially centred on the skill-challenge balance in the introduction of divided attention. Including pitfalls and student case studies helps the reader understand how the process unfolds and where and why adjustments are made. This balance still plays a part later on in the process, but instead of skill and challenge, we focus on balancing objective and observation. The adjustments made included the plausibility of the reason, embodied preparation, minimising the imaginative aspects — and thus the risk of excessive deliberate mind wandering — the use of prevention focus, threat situations and partner-focused objectives. All of the adjustments have been incorporated in order to address this objective-partner balance, in order that the objective and the circumstance do not out-weigh the external focus on the partner.

This section was followed by an investigation into the main differences between the reaction in Meisner technique and the counter-action in Active Analysis, in order to understand the place of instinct and motivation within the acting process. As this chapter was based on personal experience, I was keen to figure out how training impulse and instinctive reaction whilst incorporating planned actions could lead to emotional build-up. It became clear that connection to given circumstances was key for the instinctive reaction, but that motivation could play against the initial reaction and instead focus on a counter-action which was opposed to the impulse. This will lead to emotional build-up, especially if the stakes are high and you are working against something. As my investigation continued, the discovery was made that when we alter our impulsive reaction to an action (because of motivation) we employ self-regulation, which is a limited resource. It draws from the same well as emotion-

regulation, the way we regulate feelings as they occur. The discovery that these two regulatory functions use the same resource and can become depleted provided me with the understanding of what had happened during the exercise. My emotion regulation resource had become depleted due to using it to alter my immediate reaction to fit my counter-action, resulting in a stronger manifestation of emotion and the subsequent inability to keep playing my counter-action. Additionally, as noted in Chapter 5, the emotion regulation source is also the same source used by sustained attention. This means that by directing the attention to the partner and allowing motivation to change our instinctual reactions to counter-actions — this source will be depleted at a faster pace and allow the actor stronger emotional reactions and more spontaneity. The concluding section of Chapter 6 highlights the importance of training impulse in actors as well as the ways in which instinctive reaction works in conjunction with action on text. Moreover, I posit that the idea of the *action-reaction triangle*: inner reaction — counter-action — partner's action, which can present actors with an effective way of accessing emotions that are wholly based on the present, the given circumstances and attention to the partner. The combined aspects in this triangle could replace the use of memory, or substitutions, which can make the actor's attention turn inwards and risk the possibility of self-consciousness. This opens up new realms of inducing emotions, provided that the training of impulse is fully embodied beforehand so that the instinctive reaction has a chance to be formed and felt by the actor before adapting it to the motivation and partner.

### Main findings

Before commencing this research, I understood that Meisner's foundational exercises used redirection of attention to train the actor to be less self-focused, able to shift focus from one source to another. Attention stays external in the Repetition exercise due to the demands the exercise places on the participant to keep sustained focus on the other. While from personal experience I could ascertain how this limitation to self-focus made the student more spontaneous, I did not know how; the crucial finding that a different attentional brain network is activated during goal-directed tasks than when mind wandering occurs and further, that mind wandering can lead to self-consciousness and is not conducive to flow.

Finding that sustained external attention can facilitate flow, and in turn decrease mind wandering has illuminated the process of Repetition and task-focus, especially in terms of the skill-challenge balance. Relating the Repetition exercise to flow firmly establishes the skill-challenge element of the Repetition exercise, explains why the exercises are so carefully layered, and demonstrates that the technique must be taught as a step-by-step process and not a quick fix or interpolated tool. Further, this research validates how important the skill-challenge balance is — because of it being a fluid concept that needs constant, individual adjustment — it requires the tutor observing the exercise to commit to the same attentional demand as the participants. In this way, the tutor can realise when and why attention moves from the external to the internal and increase or decrease challenge accordingly. In particular, linking the notion of an objective to the initial stages of the Repetition exercise bridges the gap between observing and listening and the later stage of Independent Activity and Knock on the Door. This allows the students to find an easier way to engage their full attention on the external task, and in turn alleviates mind wandering and self-consciousness. As a task becomes more automated, sustained attention alone will not be enough to keep the attention on the task — this is where the challenge-skill level is crucial to keep the thoughts task-based. This signifies not only the importance of seeing this state as fluid, needing constant re-evaluation and adaptation to the individual, but also as something that should be adhered to in any forms of vocational teaching and development. By using an individual evaluation process, determining the ability and mind-set of each student, the skills and challenge balance could be continuously adjusted to a specific person resulting in better understanding, increased productivity and improved mental health. Feedback from students suffering from mental health issues has been very positive in terms of the decreased levels of anxiety they have experienced during the Repetition process — ranging from being able to sustain eye contact, diminished self-rumination and significant gains in confidence.

In terms of the Independent Activity and Knock on the Door exercises, the research has helped clarify the process immensely, as these are multifaceted exercises drawing on many different elements at once. I know from experience that, as a tutor, these exercises can be hard to manage if you are not sure what to look out for. Through this research, it has become clear that the reason we divide the attention between the task and the other person is to first create a greater challenge for the actor once the Repetition exercise becomes more automatic, and second, because

divided attention decreases self-control and hence makes the actor more spontaneous. By understanding this, we can adjust and pinpoint when the actor stops using divided attention and how this affects their instinct and self-consciousness.

In Independent Activity, the skill-challenge is adjusted again, this time letting urgency, stakes and difficulty direct the attention outward. As the mind is more likely to wander if attention turns from the task, it becomes critically important to keep the attention on task — hence the elements of urgency, specificity and difficulty in the exercise all need to be adhered to in order to ensure maximum commitment to the activity. The key finding in this chapter, however, is the difference between using prevention focus and promotion focus when establishing motivation — in particular as the difficulty of task increases. By encouraging the students to move from an objective where the emphasis is on gaining something (promotion), to an objective where the priority becomes preventing the loss of something (prevention) — motivation can be sustained for longer durations even when success seems unlikely.

### Primary applications

I believe that the revelation regarding the effect of prevention focus motivation on objectives is applicable to all actor training. This is because objectives lie at the heart of the majority of actor training, and ways that can ensure that an actor connects to — and is able to sustain — their objective whilst engaging with a task or another person is certainly beneficial. Making the students prepare to prevent a loss or attempt to maintain the status quo rather than gaining something can raise the stakes and prolong external motivation and engagement with task. Further, by encouraging objectives in terms of needing something from the partner, which makes it even more important to observe them, will allow the students to sustain their attention to the other and diminish self-focus and excessive mind wandering. When teaching students, actor trainers often say: “make the objective about the other person”, but this needs to be clearer in terms of needing something from the other person or changing something in the other, making the actor keep their attention on the other, rather on themselves. Getting away from someone or finding a way to tell them something brings the attention back to the self — but if it was phrased in terms of “making sure they don’t come closer to me, or touch me” / “I need them to not become upset when I tell them/I need their undivided attention” becomes about observing and attending the other, and hence not the self.

Uncovering of two different types of mind wandering has helped me explore a different way to address the “stop thinking” problem. Thinking about the task, or what you see before you is not necessarily bad for the task if the occurrences are controlled and limited — it is when mind wandering becomes something we cannot control that it takes us out of the moment. This means that “stop thinking” is a misleading phrase for actors, in that thought will often enter the situation, which is why we differentiate between spontaneous and deliberate mind wandering. Deliberate mind wandering, however, should be limited so as not to risk over-internalising the focus. By insisting on adherence to the Repetition exercise throughout the foundational exercises, and on the honest support of fellow actors to identify immediately when their partner’s attention becomes too internal, the onus falls on the support training actors provide each other, and trust becomes the cornerstone of the interaction. This, in turn, allows the actor to feel free from self-consciousness.

### Limitations and future research

As stated in the introduction, there are socio-political implications within Meisner’s process, for example exercises will most likely change when we are working closely with the opposite sex, in comparison to someone of our own gender. These changes could influence our impulses, self-consciousness, and sense of social norms, and in turn affect our sense of private space and learned behaviour — which could be explored more in future research. Furthermore, there is also scope to examine cultural differences between students from different countries and backgrounds undertaking the same exercises, and whether the same self-consciousness is present in different cultures. Would social norms and gender roles change between cultures? How might this affect the exercises? Building on the discoveries within this thesis, this research could be interesting to undertake in the future, particularly in terms of self-regulation and politeness or social conditioning.

As touched upon earlier, another avenue to explore might be to consider the technique in holistic and therapeutic terms, as this work helps participants re-focus on the present moment, and away from self-rumination. Self-rumination can affect bodily tensions as well as mental health; while research on the subject has not been conducted, experiences with students of mine improving in these areas during training leads me to believe in the technique’s potential to benefit anyone suffering

from too much internal focus, anxiety and mental health issues. In a holistic setting with a long-term application, the technique could perhaps re-direct that harmful attention in order to encourage self-acceptance and confidence building. Further, through my own experiences teaching the Meisner technique, I have observed great changes in non neuro-typical students, especially in ability to hold eye contact, release tensions and read others' emotional states. There are lots of possibilities for future research here, including the ones mentioned above and others I have not yet thought of or didn't have space to include.

### Mystery solved

The language around self-consciousness in actor training is out-dated and needs to be refined in order to better help actors. In this thesis, I have explained how the Meisner process can influence this particular concern, and how the skill-challenge balance is crucial to the success of that process. I have demonstrated that as the Meisner technique progresses, other aspects need balancing in terms of inward and outward attention; this can only happen if we are aware of the individual student and their needs. Gone are the days where we teach all actors the same things and hope they all follow the same path; due to the diverse nature of our students, holistic individual attention needs to be placed on each student in order for them to grow and achieve their potential. This puts the onus of attentional training onto the teaching practitioners as well. The sustained attention proposed and trained by the Meisner technique is the ideal way to interact with exercises from an actor trainer's point of view. Not only must we observe fully what happens with our students, but we must also constantly develop our understanding of and connection with the students' training, as we are engaging in a mirrored process with our own use of attention. Diminished concentration and fatigue become points of shared experience that allows the trainer to know fully when and how to adjust the balance elements for each student. This forces actor trainers to understand for themselves the exercises and processes, reduces the emphasis on lineage, and instead replaces it with a demand for deep, rigorous understanding of the techniques, to the point where adaptations can be thoughtfully made. This thesis thus offers a new perspective on the Meisner technique and another potential extension, this time within the realms of actor training — for actor trainers to find new ways to combat self-consciousness, use motivation to become present with other actors, and train emotional connection. By demonstrating that reaction and counter-action can work in conjunction with the objective to create

emotion and emotional build up, I have shown through this thesis that this technique is invaluable to any actor, works alongside other techniques that focus on objectives and actions such as Stanislavski's Active Analysis, and is crucial to emotional connection and affect in the actor.

Only when an idea stops being a feeling and starts being a workable fact can we adjust the concepts to different individuals, as we understand how and why we are doing this. In the UK, the Meisner technique is not as well-known as other techniques, especially not through academic text and analytical publications. The fact that the technique is a step-by-step process makes it imperative that the process is understood and adhered to, especially when making developments or reductions to the exercises. It is crucial to understand why the exercises are done, how they affect the students and what the reasoning is behind them; this knowledge increases the efficacy of the training and makes the inclusion of the technique in all actor-training institutions more likely.

In conclusion, this thesis constitutes a novel contribution to knowledge by giving substance to the concepts outlined above. Many of these findings will be practically and experientially familiar to other practitioners, but this thesis uniquely substantiates the perceived knowledge with a contextual psychological knowledge, turning some often-voiced "hunches" about Meisner technique into concrete theory. This new way of understanding Meisner technique diminishes the mystery of the process and empowers teachers who want to use the work properly to allow the individual to grow. This research thus provides an in-depth account of a technique that has too often been miss-taught, misunderstood or simply avoided due to the knowledge required to teach the process. Most importantly, the thesis shows that if taught in a process-driven fashion — with great attention to individual needs — the Meisner technique can surpass its challenges of dissemination in the UK to be welcomed into the full actor-training canon, and as a result allow any training actor to become more spontaneous and less self-conscious.

## **Bibliography**

Aarts, H. & Dijksterhuis, A. (2003). The silence of the library: Environment, situational norm, and social behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84: 18-28.

Abbott, J. (2012). *The Acting Book*, Nick Hern Books, London.

Abuhamdeh, S. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2012). Attentional involvement and intrinsic motivation. *Motivation and Emotion*, 36(3): 257-267.

Abuhamdeh, S. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2012). The Importance of Challenge for the Enjoyment of Intrinsically Motivated, Goal-Directed Activities, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(3): 317-330.

Agnoli, S. & Corazza, G.E. (2015). TRIZ as Seen through the DIMAI Creative Thinking Model, *Procedia Engineering*, 131: 807-815.

Agnoli, S., Corazza, G.E., Vannucci, M. & Pelagatti, C. (2018). Exploring the Link Between Mind Wandering, Mindfulness, and Creativity: A Multidimensional Approach. *Creativity Research Journal*, 30(1): 41-53.

Alderson, W. (2016). Email interview with author, 21st of January.

Alfreds, M. (2007). *Different Every Night*. Nick Hern Books, London.

Asher, J. (2007). *Adler vs. Strasberg: The Great Controversy in American Acting*. Insight Media, New York.

Ashinoff, B.K. & Abu-Akel, A. (2019). Hyperfocus: the forgotten frontier of attention. *Psychological Research*: doi.org/10.1007/s00426-019-01245-8

Baird, B., Smallwood, J., Mrazek, M., Kam, J., Franklin, M.S & Schooler, J. (2012). Inspired by Distraction: Mind Wandering Facilitates Creative Incubation. *Psychology Science*, 23(10): 1117-1122.

Barba, E. & Savarese, N. (1991). *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: the Secret Art of the Performer*, Routledge, London.



- Barba, E. (1995). *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*. Routledge, London.
- Barkley, R.A. (1997). Behavioral inhibition, sustained attention, and executive functions: Constructing a unifying theory of ADHD. *Psychology Bulletin*, 121(1): 65-94.
- Baron-Cohen, S. (1997). *Mindblindness: An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*. MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Barrow, R. (2005) On the Duty of not Taking Offence. *Journal of Moral Education*, 34 (3): 265-275.
- Bartow, A. (2006). *Handbook of Acting Techniques*, Nick Hern Books, London.
- Baumeister, R. & Vohs, K. (2007). *Self-Regulation, Ego Depletion, and Motivation*. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 1:115-128.
- Baumeister, R.F. (1984). Choking Under Pressure: Self-consciousness and Paradoxical Effects of Incentives on Skilful Performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(3): 610-620.
- Beaty, R.E. (2015). The neuroscience of musical improvisation. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 51: 108-117.
- Beaty, R.E., Silvia, P.J., Benedek, M. & Kaufman, S. B. (2015). Default and Executive Network Coupling Supports Creative Idea Production. *Scientific Report*, 5, article no 10964.
- Beilock, S. L., Carr, T. H., MacMahon, C., & Starkes, J. L. (2002). When paying attention becomes counterproductive: Impact of divided versus skill-focused attention on novice and experienced performance of sensorimotor skills. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 8(1): 6-16.
- Beilock, S.L. & Carr, T.H. (2001). On the Fragility of Skilled Performance: What Governs Choking Under Pressure? *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 130(4): 701-725.
- Benedetti, J. (2008). *Stanislavsky and the Actor*. Routledge, New York.

- Berliner, P. F. (1994). *Thinking in jazz: The infinite art of improvisation*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Bindemann, M., Burton, A.M., Hooge, I.T.C., Jenkins, R. & De Haan, E.H. F. (2005). Faces retain attention. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 12(6): 1048-1053.
- Birdwhistell, R.L. (1955) Background to Kinesics, *Review of General Semantics*, 13: 10-18.
- Blair, R. (2000). The Method and the Computational Theory of Mind. In Krasner, D (Ed) *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York.
- Blair, R. (2007). *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*. Routledge, London.
- Blakemore, S.J. & Decety, J. (2001). From the Perception of Action to the Understanding of Intention. *National Review of Neuroscience*, 2(8): 561-567.
- Blascovich, J. & Tomaka, J. (1996). The Biopsychosocial Model of Arousal Regulation. *Advanced Experimental Social Psychology*, 28:1-51.
- Blascovich, J., Mendes, W.B, Hunter, S.B & Salomon, K. (1999). Social “Facilitation” as Challenge and Threat. *Journal of Personal Social Psychology*, 77: 68-77.
- Botvinick, M. (2007). Multilevel Structure in Behaviour and in the Brain: A Model of Fuster’s hierarchy. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 10:1615-1626.
- Braboszcz, C. & Delorme, A. (2011). Lost in thoughts: Neural markers of low alertness during mind wandering. *Neuroimage*, 54(4): 3040-3047.
- Braver, T. S. (2012). The variable nature of cognitive control: A dual mechanisms framework. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 16(2): 106-113.
- Brehm, J. & Self, E.A. (1989). The Intensity of Motivation, In M.R Rosenzweig & L.W Porter (Eds) *Annual Review of Psychology*. Annual Reviews Inc, Palo Alto.
- Broadbent, D.E. (1958). *Perception and Communication*. Pergamon Press, Oxford.

- Brown, P. & Levinson, S.C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in language Usage*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S.C. (2006). Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. In: Jaworski, A. & Coupland, N. (eds) *The Discourse Reader*. Routledge, London.
- Bruya, B. & Tang, Y. (2018). Is Attention Really Effort? Revisiting Daniel Kahneman's Influential 1973 Book *Attention and Effort*. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9: article no: 1133: doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01133
- Burgoon, J.K., Guerro, L.K. & Floyd, K. (2010). *Nonverbal Communication*, Routledge, London.
- Cacioppo, S., Fontang, F., Patel, N., Decety, J., Monteleaone, G. & Cacioppo, J.T. (2014). Intention Understanding over T: a Neuroimaging Study on Shared Representations and Tennis Return Predictions. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*: doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00781
- Caine, R. (2008). *Natural Learning: The Basis for Raising and Sustaining High Standards of Real World Performance*, Position paper for The Natural Learning Institute.
- Calero, C.I, Salles, A., Semelman, M. & Sigman, M. (2013). Age and Gender Dependent Development of Theory of Mind in 6 to 8 years Old Children. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 17(7): 281.
- Cannon, D. (2012). *In Depth Acting*. Oberon Books, London.
- Capa, R.L., Audiffren, M. & Ragot, S. (2008). The Effects of Achievement motivation, task difficulty, and goal difficulty on physiological, behavioural, and subjective effort. *Psychophysiology*, 45(5): 859-868.
- Carlson, M. (2000). Acting and Answerability. In Krasner, D (Ed) *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York.
- Carnicke, S. (2008). *Stanislavski in Focus: An Acting Master for the Twenty-First Century*, Taylor and Francis, New York.

- Carnicke, S. (2010). Stanislavski's System: Pathways for the Actor. In Hodge's (Ed) *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. Routledge, London.
- Carnicke, S.M. (2018) Email interview with the author, 7th of June.
- Carver, C. & Scheier, M. (2017). Self-Regulatory Functions Supporting Motivated Action, in A. Elliot (ed) *Advances in Motivation Science (vol 4)*, Elsevier, New York.
- Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M. F. (1981). *Attention to Self-regulation: A Control-Theory Approach to Human Behaviour*, Springer, New York.
- Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M. F. (2012). A model of behavioral self-regulation. In *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, 1: 505-525.
- Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M.F. (1978). Self-focusing Effects of Dispositional Self-consciousness, mirror presence, and audience presence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36: 324-332.
- Carver, C.S. & Scheier, M.F. (1998). *On the Self-regulation of Behavior*. Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Carver, C.S. & Scheier, M.F. (2013). Self regulation of Action and Affect. In Vohs, K. & Baumeister, R. (Eds) *Handbook of Self-regulation: Research Theory and Application*. Guildford Press, Guildford.
- Carver, C.S., Sutton, S.K., & Scheier, M.F. ( 2000). Action, Emotion, and Personality: Emerging Conceptual Integration. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26: 741-751.
- Carver, C S. & Glass, D.C. (1976). The Self-Consciousness Scale: A Discriminant Validity Study. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 40: 169-172.
- Chai, X.J., Castañón, A.N., Öngür, D. & Whitfield-Gabrieli, S. (2012). Anticorrelations in resting state networks without global signal regression. *Neuroimage*, 59(2): 1420-1428.
- Chandler, C.L. & Connell, J.P. (1987). Children's Intrinsic, Extrinsic and Internalized Motivation: A Developmental Study of Children's Reasons for Liked and Disliked Behaviours. *Developmental Psychology*, 5(4): 357-365.

- Chaparro, R.A.H.(2015). *Behavioral and neural correlates of spontaneous attentional decoupling: towards an understanding of mind wandering*. Cognitive Sciences. Université Pierre et Marie Curie - Paris VI. PhD Thesis
- Cherry, E.C. (1953). Some Experiments on the Recognition of Speech with One and with Two Ears. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 25: 975-979.
- Christoff, K., Gordon, A.M., Smallwood, J., Smith, R., Schooler (2009). Experience Sampling during fMRI Reveals Default Network and Executive System Contributions to Mind Wandering, *PNAS*, 106(21): 8719-8724.
- Cole, G.W (2015). The Reality of Doing: Discussion of Arthur A. Gray's Paper. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 25(6): 743-750.
- Cole, M.W. & Schneider, W. (2007). The cognitive control network: Integrated cortical regions with dissociable functions. *Neuroimage*, 37(1): 343-360.
- Cole, T. & Strasberg, L. (1955). *Acting : a Handbook of the Stanislavsky Method*. Crown Publishers, New York.
- Connolly, A.C., Long, S.J., Guntupalli, S., Oosterhof, N., Halchenko, Y.O., Nastase, S.A., Visconti di Oleggio Castello, M., Abdi, H., Jobst, B.C., Gobbini, I. & Haxby, J.V. (2016). How the Human Brain Represents Perceived Dangerousness or "Predacity" of Animals. *Journal of Neuroscience*, 36(19): 5373-5384.
- Connolly, C.T. & Tenenbaum, G. (2010). Exertion-Attention-Flow Linkage Under Different Workloads. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 40(5): 1123-1145.
- Conway, A.R.A., Kane, M.J., Bunting, M.F., Hambrick, D.Z., Wilhelm, O. & Engle, R.W. (2005). Working Memory Span Tasks: A Methodological Review and User's Guide. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 12(5): 769-786.
- Cook, A. & Blair, R. (2016). *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies*, Methuen Drama, London.
- Corbetta, M. & Shulman, G.L. (2002). Control of goal-directed and stimulus-driven attention in the brain. *National Review of Neuroscience*, 3(3): 201-215.

- Corradi-Dell'Acqua, C., Hofstetter, C. & Vuilleumier, P. (2014). Cognitive and Affective Theory of Mind share the same Local patterns of Activity in Posterior Temporal but not Medial Prefrontal Cortex. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 9(8): 1175-1184.
- Cortney, C.C. (2000). The Neighborhood Playhouse. In Krasner, D (Ed) *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York.
- Crohn Schmitt, N. (1990). *Actors and Onlookers: Theatre and Twentieth-Century Scientific Views of Nature*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M & Nakamura, J. (2012). Emerging Goals and the Self-Regulation of Behavior in R. Wyer (Ed) *Perspectives on Behavioural Self-regulation*, Psychology Press, Hove.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. & Csíkszentmihályi, I.S. (1988). *Optimal experience: psychological studies of flow in consciousness*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. & Figurski, T.J. (1982). Self-awareness and aversive experience in everyday life. *Journal of Personality*, 50(1): 15-19.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. (1984). Creativity: the social psychology of creativity. *Science*, 225(4665): 918-919.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. (1990). *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*, Harper Perennial, New York.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. (1996). *Wired Magazine*, doi: [www.wired.com/1996/09/czik/](http://www.wired.com/1996/09/czik/)
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. Basic Books, London.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. (2000). *Beyond boredom and anxiety*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. (2002) *Creativity: flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*, Harper Perennial, New York.

- Csíkszentmihályi, M. (2014). *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology*. Springer, New York.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M., Rathunde, K. & Whalen, S. (1993). *Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success and Failure*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Csíkszentmihályi, M. & Nakamura, J. (2009). The Concept of Flow. In Snyder, C.R. & Lopez, S.J (Ed) *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford Press, Oxford.
- Culpeper, J. (2005). Impoliteness and Entertainment in the Television Quiz Show: The Weakest Link. *Journal of Politeness Research, Language, Behaviour, Culture*, 1(1): 35-72.
- Culpeper, J. (2009). *Impoliteness: Using and Understanding the Language of Offence*. ESRC project website: [www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/impoliteness/](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/impoliteness/)
- Culpeper, J. (2011). Politeness and impoliteness. In: Aijmer, K. & Andersen, G. (eds.) *Sociopragmatics: Handbook 5 Handbooks of Pragmatics*, De Greyter, Berlin.
- DaSilveira, A., DeSouza, M.L., & Gomes, W.B. (2015). Self-consciousness Concept and Assessment in Self-report Measures. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, Article ID 930.
- Daboo, J. (2013). Stanislavski and the Psychophysical in Western Acting, in Zarrilli, P.B, Daboo, J. & Loukes, R. (Eds) *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Damasio, A.(2000). *The Feeling Of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*. Vintage, London.
- David, N., Aumann, C., Santos, N. S., Bewernick, B. H., Eickhoff, S. B., Newen, A., Shah, N. J., Fink, G. R., and Vogelei, K. (2008). Differential Involvement of the Posterior Temporal Cortex in Mentalizing but not Perspective Taking. *Social Cognitive Affective Neuroscience*, 3: 279-289.
- De Havas, J.A., Parimal, S., Soon, C.S. & Chee, M.W.L. (2012). Sleep deprivation reduces default mode network connectivity and anti-correlation during rest and task performance. *Neuroimage*, 59(2): 1745-1751.

- DeBono, A., Shmueli, D. & Muraven, M. (2011). Rude and Inappropriate: The Role of Self-Control in Following Social Norms, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(1): 136-146.
- Debus, M.E., Sonnentag, S., Deutsch, W. & Nussbeck, F.W. (2014). Making Flow Happen: The Effects of Being Recovered on Work-Related Flow Between and Within Days, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 99(4): 713-722.
- Decety, J. (2004). Motor Cognition: a New Paradigm to Study Self-Other Interactions, *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 14: 259-263.
- Deci, E.L. & Cascio, W.F. (1972). *Changes in Intrinsic Motivation as a Function of Negative Feedback and Threats*. Paper presented at the Eastern Psychological Association Convention, April 1972.
- Deci, E.L. (1975). *Intrinsic Motivation*. Plenum, New York.
- Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. Plenum, New York.
- Deci, E.L., Koestner, R. & Ryan, M.R. (1999). A Meta-Analytic Review of Experiments Examining the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125: 627-668.
- Dennis, T.A., Chao-Cheng Chen, M.S & McCandliss, B.D. (2008). Threat-Related Attentional Biases: An Analysis of Three Attention Systems. *Depress Anxiety*, 25(6): 1-10.
- Denny B. T., Kober H., Wager T. D., Ochsner K. N. (2012). A Meta-Analysis of Functional Neuroimaging Studies of Self- and Other Judgments Reveals a Spatial Gradient for Mentalizing in Medial Prefrontal Cortex. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 24: 1742-1752.
- Deutsch, J.A. & Deutsch D. (1963). Attention: Some Theoretical Considerations. *Psychological Review*, 70(1): 80-90.
- Diamond, A. (2013). Executive Functions. *The Annual Review of Psychology*, 64: 136-168.



- Dickman, S. J. (1990). Functional and dysfunctional impulsivity: Personality and cognitive correlates. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(1): 95-102.
- Diener, E. (1979). Deindividuation, Self-awareness, and Disinhibition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(7):1160-1171.
- Dixon, M.L., Andrews-Hanna, J.R., Spreng, R.N., Irving, Z.C., Mills, C., Gern, M. & Christoff, K. (2017). Interactions between the default network and dorsal attention network vary across default subsystems, time, and cognitive states. *Neuroimage*, 15(147): 632-649.
- Donellan, D (2005) *The actor and the target*. Nick Hern Books, London.
- Donnay, G.F., Rankin, S.K., Lopéz-González, M., Jiradejvong, P. & Limb, C.J. (2014). Neural substrates of interactive musical improvisation: An fMRI study of 'trading fours' in jazz. *PLoS One*, 9(2), article no: e88665.
- Dosenbach, N.U.F., Visscher, K.M., Palmer, E.D., Miezin, F.M., Wenger, K.K., Kang, H.C., Burgund, E.D., Grimes, A.L., Schlaggar, B.L. & Petersen, S.E. (2006). A Core System for the Implementation of Task Sets. *Neuron*, 50(5): 799-812.
- Drengner, J., Sachse, M., and Furchheim, P. (2009). Flow in Consumer Research: a Novel Approach, *Advances in Consumer Research*, 36: 670-671.
- Driver, J. (2001). A Selective View of Selective Attention Research from the Past Century. *British Journal of Psychology*, 92: 53-78.
- Duncan, J. (2010). The multiple-demand (MD) system of the primate brain: Mental programs for intelligent behaviour. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 14(4): 172-179.
- Durham, K. (2004). Acting on and off: Sanford Meisner Reconsidered. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 23(3): 151-163.
- Duval, S. & Wicklund, R.A. (1972). *A Theory of Objective Self Awareness*. Academic Press, London.
- Duval, S. & Wicklund, R.A. (1973). Effects of Objective Self-awareness on Attribution of Causality. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 9: 17-31.

Dvorkin, A.Y., Ramaiya, M., Larson, E.B., Zollman, F.S., Hsu, N., Pacini, S., Shah, A. & Patton, J.L. (2013). A "Virtually Minimal" Visuo-haptic Training of Attention in Severe Traumatic Brain Injury. *Journal of Neuroengineering and Rehabilitation*, 10(92): [www.jneuroengrehab.com/content/10/1/92](http://www.jneuroengrehab.com/content/10/1/92)

D'Souza, D. (1991). *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*. The Free Press, New York.

Easterbrook, J.A (1959). The effect of emotion on cue utilization and the organization of behaviour. *Psychol Rev*, 66: 183-201.

Ebrary, I., McConachie, B.A. and Hart, F.E. (2006). *Performance and cognition theatre studies and the cognitive turn*. Routledge, New York.

Egeth, H. E. & Yantis, S. (1997). Visual Attention: Control, Representation, and Time Course. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 48: 269-297.

Eichstaedt, J. & Silvia, P. J. (2003). Noticing the Self: Implicit Assessment of Self-focused Attention Using Word Recognition Latencies. *Social Cognition*, 21: 349-361.

Engelmann, J.B, Damaraju, E., Padmala, S. & Pessoa, L. (2009). Combined Effects of Attention and Motivation on Visual Task Performance: Transient and Sustained Motivational Effects. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 3(4): 1-16.

Engelmann, J.B. & Pessoa, L. (2007). Motivation Sharpens Exogenous Spatial Attention. *Emotion*, 7: 668-674.

Engeser, S. & Rheinberg, F. (2008). Flow, performance and moderators of challenge-skill balance. *Motivation and Emotion*, 32(2): 158-172.

Engeser, S. & Schiepe-Tiska, A. (2012). Historical Lines and an Overview of Current Research on Flow. In Engeser, S. (Ed) *Advances in Flow Research*. Springer, New York.

Engeser, S., & Schiepe-Tiska, A. (2012). Historical lines and an overview of current research on flow. In Engeser S. (ed.). *Advances in flow research*. Springer Verlag, New York.

Equality Act 2010 (2010). Government Legislation. Available at: [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents)

- Esper, W & DiMarco, D. (2008). *The Actor's Art and Craft: William Esper Teaches the Meisner Technique*. Anchor, New York.
- Esper, W & DiMarco, D. (2014). *The Actor's Guide to Creating a Character: William Esper Teaches the Meisner Technique*. Anchor, New York.
- Eustis, M. (2008). 'Paul Muni: A Profile and a Self-Portrait, in Laurence Senelick (Ed) *Theatre Arts on Acting*. Routledge, London.
- Euston, D.R., Gruber, A.J. & McNaughton, B.L. (2012). The Role of Medial Prefrontal Cortex in Memory and Decision Making. *Neuron*, 76(6): 1057-1070.
- Evans, D.R., Baer, R.A. & Segerstrom, S.C. (2009). The Effects of Mindfulness and Self-consciousness on Persistence. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 47(4): 379-382.
- Eysenck, M. W., Derakshan, N., Santos, R., & Calvo, M. G. (2007). Anxiety and cognitive performance: attentional control theory. *Emotion*, 7(2): 336.
- Faculty page of The Sanford Meisner Centre:  
[www.themeisnercenter.com/faculty.html](http://www.themeisnercenter.com/faculty.html). Accessed 1st of August 2019.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). Political Correctness: the politics of culture and language. *Discourse and Society*, 14 (1): 17-28.
- Fenigstein, A. (1979). Self-consciousness, Self-attention, and Social Interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37: 75-86.
- Fenigstein, A. (1984). Self-consciousness and the Over-perception of Self as a Target. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47: 860-870.
- Fenigstein, A. (1987). On the Nature of Public and Private Self-consciousness. *Journal of Personality*, 55(3): 543-554.
- Fenigstein, A., Scheier, M.F. & Buss, A.H. (1975). Public and Private Self-consciousness: Assessment and Theory. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 43(4): 522-527.

- Fingelkurts, A. A., & Fingelkurts, A. A. (2011). Persistent operational synchrony within brain default-mode network and self-processing operations in healthy subjects. *Brain and Cognition*, 75(2): 79-90.
- Finke, R.A. (1992). *Creative cognition: theory, research, and applications*. MIT Press, London.
- Finnigan, F., Schulze, D., & Smallwood, J. (2007). Alcohol and the wandering mind: A new direction in the study of alcohol on attentional lapses. *The Journal of Endocrine Genetics*, 6(2): 189-199.
- Fornito, A., Zalesky, A., Pantelis, C. & Bullmore, E.T. (2012). Schizophrenia, neuroimaging and connectomics. *Neuroimage*, 62(4): 2296-2314.
- Foster, B.L., Rangarajan, V., Shirer, W.R. & Parvizi, J. (2015). Intrinsic and Task-Dependent Coupling of Neuronal Population Activity in Human Parietal Cortex. *Neuron*, 86(2): 578-590.
- Fox, E., Russo, R., Bowles, R. & Dutton, K. (2001). Do Threatening Stimuli Draw or Hold Visual Attention in Subclinical Anxiety? *Experimental Psychology General*, 130: 681-700.
- Fox, E., Russo, R., Bowles, R. & Dutton, K. (2002). Attentional Bias for Threat: Evidence for Delayed Disengagement from Emotional Faces. *Cognitive Emotion*, 16: 355-379.
- Fox, M.D., Corbetta, M., Snyder, A.Z., Vincent, J. & Raichle, M. (2006). Spontaneous Neuronal Activity Distinguishes Human Dorsal and Ventral Attention Systems. *PNAS*, 103(26): 10046-10051.
- Fox, M.D., Snyder, A.Z., Vincent, J., Corbetta, M., Van Essen, D. & Raichle, M. (2005). The Human Brain Is Intrinsically Organized into Dynamic, Anticorrelated Functional Networks. *PNAS*, 102(27): 9673-9678.
- Franzoi, S. L., Davies, M. H., and Markwiese, B. (1990). A Motivational Explanation for the Existence of Private Self-consciousness Differences. *Journal of Personality*, 58: 641-65.

- Franzoi, S.L. & Brewer, L.C. (1984). The Experience of Self-awareness and its Relation to Levels of Self-consciousness: An Experiential Sampling Study. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 18: 522-540.
- Fraser, B. (1990). Perspectives on Politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14(2): 193-365.
- Frith, C. (2007). *Making Up the Mind: How the Brain Creates Our Mental World*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Fullagar, C.J., Knight, P.A. & Sovern, H.S. (2013). Challenge/Skill Balance, Flow, and Performance Anxiety. *Applied Psychology*, 62(2): 236-259.
- Fuster, J. M. (1990). Prefrontal cortex and the bridging of temporal gaps in the perception-action cycle. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 608: 318-336.
- Fuster, J. M. (2004). Upper Processing Stages of Perception-Action Cycle. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 8(4): 143-145.
- Gailliot, M, Zell, A. & Baumeister, R. (2014). Having Used Self-Control Reduces Emotion Regulation—Emotion Regulation as Relying on Interchangeably Used “Self-Control Energy”. *Open Access Library Journal*, 1:1-14.
- Gendolla, G.H.E., Wright, R.A. & Richter, M. (2012). Effort Intensity: Some Insight From the Cardiovascular System. In R.M Ryan (Ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Human Motivation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Giambra, L.M. (1995). A laboratory method for investigating influences on switching attention to task-unrelated imagery and thought. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 4(1): 1-21.
- Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Boston.
- Gibson, J.J. (1966). *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*. Houghton Mifflin and Company, Oxford.
- Gilberg, S.J., Dumontheil, I., Simons, J.S., Frith, C.D. & Burgess, P.W. (2007). Comment on ‘Wandering Minds: The Default Network and Stimulus Independent Thought’. *Science*, 317(5834): 43.

- Gillett, J. (2014). *Acting Stanislavski: A Practical Guide to Stanislavski's Approach and Legacy*. Bloomsbury, London.
- Giorelli, G. & Sinigaglia, C. (2007). Perception in Action. *ACTA Biomed*, 78: 49-57.
- Glass, A. L., Holyoak, K. J. (1986). *Cognition*, Random House, London.
- Gloor, P., Oster, D. & Fischbach, K. (2013). JazzFlow—Analyzing “Group Flow” Among Jazz Musicians Through “Honest Signals”. *German Journal on Artificial Intelligence*, 27(1): 37-43.
- Godden, D.R. & Baddley, A.D. (1975). Context-Dependent Memory in Two Natural Environments: on Land and Underwater. *British Journal of Psychology*, 66(3): 325-331.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour*, Penguin, London.
- Goldberg, L. S. & Grandey, A. A. (2007). Display rules versus display autonomy: Emotion regulation, emotional exhaustion, and task performance in a call center simulation. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 12: 301-318.
- Golland, Y., Bentin, S., Gelbard, H., Benjamini, Y., Heller, R., Nir, Y., et al. (2007). Extrinsic and intrinsic systems in the posterior cortex of the human brain revealed during natural sensory stimulation. *Cerebral Cortex*, 17(4): 766-777.
- Gonsalves, A. (2012) Meisner Training, in Abbott, J. *The Acting Book*, Nick Hern Books. London.
- Gordon, M. (2009). *Stanislavsky in America: An Actor's Workbook* Routledge, New York.
- Grant, A. (2001). Rethinking Psychological Mindedness: Metacognition, Self-reflection, and Insight. *Behavioural Change*, 18: 8-17.
- Gray, A. (2015). Living Truthfully Under Imaginary Circumstances: Improvisation in Psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 25: 725-742.
- Gray, P. (1964). The Reality of Doing. *The Tulane Drama Review*, 9(1): 136-155.

- Haggard, P. (2003). Intentional Action: Conscious Experience and Neural Prediction. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 12: 695-707.
- Haggard, P. (2005). Conscious Intention and Motor Cognition. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 9:290-295.
- Halba, H. (2012). *Play, but Don't Play Games! The Meisner Technique Reconsidered*. Theatre Topics, 22(2): 127-136.
- Hall, S. (1994). Some "Politically Incorrect" Pathways Through PC', in S. Dunant (ed.) *The War of the Words: The Political Correctness Debate*, Virago Press, London.
- Hallowell, E. M. & Ratey, J. J. (1994). *Answers to distraction*. Pantheon Books: New York.
- Handy, T.C. & Kam, J.W.Y. (2015). Mind wandering and selective attention to the external world. *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 69(2): 183-189.
- Hansen, E. B., & Breivik, G. (2001). Sensation seeking as a predictor of positive and negative risk behaviour among adolescents. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 30(4): 627-640.
- Hao, N., Wu, M., Runco, M. A., & Pina, J. (2015). More mind wandering, fewer original ideas: Be not distracted during creative idea generation. *Acta Psychologica*, 161: 110-116.
- Harris, D. J., Vine, S. J., & Wilson, M. R. (2017). Is flow really effortless? The complex role of effortful attention. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 6(1), 103-114.
- Harris, D.J., Wilson, M. & Vine, S. (2017). The role of attentional control in flow states. *Cognitive Processing*, 18(3): 343-347.
- Hart, V. (2008). Meisner Technique: Teaching the Work of Sanford Meisner, in Bartow, A. (Ed) *Handbook of Acting Techniques*, Nick Hern Books, London.
- Hatfield, B.D., Haufler, A.J., Hung, T.M. & Spalding, T.W. (2004). Electroencephalographic Studies of Skilled Psychomotor Performance. *Journal of Clinical Neurophysiology*, 21(3): 144-156.

- Hentoff, N. (1992). *Free speech for me but not for thee*. Harper Collins, London.
- Herrera, M. d. C., et al. (2017). To confront versus not to confront: Women's perception of sexual harassment. *The European Journal of Psychology Applied to Legal Context*: doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpal.2017.04.002
- Higgins, E.T. (1997). Beyond Pleasure and Pain. *American Psychologist*, 52: 1280-1300.
- Hodge, A. (2010). *Twentieth Century Actor training*. Routledge, London.
- Hughes, G. (2010). *Political Correctness — a History of Semantics and Culture*. Wiley-Blackwell, London.
- Hull, R. (2016). The Art of Non Verbal Communication in Practice, *The Hearing Journal*, 69(5): 22.
- Hutchison, J.C. & Tenenbaum, G. (2007). Attention focus during physical effort: The mediating role of task intensity. *Psychology of sport and science*, 8(2): 233-245.
- Hytonen-Ng, E. (2016). *Experiencing "Flow" in Jazz Performance*. Routledge: London.
- Ickes, W.J., Wicklund, R.A. & Ferris, C.B. (1973). Objective Self-awareness and Self-esteem. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 9: 202-219.
- In memoriam page of Sanford Meisner. The William Alderson Acting Studio: [www.aldersonstudio.com/to-sandy](http://www.aldersonstudio.com/to-sandy). Accessed 1st of August 2019.
- Ingold, T. (Ed.) (2000). *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. Routledge, London.
- Ingram, R.E. (1990). Self-focused Attention in Clinical Disorders: Review and Conceptual Model. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107(2): 156-76.
- Isoda, M. & Noritake, A. (2013). What Makes the Dorsomedial Frontal Cortex Active During Reading The Mental States of Others? *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 7: 232.
- Jackman, C.J. (2016). Training, Insight and Intuition in Creative Flow, in Blair, R. & Cook, A. (Eds) *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies*, Bloomsbury, London.



- Jackson, S.A. & Csíkszentmihályi, M. (1999). *Flow in Sports*, Human Kinetics, Champaign.
- James, W. (1884). What Is an Emotion? *Mind*, 9(34): 188-205.
- Jarrett, J. (2016). Email interview with author, 20th of January.
- Josipovic, Z., Dinstein, I., Weber, J., & Heeger, D. J. (2012). Influence of meditation on anti-correlated networks in the brain. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 5, article no: 183.
- Kahneman, D. & Treisman, A. (1984). Changing views of attention and automaticity. In R. Parasuraman (ed.). *Varieties of attention*, Academic Press, Orlando.
- Kahneman, D. (1973). *Attention and effort*. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Penguin, London.
- Kam, J.W.Y. & Handy, T.C. (2013). The Neurocognitive Consequences of the Wandering Mind: a Mechanistic Account of Sensory-motor Decoupling. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4(725): doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00725
- Kam, J.W.Y., Dao, E., Farley, J., Fitzpatrick, K., Smallwood, J., Schooler, J.W. & Handy, T.C. (2010). Slow fluctuations in attentional control of sensory cortex. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 23(2): 460-470.
- Kane, M.J. & Engle, R.W. (2003). Working-Memory Capacity and the Control of Attention: The Contributors of Goal Neglect, Response Competition, and Task Set to Stroop Interference. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 132(1): 47-70.
- Katsuki, F. & Constantinidis, C. (2014). Bottom-Up and Top-Down Attention: Different Processes and Overlapping Neural Systems. *Neuroscientist*, 20(5): 509-521.
- Kaufman, S.B. (2013). Opening up Openness to Experience: A four-factor model and relations to creative achievement in the arts and sciences. *The Journal of Creative Behaviour*, 47(4): 233-255.

- Kawabata, M., Mallett, C. J. & Jackson, S. A. (2008). The flow state scale-2 and dispositional flow scale-2: Examination of factorial validity and reliability for Japanese adults. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 9(4): 465-485.
- Kee, Y. H. & Wang, C. K. J. (2008). Relationships between mindfulness, flow dispositions and mental skills adoption: A cluster analytic approach. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 9(4): 393-411.
- Kelly, G. A. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs (vols. 1 and 2)*. Norton, London.
- Kemp, R. (2012). *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells us About Performance*. Routledge, London.
- Kennedy, P., Miele, D.B. & Metcalfe, J. (2014). The cognitive antecedents and motivational consequences of the feeling of being in the zone. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 30: 48-61.
- Kerns, K.A., Eso, K. & Thomson, J. (1999). Investigation of a Direct Intervention for Improving Attention in Young Children with ADHD. *Developmental Neuropsychology*, 16(2): 273-295.
- Killingsworth, M.A. & Gilbert, D.T. (2010). A Wandering Mind is an Unhappy Mind. *Science*, 330(6006): doi: 10.1126/science.1192439
- Kim, H. (2012). A dual-subsystem model of the brain's default network: Self-referential processing, memory retrieval processes, and autobiographical memory retrieval. *NeuroImage*, 61(4): 966-977.
- Kinchla, R. A (1992). Attention. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 43: 711-742.
- Kinchla, R. A. (1980). The measurement of attention. In R. S. Nickerson (ed.). *Attention and Performance*, Lawrence Erlbaum, New Jersey.
- Kinchla, R. A., and Wolfe, J. M. (1979). The order of visual processing: "top-down," "bottom-up," or "middle-out". *Perception & Psychophysics*, 25(3):225-231.
- Klinger, E. (2013). Goal Commitments and the Content of Thoughts and Dreams: Basic Principles. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4(415): 415.

- Knudsen, E.I. (2007). Fundamental components of attention. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 30: 57-78.
- Koehn, S., Morris, T. & Watt, A.P. (2013). Flow state in self-paced and externally-paced performance contexts: An examination of the flow model, *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 14(6): 787-795.
- Koole, S.L (2009). The Psychology of Emotion Regulation: An Integrative Review. *Cognition and Emotion*, 23: 4.
- Krasner, D. (2000a). *Method Acting Reconsidered : Theory, Practice, Future*. St. Martin's Press, New York.
- Krasner, D. (2000b). Strasberg, Adler and Meisner: Method Acting. In Hodge's (Ed) *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. Routledge, London.
- Krasner, D. (2011). *An Actor's Art and Craft: The Art and Technique of Acting*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Lahnakoski, J., Glerean, E., Salmi, J., Jääskeläinen, I., Sams, M., Hari, R. & Nummenmaa, L. (2012). Naturalistic fMRI Mapping Reveals Superior Temporal Sulcus as the Hub for the Distributed Brain Network for Social Perception. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 6: 233.
- Levinson, D., Smallwood, J. & Davidson, R.J. (2012). The Persistence of Thought: Evidence for a Role of Working Memory in the Maintenance of Task-Unrelated Thinking. *Psychological Science*, 23(4): 375-380.
- Lewis, B. P., & Linder, D. E. (1997). Thinking about choking? Attentional processes and paradoxical performance. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23(9), 937-944.
- Limb, C.J. & Braun, A.R. (2008). Neural substrates of spontaneous musical performance: An fMRI study of jazz improvisation. *PLoS One*, 3(2), article no: e1679.
- Liu, S., Liao, H. & Pratt, J.A. (2009). Impact of Media Richness and Flow on E-Learning Technology Acceptance. *Computers & Education*, 52: 599-607.

- Locke H. S., Braver T. S. (2008). Motivational Influences on Cognitive Control: Behavior, Brain Activation and Individual Differences. *Cognitive Affective Behavioral Neuroscience*, 8: 99-112.
- Locke, E.A. & Latham, G.P. (2002). Building a Practically Useful Theory of Goal-setting and Task-motivation: A 35 year Old Odyssey. *American Psychologist*, 57: 705-717.
- Lohse, K. R., Jones, M., Healy, A. F. & Sherwood, D. E. (2014). The role of attention in motor control. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 143(2): 930-948.
- López-González, M. & Limb, C.J. (2012). Musical creativity and the brain. *Cerebrum*, article no: PMC3574774.
- Malague, R. (2012). *An Actress Prepares: Women and the Method*, Routledge, New York.
- Marisa, C. (2011). Visual attention: The past 25 years. *Vision Research*, 51(13): 1484-1525.
- Martin, J. & Cutler, K. (2002). An Exploratory Study of Flow and Motivation in Theater Actors. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 14(4): 344-352.
- Mason, M.F., Norton, I., Van Horn, J.D., Wegner, D., Grafton, S. & Macrae, C.N. (2007). Wandering Minds: The Default Network and Stimulus-Independent Thought. *Science*, 315(5810): 393-395.
- Matthews, A. & McLeod, C. (1985). Selective Processing of Threat Cues in Anxiety States. *Science Direct*, 23(5): 563-569.
- McKiernan, K.A., D'Angelo, B.R., Kaufman, J.N. & Binder, J.R. (2006). Interrupting the "stream of consciousness": An fMRI investigation, *Neuroimage*, 29(4): 1185-1191.
- McNevin, N. H., Shea, C. H., & Wulf, G. (2003). Increasing the distance of an external focus of attention enhances learning. *Psychological Research*, 67(1): 22-29.
- McPherson, M.J., Barrett, F.S., López-González, M., Jiradejvong, P. & Limb, C.J. (2014). Emotional Intent Modulates the Neural Substrates of Creativity: an fMRI Study of Emotionally Targeted Improvisation in Jazz Musicians. *Scientific Reports*, 6, article no: 18460.

- McVay J.C., & Kane, M.J. (2010). Does Mind Wandering Reflect Executive Function or Executive Failure? *Psychology Bulletin*, 136(2): 188-207.
- McVay, J.C., Kane, M.J. & Kwapil, T.R. (2009). *Tracking the train of thought from the laboratory into everyday life: An experience-sampling study of mind wandering across controlled and ecological contexts. Psychonomic Bulletin Review*, 16(5): 857-863.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society: From the standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Mehrabian, A. (2017). *Nonverbal Communication*. Routledge, New York. Ebook: [doi.org/10.4324/9781351308724](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351308724)
- Meisner, S. & Longwell, D. (1987). *Meisner on Acting*. Vintage Books, New York.
- Merlin, B, 2014. *The complete Stanislavsky toolkit*. Revised edition. edn. New York : Nick Hern Books.
- Merlin, B. (2001). *Beyond Stanislavsky: the Psycho-physical Approach to Actor Training*. Nick Hern Books, London.
- Merlin, B. (2003). *Konstantin Stanislavsky*. Routledge, London.
- Merlin, B. (2007). *The Stanislavsky Toolkit*, Nick Hern Books, London.
- Merlin, B. (2010). *Acting: The Basics*, Routledge, London.
- Merlin, B. (2016). *Facing the Fear: An Actor's Guide to Overcoming Stage Fright*. Nick Hern Books, London.
- Mestnik, E. (2011). *Beyond Repetition*, EmasLA Blog, June 21. [www.emasla.com/blog/2011/06/21/beyond-repetition-by-elizabeth-mestnik](http://www.emasla.com/blog/2011/06/21/beyond-repetition-by-elizabeth-mestnik)
- Mestnik, E. (2011). *What does the Meisner Technique Teach?* EmasLA Blog, June 16. [www.emasla.com/blog/2011/06/16/what-does-the-meisner-technique-teach](http://www.emasla.com/blog/2011/06/16/what-does-the-meisner-technique-teach)
- Miller, E.K. & Buschman, T.J. (2013). Cortical circuits for the control of attention. *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, 23(2): 216-222.

- Morin, A. (2009). Inner Speech and Consciousness in W. Banks (ed.). *Encyclopaedia of Consciousness*. Academic Press, Oxford.
- Morin, A. (2011). Self-Awareness Part 1: Definition, Measures, Effects, Functions, and Antecedents. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5(10): 807-823.
- Moseley, N. (2012). *Meisner in Practice*. Nick Hern Books, London.
- Moseley, N. (2006). *Acting and Reacting: Tools for the Modern Actor*. Nick Hern Books, London.
- Moseley, N. (2012). *Meisner in Practice: A Guide for Actors, Directors and Teachers*, Nick Hern Books, London.
- Mueller, A., Hong, D.S., Shepard, S. & Moore, T. (2017). Linking ADHD to the Neural Circuitry of Attention. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 21(6): 474-488.
- Muraven, M. & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). Self-regulation and depletion of limited resources: Does self-control resemble a muscle? *Psychological Bulletin*, 126: 247-259.
- Muraven, M., Pogarsky, G., & Shmueli, D. (2006). Self-control depletion and the general theory of crime. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 22: 263-277.
- Muraven, M., Shmueli, D., & Burkley, E. (2006). *Conserving self-control strength*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91: 524-537.
- Muraven, M., Tice, D. M. & Baumeister, R. F. (1998). Self-control as a limited resource: Regulatory depletion patterns. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74: 774-789.
- Noe, A. (2006). *Action in Perception*. MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Northoff, G., Heinzel, A., de Greck, M., BERPohl, F., Dobrowolny, H. & Panksepp, J. (2006). Self-referential processing in our brain—A meta-analysis of imaging studies on the self. *NeuroImage*, 31(1): 440-457.
- Page, K. (2018). *ACT: Advanced Consciousness training for Actors*. Routledge, New York.
- Page, K. (2019). *Psychology for Actors*. Routledge, New York.

- Payne, B.R., Jackson, J.J., Noh, S.R. & Stine-Morrow, E. (2011). In the Zone: Flow State and Cognition in Older Adults, *Psychology and aging*, 26(3): 738-743.
- Peifer, C., Schulz, A., Schächinger, H., Baumann, N. & Antoni, C.H. (2014). The relation of flow-experience and physiological arousal under stress — Can u shape it? *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 53: 62-69.
- Pelphrey, K.A., Morris, J.P. & McCarthy, G. (2004). Grasping the Intentions of Others: The Perceived Intentionality of an Action Influences Activity in the Superior Temporal Sulcus during Social Perception. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 16(10): 1706-1716.
- Pinker, S. (1997). *How The Mind Works*. Penguin, London.
- Pitches, J. (2005). *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting*. Routledge, London.
- Poerio, G.L., Totterdell, P. & Miles, E. (2013). Mind-wandering and negative mood: Does one thing really lead to another? *Consciousness and Cognition*, 22(4): 1412-1421.
- Pope, B.L. (2000). Redefining Acting: The Implications of the Meisner Method. In Krasner, D (Ed) *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York.
- Posner, M.I., Snyder, C.R.R. & Davidson, B.J. (1980). Attention and the Detection of Signals. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 109(2): 160-174.
- Power, C. (2008). *Presence in Play : a Critique of Theories of Presence in the Theatre*. Rodopi, Amsterdam.
- Premack, D. & Woodruff, G. (1978). Does the Chimpanzee have a Theory of Mind? *The Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 4: 515-526.
- Qiao, L., Xu, L., Che, X., Zhang, L., Li, Y., Xue, G., Li, H & Chen, A. (2018). The Motivation Based Promotion of Proactive Control: The Role of Salience Network. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 12: 328.
- Quinn, M. (1995). Self- Reliance and Ritual Renewal: Anti-theatrical Ideology in American Method Acting. *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 10(1): 5.

- Raichle M.E, MacLeod A.M, Snyder A.Z, Powers W.J, Gusnard D.A, Shulman G.L. (2001). A default mode of brain function. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA*, 98(2): 676-682.
- Ravitch, D. (2003). *The Language Police: How pressure groups restrict what students learn*. Vintage Books, London.
- Redick, T. S., Broadway, J. M., Meier, M. E., Kuriakose, P. S., Unsworth, N., Kane, M. J. & Engle, R. W. (2012). Measuring Working Memory Capacity With Automated Complex Span Tasks. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 28(3): 164-171.
- Reeve, J. & Deci, E.L. (1996). Elements of the Competitive Situation That Affect Intrinsic Motivation. *PSPB*, 22(1): 24-33.
- Reeves, J.L., Tenenbaum, G. & Lidor, R. (2007). Choking in front of the Goal: The effects of self consciousness training. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 5(3): 240-254.
- Ricard, M., Lutz, A. & Davidson, R.J. (2014). Mind of the meditator. *Scientific American*, 311(5): 38-45.
- Rizzolatti, G. & Sinigaglia, C. (2007). *Mirrors in the Brain: How our minds share actions and emotions*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Robinson, L.J., Stevens, L.H., Threapleton, C.J., Vainniute, J., McAllister-Williams, R.H. & Gallagher, P. (2012). Effects of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation on Attention and Memory. *Acta Psychologica*, 141(2): 243.
- Rochat, P. (2003). Five Levels of Self-Awareness as They Unfold Early in Life. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 12: 717-731.
- Rodriguez, M. L., Mischel, W., & Shoda, Y. (1989). Cognitive person variables in the delay of gratification of older children at risk. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(2): 358-367.
- Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25: 54-67.



- Ryan, R.M. (1995). Psychological Needs and the Facilitation of integrative Processes. *Journal of Personality*, 63: 397-427.
- Sanford Meisner: The American Theatre's Best Kept Secret*. (1990). Directed by N. Doob. [Documentary]. New York, NY: Eagle Rock Entertainment & WNET Channel 13.
- Sassenberg, K., Sassenrath, C. & Fetterman, K (2015). Threat-Prevention, Challenge-Promotion: The Impact of Threat, Challenge and Regulatory Focus on Attention to Negative Stimuli. *Cognition and Emotion*, 29(1): 188-195.
- Scheier, M.F. & Carver, C.S. (1985). The Self-Consciousness Scale: A Revised Version for Use with General Populations. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 15(8): 687-699.
- Schmeichel, B.J. & Baumeister, R.F. (2010). Effortful Attention Control, in B. Bruya (Ed) *Effortless Attention: A New Perspective in the Cognitive Science of Attention and Action*: doi: 10.7551/mitpress/9780262013840.001.0001
- Schmeichel, B.J. (2005) *Ego Depletion, Working Memory, and the Executive Function of the Self*. PhD Thesis, Florida State University
- Schmitt, N.C. (1990). *Actors and Onlookers : Theatre and Twentieth-century Scientific Views of Nature*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston.
- Schneider, R (2014). *Theatre & History*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Schooler, J.W., Smallwood, J., Christoff, K., Handy, T.C., Reichle, E.D. & Sayette, M.A. (2011). Meta-awareness, perceptual decoupling and the wandering mind. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 15(7): 319-326.
- Seli, P., Carriere, J.S.A. & Smilek, D. (2015). Not all Mind Wandering is Created Equal: Dissociating Deliberate from Spontaneous Mind Wandering. *Psychological Research* 79(5): 750-758
- Seli, P., Risko, E.F., Smilek, D. & Schacter, D.L. (2016). Mind-Wandering With and Without Intention. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 20(8): 605-617.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (1975). *Helplessness On Depression, Development, and Death*. Freeman, San Fransisco.

- Shaughnessy, N. (2013). *Affective Performance and Cognitive Science Body, Brain, and Being*. Bloomsbury, London.
- Shevtsova, M. (2010). Song of the Goat Theatre: Finding Flow and Connection. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 26(3): 248-260.
- Shiffrin, R. M., & Schneider, W. (1977). Controlled and automatic human information processing. II. Perceptual learning, automatic attending and a general theory. *Psychological Review*, 84(2): 127-190.
- Shirley, D. (2010). 'The Reality of Doing': Meisner Technique and British Actor Training. *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 1(2): 199-213.
- Silberschatz, M. (2013). Creative State/ Flow State: Flow Theory in Stanislavsky's Practice. *New Theatre Quarterly*, 29(1): 13-23.
- Silverberg, L. (1994). *The Sanford Meisner Approach: Workbook One: An Actor's Workbook*, Smith and Kraus, New Hampshire.
- Silverberg, L. (1997). *The Sanford Meisner Approach: Workbook II: Emotional Freedom*. Smith and Kraus, New Hampshire.
- Silverberg, L. (1998). *The Sanford Meisner Approach: Workbook Three: Tackling the Text*. Smith and Kraus, New Hampshire.
- Silverberg, L. (2000) *The Sanford Meisner Approach: Workbook Four: Playing the Part*. Smith and Kraus, New Hampshire.
- Silvia, P.J. & Duval, T.S. (2001). The Objective Self-awareness Theory: Recent Progress and Enduring Problems. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5(30): 230-241.
- Skinner, B. F. (1953). *Science and human behaviour*. Macmillan, London.
- Small, D.M, Gitelman, D., Simmons, K., Bloise, S., Parrish, T. & Mesulam, M.M (2005). Monetary Incentives Enhance Processing in Brain Regions Mediating Top-Down Control of Attention. *Cerebral Cortex*, 15(12): 1855-1865.

- Smallwood J. M., Baracaia S. F., Lowe M. & Obonsawin M. (2003). Task unrelated thought whilst encoding information. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 12(3): 452-484.
- Smallwood, J., Davies, J.B., Heim, D., Finnigan, F., Sudberry, M., O'Connor, R. & Obonsawin, M. (2004). Subjective Experience and the Attentional Lapse: Task Engagement and Disengagement During Sustained Attention. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 13: 657-690.
- Smallwood, J. & Schooler, J.W. (2006). The Restless Mind. *Psychological Bulletin*, 123(6): 946-958.
- Smallwood, J., Fitzgerald, A., Miles, L. K., & Phillips, L. H. (2009). Shifting moods, wandering minds: Negative moods lead the mind to wander. *Emotion*, 9(2), 271-276.
- Smallwood, J., Beach, E., Schooler, J.W. & Handy, T.C. (2008). Going AWOL in the brain: Mind wandering reduces cortical analysis of external events. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 20(3): 458-469.
- Smallwood, J., Brown, K., Baird, B., & Schooler, J. W. (2012). Cooperation between the default mode network and the frontal-parietal network in the production of an internal train of thought. *Brain Research*, 1428: 60-70.
- Smallwood, J., O'Connor, R.C., Sudbery, M.V. & Obonsawin, M. (2007). Mind-wandering and dysphoria. *Cognition and Emotion*, 21(4): 816-842.
- Snyder, C.R. & Lopez, S.J. (2009). *Oxford handbook of positive psychology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Sohlberg, M.M, McLaughlin, K.A, Pavese, A., Heidrich, A. & Posener, M. (2000). *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*, 22(5): 656-676.
- Sohlberg, M.M. & Mateer, C.A (2017). *Cognitive Rehabilitation: An Integrative Neuropsychological Approach*. The Guildford Press, New York.
- Sohlberg, M.M. & Mateer, C.A. (1987). The Effectiveness of an Attention-training Program. *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology*, 9(2): 117-130.
- Soto-Morettini, D. (2010). *The Philosophical Actor: A Practical Meditation for Practicing Theatre Arts*. Intellect, Bristol.

Spreng, R.N., Dupre, E., Garcia, J., Mildner, J., Luh, W., Selarka, D., Gojkovic, S. & Turner, G.R. (2014). Goal-congruent default network activity facilitates cognitive control. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 34(42): 14108-14114.

Spreng, R.N., Stevens, W.D., Viviano, J.D., Schacter, D.L. (2016). Attenuated anticorrelation between the default and dorsal attention networks with aging: evidence from task and rest. *Neurobiology of Aging*, 45: 149-160.

Stanislavski, K. (2008/1936). *An Actor Prepares (Orig. Работа актера над собой)*. Translated by: Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. Methuen Drama, London.

Stanislavski, K. (2008/1948). *Building a character (Orig. Работа актера над собой)*. Translated by: Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. Bloomsbury, London.

Stanislavski, K. (2008/1924). *My Life in Art (Orig. Моя жизнь в искусстве)*. Translated by: J.J. Robbins. Routledge, London.

Stanislavski, K. (2009/1963). *An Actor's Work: A Student Diary*, Translated and edited by: Jean Benedetti. Routledge, London.

Stanislavski, K. (2013/1957). *Creating a Role*. Translated by: Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. Bloomsbury, London.

Stanovich, K. E., West, R. F., & Toplak, M. E. (2011). Individual differences as essential components of heuristics and biases research. In K. Manktelow, D. Over, & S.

Elqayam (Eds.), *The science of reason: A festschrift for Jonathan St B. T. Evans*. Psychology Press, New York.

Stawarczyk, D., Majerus, S., Catale, C. & D'Argembeau, A. (2014). Relationships between mind-wandering and attentional control abilities in young adults and adolescents. *Acta Psychologica*, 148: 25-36.

Stawarczyk, D., Majerus, S., Maquet, P. & D'Argembeau, A. (2011). Neural Correlates of Ongoing Conscious Experience: Both Task-Unrelatedness and Stimulus-Independence Are Related to Default Network Activity. *PLoS One*, 6(2), article no: e16997.

- Sternagel, J., Levitt, D. & Mersch, D. (2012). *Acting and Performance in Moving Culture: Bodies, Screen, Renderings*. Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld.
- Sternberg, R.J. & Lubart, T.I. (1996). Investing in Creativity. *American Psychologist*, 51(7): 677-688.
- Stinespring, L.M. (1999). *Principles of Truthful Acting: A Theoretical Discourse on Sanford Meisner's Practice*. PhD Thesis, Texas Tech University.
- Stinespring, L.M. (2000). Just be Yourself: Derrida, Difference and the Meisner Technique. In Krasner, D (Ed) *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*. Palgrave MacMillan, New York.
- Styles, E.A. (2008). *The psychology of attention*, Second ed., Psychology Press, Hove.
- Svoboda, E., McKinnon, M. C., & Levine, B. (2006). The functional neuroanatomy of autobiographical memory: A meta-analysis. *Neuropsychologia*, 44(12): 2189-2208.
- Swann, C., Crust, L., & Vella, S. A. (2017). New directions in the psychology of optimal performance in sport: flow and clutch states. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 16: 48-53.
- Swann, C., Keegan, R., Piggott, D. & Crust, L. (2012). A systematic review of the experience, occurrence, and controllability of flow states in elite sport. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 13(6), pp. 807-819.
- Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive Load during Problem Solving: Effects on Learning. *Cognitive Science*, 12(2): 257-285.
- Tang Y.Y. & Posner, M.I. (2009). Attention Training and Attention State Training. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 13(5): 222-227.
- Teasdale, J.D., Segal, Z. & Williams, J.M.G. (1995). How does cognitive therapy prevent depressive relapse and why should attentional control (mindfulness) training help? *Behaviour Research Therapy*, 33(1): 25-39.
- Tenenbaum, G. (2001). A social-cognitive perspective of perceived exertion and exertion tolerance. In R. N. Singer, H. Hausenblas, & C. Janelle (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology*. Wiley, New York.

- Thomas, J. (2016). *Stanislavski's Active Analysis*. Methuen Drama, London.
- Thomsen, D.K., Jensen, A.B., Jensen, T., Yung-Mehlsen, M., Gundgaard-Pedersen, C. & Zachariae, R. (2013). Rumination, Reflection and Distress: An 8-Month Prospective Study of Colon-Cancer Patients. *Cognitive Therapy Research*, 37: 1262-1268.
- Tomporowski, P.D. & Tinsley, V.F. (1996). Effects of Memory Demand and Motivation on Sustained Attention in Young and Older Adults. *American Journal of Psychology*, 109(2): 187-204.
- Torrance, S. & Schumann, F. (2018). The Spur of the Moment: What Jazz Improvisation Tells Cognitive Science. *AI & Society*, 34(2): 251-268.
- Trapnell, P. D. & Campbell, J. D. (1999). Private Self-consciousness and the Five-Factor Model of Personality: Distinguishing Rumination From Reflection. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76: 284-304.
- Treisman, A. (1964). Monitoring and Storage of Irrelevant Messages in Selective Attention. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, 3(6): 449-459.
- Tribble, E.B. (2016). Distributed Cognition, Mindful Bodies and the Arts of Acting in Blair, R. & Cook, A. (Eds) *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies*, Bloomsbury, London.
- Trudeau, K.J. & Reich, R. (1995). Correlates of Psychological Mindedness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 19(5): 699-704.
- Tsoukalas, I. (2018). Theory of Mind: Towards an Evolutionary Theory. *Evolutionary Psychological Science*, 4(1): 38-66.
- Turner, J. & Stets, J. (2006). Sociological theories of human emotions. *Annual Review Sociological*, 32: 25-52.
- Ulrich, M., Keller, J. & Grön, G. (2015). Neural signatures of experimentally induced flow experiences identified in a typical fMRI block design with BOLD imaging. *Social, cognitive and affective neuroscience*, 11(3): 496-507.

- Ulrich, M., Keller, J. & Grön, G. (2016). Dorsal Raphe Nucleus Down-Regulates Medial Prefrontal Cortex during Experience of Flow. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience, 10*: article no: 169: dx.doi.org/10.3389%2Ffnbeh.2016.00169
- Ulrich, M., Keller, J., Hoenig, K., Waller, C. & Grön, G. (2014). Neural correlates of experimentally induced flow experiences. *Neuroimage, 1*(86): 194-202.
- Utterback, N. (2016). The Olympic Actor: Improving Actor Training and Performance Through Sport Psychology, in Blair, R. & Cook, A. (Eds) *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies*. Bloomsbury, London.
- Van Dijk, D. & Kluge, A.N. (2004). Feedback Sign Effect on Motivation: Is it Moderated by Regulatory Focus? *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 53*(1): 113-135.
- Vannucci, M. & Chiorri, C. (2018). Individual differences in self-consciousness and mind wandering: Further evidence for dissociation between spontaneous and deliberate mind wandering. *Personality and Individual Differences, 121*: 57-61.
- Vohs, K. & Baumeister, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook of Self Regulation Volume 2*. Guilford Press, Guildford.
- Ward, A. (2004). *Attention: A Neuropsychological Approach*. Psychology Press, Hove.
- Watson, D., Wiese, D., Vaidya, J. & Tellegen, A. (1999). The Two General Activation Systems of Affect: Structural Findings, Evolutionary Considerations, and Psychological Evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*(5): 820-838.
- Wayth, L. A (2014). *Field Guide to Actor Training: Navigating Acting Methods, Studio Classes, Private Training, and Graduate and Post Graduate Programs*, Applause Theatre Books, London.
- Weissman, D.H., Roberts, K.C., Visscher, K.M. & Woldorff, M.G. (2006). The neural bases of momentary lapses in attention. *Nature Neuroscience, 9*(7): 971-978.
- Wine, J. (1971). Test anxiety and direction of attention. *Psychological Bulletin, 76*(2), 92-104.
- Whyman, R. (2008). *The Stanislavsky System of Acting: Legacy and Influence in Modern Performance*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

- Wicklund, R. A. & Gollwitzer, P.M. (1987). The Fallacy of the Private-Public Self-Focus Distinction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55: 492-523.
- Williams, S. (2015). Email interview with author, 5<sup>th</sup> of November.
- Pressley, M., & Wine, P. (1990). Elaborative Interrogation Effects on Children's Learning of Factual Content. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82: 741-748.
- Wood, J., Mathews, A. & Dalgleish, T. (2001). Anxiety and cognitive inhibition. *Emotion*, 1:166-181.
- Worthen, W.B. (1992). *Modern Drama and the Rhetoric of Theater*. University California Press, Los Angeles.
- Wright, R.A & Kirby, L.D. (2001). Effort Determination of Cardio-vascular response: An Integrative Analysis with Applications in Social Psychology. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 33: 255-30.
- Yeo, B.T., Krienen, F.M., Eickhoff, S.B., Yaakub, S.N., Fox, P.T., Buckner, R.L., Asplund, C.L. & Chee, M.W.L. (2015). Functional specialization and flexibility in human association cortex. *Cerebral Cortex*, 25(10): 3654-3672.
- Zarrilli, P.B. (1995). *Acting (Re)considered : Theories and Practices*. Routledge, London.
- Zarrilli, P.B. (2009). *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski*. Routledge, London.
- Zarrilli, P.B. (2012). *The Psychophysical Actor at Work*. Routledge, London.
- Zarrilli, P.B. (2013). Introduction: Acting as Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process, in Zarrilli, P.B., Daboo, J. & Loukes, R. (Eds) *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Zarrilli, P.B., Daboo, J. & Loukes, R. (2013). *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Zazzali, P. (2016). *Acting in the Academy: The History of Professional Actor Training in US Higher Education*. Routledge, Oxford.



## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Practitioner interviews**

#### **1:1 Email interview with Jim Jarrett, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2016.**

**Question 1:** What do you reckon is the reason Meisner technique helps actors overcome self-consciousness, and how?

**J.J:** Sandy realized very early in his teaching career that people in general are horrible listeners (we don't even listen when we're introduced to other people) and then put poor listeners in front of other people (the #1 fear of most people is getting up in front of other people) and horrible listening goes to pathetic. This was the beginning of his "technique" - he said, "nothing believable or truthful or interesting can ever happen between two people on stage until those two people are present."

Sandy spent the next 65 years of his life dedicated to finding a way for his actors to be present, wide open, moment to moment machines and out of that came the Meisner technique - a process designed to get us to stop acting and become world class listeners. There are incredible benefits to working this way and one of the greatest is for an actor to present his focus must be off himself and if his focus is off himself all nerves and self-consciousness melts away. in fact, it's impossible to even be nervous if your focus is off yourself so Sandy's way is incredibly liberating.

**Question 2:** Is there anything else, outside the technique itself, would you ask an actor to do to overcome self-consciousness, or is the process in itself enough?

**J.J:** Yup, getting as healthy as possible about trying to be good and trying to impress anyone when working - the audience, the casting director, yourself - Sandy one said, "no artist will ever be free until they rid themselves of all outside opinions and influences. Screw your critics, especially the worst one of all, the one deep inside us". So getting as healthy as possible about being an artist and embracing it's not about being good, it's about growing every single time you work and loving the process instead of the result.

**Question 3:** When would you move your students on from just observing something external to commenting

**a)** with their point of view on the observation (for example "you have a nice belt" rather than "you have a belt")?

**b)** on what is happening emotionally with the other person (for example "you are surprised" or "you look worried")?

**J.J:** My goodness it's all about the behaviour it's all about the emotion it's all about the inner life it's all about what's really going on in the Meisner technique.

Cold factual observations are the beginning of course - it's where we have to start but it's ALL about going underneath the obvious to get into the inner life and what's really going on, and that actually happens very early on in the first session IF taught properly.

1:2 Email interview with William Alderson, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016.

**Question 1:** What do you reckon is the reason Meisner technique helps actors overcome self-consciousness, and how?

**W.A:** In the Meisner Technique there are exercises that are done which require the use of one's concentration. The first exercise is the repetition exercise where two actors face off and observe something that exists on the other actor using only one or two words. For example, one actor may say "black tee shirt" the other actor, if that is true, repeats "black tee shirt" and already they each have a point of view, the truthful observation of something that really exists and the truthful response of agreement that indeed, it is a "black tee shirt." This repeat exercise can go on ad infinitum. They listen and give back the repetition as it was given to them. Thus, they are listening and answering each other, which one has to do all the time in acting. Doing this requires each actor to put his attention on the other person. As this training goes on, habits of how one uses oneself starts to take root in the actor. This beginning exercise develops and eventually opens up into a full improvisation. However, the attention of the actor is never on himself, rather on the other person listening and answering. Not thinking. Objects are brought in. Something for one actor to be doing while the other is observing what he is doing. For example, one actor is sitting at a table, gluing a plate together. The observation might be, you're gluing a plate together, the actor gluing the plate repeats but changes the pronoun from you to I and it becomes, "I am gluing a plate together". This little change is in order to make the repetition truthful.

Then it goes back and forth that way until it changes by itself. After many repetitious moments one actor may have the impulse to say "yes, I am gluing a plate" and the other actor says "yes, I know you are gluing a plate" then the other actor may respond "oh, you know I am gluing a plate". And on it goes, but both actors are exercising the use of themselves by putting their attention outside of themselves. One actor is really trying to fix that heirloom plate with all of himself and the other is observing him with all of his concentration. I won't go into how this exercise continues but it is always a question of where one's attention is. Is it where it should be? Never on himself but on some object outside himself. When this is done it causes involvement and that is what you want when you act real involvement. In the Meisner Technique one of the bitter pills for the actor to swallow is he must make the other person more important than himself. A big demand for actors.

**Question 2:** Is there anything else, outside the technique itself, would you ask an actor to do to overcome self-consciousness, or is the process in itself enough?

**W.A:** The above will help a lot if they have a knowing teacher behind them to catch them when their attention wanders and keep them focused on the doing. Also as one goes on in life and keeps working, certain universal truths will come to him. Like the world doesn't revolve around them, and only good ego is wanted in life, not bad ego. If they brag about how wonderful their Hamlet is going to be, then drink themselves into a stupor at some bar every night but haven't worked hard to achieve what they want in their Hamlet, then it is just ego talking. They must get more interested in what is going on AROUND them. Not just them.

1:3 Email interview with Scott Williams, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

**Question 1:** What do you reckon is the reason Meisner technique helps actors overcome self-consciousness, and how?

**S.W:** That said, I think self-consciousness is the normal state of the actor. How could it be otherwise? The actor exposes herself to a primal terror in stepping out on to the stage; think of the animal out on the Serengeti — in a heightened state of alert and constantly scanning for danger. Now imagine the courage it takes for the actor to leave the wings and walk to the centre of the stage.

There's also something in the actor which craves that exposure, either that or something she needs which is strong enough to surmount that very real terror. And so the question isn't 'should the actor not experience self-consciousness,' but 'how does the actor deal with that fear?'

Our solution to that issue is simple, so much so that it sounds simplistic: take your attention from the fear you're experiencing and place it upon your fellow actor. Remember that the hallmark of Meisner's work, and the thing which separates him from other Stanislavski-based teachers, is the idea that what happens to the actor does not depend on her, it depends on what the other person does to her. So our basic effort — put your attention on your partner — is both acknowledgement of and a solution to the problem of self-consciousness.

**Question 2:** Is there anything else, outside the technique itself, would you ask an actor to do to overcome self-consciousness, or is the process in itself enough?

**S.W:** The training is absolute, i.e., once it is properly adopted, it has the positive effect of expanding itself in the actor. If one is doing the technique properly, it is not only enough to deal with the issues of self-consciousness, but it provides increasing rewards in impulsivity, spontaneity, states of aliveness, and other good values for actors.

1:4 Email interview with Sharon Carnicke, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

**Question 1:** Dear Sharon, firstly I wanted your thoughts on action and counter-action. My interpretation of it is that it is aiding something you want/need — which is rooted in the text, is this how you see it as well?

**S.C:** Yes, Philippa, you are correct. If we were working on a text you would need to link your character's action or counteraction and also your choice of verb to the circumstances and facts of the text as written—what the character wants is usually encoded in the circumstances and facts. In the case of our lab, the action/counteraction and verb (when we had no text) were linked to what you want in terms of what your group set up as your circumstances. In early Stanislavsky, he actually used the word "want" to help actors see their scenes in active terms.

**Question 2:** The other question was regarding my experience of the verb working against each other so strongly that it caused an emotional connection in me when the

obstacle was too great to play the verb: all I was looking for her was a comment from you on that etude, if you had any thoughts on what we experienced there.

**S.C:** Yes, the discovery that you made and what I said in our session was this: in his later years, Stanislavsky never asked actors to work on specific emotions. He saw emotion (like our ability to see or touch) as a sixth sense that comes naturally as a result of what we do. Active Analysis presumes that if you commit fully to your verb (provided that the verb is well chose in terms of the scene's circumstances and facts), emotion will result naturally (As it did for you in your etude)!

## **Appendix 2: Student interviews**

**Participants:** Nina, Erica, Elena, Leo, Esther, Louise, Andre and Henry

**Experience:** 1<sup>st</sup> year students with experience of 2 terms of Meisner technique.

### **2:1 Interview with student Nina, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019.**

**Philippa:** How have you perceived the process over the two terms so far?

**Nina:** It was really weirdly slow, but because it was such tiny increments at a time, it sort of unlocked things a lot, emotionally. It was massive. Breaking down barriers in myself, the gradual process of it made it harder, but made the revelations larger.

**Philippa:** Any of those discoveries that you want to share with me?

**Nina:** That I put a weird sort of facade of little, very little, and it has made me examine how I put myself out to the world. Why I am focusing on myself so much, instead of focusing on other people. Which has really been a revelation. It's really helped me in the acting work as well, being able to fully focus on my scene partner in scene study, instead of being consumed with whatever is going on in my head, or even the character's head. That's been massively helpful.

**Philippa:** How do you think that's changed what you do?

**Nina:** Before, if we were to talk about the beginning of the course, I was so much in my head and was very conscious of how I was being perceived by someone else, and of whatever I was saying was being perceived by everyone else. As we have moved forward it's become much more about just looking at someone and saying exactly

what's there, daring to go with the impulse. And, when we do the scene study now, when I approach it, I am able to just look at my partner's face and react. That adds so much more to the moment and this feels stronger now, in this scene study we're doing now.

**Philippa:** What has been your biggest hurdle for you in Meisner technique?

**Nina:** Definitely to keep that constant focus on someone else, and not turn it onto myself — because as soon as I go up in my own head, do I just forget to look at them and can't find or see anything.

**Philippa:** Where do your thoughts go when you "go up in your own head" as you say?

**Nina:** "What am I doing??" Honestly, in the beginning of the exercises I used to get so nervous, just thinking "they're going to see everything that's inside me, I have to be sweet and lovely so they only see that and not what's there".

**Philippa:** You were worried people would see what was actually there?

**Nina:** Massively worried.

**Philippa:** Do you still feel that?

**Nina:** No, mostly I don't. Because I know what is there and I feel confident that I know what's there, and if they see it, it's because it's there. I am not afraid for them to unlock that anymore. I feel more comfortable in myself, in showing other sides. This transfers to the work really well.

**Philippa:** How did you find the back to back repetition?

**Nina:** It stripped everything away. Back to back, it helped me focus on the other so much. I could feel their every movement, and I could feel them breathe. Feeling them breathe helped me connect to that person a lot more, which broadened my focus or my perception on them so much. It was a broadening. I thought that not seeing someone would close everything, but it actually was the opposite.

**Philippa:** It was quite early in the process, do you think not having someone look at you might have influenced that broadening of your focus?

**Nina:** Yes, I think so. I was so connected to the other person and I remember going back to them looking at me and I closed up almost straight away. It took a while to find the same focus and perception face to face. The pressure was suddenly off when they weren't looking at me, and my attention was just so much on their physicality, their breathing, their body, their voice. I could hear every little change and they could hear it in me. I was surprised how much they could pick up on how I was feeling in that exercise.

**Philippa:** Did it surprise you also how much you picked up on their feelings?

**Nina:** Yes, definitely, I didn't think I was that perceptive, but maybe we all are, when we stop thinking about other things.

**Philippa:** Do you feel that your self-consciousness has changed?

**Nina:** It has changed from self-consciousness to self-awareness. It doesn't mean that I have suddenly been cured of all anxiety and doubt, but certainly in scene work I just feel now that that's there, they're gonna pick up on it. Just an awareness of how you are in the day and how that can feed into the work, or how it can be left out of the work, and it makes me able to work with yourself rather than block it and try to mask it all the time.

**Philippa:** How would you see the difference in being self-conscious and being self-aware?

**Nina:** For me, self-consciousness is that you know everything that is happening to you and you try to hide it, because you are very conscious of making yourself smaller or try to put up a façade. When you're self-aware you're acknowledging what's there, and you're noticing what's there, but you're not judging it, and when you're not judging it allows someone else to comment on it and you don't feel attacked. So rather than defending myself, it's an opening to something new.

**Philippa:** It's that feeling of "being uncomfortable in being uncomfortable", so instead of pretending you're comfortable, you just allow the other person to see it all. How did activity change you?

**Nina:** I remember doing the puzzle vividly. I remember doing something else, and putting my mind on that completely, it stopped the interaction with the other at first,

but it made me more open to my impulses. I was less conscious of myself. I had so many comments in the beginning that “I was not giving any eye contact”, that “I did very few comments”, that “I was completely absorbed in the puzzle” and it seemed frustrating for my partner, but up until then it was the least aware of myself I had been. As we continued, and progressed, I was able to be focused on the activity and also the other person, and it was an interesting journey. When I was able to do the activity and start to look at them, it just took all the attention away from myself, it stopped me feeling insecure in what I was doing, and I felt more honest. There are always dips, and ups and downs, but from the beginning to now I feel really confident doing the exercises.

**Philippa:** What has been the most memorable exercise for you?

**Nina:** So many, but the distance repetition. It was me and Elena and I just remember such a strong feeling of wanting to close the gap between us, of wanting to get closer to her. I made a call, and she got very affected by it, and it didn't stop me from making another one. I remember saying “you're strong”, because I could see this person with an inner strength, and I could see it as a glimmer in her eyes at that point. I called it and she fell apart and started crying, but I continued to call, and there was this beautiful moment when we could get any closer to each other, and that's so memorable. That was the first time when I started to really looking at the other, as opposed focusing on myself. That was a big one.

**Philippa:** You felt that the focus was completely on the other person at that point? Because there was a lot of things happening with them? Or for another reason?

**Nina:** Yes, that, but also to do with the distance. Trying so hard to focus in on the other person and see what's going on with them, when they're far away. It was more difficult to see and trying to do that made me forget about myself.

**Philippa:** Do you remember any of the activities having a real effect on you?

**Nina:** Yes, with Lainey. She was doing her hair and suddenly my impulses were just firing and I was just going with them all. I think I became mean, I can say that now, but in the moment it was exactly what I wanted to do, what I felt justified in doing. I just said exactly what I saw in the moment. She was trying to ignore me, and pretend and I called her on it all. I remember her saying “you're crazy” and “you're switching



from one thing to another”, which is an aspect of my personality, where I do that really quickly. I have found people calling that before, but that was the first time where I allowed it to happen. I could have stopped, or addressed it, or changed how the scene was going. But I didn’t stop, I just continued following my impulses and didn’t judge myself along the way. I remember feeling a huge sense of relief, for that reason, that I had just gone all out as myself.

**Philippa:** Were you aware of the audience at this point?

**Nina:** No

**Philippa:** What made you act on your impulses so much in that exercise, was it the circumstance, or her behaviour? The urgency? What do you think was the most important aspect?

**Nina:** In the first instance it was the circumstance I had created, but it very quickly became what she was doing that made me react like that.

**Philippa:** Did you have to remind yourself of that circumstance?

**Nina:** No, after I had done the physical and musical prep, and I came in, it was sort of embedded in me from that first moment.

**Philippa:** You’ve had some mental health issues during the two terms, if you don’t mind me bringing that up. How did this type of work make you feel, when you are going through something like that?

**Nina:** It is very exposing. So, when I was having a more “down day”, or more “manic day” there is no way in hiding from it. A couple of times I did decline to do the exercises. It made it difficult, but because I was forced to expose it and address it, it actually became hugely helpful. It was cathartic because I am used to hiding it, or working against it. Meisner technique forced me to work with it, with whatever was coming out, whatever I was seeing or whatever I had the impulse to say or do. To begin with that was difficult and it felt like a very slow start, dragging myself along feeling very self-conscious, very much in my own head. But as we carried on, and people started calling things out like “your have a crazy look in your eye”, which is something that’s massively affecting me and can be quite hurtful, and that either made me feel hurt, and they would notice that I was affected by that, or it made me

go “yes in this moment I do feel like that” and I would just continue with whatever I was feeling in that moment, it didn’t make me hide it — it just made me being ok with what I felt about it.

**Philippa:** Do you feel nervous about going into the classes now?

**Nina:** Not in the last four weeks. No I feel excited to go up, and excited to work. But it took nearly a term and a half probably to feel like this. I was getting more and more confident as we went on, but now I just feel far more excited, far more open towards it, ready to be affected in whatever way I will and ready to let the impulses take me wherever they take me.

**Philippa:** I noticed a change in how you were offering to work in the class room, and in my opinion that was right on the cusp, before you started to find it easier. It was almost like you wanted to work to get through it. Do you recognise that?

**Nina:** I do, I was actively wanting to combat that feeling of discomfort, I just wanted to be in the room, I wanted to prove to the others, and I guess even more to myself, that I can do it. And from doing that, and working more, and observing other people as well, it helped so much to opening myself up to the growth that was happening. Because it is about a process of facing your fears and you can’t sit at home and read about it, it’s constant exposure to it.

**Philippa:** I saw a great change in you over those couple of weeks, where you sometimes worked twice in one lesson. Do you feel it has had an effect on your confidence?

**Nina:** I genuinely do. Meisner is the one class where I really struggled a lot, I remember coming out of a lesson feeling absolutely drained. And I was getting frustrated about everyone seeing the things I was trying to hide. It made me angry. But as I worked more and started to focus on the others, it’s had a good effect on my self-esteem, it’s also made me work more in other lessons. This was the one I struggled more with, and feeling how much I have grown through this process, made me want that from all the classes.

**Philippa:** Thank you for being so open and honest about your journey.

**Nina:** No thank you, I wanted to be able to say these things to you, because they have really changed me.

2:2 Interview with student Henry, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

**Philippa:** How have you found the process over the first two terms?

**Henry:** Very helpful in terms of seeing beyond what's in the script. Seeing their previous circumstances in terms of their body language, the sort of tone they use, as they respond to what I say.

**Philippa:** What has been the biggest hurdle for you?

**Henry:** Probably finding a balance in doing the activity and focus on my partner.

**Philippa:** What happens when it becomes difficult to balance that?

**Henry:** Sometimes my brain just goes weird for some reason, I don't know why, it just happens. It goes funny and I can't do both things, I start to panic. If I am doing too many things at once it goes all "mumbly-jumbly", but if I just do one thing at a time it's much easier.

**Philippa:** What happens when it goes "mumbly-jumbly"?

**Henry:** It's kind of like fireworks going off, just so much stuff going on at one place at one time it's hard for me to keep track, it feels like my brain's a pin ball machine.

**Philippa:** Does that make you stressed?

**Henry:** It used to be stressful, but now I feel more annoyed, because I know I can do it, but it doesn't always work. Especially when I start thinking about something else or when I doubt myself, because that happens quite a lot.

**Philippa:** When you say you doubt yourself a lot, have you ever had an exercise in Meisner when you haven't doubted yourself?

**Henry:** Sometimes in the repetition I don't doubt myself, but sometimes I do, I don't know why. The second term I have found it harder, a lot more to take in and take on-board than the first term, a lot more going on in the exercises — it's very full on. The tap in repetition is what really helped me with my self-doubt, because I can learn

from watching first, and then tap in and have a go myself. Also it helps that not everyone is watching. It's easier in the Stanislavski exercises, it feels more intellectual, much more under control. I feel in control of what I am doing and how well I am doing it.

**Philippa:** Do you remember the distance repetition?

**Henry:** Yes, I did an exercise with Julia. I remember getting very emotional about it. We were very close and I was feeling so many emotions I started becoming teary eyed, I didn't know what was going on. I hadn't felt anything like that before.

**Philippa:** Do you remember at a certain distance there was a change in you?

**Henry:** Yeah, about half way through it felt like I just shed all tensions. It was that point of her coming into soft focus, and it just felt easy, like a release. I remember that feeling, it didn't feel difficult anymore. When we got closer those barriers were starting to come up again, but they were still half way down I would say, and I could see everything she was thinking and feeling. It just made me overwhelmed.

**Philippa:** Are you aware that you often have tensions in your feet which makes you walk, almost on your toes?

**Henry:** Yes, I go up on my toes when I need to focus on the something that I am not sure of, and I need to be alert, it goes away when I feel reassured and when I feel I get it. I also have tension in my shoulders at that point.

**Philippa:** Do you remember an exercise when you didn't feel any of those tensions?

**Henry:** In the exercise with Amanda, I felt tensions but they were to do with the circumstance, I think. But that circumstance made me so angry but when you made me look at her I didn't want to hurt her. I did start to think about the audience then, what they were thinking of me getting so angry. In the exercise with Isabelle, when you changed the circumstance so that she was my wife. I remember only thinking about what she was doing. All my thoughts was on the circumstance, I didn't think of the audience then, I just really couldn't work her out, all my thoughts went to that.

**Philippa:** You say you were worried about the audience seeing you angry. Is that something you are scared of being?

**Henry:** Yes, very much so. Because I feel like if I lose control I might actually lost control and shout things. And I don't want to lose my friendships or working relationships, so I need to control it, maybe find a way I can let it out in a really controlled way. I am scared of it making me do things, like hurt someone, I think it would be very damaging to completely let go.

**Philippa:** You said in the beginning that you were not sure you could tell how someone was feeling. Has that changed?

**Henry:** I still doubt myself with that. I stick to physical observations mostly, but when you push me I say what I think, but I kind of question in my head if that was true.

**Philippa:** In the beginning you had problems with eye contact, do you feel that has changed?

**Henry:** Yes, 100%, I think that's not an issue anymore. In the beginning I kept wanting to look away, and sometimes it still happens but not very much. I feel much more comfortable looking into someone's eyes now.

**Philippa:** How do you feel generally about Meisner classes?

**Henry:** Still quite stressful I have to say. It's still not comfortable and I feel like I should be getting better than I am.

### 2:3 Interview with students Erica and Elena, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

**Philippa:** How have you found the first two terms of the process?

**Elena:** I really like the way it's taken us, almost with our eye closed, on a journey. Beginning with everyone just notice things about each other and finding how that just creates a sense of honesty to go from. I knew a lot about Meisner before, but this feels very unique, I've never felt so guided. I think there is a really nice balance between being pushed and supported. Not forcing us into the uncomfortable place but taking us there slowly and before you realise it you're there. I think you have a really good awareness of what we need, and where we're at, and what we individually need more of. I've discovered a lot about myself, that I am very self-absorbed, in my own head a lot. I think the exercises, and when we start to relate it to

things that matter to us, it creates a good tool to deal with other aspects of our lives, and get us to open up and look around, and centre ourselves in where we are.

**Erica:** It was so different from the other Meisner training I've done, and I realised I shouldn't have assumptions about how something should be done or what you think you know. Things can change from one day to another, and one teacher to another. You always have to challenge that. And I love that about this course, it's humbled me about actor training. I have realised as well that I started in a certain way, after my other Meisner training, and I am much more aware now about my habits and with the idea of me being enough. Unconsciously, I am always adding things on top because I am scared that I won't be watchable, or be interesting enough.

**Philippa:** That's a big change I have seen in you, letting the other person or the situation, control what happens.

**Erica:** That was the same feedback I had in the other Meisner training, they were saying: "Don't be afraid of letting something happen and take you somewhere". But I think, unconsciously, I am scared of losing control and scared of feeling hurt. But it's a cycle from all your experiences, and you realise that in acting you have to get free from that fear.

**Philippa:** Have you experienced that kind of freedom in the classes at all? Where you completely let go of control and see what happened?

**Erica:** I think I am still controlling some aspects. But I feel when Marco and me did our scene I didn't care what happened, it went a different way to what I had expected but I just went with it.

**Philippa:** Did that feel uncomfortable?

**Erica:** No, it felt great.

**Philippa:** Elena, what do you think has been the biggest hurdle for you to overcome?

**Elena:** I think the biggest hurdle for me, has been to stop demonstrating that I know what you are talking about, and that I understand what you are saying. I think I have a habit of demonstrating that I know what I am doing, doing the exercise correctly, rather than just say what I am seeing and experiencing it. That break-through, if I

was to give an example, was my activity with Chris in the beginning of the term. (Activity 2) When I just let myself be horrible and honest about what I thought he was doing. It was a made up circumstance but something I really related to, and I lost all that need to impress or show anything to you, I stopped demonstrating that I was good — something I think I do in every aspect of my life to be honest.

**Philippa:** And what happened when you did that?

**Elena:** I was being a lot more reactive, I was expressing emotions in ways I didn't think I would express them. I surprised myself a lot, I found myself shouting a lot and that's not something I do. It was completely on impulse and that thing about surprising yourself, and allowing yourself to be who you might not want to be, is the real challenge in Meisner. Some people like shouting and being dramatic and I don't, so when it happens it's scary to me. It's like letting out aggression that I don't want others to see, but it's part of me.

**Philippa:** Erica, what has been your most memorable moment in these classes?

**Erica:** The fourth activity with Marie, the relationship that we had created beforehand, we were sisters at the funeral of the mother, and one sister coming back that we hadn't seen for a while. I was not trying to create anything. The second time we did it, it was so genuine, what happened, we even started laughing. I remember so much Marie saying "You have butter on your face" and it just made us laugh so much. It was so simple and not how I would think a funeral scene should be. I felt like it was so nice to be able to just open up to what you're actually feeling, that it is fine to feel whatever the moments make you feel. The circumstance just had a kind of background feeling of sadness, but everything else just happened from what we saw in each other. There was no need to push. But it's the idea that we're bigger than we think, even a very small thing can be really powerful if it's true. Sometimes we just try and be more dramatic and it's not needed.

**Philippa:** What exercise do you feel changed your process the most? Negative or positive.

**Elena:** It was an exercise with Louise, I had completely forgotten about this until now actually, she was editing something on her computer and my back story was that she had really hurt me, in relation to a night out. It shifted things because I was so

desperate for her attention that I became so aware of everything she was doing to me, it all mattered so much. I called her out on everything and she became very vulnerable. I think that's an exercise where I wasn't afraid to say exactly what I saw, my impulse was to hurt her back and that's not something I tend to do in my exercises, that changed me.

**Philippa:** Was that to do with the stakes?

**Elena:** Yeah but also the urgency, I needed this now. I needed her to stop pretending. Everything she did made me feel small, and normally I would just concentrate on that feeling, but this time that feeling created a reaction and there was so much anger in me. I've not felt like that before or since.

**Erica:** I remember an exercise with Jamie, when I was making Mayonnaise. I was getting so frustrated with what Jamie was doing, and instead of blaming them for making me feel that way or just reacting to what they were doing to me, I tried to control that frustration. I should have just let that happen. When the exercise ended I cried because I let all the things I was feeling come out. But I could have let that be part of the exercise. But it was not going how I had planned it, so I was trying so hard to make it go the way I wanted, and it just ruined it. It's ridiculous, especially when you say it out loud. I was feeling everything but I was just blocking everything. In the exercise I was actually thinking "nothing is happening" but I had so much there that I was just not letting be. That's how I feel often about myself, that I have nothing, when actually I have a lot. Maybe just not what I expected, I don't know why I feel that.

**Philippa:** And we are again back to that "you are enough" concept. As long as it's something coming from a truthful place we will want to watch it. Not for you to judge if that's interesting or not. Do you feel like your self-consciousness levels have changed through the two terms at all?

**Elena:** I still have all the anxiety problems that I always had, because it doesn't just go, but I am not scared of them anymore. They still are in my way sometimes, but it's more of an awareness that they are there.

**Philippa:** Almost an acceptance?

**Elena:** Yes, that's the best word to use actually, I have accepted them as part of me, like anything else that is part of me. Everyone sees it and I can own it. I try to impress



a lot less. I was really trying to impress you and the class in the beginning of the term. The only person I have to stop trying to impress now is myself, then I think we'll be alright.

**Erica:** I think I am more playful than I was before. I think that's because I feel I deserve to be here, I am legitimate to be an actor. I had an idea that because I didn't train before and I am not English and I am thirty years old. I have worked before and now I felt really overwhelmed with the feeling that I didn't belong in this industry. Voices like "What are you doing in England, in drama school? Who do you think you are?" I don't feel like that anymore, I deserve to be here.

#### 2:4 Interview with students Leo and Esther, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

**Philippa:** What are your general thoughts on the process so far?

**Leo:** I think before I came here, the idea of just sitting back and listening to what's on the other end, the idea that you can take so much from what the other person is giving you — you don't have to you don't have to put things on, there's already so much there. I think for all of us that's been really freeing. I think Meisner is the biggest moment we have had where we have really learnt to listen to what is going on with the other actor on stage.

**Esther:** I find Meisner really interesting. The first time I did it I did it because of a lot of personal things that was happening to me and I wanted to take my mind off it. But in a way that's exactly what Meisner isn't, because you have to deal with everything. It almost brought me to an identity crisis. It forces you to think about all the blocks, the barriers and the layers that you put up, which sometimes you're not even conscious of. People start to say all these things to you and you realise "this is what I give off".

**Philippa:** How did that make you feel?

**Esther:** It made me feel like I didn't want to seem the way that I was coming across. It was all "you're defensive" "you're aggressive" "you're putting on a front and trying to be tough". It makes sense to me now, when I think about my school and where I grew up, and my friends, we all sort of had this edge. You never think of yourself in those terms, it's really helped me think about the face I give off, just as I walk around,

but more importantly in acting. You can't have that barrier, that wall, then you're just someone not being affected, you're not affecting others.

**Philippa:** Has that changed for you through this work?

**Esther:** Yeah, it's a work in progress, on-going struggle for me, but it's something I have realised about myself through doing this.

**Philippa:** You have both grown a lot over the two terms in terms of your availability to others, but something happened in your fourth activity, that you did together. What did you feel happened in that exercise?

**Leo:** I think we tried to be clever with our previous circumstances. Esther denied what had happened and that really threw me in the moment. It was a learning curve for me in being able to take that and not just sit in that moment of shock. Instead of moving with the moments I stayed in that first moment. You know you talk about filter your observations through the given circumstances, instead everything was about that first moment. I just got stuck in that moment. It was really difficult to stay in the moment, I just kept questioning why she did that first thing, instead of noticing what was happening all the time, I was just thinking to myself rather than observing her.

**Esther:** As soon as you explained why it made complete sense, that you can't deny the circumstances, it's not helpful in any way, it just mean you are never going to be in that moment because your playing a constant tactic, you're adding layers onto what your reaction is. It would be so simple to just have "we have both experienced this and now we are dealing with it". But by denying it I just added another wall. I was thinking too much about what my responses should be.

**Philippa:** What were you thinking about?

**Esther:** I also gave myself a really difficult objective, "to take his mind off it", which was completely counterproductive to what else I was doing — take his mind of what I was denying happened! He was just completely confused all the time so it didn't go anywhere. In hindsight it made no sense. It made me look slightly psychopathic I think, making him think he was crazy rather than actually doing the exercise and reacting to each moment.

**Philippa:** Were there any times when your thoughts went to something not to do with the scene?

**Esther:** It was me in my head thinking “how can I play this situation”, calculating my next move. It became an internal story instead of something we did together.

**Leo:** It’s interesting when you start to think with your mind about your circumstance and the tactics that might work, you immediately drop out of it, out of the moment with the person. If you let your thoughts go to “You should be doing this and remember this” you immediately cut off. When it works you have this feeling like the scene has just washed over you, it’s happened to you.

**Philippa:** Have you both had that experience when you are feeding directly off the other person?

**Esther:** Yes

**Leo:** Yes

**Philippa:** What did that feel like?

**Leo:** It was in another exercise we did together, the third activity, we did the exercise and I came into the space and you told us to start again, you took me outside and told me as high stakes previous circumstance — you raised the stakes basically, saying that she had told everyone that I had hit her. And I hadn’t. It made me connect to something in myself, and when I came in I connected to her, and I did things I never thought I’d do. At the time I didn’t have to think, I just believed the relationship and what happened. My whole body was feeling the injustice of what she’s done. At no point did I have to remind myself of what had happened, I felt it when I saw her.

**Philippa:** So that simple adjustment was easier to believe? And then you were able to feed off her?

**Leo:** Yes, definitely

**Esther:** I had the same thing, because you were really sneaky there what you did to us, because you told me that he had hurt me. So when he came in being aggressive it felt really overwhelming, I believed it so much and I was trying to understand how he could be doing this right now when he knew what had happened.

**Philippa:** How was that working out different to the other exercise?

**Leo:** I think one of the things that helped was that I was asked to go to a place where I didn't feel comfortable, it threw me off balance and it raised the stakes, it gave me so much drive. I felt it so strongly that I needed to understand why she had done what she did. It made listening to her and reading her so important. I am listening to you because I need to sort this out, I need to work out what is going on with you, it was so powerful. Listening became so easy because I had such a strong reason to. The urgency gave it that importance. I needed to know right now.

**Esther:** The biggest thing for me was that I had accepted the circumstance. Then everything just happened. I felt like I was really invested. When he pushed the table I felt like I turned into myself. I couldn't comprehend why he would act like that and I felt myself blocking what I wanted to do.

**Philippa:** Why? Were you scared?

**Esther:** I just felt outraged and like I had a red mist...I didn't feel like I wanted to understand anymore I just wanted to block him out. I cut myself off from him then I didn't want anything to do with him. I think I lost connection then.

### 2:5 Interview with students Louise and Andre, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

**Philippa:** What are your general thoughts on the process so far?

**Andre:** I thought that I gave, I thought that I was present, in a scene, and when we started doing Meisner I never realised how much preparing and thinking I do before saying anything. How much I tried to plan. And I think these exercises taught me to see what you see in that moment. So my journey has been me fighting those thoughts: "what's going on here — what should I be doing". No, just see what's there and receive whatever is coming, and trust that that is the truth and if it goes into something else, you'll get back on track if you just stick to the person in front of you. It has been a good journey and an awakening to the way I work.

**Louise:** I think similarly having another person is such an anchor for me. I think when you have a structure, a frame work, and you are just told "this is a simple set up — you are just watching what they do" and from then on you are just playing and adding layers and it goes from being "you are smiling" to "you want to marry me and

you're in love with me" and suddenly there are all these different conversations going on.

**Andre:** And in terms of being open and accepting and feeling things, like you say about letting things in and letting things land and not just brushing it off, is another progress I have made. Because you can hear something and, just hear it, but not let it affect you. The way it affects you creates your response. You know the impulse for the next line or the next comment, the next observation. If you don't let it land you are just saying things and there is no weight to it.

**Louise:** Also, if you are constantly looking elsewhere, or on the other person, you are allowing yourself not to dictate how you reply, you're entirely leaving yourself to it, let yourself be in it, let yourself be affected by it and let that change the situation — which is really scary! But really exciting.

**Philippa:** Great, let's have a conversation about your fourth exercise. Can you remember anything you were thinking about during that exercise?

**Louise:** I remember trying to work out what [Andre] felt about me. I mean we had spoken about the back story, but for all I knew he could have come into the room in any way, happy and wanting it to work. I had no idea what he was going to bring. He obviously did not come in like that and I remember thinking "how does he feel about me" and that was a really jarring and unsettling feeling. Not knowing how he felt and why he was acting like that to me.

**Andre:** The scene happened so quickly, it was the quickest exercise I had ever been in. I was just there — just there. And I knew in order for me to live truthfully in the moment, and to get what I wanted was to just don't pre-plan anything. When I walked in she seemed in a great mood so I went with that, I really went with that and I thought "Let's see what happens from here". It's like we didn't know where we were headed, we knew what we wanted individually but everything unfolded just by us watching each other and truthfully being in the moment. Otherwise if you try and get something from someone, without seeing them and what they're going through, it's a one-way street.

**Philippa:** You say it's the quickest scene you have done, do you have any idea how long you were up there for?

**Louise:** No idea

**Philippa:** What did it feel like?

**Andre:** It felt like, less than 3 minutes I think.

**Louise:** No idea, for me there was this moment, near the start, where I realised we were not on the same page and from that moment on I have no concept of time. I can remember feelings and places I was in the room. Yeah I can remember feeling certain things, but can't remember how long for.

**Philippa:** Your exercise was 20 minutes long. It was the only one I carried on much longer than the normal 10 minutes.

**Louise:** No way!

**Andre:** That's mad....wow

**Louise:** I would have said maximum 10

**Andre:** Twenty minutes.... I only fully remember bits of it, it was like a slice of life.

**Philippa:** Were you ever conscious of the audience?

**Andre:** Yes, there was a moment when I first walked in, I knew that there was an audience there. But, in my head it was like "They're there...but this is what we have, this our space". I know that they were there but as we carried on it was like we were at home and they were, I don't know, seeing what goes on in this room in this house, on a day like this.

**Louise:** For me it wasn't so much the audience, as myself, making a comment of what I was doing. It was when we were right in each other's faces. And it wasn't like a comment from the outside of the scene, it was from inside the scene, where I told myself not to cry. Telling myself that I would not let this person do that to me. I found that interesting, because I was obviously very emotional. But I think that came from the circumstance. But I remember there was this inner thought to myself — you're not going to let that happen, right now.

**Philippa:** Do you think it would have changed the exercise if you hadn't told yourself that?

**Louise:** Probably, probably.

**Philippa:** Louise, you almost decided not allowing Andre's actions affect you in the beginning, he was obviously affecting you, but you didn't want to let him see it. At what point did you feel "fuck that" and stopped keeping the act up?

**Louise:** There were two points, one was when I noticed that he'd opened my card and thrown it on the floor. When I noticed it I was like "oh that's a clear message..." I am hearing what he has been saying. When he flipped the table, that was it, no more pretending, no more niceness, I felt he had ruined everything and "let's go". After that it felt much more alive and quick.

**Philippa:** It sped up?

**Louise:** Yeah

**Philippa:** Why do you think it speeds up in those moments?

**Louise:** I think if you are feeling things and you are going impulse to impulse, and when you are watching someone else, and you're observing someone else's thoughts and communication, you just go into this quick cycle, like when you're watching a film. You are very much concentrated on their feelings and you get the over riding arch of their emotions, rather what small physical movement they are doing, you are taken on a journey with them. Which moves you.

**Philippa:** Andre, at what point did you feel like your impulses started to take over, from what you "should be doing".

**Andre:** Definitely when she gave me the card and I just threw it down. There was a moment just before I flipped the table, she kept saying the same thing, and I was just about to eat a cake and she walked away pretending you hadn't heard what I said. It made me want to make myself clear and get her attention.

Before this exercise, a few weeks back, I probably would have talked myself out of moving at all. I would have done something different. But this time I went with the first gut reaction. And from that moment on it was all on impulse. This is the first

time that things were happening so quickly and I wasn't stopping myself. She started coming at me as well, and there were moments here and there when I thought about our relationship and the history. Some impulses changed because of the relationship history. I wanted to grab her at one point, but something inside me remembered something we'd decided about their past so I pulled back. I don't know if that was me or in the scene. I just felt like it was the wrong thing to do in this circumstance, I didn't want to hurt her in the relationship. But when you're in that moment, you are just living, the thoughts come so fast it's so alive.

**Louise:** Yeah, and it all felt very important. There was a switching point where for me where it went from being "ok we can keep going and it'll be fine" to "whatever happens now is the most important thing, and everything you say about me is the most important thing you have ever said, and everything I say about you is exactly what I think of you right now".

**Andre:** And the audience doesn't exist. In that moment, literally nothing, nothing. Just me and her in the space.

**Philippa:** Do you feel then when the stakes rise it's easier to stay in the moment?

**Andre:** Yes

**Louise:** Definitely, for me. Like I said at the start the good thing for me in Meisner was having that structure and when you are doing something simple, you can add so many layers and take it up to however high you want it to go. It's almost mindful, you are starting to notice the important things the higher the stakes get, because that's what you are looking for. And you are observing other things, because they are there, and they are seeing things in you because they are there, because you are letting yourself be. It can only be the truth, it's truth, right there.

**Andre:** I don't think you can't plan the stakes to rise, by yourself, it has to be from the interaction with each other, if one person does it themselves, the audience will be confused "what?? What did he do that for?" Like you say about the pinch and the touch it has to come from a reaction.

### **Appendix 3: Feedback forms research workshops, spring 2018**

**Participants:** Paula, Helen, Georgina, Daisy, Jane, Tilly, Steven and Michael



**Experience:** Foundation year students with no prior experience of Meisner technique.

### 3:1 Workshop 1

**1. How self-conscious did you feel at these moments? (Please circle the correct answer — elaborate briefly if possible)**

**a) Impulse circle:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Michael, Daisy

VERY LITTLE Paula, Jane, Helen, Tilly, Steven

NOT AT ALL Georgina

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I was only worried about breaking the rhythm but as that was only low stakes it did not make me too conscious of it.

**Helen:** Because I've done this before, and felt confident surrounded by my peers.

**Georgina:** I was more focused on what I'm doing than myself.

**Daisy:** I was just aware of everyone around me and keeping the exercise going and not letting drop having the sense of wanting to do well so you don't look bad.

**Jane:** I felt comfortable in the space, with the other people taking part, I felt relaxed. The only slight feeling of self-consciousness was me overthinking if I was running fast enough or catching the eye contact well enough etc.

**Steven:** Because the exercise is so quick it is difficult to have time to think about being self-conscious.

**Michael:** As I was trying to do the exercise correctly and fast with the speed the group was working at, I started noticing myself and how I was doing rather than going with the group connection.

**Tilly:** The pace of the game meant that there wasn't a lot of time to think. Also because it was something I've done before it meant that I wasn't as conscious.

**b) See and be seen:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Paula, Steven

SOMEWHAT Georgina, Helen, Tilly, Daisy

VERY LITTLE Michael

NOT AT ALL Jane

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I'm self-conscious about certain parts of my face so when they glanced that way it made me more aware but as I was with people I know and trust I knew I shouldn't worry as they wouldn't judge me.

**Helen:** I didn't know if what I was doing with my actions etc was right, I engaged in physical contact and was unsure whether this was okay in the exercise.

**Georgina:** Even though I was really concentrating on the other person, if I noticed their eyes moving, it made me wonder what they were looking at on me. Also I found that when I observed something on someone else that I know I have as well, I'd wonder if they saw it too.

**Daisy:** With the first partner I was conscious and looking at me wondering what part they were looking at or imagining them imagining me and wondering what they saw. The exercise definitely became easier as I got into the exercise and the flow and I started to relax and really try to visualise and take in all those features so I could replicate perfectly and properly observe them.

**Jane:** I was so concentrated on remembering those features that I didn't think about myself at all. Afterwards I realised that somebody had been staring at me just as much as I had been staring at them, then I felt a bit self-conscious but not during the exercise.

**Steven:** You could quite easily become aware of someone looking at your features and your first thought is immediately "what are they looking at?"

**Michael:** I was focusing so much of trying to remember the other persons features that I over time completely forgot about myself.

**Tilly:** Just to be looked at so intently was different at first but then once I got over that it was interesting to look at someone's features.

**c) Automatic repetition:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Jane

VERY LITTLE Georgina, Paula, Michael, Helen, Tilly, Daisy, Steven

NOT AT ALL

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I wasn't aware of what was expected from me as I was in the first pair with no one to compare myself to. I was happy with my partner and felt comfortable with him and so it turned into really fun and safe exercise.

**Helen:** I was pretty much completely listening to my partner. The others didn't matter, even though they were giggling, I still stayed focused on the person I was reacting to.

**Georgina:** My focus was entirely on listening and repeating the word/sound that I wasn't thinking about myself very much at all.

**Daisy:** I was so focused on listening to the other person sound and words I'm so focused on repeating what I heard that the whole surrounding didn't even occur to me.

**Jane:** At first I was quite self-conscious of my appearance and didn't feel comfortable looking in each other's eyes. I relaxed into the exercise more and focused more on the other person.

**Steven:** Perhaps a little at the beginning, but soon it becomes so unimportant and the exercise becomes so quick that you again forget about anything that makes you feel self-conscious

**Michael:** I was so focused on the correct words being said and the way and they said it in, that I didn't really notice the cameras much or if the exercise was done right. I did find it difficult though when it became very fast paced and we started to laugh and move more.

**Tilly:** Again, the pace of the exercise meant that I wasn't thinking about what the other person was saying or what was doing.

**d) Repetition with call out:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Paula

SOMEWHAT Georgina, Jane, Tilly, Steven

VERY LITTLE Daisy

NOT AT ALL Michael, Helen

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** Because of the changing between observations I was worried firstly about calling out something that the other person was self-conscious of, I was also conscious of how I was pronouncing words with my partner picking up my accent. I also worried about finding something different to say from what I observed last.

**Helen:** Because of already doing the first exercise I was pretty confident with the exercise. When my name was called out and broke the rhythm I was trying to not let that affect my thoughts and me too much and I didn't overthink a lot.

**Georgina:** I wasn't self-conscious about what the other person was observing, but more on what I was saying. It is very difficult to not think of something to say in advance, and then I'd panic, not wanting to say something that others would judge me by or possibly be offended by.

**Daisy:** With the automatic repetition I was so focused on listening to my partner that I wasn't aware or conscious of what was happening around me. When my name got called out I sort of panicked and distracted my mind from the previous word which sometimes make the next repetition unarticulated I felt self-conscious with the fact that I thought I messed up the task by saying what was coming into my head rather than what I was observing.

**Jane:** I wasn't sure if I was observing right but instead of thinking and feeling I panicked and just said what I observed in the other person.

**Steven:** similar to automatic repetition, but you're slightly more aware of pressures to finding new observation when your name is being called.

**Michael:** I tried to keep a good eye contact throughout and keep the connection and though I wasn't nervous about what to say before I started during the exercise that just came. Completely didn't realise anyone was there other than us two.

**Tilly:** The only reason I became self-conscious was because my partner said or noticed something about me that I'm already conscious of so then it took me a while to get out of my head but after that I wasn't so self-conscious.

## **2. Did you feel worried today, if so at what point?**

**Paula:** At the beginning of the very first exercise, automatic repetition, I was worried about what was needed of me and being in the first couple I didn't know what to expect or how people would react to me in the space.

**Helen:** Not really. I was a little wary at first when I did the see and be seen exercise

**Georgina:** I was a little worried about what I would observe, and not thinking about what to say during repetition with callout.

**Daisy:** I felt worried at the beginning of the session as I had no idea what to expect. I was worried I've been chosen for a negative reason and the fact that I'm always told I need to let down my guard.

**Jane:** Before the lesson I was anxious of what was to come because I had no idea what we were going to be doing. Also before each exercise I felt a little anxious in case I was going to do it wrong.

**Steven:** At the beginning as I knew very little about Meisner or how deep we might be going.

**Michael:** I think right at the beginning I was worried as I was picked for this and I had to try to be clever and do everything correct, which I found quickly that not thinking actually make the offers better and more real.

**Tilly:** I only felt worried when someone was asked to get up in the space even though we haven't been told that the exercise was.

### **3. Did you feel excited today, if so at what point?**

**Paula:** After doing the first repetition exercise I was excited to do more. I'm excited to explore more about my subconscious and immediate reactions.

**Helen:** Yes, I was happy and excited to be involved in the exercises. I love learning new things and I'm comfortable with my group.

**Georgina:** I felt excited whilst doing the impulse circle, when it went faster and faster, I was so focused on following it.

**Daisy:** I felt excited to go into something completely new. The thought of going into something completely open-minded, which was also scary. I felt excited going into the exercises and trying to understand what it feels like for me personally. It excites me to learn about and understand different concepts and practices.

**Jane:** Yes! After chatting about this process and the reason we were picked, also mainly when the first exercise started I stopped thinking and just did it, finding a relationship with my partner felt quite rewarding.

**Steven:** As soon as we got into starting exercises and from then on I was determined to jump in and let go and learn something.

**Michael:** In the see and be seen exercise and the repetition with callout I felt very good when creating a real connection with my partner, this made me more focused on the other person on the task whilst everything else just disappeared.

**Tilly:** The first exercise we did, the impulse circle, was great fun and was definitely the most comfortable I felt even though I was thrown in the deep end.

#### **4. At what point were you most “in the flow”?**

**Paula:** In the automatic repetition exercise

**Helen:** In the first exercise (automatic repetition), reacting and using different actions to affect the other person.

**Georgina:** During the impulse circle

**Daisy:** I felt most in the flow during repetition with callout. The eye contact kept the bond and relationship growing, I felt fully involved and fully connected to the exercise and my partner.

**Jane:** In the automatic repetition. I wasn't worried about our audience for the cameras or anyone observing just the conversation with my partner.

**Steven:** automatic repetition, you concentrate on the sound and word so much and the pace, so much, so that even when the sound or word changed the flow stayed to a certain extent.

**Michael:** Definitely in the repetition with call out as when I stopped trying to think about what to say when my name was called my priority just became about keeping the connection with my partner.

**Tilly:** During the automatic repetition, I just found responding to my partner is much easier and my attention was solely on my partner.

### **5. When was the attention on your partner the strongest?**

**Paula:** When I focused more on how they were pronouncing the word—more how it sounded and the intonation rather than the meaning of the word itself, this was in automatic repetition and repetition with a callout.

**Helen:** When we had to look at our partner in the see and be seen exercise taking note of their facial features in a photographic memory way.

**Georgina:** Automatic repetition

**Daisy:** In repetition callout. Maintaining eye contact throughout kept the attention on the exercise and built the relationship to its strongest. I was focused completely on my partner connected through our eye contact.

**Jane:** When I had to observe something new about them in the moment, I think it is called repetition with call out.

**Steven:** Automatic repetition because there was the least things to think about, I felt I could completely focus and tune in to my partner.

**Michael:** I would probably say the see and be seen exercise as all you had to do was put your focus on them which over time grew to me feeling a real relationship with them and notice things about them I never knew.

**Tilly:** During see and be seen it was the easiest to pay attention to my partner.

### **6. When did your attention drift?**

**Paula:** When I heard or noticed someone reacting to me, if there began to be some sort of judgement, good or bad, on how I was performing in the class.

**Helen:** I'm not sure when my attention drifted during the class I don't think it did.

**Georgina:** See and be seen



**Daisy:** My attention drifted during the discussion after See and be seen exercise I was focusing heavily on how I saw the exercise that I drifted away from the group.

**Jane:** Whenever I worried about myself

**Steven:** Only momentarily at points when my partner was observing me in see and be seen.

**Michael:** Don't think it did

**Tilly:** During the automatic repetition with call out I found that after something has been said that I was conscious about my attention was on myself rather than my partner.

### **7. When you were most aware of the audience?**

**Paula:** When they were laughing with us I felt the need to perform but quickly got over that by focusing on my partner's pronunciation again.

**Helen:** When I got up in front of the cameras and the audience for the first time in the class.

**Georgina:** Repetition with call out

**Daisy:** I was definitely most aware of my audience during impulse circle, being open everything so they did and walking around the room etc also during my first see and be seen exercise I was conscious of my partner looking at me as I wasn't fully focused on the task. Too much worrying about what she was looking at.

**Jane:** When I tried thinking of something to say instead of observing, I panicked.

**Steven:** At no point as far as I'm aware.

**Michael:** Probably in the automatic repetition as well we started laughing halfway through broke the fourth wall a bit.

**Tilly:** I wasn't really aware of the audience at any point. If my attention came off my partner it immediately went onto myself rather than the audience.

### **8. When did you feel the strongest motivation in the sessions?**

**Paula:** When I began to drift away from my focus on my partner. I noticed myself doing so and so I began to motivate myself to get back on topic and listen to her more attentively.

**Helen:** During the impulse circle

**Georgina:** Automatic repetition

**Daisy:** I felt the strongest motivation when completely focused on my third partner during see and be seen, Just letting go and really focusing on observing gave me a strong sense of motivation and being completely immersed in a task. Also during repetition with call out. Keeping eye contact throughout really kept the attention and exercise alive.

**Jane:** When I found a flow with my partner and would genuinely laughed and giggled.

**Steven:** in the impulse circle because I felt more strongly an objective

**Michael:** All the way through was really interesting and can't wait to explore it more

**Tilly:** During the impulse circle because I had to make sure I was out of the way of person coming towards me.

### 3:2 Workshop 2

**1. How self-conscious did you feel at these moments today? (Please circle the correct answer — elaborate briefly if possible)**

**a) Impulse circle:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT

VERY LITTLE Jane, Daisy, Michael

NOT AT ALL Tilly, Georgina, Paula, Helen, Steven

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I've done this a few times now in these workshops and in other classes so I'm feeling more comfortable with how the game works and then I can do it well.

**Helen:** I feel confident with this now.

**Georgina:** My attention was entirely on what we were doing.

**Daisy:** I was so focused following the clap and grabbing someone's attention that you don't think about what you doing at all. Attention is all on the group.

**Jane:** Because I was comfortable with the people around me and the exercise. I felt focused on the exercise and there wasn't much room left to feel self-conscious, although a tiny part of me was thinking "Am I doing this quick enough?"

**Steven:** I can focus on this easily in this exercise.

**Michael:** Because it was a lot faster towards the end and slightly more chaotic I found as long as I was alive in and the space open to where people were looking I could keep calm.

**Tilly:** I think it was because we have done the exercise before I wasn't concerned about myself only to play the game.

**b) Count to 3 exercise:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Daisy

SOMEWHAT Tilly, Steven

VERY LITTLE Jane, Michael, Paula, Helen

NOT AT ALL Georgina

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I enjoyed this exercise. Probably because there are no high-stakes, and it's not too difficult but just enough to pose a challenge and not let it be boring. The only time I get self-conscious is if I worry about letting my partner down by messing up.

**Helen:** I was concentrating on my partner, not myself.

**Georgina:** As with the impulse circle, it required such concentration, I was unable to think about anything else.

**Daisy:** I found it quite hard to grasp the exercise, listening to everyone count I found it quite hard to stay focused on my partner fully. And then trying to work out what came next to my focus is elsewhere.

**Jane:** I found this a challenge at first because we took it in turns as pairs and had a type of audience which added to the pressure but I wasn't particularly worried self-conscious.

**Steven:** Once I was in a pattern I wasn't self-conscious, but before that I was conscious of getting it right for my partner.

**Michael:** I found that in this I was focused so much on the current exercise I didn't think about myself at all. As we progressed I found it a lot easier as I was just thinking about making sure out saw my partner cues. I was found adding movements instead of numbers easier as I work better with movement memory.

**Tilly:** Because I kept going wrong. Every time I made a mistake I felt more and more self-conscious.

**c) Blind leading blind:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Tilly, Daisy, Michael, Paula, Helen

VERY LITTLE Jane, Georgina, Steven

NOT AT ALL

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I got a bit self-conscious about what I looked like during this when I had my eyes closed. But I felt in control when leading and I felt confident, and when I was

being led I trusted my partner because of house successful and careful everyone had been when I was in the group of people leading. And natural instinct of protecting others did kick in however when I was being led strangely.

**Helen:** I had to think about what everyone else was and how my position affected others.

**Georgina:** I was very comfortable leading and being led by the first person, however I felt uneasy not knowing who was leading me.

**Daisy:** I felt more comfortable leading someone's being led myself. Being lead I want a strong contact through my hands to feel safe and to trust them, but that contact became weaker so I felt more untrusting and able to be led

**Jane:** Relaxed and I believe I put my trust in to my partners. I felt probably more self-conscious leading backwards, and that I wasn't reassuring enough to my partners, that maybe they didn't feel safe with me.

**Steven:** Only when my partner didn't trust me, you could tell from their face.

**Michael:** I found trying to let my partner have complete control so much harder than I thought I would, which made me very wary and made me only takes more careful steps.

**Tilly:** I didn't feel totally self-conscious because I had my eyes closed so I couldn't see everyone else's reaction, however I was pretty scared and I found it difficult to trust my partners and then I found I wasn't very good at reading what they wanted.

**d) Repetition (You have/are — I have/am, first time switching observations ourselves):**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Jane

SOMEWHAT Tilly, Georgina, Paula, Steven

VERY LITTLE Daisy, Michael

NOT AT ALL Helen

### **Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I feel because I was focusing on my partner more to find observations I wasn't focusing on what I felt self-conscious about. The worry came when there was a big reaction and I was worried about if my partner was offended, which is worried about doing to them. I also got conscious when I could see my partner actively looking for something as I was worried there was a flaw on my face that they would find and point out.

**Helen:** Because we've done it before it felt easier this time.

**Georgina:** The first time I don't think I fully understood the exercise, but did feel quite self-conscious with someone and evaluating my behaviour.

**Daisy:** I was so focused on my partner and focused on what she was doing that I was completely unaware of what I was hearing or doing. I lost sense of the original meaning or purpose of the task as I was so focused and invested in my partner. Even when my partner was commenting on things I did I wasn't fazed as I was completely focused on her.

**Jane:** I felt quite conscious about what they might observe about me, and what I might tell them by my reaction of that observation.

**Steven:** It felt judgemental at first and naturally this felt uncomfortable.

**Michael:** I found this quite nice as you didn't feel rushed to come up with observations we could focus on connecting with your partner and when you noticed something you didn't panic you just vocalised it.

**Tilly:** I found it more difficult to get away from physical appearances and when I did comment on behaviour it was more the physical response rather than wider behaviours coming but I found that my partner and I had a good rhythm and we were both focused properly on the other.

### **e) 3 moments all work at once:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Tilly, Georgina, Paula

SOMEWHAT Jane, Daisy, Michael

VERY LITTLE

NOT AT ALL Helen

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** There was an automatic anxiety of trying to get into the flow of it. I found it difficult to find something interesting or different at first and then once I have the relief of finding something I forgot to watch the reaction so I just began to stress out and that made me more worried.

**Helen:** I was intent of observing my partner's body language.

**Georgina:** I was already feeling a little self-conscious with someone commenting on my behaviour but even more so when they were commenting on my reaction to that.

**Daisy:** I felt more worried when people commented on my features and became more aware and self-conscious as they were being pointed out to me. When they commented on my behaviour I felt less worried as it surprised me when my partners pointed out things I didn't realise I did.

**Jane:** I felt conscious of not being able to observe my partner well enough.

**Michael:** I found it challenging trying to spot some of the responses that fast because saying to someone you have a nose or something equal to that it doesn't give a lot of response from them.

**Tilly:** Being sat so close to someone made me more conscious, however I wasn't necessarily nervous about what people were saying about me it was that I couldn't read their behaviour properly.

**f) 3 moment filmed:**

VERY MUCH Georgina

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Tilly, Jane, Daisy, Paula

VERY LITTLE Michael

NOT AT ALL Helen

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I'm not very good at silence so I felt pressure when me and my partner was searching each other things to say.

**Helen:** Same as before.

**Georgina:** Same as before but it was more heightened with everyone watching.

**Daisy:** Same as before however I felt a bit more comfortable by now.

**Jane:** Still a little conscious of being observed by my partner and observing enough of them too, however I felt more relaxed than in the last session.

**Michael:** By this point they were being filmed I felt a lot more relaxed knowing the exercise and knowing that sometimes responses aren't always sudden so I took my time and felt comfortable.

**Tilly:** I felt less so than before because I was working with my core partner I was still worried that I wouldn't have anything to say.

**g) 3 moment with provocative question/statement:**

VERY MUCH Georgina, Paula

QUITE A BIT Jane, Helen, Steven

SOMEWHAT Tilly, Daisy

VERY LITTLE Michael

NOT AT ALL

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I was very worried here about being asked questions I didn't want to be asked about my private life. Because I know people in the group well enough I was scared



they would ask me questions I didn't want answer and I'm not very good at discussing the truth that made me feel self-conscious.

**Helen:** I didn't feel comfortable with this exercise.

**Georgina:** I felt incredibly self-conscious doing this it was deliberately things that would get a reaction and when that was then commented on it felt like they were seeing into the depths of my soul.

**Daisy:** I was worried what questions I was going to be asked when people commented on my behaviour I was surprised how I came across. I felt like I couldn't pinpoint what I was observing which made it quite difficult for me it blocked my thoughts I became quite "thinky".

**Jane:** Being asked things that made me react in a way that I just wanted to say back and "omg no" or "yes obviously" was difficult and I couldn't cover up as much as I could have with words because my reaction in repeating the question back would probably say a lot of how I felt.

**Steven:** Naturally questions were designed to be deep and get a response and the questions were uncomfortable enough to elicit a response, and make you feel self-conscious.

**Michael:** As the responses to the questions were so big and so easy to pinpoint this was a lot easier, and it was fun finding things out about my partners.

**Tilly:** I felt self-conscious in case people felt that the provocative things I was saying were truthful, because I was trying to get a reaction I was saying things that I knew would either make them feel uncomfortable or angry.

#### **h) Repetition second time:**

VERY MUCH Georgina

QUITE A BIT Helen

SOMEWHAT Michael, Paula

VERY LITTLE Jane

NOT AT ALL Tilly, Daisy, Steven

### **Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I feel much more relaxed now that we've done the other tasks as well, however I also felt self-conscious pressure to be better because now we all have the practice of the workshop I should be much more in the flow and more interesting than in the beginning.

**Helen:** I just didn't feel happy with the exercise

**Georgina:** I don't think I've ever felt as self-conscious as I did during this exercise, because the more things that would pointed out the more I reacted which then gave more things to comment on if felt like vicious circle.

**Daisy:** throughout the whole exercise my eye contact and focus was on my partner. I felt a really strong equal connection with my partner this time, which made me feel safe and completely present in the moment.

**Jane:** It was smoother, and gave loads more, and I felt more open to being observed. Still a tiny part of me not quite sure and wondering what people were watching in my partner and me. I think because we are done the provocative question exercise, it had warmed me up, and the repetition felt easier.

**Steven:** I got into this really quickly, a really good flow and purely focused on observing behaviour and my partner.

**Michael:** Well I felt somewhat self-conscious because I messed up the exercise slightly in the beginning, it got quite hard to jump back in and try to forget were I had gone wrong, I tried to focus on my partner but I was slightly more aware of myself I have to admit.

**Tilly:** My partner and I got into a real flow so there was no time and energy to put on myself and I was just solely thinking about my partner.

### **2. Did you feel worried today, if so at what point?**

**Paula:** When getting in front of the cameras I felt much more worried, not because of the stage fright kind of thing but just because I felt like I needed to be really

interesting and because in case my partner said something I didn't want to be said then the rest of the class would see my true reaction to it.

**Helen:** When we filmed the last exercise I didn't feel happy and I felt very self-conscious.

**Georgina:** During the three moment exercise with the provocative question, because I was really scared what the other person would say to me.

**Daisy:** I felt worried during the provocative statements and questions, as I couldn't find the right words to express what I thought or observed. And I was worried about what questions were going to be asked and what they'd see about my behaviour.

**Jane:** A little in the repetition first time around, worried how it would go with anything might be harder since the first day session.

**Steven:** During the provocative questions.

**Michael:** Just at the last repetition exercise really as I know I could have done better if I didn't mess up at the beginning and my mind wasn't in the right place towards the end as a result of that.

**Tilly:** I felt worried during the provocative question exercise because I was so conscious of saying something to really offend someone so that I was thinking about myself not my partner.

### **3. Did you feel excited today, if so at what point?**

**Paula:** I felt excited for that three moment provocative question exercise because I've been told about before at that also made me really worried that it may go too deep.

**Helen:** When we were doing the three moment exercise and switched partners several times I was happy and excited.

**Georgina:** I found the impulse circle exciting again, I find following it and the movement is very exciting and I'm really on edge waiting for that eye contact.

**Daisy:** Throughout the session I was excited as I thoroughly enjoy learning and finding out new things I didn't necessarily realise I did.

**Jane:** Yes, the counting exercise felt quite rewarding and being able to notice that that skill is a part of myself that's just needed to be warmed up, the ability is inside me. Noticing the difference between when we counted to 3 the first time, too when we counter to 3 after that clapping jumping and bending the knees was remarkable.

**Steven:** During impulse circle and repetition the second time.

**Michael:** yeah I felt very alive and upbeat throughout the whole session but definitely the counting to 3 exercise got me feeling most connected.

**Tilly:** I don't know whether I felt excited today, I enjoy myself but I found I was much more self-conscious than I think I was in the first session. I think I felt pressure to be better than I had been the previous session.

#### **4. At what point were you most "in the flow"?**

**Paula:** Probably in the repetition the second time because then I knew what I was doing.

**Helen:** I didn't feel in the flow at all

**Georgina:** Impulse circle

**Daisy:** I was most in the flow during the repetition exercise the second time.

**Jane:** Last repetition exercise with my partner in front of the camera.

**Steven:** During impulse circle and repetition the second time.

**Michael:** I will probably say the impulse circle, in the very beginning, as I needed to be open to offers and connect to the group which we achieved and it was very enjoyable.

**Tilly:** Second repetition exercise.

#### **5. When was the attention on your partner the strongest?**

**Paula:** When I was partnered with Holly in the three moment work with the provocative questions because I felt like I knew the right questions to ask to make her feel happy or excited she was just so nervous, as I was so there was no extra pressure to be better or more calm.

**Helen:** When we did the counting to 3 exercise.

**Georgina:** Towards the end of the second repetition exercise, after taking most of the observations I was really determined to make some myself.

**Daisy:** It was strongest during the repetition exercise the second time because I was so focused on what she was doing and finding other observations in her behaviour, I have no awareness of anything else or myself.

**Jane:** During the middle and end of repetition, when I had relaxed more, and completely forgotten about the audience.

**Steven:** During repetition the second time I was so concentrated on observing my partner.

**Michael:** I filled in the blind leading the blind exercise, as I had to focus so much on my partners' movements and their pressure on the hands and palms.

**Tilly:** The second time we did repetition we got into a really good flow and I think that's because we were so focused on each other.

## **6. When did your attention drift?**

**Paula:** When trying to find that reaction part of the three moment exercise, because I was so relieved about finding something to say I lost focus on watching my partner, I guess I relaxed too much.

**Helen:** When I tried to think about how the body language changed while doing the provocative questions.

**Georgina:** The three moment exercise.

**Daisy:** My attention drifted during the count to three exercise, because I couldn't figure out what number came next and all the noise around me from the other people made my attention slack.

**Jane:** When I became conscious people watching me— the audience—then I try to think too much about finding something to observe in my partner instead of just saying what I saw.

**Steven:** During provocative questions.

**Michael:** Only in the very last exercise I felt more conscious of myself instead of the other person because I messed up.

**Tilly:** During the repetition with provocative question, I felt so uncomfortable I spent so much more time thinking about myself rather than my partner. I was thinking about what I was saying and how I was reacting, I didn't pay much attention to them at all.

## **7. When you were most aware of the audience?**

**Paula:** I don't remember being aware of the audience at all.

**Helen:** In the last repetition exercise. Hello

**Georgina:** In the middle of the second repetition exercise, I was laughing so much and was so self-conscious of everything I was doing, I became very aware of the people watching worrying they were judging me.

**Daisy:** During count to 3 exercise, but also during the three moments as they were pointing out my features so I became quite self-conscious and aware of myself.

**Jane:** Probably when I wasn't focused enough on Holly my partner.

**Steven:** I wasn't.

**Michael:** Same as before right after messing up in the second repetition exercise. I wish I could just silence that voice in my head that keeps telling me I've done something wrong and making me conscious of everything except of what I am actually doing.

**Tilly:** During the provocative question, I was worried the others would hear what I was saying and they would judge me.

### **8. When did you feel the strongest motivation in the sessions?**

**Paula:** When doing the counting to 3 together, I felt really motivated because there was no pressure to perform or be particularly interesting so I could just focus and be motivated just do as best as I could.

**Georgina:** When we did the blind leading the blind, and I was leading I felt particularly motivated to move my partner through the space ensuring they were comfortable.

**Daisy:** I felt the strongest motivation at the end of the session when we were just talking to Philippa about Meisner technique, it made me excited about what was to come and to learn more about Meisner technique specifically.

**Jane:** When things worked with my partner and also watching others progress from their first time doing repetition to the last time today.

**Steven:** During repetition exercise the second time.

**Michael:** Probably in the three moment exercise as I really wanted to pinpoint what exactly the response was I felt like a detective trying to find stuff out.

**Tilly:** During the second repetition, the flow felt so good and I just kept focusing on their behaviour to stay in that moment.

### 3:3 Workshop 3

#### **1. How self-conscious did you feel at these moments today? (Please circle the correct answer — elaborate briefly if possible)**

##### **a) Impulse circle:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Helen

SOMEWHAT Daisy

VERY LITTLE Paula, Michael

NOT AT ALL Steven, Georgina, Tilly, Jane

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** We have done this so often with no need to think about it now makes it easy, however I'm still self-conscious about being too slow and holding up the group.

**Helen:** I wasn't feeling very well today, and I was really tired. I couldn't really concentrate so I felt very self aware that I couldn't connect with the group.

**Georgina:** I am very comfortable with this now and I'm just excited to get stuck in.

**Daisy:** I wasn't necessarily completely focused on the group, I felt quite distracted within myself didn't put all my attention group and became quite fuddled in my mind. I think this was mostly due to my own state of mind, not the exercise.

**Jane:** Comfortable with the exercise now that we have done it a few times.

**Steven:** The speed of the game and the amount we have done it makes it second nature now.

**Michael:** I feel we have all done this exercise a lot and have adopted a very good group dynamic by now.

**Tilly:** We have done the exercise many times now so I felt very comfortable with it.

**b) Point to.....exercise:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Steven

VERY LITTLE Tilly, Paula, Daisy

NOT AT ALL Georgina, Jane, Michael

**Why do you think that was?**



**Paula:** I enjoy this exercise a lot it's a little challenge and it's fun to try and get right, but if I do get it wrong it doesn't affect others so no major subconscious pressure.

**Georgina:** It was fun I just enjoyed the task.

**Daisy:** I was so aware and conscious of trying to remember where everyone was in the circle and getting it right that I lost all sense and care about what I was doing or thinking or feeling.

**Jane:** I find this a good exercise to get myself focus and present in the room. It's not an exercise where I feel exposed or uncomfortable. If I mess up I just know that I'm not as focused or present in the room as I can be.

**Steven:** I was conscious of everyone succeeding and not failing.

**Michael:** As I was focusing so much on making sure I knew where everyone was at all times I didn't have time to feel self-conscious.

**Tilly:** I have done this exercise before so I felt that I wasn't going in blind. I find I feel more self-conscious doing an exercise I have never done before.

**c) Tap in and out repetition:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Jane

SOMEWHAT Paula

VERY LITTLE Steven, Georgina, Tilly, Daisy, Michael

NOT AT ALL Helen

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I worried a lot about disturbing other people's flow in the exercise but whilst I was in it I didn't have any have a major awareness of any others and I felt comfortable doing the exercise without being judged too much.

**Helen:** I felt that I could work well with my different partners, and enjoyed swapping it when I noticed something I wanted to assess in someone else.

**Georgina:** I was very happy doing this partly because I'm more used to it now, but it also helped having others doing it around me, as there was less pressure.

**Daisy:** I felt very observant and invested in my partner and trying to find their emotions through what or how they were acting, I didn't mind being commented on or fazed by what I was doing. Even being observed by someone didn't come to my attention until one of them tapped me out. Watching the dynamics between two people carefully was really interesting

**Jane:** Although we have been doing the repetition in front of the rest of the group for a while now, in this one I felt particularly conscious of myself. When I had another person up close watching me and my partner I sometimes felt more conscious of them than my partner. I also felt worried about them tapping me out and not wanting to do repetition with me.

**Steven:** Only occasionally when the person came to tap me out did I feel self-conscious.

**Michael:** Even though with this one you were having people observing you while doing the repetition I was so focused on my partner I didn't really notice anyone watching.

**Tilly:** I was using all my focus on the people I was working with, the only time I started to feel self-conscious was when I was worried that I was leaving it too long to tap in, but then I was struggling to notice behaviour because I was thinking about myself.

**d) Repetition with your set partner (You have/are — I have/am, first time switching observations ourselves):**

VERY MUCH Daisy

QUITE A BIT Helen

SOMEWHAT Tilly, Jane, Paula, Michael

VERY LITTLE Georgina

NOT AT ALL Steven

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** having done the exercise before made me feel more comfortable with doing it now, but at the same time I felt like I was thinking too much because I needed to better progress more from last week.

**Helen:** It was hard to get back into this, I was so self-conscious.

**Georgina:** I think after having done it quite a few times now becomes easier and more comfortable.

**Daisy:** I don't know why but I felt the connection this time was forced. Constantly felt eyes on me. Trying to find something to say and I felt I was focused on the exercise moving forward rather than on the present, I lost sense of just repeating and staying on the moment with my partner. Still thinking a lot and was completely aware of my surroundings and it became a vicious circle. It was almost an out of body experience I was just not engaged and the less engaged and became the less I could see my partner my head just to over.

**Jane:** Still haven't completely been able to block out people observing us.

**Steven:** Again I feel so focused on my partner when doing this exercise and I do not feel self-conscious at all. Even when observations were made on my behaviour I didn't feel self-conscious, there was too much going on to focus on myself.

**Michael:** I found that sometimes finding things about my partner's behaviour quite hard which led me to observe external things only, not what was actually going on with them.

**Tilly:** I didn't feel self-conscious at the start but my partner and I just couldn't get into a rhythm. The longer we were stood there the more self-conscious I got because I knew that we had done better before.

**e) Back to back repetition:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Paula

SOMEWHAT

VERY LITTLE Steven, Georgina, Tilly, Jane, Daisy, Michael

NOT AT ALL Helen

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I found this really difficult to find my partners reactions because I personally use eye contact a lot seeing people and being aware of them. I was also worried as to how I felt to my partner and, if I was slouching too much always my back was too wide, this hindered my progression a lot I think.

**Helen:** I felt really good doing this exercise, I could really see what my partner was doing and feel their emotions without even looking at them.

**Georgina:** Without the intense eye contact it's almost easier to make observations even when you can't see the other person.

**Daisy:** I sensed a lot more emotion with my partner by listening and feeling their movements and their intonation than I thought I would. You had to completely engage with your partner and put all your effort into understanding them and observe their behaviour and make sense of the reason behind it. There was just no attention left over to be self-conscious.

**Jane:** I found this exercise so much easier to observe my partner in, to not have the intense eye contact really helped me focus on them, and use my other senses and I felt like I was able to listen a lot better. We both had a good flow going and felt really connected. I probably felt a little conscious when my partners observations were accurate and I couldn't believe I had given that away in my body language or tone of my voice. It made me conscious of how much I give away and wondering if people can read me easily.

**Steven:** Only at the start before I tuned into my partner, until I found the focus point I was aware of my self-consciousness.

**Michael:** Because this is so much harder that watching someone, you really have to put all your attention on the other person and be very sensitive to their offers and the little things like voice intonation and back movements.

**Tilly:** I was focusing on how much I could feel from my partner. I was starting to connect the behaviour though, so I would mention that my partner's back was tense but then I wouldn't elaborate saying that he was uncomfortable because my mind was just thinking about physical movement.

**f) Pushing towards each other repetition:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Steven

SOMEWHAT

VERY LITTLE Tilly, Paula, Daisy, Helen

NOT AT ALL Georgina, Jane, Michael

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** As there was something else happening between us it felt like there was more to comment on and the focus of each other wasn't difficult to hold so there was much less pressure.

**Helen:** We had to concentrate on each other so that we wouldn't fall, but I wasn't really disconnected with my partner at all, we had to work together.

**Georgina:** I was really happy doing this, with something else to concentrate on it was less intense but also gave more things to comment on.

**Daisy:** Physical activity and physical connection with my partner created an obstacle which made it easier to find reasoning behind their behaviour, because we were both in the same situation. Staying physically connected kept a bond between us; we both needed something from the other. You could sense their emotions a lot easier when my partner was tense and understood a lot more and there was clarity behind the behaviour.

**Jane:** No one was watching us while we did it as everyone worked at the same time. I didn't feel pressured for the exercise to go a certain way, I just let it happen.

**Steven:** Because in the position I felt vulnerable and was very much more aware of my behaviour.

**Michael:** As we were so focused on the actual task of keeping balanced the repetition just flowed really well.

**Tilly:** As I was concentrating on not falling over and my partner and I found it easier to think. There was no time to think about yourself because I was solely focused on my partner.

**g) Leaning away from each other repetition:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Steven, Paula, Michael, Helen

VERY LITTLE Tilly, Jane, Daisy

NOT AT ALL Georgina

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I was worried about slipping and falling from my partner there was a lot of mentioning about this which, I think, made it easier for everyone thinking about the task so much instead of the fact that we were commenting on each other.

**Helen:** I kept feeling like I was going to fall! I was trying so hard to concentrate on my partner, however I struggled somewhat because I was thinking about falling.

**Georgina:** As before the combination of having others doing the exercise at the same time, having something else to concentrate on and comment on, I felt far more at ease.

**Daisy:** You could easily gauge how the other person was feeling and as the stakes were a lot higher, there was a risk of falling, you both needed something from the

other person again and it was prominent. There was desperation and a need for help. You both understood or could clearly see the other persons reason from the behaviour. Their tension, anxiety, worry was a evident.

**Jane:** I was a tiny bit conscious of my sweaty palms, but the leaning away I felt took away the intensity of the eye contact and having something else to concentrate on helped me observe more.

**Steven:** I felt less conscious than the pushing exercise, but still felt partially vulnerable.

**Michael:** As my partner was really scared in this exercise meant we were both less comfortable in it.

**Tilly:** Again there was just no time to think about myself. I was only thinking about my partner. My hands were very sweaty though so I was becoming more self-conscious about that the longer the exercise went on.

#### **h) Sitting down holding hands repetition:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT

VERY LITTLE Jane, Paula, Daisy, Michael

NOT AT ALL Steven, Georgina, Tilly, Helen

#### **Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I felt so much more open with my partner here and that there wasn't so much pressure to impress or make intelligent observations.

**Helen:** I felt really in the zone doing this, my attention wasn't on anything else in the room. I couldn't hear or see anything other than my partner Lizzie. I was so engaged with her and it felt really natural and as though we were just talking and observing. What I thought was 2,5 min exercise turned out to be 10 minutes — lost in it!

**Georgina:** I'm not sure exactly what it was, but I was perfectly comfortable and happy in this exercise, so much that I still can't believe how long we did it for. I think it may have been due to how relaxed it felt after the pushing and leaning exercise.

**Daisy:** Both were very relaxed with each other. Previous exercises made us trust each other so we could just relax into sitting, Being there with each other. The contact between us synched our behaviour where we ended up copying each other's actions. We did a gasp at exactly the same time at one point, I was completely invested in my partner.

**Jane:** After all of the other exercises we were both relaxed and fully focused on each other.

**Steven:** This was so comfortable, the position was comfortable, but also the exercise itself, and I could easily focus on the task and tune out of my own self-consciousness

**Michael:** I found that as soon as the connection between us was established it flowed better than normal, it went by so quick!

**Tilly:** I found this the most comfortable I have been since we started the workshops, something about having physical contact made it so much easier to see what my partner was feeling or thinking.

**i) Repetition second time with set partner:**

VERY MUCH Georgina

QUITE A BIT Michael, Helen

SOMEWHAT Jane, Daisy

VERY LITTLE Steven, Tilly, Paula

NOT AT ALL

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** Being given the task of trying to get to know my partner more gave me more objective in the exercise which made easy to focus on my partner and less on myself.



**Helen:** I don't know whether it was easier or harder to get back to the repetition. We'd done quite well and felt confident in the last few exercises, that I felt so self-conscious during this, because I was overthinking too much.

**Georgina:** Being asked to "go deeper" and seeing things other people had said made me really worried about what might be observed about me, and said in front of everyone else.

**Daisy:** Trying to understand my partner on a deeper level was interesting, although I was so focused on trying to find things about her I got quite nervous about what she'd say to be and what she'd observe about me on a deeper level. I felt nervous and quite defensive and started to want to cover that by firing off loads of observations about her so that she couldn't say anything about me. I did this subconsciously though to protect myself.

**Jane:** It started off ok, as normal, but then Holly started noticing things like "you're confident about yourself" which made my tummy tense up and I felt like I was repeating that line forever.

**Steven:** I was partially aware of what had come before and potential questions that come before me and this made me a little self-conscious before we started, once we got going off at all.

**Michael:** I don't know why but I found it a lot more challenging to keep the ball rolling in this exercise. I think I worried too much about making offers. Apparently I didn't repeat certain things my partner said, I really had no idea I hadn't, but I wasn't listening, I was thinking too much.

**Tilly:** I found it more difficult coming back to the repetition but not being allowed to hold hands. I just felt like I wasn't as connected and I couldn't feel those little twitchy hand movements that would give so much away.

## **2. Did you feel worried today, if so at what point?**

**Paula:** I was worried in the leaning away exercise because I didn't trust me or my partner to not fall.

**Helen:** No not really. A little puzzled in the end as to why the exercise felt so odd.

**Georgina:** In the last repetition exercise.

**Daisy:** I felt worried in the first repetition exercise when me and my partner didn't connect. Made me feel indifferent when I wasn't completely connected with my partner. I didn't feel like myself at all.

**Jane:** I didn't really. Just in the last repetition exercise when the observations got a bit personal and I worried that I wouldn't be able to get focused again and carry on making observations of her because I felt thrown off course. I did manage that though.

**Steven:** When the first set partners finish their go in the last exercise I worried a little bit but what questions could be asked.

**Michael:** In the last repetition exercise as I found it harder to observe things for some reason. I was also more aware of the audience.

**Tilly:** Just during the tap in and tap out exercise when I was worried that I had been waiting too long.

### **3. Did you feel excited today, if so at what point?**

**Paula:** I was excited to do that back-to-back exercise because it was new and different it wasn't as interesting when I was actually doing it, I was expecting it to be different.

**Helen:** I always feel excited in the warm ups! It gets me ready for the work ahead.

**Georgina:** I was excited when we found out how long we had done the hand holding repetition, because it was so interesting that being that concentrated, completely alters the perspective of time.

**Daisy:** I felt excited all the way through. Specifically through the tapping in and tapped out exercise. Observing two people through repetition and being able to step in and identify something the other partners might not have observed was really interesting and exciting. It was like stepping into an already built-up flow.

**Jane:** Back to back exercise with Steven. I love the discoveries we made and the flow of it and how much easier I found it to listen.

**Steven:** I generally feel excitement before every exercise, as I'm intrigued as to what I'll discover.

**Christina:** I was very excited at the physical exercises; leaning, pushing and holding hands as it was more task based.

**Tilly:** When we finished the hand holding repetition and were told we had been doing it for 7 minutes. I just couldn't believe it. I could have carried on for ages, my whole concept of time just disappeared.

#### **4. At what point were you most "in the flow"?**

**Paula:** I was most in the flow during sitting down exercise because I was relaxed and released. It felt really easy to do the exercise with my partner here.

**Helen:** When I did the sit down holding hands exercise.

**Georgina:** hand holding repetition

**Daisy:** During the final repetition exercise when I wanted to get to know my partner deeper level. I was so completely focused on her I was just immersed and unconscious of all my surroundings.

**Jane:** In the back to back exercise

**Steven:** During the handholding repetition.

**Michael:** Probably during the tap in and tap out exercise as you constantly were working with different people which really helped because if the flow started to drift someone else stepped in.

**Tilly:** During the hand holding repetition, I found it easier to connect with my partner.

#### **5. When was the attention on your partner the strongest?**

**Paula:** When I was pushing against them, I felt the emotional connection was massively enhanced by physical contact.

**Helen:** Back to back repetition

**Georgina:** back to back repetition

**Daisy:** During the balancing exercise both the pushing and the leaning, Because I felt like I needed something from her. That increased the connection.

**Jane:** Back to back repetition, but also in the last repetition exercise when I started to feel self-conscious and managed to find my way back to full attention on Holly and observe deeper things about her.

**Steven:** During the handholding repetition.

**Michael:** Probably in the back to back exercise as any little movement and tone change you had to analyse and with doing this exercise you can feel the breathing of your partner and understand their emotions better.

**Tilly:** During the hand holding repetition, all of my attention was on my partner, I couldn't even hear the other people talking. They could have left and I wouldn't have noticed.

## **6. When did your attention drift?**

**Paula:** In the back-to-back exercise. I felt there was very little to pick up on so I became distracted.

**Helen:** When we had to push away from our partner and lean back during repetition.

**Georgina:** Last repetition exercise

**Daisy:** My attention drifted throughout the first repetition exercise with my core partner. Neither of us were completely focused on the other so my mind drifted and I felt like I was doing it wrong it just didn't feel genuine at all.

**Jane:** Seated repeating for 10 minutes towards the end I lost focus completely because I started to feel tired and distracted.

**Steven:** During the pushing exercise.

**Michael:** In the leaning away exercise as a lot of the connection was broken as I had to assure my partner that I was not going to let go and build up trust with my partner.

**Tilly:** During the leaning away from each other repetition, just because our hands were sweaty and I was worried I'd fall

## **7. When you were most aware of the audience?**

**Paula:** In the back to back exercise

**Helen:** When I first got up in front of everyone to do the first repetition exercise.

**Georgina:** Last repetition exercise

**Daisy:** Again during the first repetition exercise I became so conscious of everything not just myself, I was also aware of the audience and of their expectations of me.

**Jane:** Last repetition exercise when Holly made really personal observations and I felt conscious that the audience could hear it.

**Steven:** Doing the pushing exercise and tap in tap out repetition.

**Michael:** In the last repetition exercise I found it hard to think of observations and so felt worried and realised the group was watching which I couldn't shake off afterwards.

**Tilly:** During the tap in and tap out exercise. When someone came to watch us I found myself wanting for them to tap me out. I just became super conscious that it wasn't just me and my partner.

## **8. When did you feel the strongest motivation in the sessions?**

**Paula:** In the trio of physical exercises, pushing, leaning and holding hands. I felt like there was a big motivation to see how they all lead to a much stronger connection with your partner.

**Helen:** Throughout really.

**Georgina:** back to back repetition

**Daisy:** I felt the strongest motivation when I was completely immersed in what my partner was doing. When I'm completely connected and focusing all my attention on my partner I feel so motivated and the technique definitely works. When my

attention is not on her I'm all over the place, when it is fully on her I am completely unaware of the audience.

**Jane:** All the way through the back to back exercise, felt like a breakthrough for me at how much I was able to observe.

**Steven:** impulse circle as there is an objective that is very strong.

**Michael:** Maybe in the "point to" exercise as I really didn't want to lose track of anyone and kept aware of everyone's positions.

**Tilly:** During the hand holding exercise. I think that it has taught me that when I want to connect with someone on a deeper level just the simple act of holding hands knocks down the invisible barriers between you.

### 3:4 Workshop 4

**1. How self-conscious did you feel at these moments today? (Please circle the correct answer — elaborate briefly if possible)**

**a) Impulse circle:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Daisy

SOMEWHAT

VERY LITTLE Michael

NOT AT ALL Georgina, Jane, Steven, Helen, Paula, Tilly

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I feel really comfortable with doing this exercise now, probably because we've done it so many times now.

**Helen:** I have become so comfortable and focused in this exercise that I don't think about the others judging me — only think about receiving the clap from someone.

**Georgina:** I'm very comfortable with this exercise now.

**Daisy:** I was very unfocused when we started — couldn't connect with the room, my thoughts were elsewhere.

**Jane:** So used to this exercise now, I don't have any worries about how it's going to go. I enjoy it and I find it a useful warm up.

**Steven:** It's so quick you're not aware of yourself at all.

**Michael:** I think as we have done this exercise every lesson we have become less worried about it getting faster and more focus between us.

**Tilly:** Because we have done this so many times before and it feels less and less like an exercise and more and more like a game.

**b) Breathe together.....exercise:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Jane, Daisy

SOMEWHAT

VERY LITTLE Georgina, Steven, Helen, Paula, Tilly

NOT AT ALL Michael

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** There was a bit of self-consciousness when trying to synch up the breathing, but then I felt much more relaxed and calm once we were connecting through the breath.

**Helen:** My partner was very out of focus and instead of being in the moment with me his eyes were constantly flicking around the room. My focus on him and what he was feeling made me not think about myself at all.

**Georgina:** Simply closing my eyes made me a little self-conscious, but generally I was quite comfortable once it started.

**Daisy:** I was too conscious of everyone seeming to be able to do it when my partner and me struggled. She was fidgeting and I sensed she was unfocused which made me un centred. None of us could concentrate, get engaged or connect with each other.

**Jane:** This was difficult and I felt slightly unfocused, which didn't help. It was hard to get it right and that made me conscious.

**Steven:** I was slightly aware of a desire to get it right with everyone and not mess up, but didn't feel self-conscious more motivated.

**Michael:** I was trying to sense my partner's breathing so much I didn't think of anything but that.

**Tilly:** At first I was a little worried that I would be breathing heavily and my partner might think I was unfit, but when I had to start concentrating on their breath to synch it that all disappeared.

### **c) Walls, Centre, Person, Repetition! :**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Michael

SOMEWHAT

VERY LITTLE Jane, Paula, Daisy

NOT AT ALL Georgina, Jane, Helen, Tilly

### **Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** There was definitely a sense of urgency in the exercise despite there being no high stakes. I wasn't self-conscious though, I just followed the instructions.

**Helen:** I love this exercise! I always feel in the zone with these kinds of games, makes you feel excited!

**Georgina:** I got so into this game that my attention couldn't have been on anything else.



**Daisy:** The urgency in Philippa's voice just completely took my attention and brought me into the room. There was no time to think or process what anyone else was doing you just had to do it. I don't know how it became such high stakes just by the tone Philippa was using, but it felt really important.

**Jane:** I wouldn't say I did not feel at all self-conscious, because I still have that little voice in my head commenting on how I am doing etc. However, this exercise is so fast paced there isn't room or time to think!

**Steven:** Too focused on the objective of the game.

**Michael:** I think the challenging nature of the reactions in this exercise affected my repetition and I wasn't as connected to my partner, I was trying to pre-empt what was going to be called next.

**Tilly:** This felt so playful and I wasn't self-conscious at all — I think because of the speed of the game you don't have time to think of anything else.

**d) Repetition with your set partner (You have/are — I have/am, first time switching observations ourselves):**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Michael

VERY LITTLE Georgina, Jane, Paula, Daisy, Tilly

NOT AT ALL Steven, Helen

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** This wasn't as easy as I'd hoped and, as I think it was the first time doing this for a week, I was slightly self-conscious in the beginning. This disappeared and was mainly because I wanted to have progressed.

**Helen:** Don't know if this was so much better because the session was in the morning or what but something had just clicked today. I felt so comfortable and the best I've ever felt doing repetition.

**Georgina:** Having done this so much now I think I got past the initial awkwardness.

**Daisy:** Working with Tilly on the repetition exercise was the moment in the session I truly focused on my partner entirely. I completely didn't care about myself and what she'd observe. This is the first time I've felt unafraid and open to my partner. My partner observed nerves in me but I didn't find it intimidating when she said it, something has just got much easier. I just feel more open and more ok with who I am and what I am feeling. It's really liberating.

**Jane:** This felt like it went really well and I could feel such an improvement from the first ever time we did it. We both have connected so much! I am comfortable with my partner now. I still worry and feel a tiny bit conscious when Helen has observed something deeper that maybe I didn't want someone to have noticed. I can't believe how much is visible on me and others! But the difference now is that I can quickly turn my attention to the other person when I start to feel self-conscious.

**Steven:** I feel comfortable in this exercise now and stay completely focused on my partner now.

**Michael:** I don't know why, our connection was good, I just worried about my observations and not coming up with enough.

**Tilly:** We've done this so many times now, however the first time in a session we do it I always find it more difficult than the second because I somehow judge myself more.

**e) Repetition with emotion objective:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT Tilly

SOMEWHAT Jane, Steven, Paula, Daisy

VERY LITTLE Michael, Helen

NOT AT ALL Georgina

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I felt more nervous because I felt as though I was being judged on my acting as well as my Meisner technique. However I did find it easier to make observations in my partner because of the higher stakes.

**Helen:** I found that I struggled to make my partner “confused”, which was my chosen objective, so I was a bit conscious of how well I was able to achieve it, but I really enjoyed it!

**Georgina:** Having an emotion objective made me feel much more at ease because I was less worried about what my partner might say or that what I said might offend them, because knowing we were playing for something added a character and circumstance, and so we couldn’t cause offense to each other truly. It gave me freedom.

**Daisy:** I did worry that my tactics to make her feel a certain way weren’t working. So I guess I was judging myself a little. I was thinking slightly too much about how I could achieve that rather than observing what it would take to affect them.

**Jane:** I really reacted to what my partner was doing, I could feel myself blush and at those moments I became aware of the audience, that they would see me feel embarrassed. I managed to put the attention back on my partner, but there were clear moments when my reaction or the emotion I was feeling made me self-conscious.

**Steven:** Not for the most part but for a little while I questioned if I was achieving the emotion in the other person, then I felt a little self-conscious of whether I was good enough.

**Michael:** I found this so much easier having an objective, it gives you purpose and something to do!

**Tilly:** I think I got lost and started to think about me playing a character instead of just concentrating on the other person and affecting them. I was so concerned of how I was playing it that I wasn’t that connected with my partner. I think if I’d had more prep or just forgot about playing a character and just “done it” it would have been easier. This was definitely the most challenging exercise so far.

**f) Get the ball objective with repetition:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Michael, Steven, Helen, Daisy

VERY LITTLE Jane, Tilly

NOT AT ALL Georgina, Paula

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I was so focused on the task at hand and I was having fun with it, I wasn't aware of myself nor anyone watching — just what I had to do and my partner.

**Helen:** My partner was so fast and I just wasn't, it made it so difficult and I felt like all eyes were on me, judging me. I was doing all the observations and trying to get the ball and he didn't really do anything to be honest.

**Georgina:** My objective was so strong it was much harder to get distracted in thought.

**Daisy:** I observed things that weren't necessarily there to try and get the ball. Having a physical objective did make me less self-conscious of the audience but I did find it harder to really observe my partner. I need more practice!

**Jane:** This was so great! Right in the beginning I was conscious of the fact that I was just saying the same sentence "you want to get the ball", but once my objective really kicked in I somehow could observe more things and emotions in James and I completely forgot about the audience, and my own self-consciousness.

**Steven:** Because it was not easy to focus on a physical objective and doing the repetition. I felt a little vulnerable.

**Michael:** I actually found it easy to get the ball from my partner so I then became aware of the audience. Although I realise I didn't really do the repetition very well so that's probably why.

**Tilly:** I was so focused on getting the ball that I had very little time to think of anything else. The only times it got a little difficult to focus fully was when the audience were being vocal it distracted me a little.

**g) Activity with repetition:**

VERY MUCH Jane

QUITE A BIT Michael, Daisy

SOMEWHAT Georgina, Steven, Tilly

VERY LITTLE

NOT AT ALL Helen, Paula

**Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I really focused on the puzzle and my partner, there was nowhere else for my mind to go. It seems as though when I'm doing something physically or have an objective whilst doing the repetition — I am much less self-conscious.

**Helen:** Loved this so much! I loved observing Georgina working and was so intrigued by that. Even when it was my turn to do the jigsaw I was really content and motivated and not bothered about anyone watching.

**Georgina:** This made me feel extremely under pressure and I spent the whole time panicking trying to complete it in the time. Had there been no time limit I think I would have been much more calm and successful in the task.

**Daisy:** I was so conscious of beating my partner's result and finding the puzzle pieces that I struggled to observe my partner. The time limit made me feel panicked.

**Jane:** This was so hard! The time pressure made me not be able to do the puzzle nor observe Holly. I'm not sure of what I was doing more than just judging myself in my head.

**Steven:** The time pressure made me feel vulnerable.

**Michael:** I found this really hard as focusing on the activity was needed to complete it which meant that it was hard to react or make observations at the same time. The time limit also made me more frantic.

**Tilly:** There was so much to do I couldn't always be focused on my partner when I was trying to do the puzzle under time constraint. The more flustered I got the more difficult and that was clear as I only got a couple of pieces together.

#### **h) Repetition second time with set partner:**

VERY MUCH

QUITE A BIT

SOMEWHAT Georgina

VERY LITTLE Helen, Paula

NOT AT ALL Jane, Michael, Steven, Daisy, Tilly

#### **Why do you think that was?**

**Paula:** I felt this was flat after doing the repetitions with different objectives and activities. I wasn't feeling very self-conscious but I just kept feeling like I wanted it to be more.

**Helen:** Not sure why, it just flows by now.

**Georgina:** I think because I knew it was the last time we were going to do it, I felt an added pressure to do it right and was therefore more self-conscious than the first time.

**Daisy:** I feel so connected with my partner now, so open, we've gone on this journey together that as soon as we start there's nothing breaking that connection now. Putting all my attention on her doesn't leave any room any more for me to think about myself.

**Jane:** The puzzle in the activity made this last repetition exercise really easy. I wasn't aware of the audience and could feel a real flow with my partner. It felt like doing the

activity, which I struggled with, had really loosened something in me and this just felt so comfortable, going back to basics helped massively. I enjoyed it so much!

**Steven:** Even more focused on my partner this tie. Just felt easy, it flowed.

**Michael:** This was so much easier! Going back to this after the activity made it so much easier to observe and respond.

**Tilly:** It felt that we were really warmed up for this with all the other exercises and it made it easier to put all my attention on my partner. It was the last time as well so I felt really motivated to really pay attention to my partner. I felt like we'd improved so much! After the physical activities and objectives this felt easy. I feel I can tell my partner's behaviour even when she's hiding it.

## **2. Did you feel worried today, if so at what point?**

**Paula:** I felt worried during the "Walls, Centre, Repetition" exercise but only because the urgency Philippa brought to the exercise by her tone.

**Helen:** Last repetition exercise, maybe because it was the last time.

**Georgina:** Activity with repetition

**Daisy:** At the beginning of the session. My mind was not in the room. I felt fidgety and distracted. I was worried that would jeopardise the session.

**Jane:** Just before I went up to do activity with repetition I felt worried.

**Steven:** During the activity, I was worried about failing the task.

**Michael:** The exercise where we get shouted at to go to the walls or centre, I was worried about what was going to come next. I felt really on edge and thinking about what was coming rather than this moment.

**Tilly:** During the emotion objective and activity exercises. I think it was because there were new layers to the exercise and I had to try really hard not to focus on how to do the new exercise, but because it was new my mind kept going there. However after doing them the repetition exercise felt so natural and easy.

## **3. Did you feel excited today, if so at what point?**

**Paula:** During the ball exercise. Adrenaline got me excited.

**Helen:** In the ball exercise and the activity.

**Georgina:** Get the ball, objective with repetition

**Daisy:** Before starting the puzzle. The competitiveness in me came out and I was excited to start and see how well I could do.

**Jane:** I felt the ball exercise really helped me with working with an objective and still be aware of my partner. I felt very excited during and after this exercise.

**Steven:** Again during the activity as it was a strong objective and I wanted to do well.

**Michael:** In the emotional objective exercise I found that having this target to work for made making observations and responding so much easier as it felt as we were characters in an imaginary circumstance.

**Tilly:** The ball exercise! It had such a strong objective that I was just in the moment and changing tactics. Also the impulse circle since it's almost like a ritual now.

#### **4. At what point were you most "in the flow"?**

**Paula:** In the puzzle exercise (activity) because the physical objective made me much more focused.

**Helen:** In the "walls, centre, person, repetition" exercise

**Georgina:** Repetition with emotion objective

**Daisy:** I was most in the flow during the second repetition with my partner. I trust her and I feel so open and free.

**Jane:** The last repetition exercise, it just flowed and didn't feel difficult at all just really comfortable.

**Steven:** Last repetition exercise, just felt really connected to my partner.

**Michael:** The breathe together. I was the most relaxed and connected to the moment.



**Tilly:** During the ball exercise! I found it much easier to focus on the other person when I wanted something from them and the objective was so clear. Not just repeating with no clear objective.

### **5. When was the attention on your partner the strongest?**

**Paula:** In the repetition with emotion — having an objective made our connection stronger, I needed to see if I was getting what I wanted.

**Helen:** In the first repetition exercise, I love that it's morning my brain just works better, I think it had a very positive impact on my focus.

**Georgina:** Get the ball with repetition

**Daisy:** During my partner doing the activity. I was so fascinated by watching her, her brain trying to work it out and it all came through her body language and facial expressions. I didn't want her to stop it was so interesting .

**Jane:** Last repetition exercise. I think to get into a flow your attention need to be completely on your partner, and it was that time.

**Steven:** Emotion objective, because I had to see if I was achieving it as well as repeating.

**Michael:** In the last repetition exercise, it didn't feel forced, it just happened. Such a difference from the first time.

**Tilly:** During the last repetition with my partner, I felt that all my attention was on her. It still hasn't topped the moment when we were holding hands and had that extra physical connection, but I was definitely completely focused on her, focusing on her felt like my task.

### **6. When did your attention drift?**

**Paula:** In the normal repetition — just doesn't feel like it's got drive to keep me focused any longer.

**Helen:** When watching others do repetition. It's quite repetitive.

**Georgina:** Breathe together

**Daisy:** When I was trying to solve the puzzle — I mean it drifted from my partner and to the activity fully, not onto myself. I struggle to do two things at once and the activity completely took over. I wasn't aware of the audience though nor self-conscious, just not as aware of the repetition as I should have been.

**Jane:** Breathing together. I couldn't focus and that made it so difficult to breathe together, I couldn't hear my partner either.

**Steven:** During the ball exercise

**Michael:** I don't think it did.

**Tilly:** When we were doing the activity exercise. I found it so hard to focus on my partner and not 100% on the activity. Even when my partner was doing the activity I was more drawn to how well they were doing at their activity rather than their behaviour and thoughts.

## **7. When you were most aware of the audience?**

**Paula:** Not at all really.

**Helen:** Ball exercise.

**Georgina:** Activity with repetition as I was worried they would judge me for not doing well.

**Daisy:** During the breathing exercise because I really struggled to connect with my partner and it felt like everyone else was getting it.

**Jane:** In the emotion objective exercise because I had a strong reaction which made me aware that everyone saw that.

**Steven:** Activity and ball exercise.

**Michael:** Getting the ball exercise. My partner didn't try very hard and I felt there was no challenge to take my mind off the audience.

**Tilly:** During me doing the puzzle, because I knew they were watching how well I was doing the same way as I had watched them, and everyone wanted to do better than the rest.

## **8. When did you feel the strongest motivation in the sessions?**

**Paula:** The puzzle activity — I really wanted to complete it.

**Helen:** When the session starts!

**Georgina:** Activity with repetition as I really wanted to do well.

**Daisy:** During observing my partner doing the activity. I was placing my full attention and focus on her. I couldn't focus on anything else if I wanted to! I could tell was she was thinking even though she wasn't saying it. It was just beautiful to watch someone else's behaviour like that. It's always been there I've just never paid attention to people in this way.

**Jane:** After the activity exercise, and during and before it actually as I really wanted to do well in the puzzle, but afterwards I felt motivated to really go for it in the repetition exercise and just let everything else go.

**Steven:** Activity.

**Michael:** In the activity exercise. I was so determined to complete it which made it hard to observe and repeat at the same time.

**Tilly:** The ball exercise since I really wanted the ball. But in general I feel motivated every time we do repetition as I really want to get better.