

Subject: Thoughts on Studio One

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To: rph2@uwm.edu

Hey Rebecca,

Well, things are definitely better. Studio One is shaping up to be an interesting class and Rebecca, our instructor, is very welcoming/demanding. It's a nice combination because she expects a lot, but doesn't make us feel awkward doing it.

On Wednesday, we did deep relaxation, and I've never been more relaxed in my life. We would lie on the mats and Rebecca, with a soothing voice that could be marketed on a deep relaxation CD, told us to focus on different parts of your body: you spine, your skeletal structure, your body in connection with the floor. For the first time, I was able to let everything go, all physical and emotional tension. I was able to just lie there and exist simply to exist, not for any specific purpose. I hope that doesn't sound too out there, but it really was wonderful. The weird/hard thing was that when we broke out of the exercise, all that tension came back with greater force; to the point where I wanted to cry.

That is one thing about the class, it has a strange effect on me. On one hand, I feel increasingly safe with my classmates. I can trust them and, with certain people in particular, I feel like I'm forming stronger bonds and relationships that never existed before. On the other hand, I am becoming increasingly vulnerable. The Berlin wall of my internal life and external life are being brought down and I constantly find the urge to cry and swiftly drown in my own emotions.

Is this a bad thing? Probably not. As much as I'd like to say that I externalize my emotions, I feel I hold back more of the real me than I should. In fact, I feel the most full when I'm on stage, when I'm entertaining. Maybe there doesn't have to be a distinction between stage me and reality me. Maybe Studio One will merge those two.

Whew. Up to this point, you probably thought I'd be talking about a lot of stuff that existed on the surface of my experiences in this program. But that's the thing with these programs and classes: what looks like a silly movement class where you roll around on the floor or run around in circles for 10 min (something I did do today), also opens up unexpected doors. So just take this as one of those unexpected doors cracking open a tad.

And this is after our planned movement exercise/climbing the wall day:

I love Studio One for several reasons. In no particular order:

The group of people and wealth of talent is tremendous. Rebecca, our professor, constantly makes me excited and interested in acting and my 'craft'.

I move in ways I usually don't in real life. Rolling around on the floor and crazy crap like that. When else would I be able to do that in my 'real' life? The expectation that we all work hard, but not the expectation that we do everything correctly.

The opportunity to surprise myself on a regular basis.

Today was especially interesting. We were given an object, rather we chose and object that we then had to place somewhere into the room (I chose a wooden rehearsal box and set it facing upright near a window). Then we had to practice walking towards to object and sitting in a normal fashion. Then we had to practice/improvise avoiding the object, but slowly getting there.

After watching a lot of other people go, I realized I didn't have a shtick for mine, I didn't have a purpose. When I chose to perform, I pretended my foot was stuck (keyword: pretended). After that I crawled/rolled over to the box and attempted to climb up it. Mind you, I'm very close to the window at this point.

Rebecca said she liked what I did because my climbing onto the box was very real and very frightening (me being near the window) but at the end I 'mugged' the moment by flashing a smile/goofy face to the crowd.

She proceeded to set up a difference between the task and thinking about the task. When I had my foot stuck to the floor, that was thinking about the task. When I was climbing on the box, that was the task. I wasn't too sure what she meant so I asked her to elaborate and she used me as a demonstration.

This time through, one of my fellow BFAers, a very bulky and muscular individual, held down my foot. The next time I did it, I had to imagine that force was still there.

This is where the 'constantly surprising myself comes in'.

I could so feel the difference. I was actually fighting against the invisible force, using my body, instead of pretending it was there and using the audience for confirmation that they understood. It felt so GOOD! It felt like I made a whole new leap in my acting, even if a tiny one. I've never really had someone help me like Rebecca did, but when she did, I understood the concept much better because I had experienced it with my whole body, not just with my mind.

Another activity was climbing the wall. I volunteered to go first with Rebecca. I successfully grabbed a hold of a fire alarm and lifted myself off the ground. At one point I even had Rebecca on my back.

The point of the exercise was to show two things:

Pretending to climb the wall.

And actually making it a task of climbing the wall.

I think the idea is to make our acting more task-oriented instead of acting by thinking about the task. Otherwise, my foot will never be stuck if I'm only thinking about it being stuck. It actually has to be stuck according to the rest of my body.

Happy reading and see you on Monday.