ATHLETE OF EMOTION

EXAMINING THE PERDEKAMP EMOTIONAL METHOD

BY
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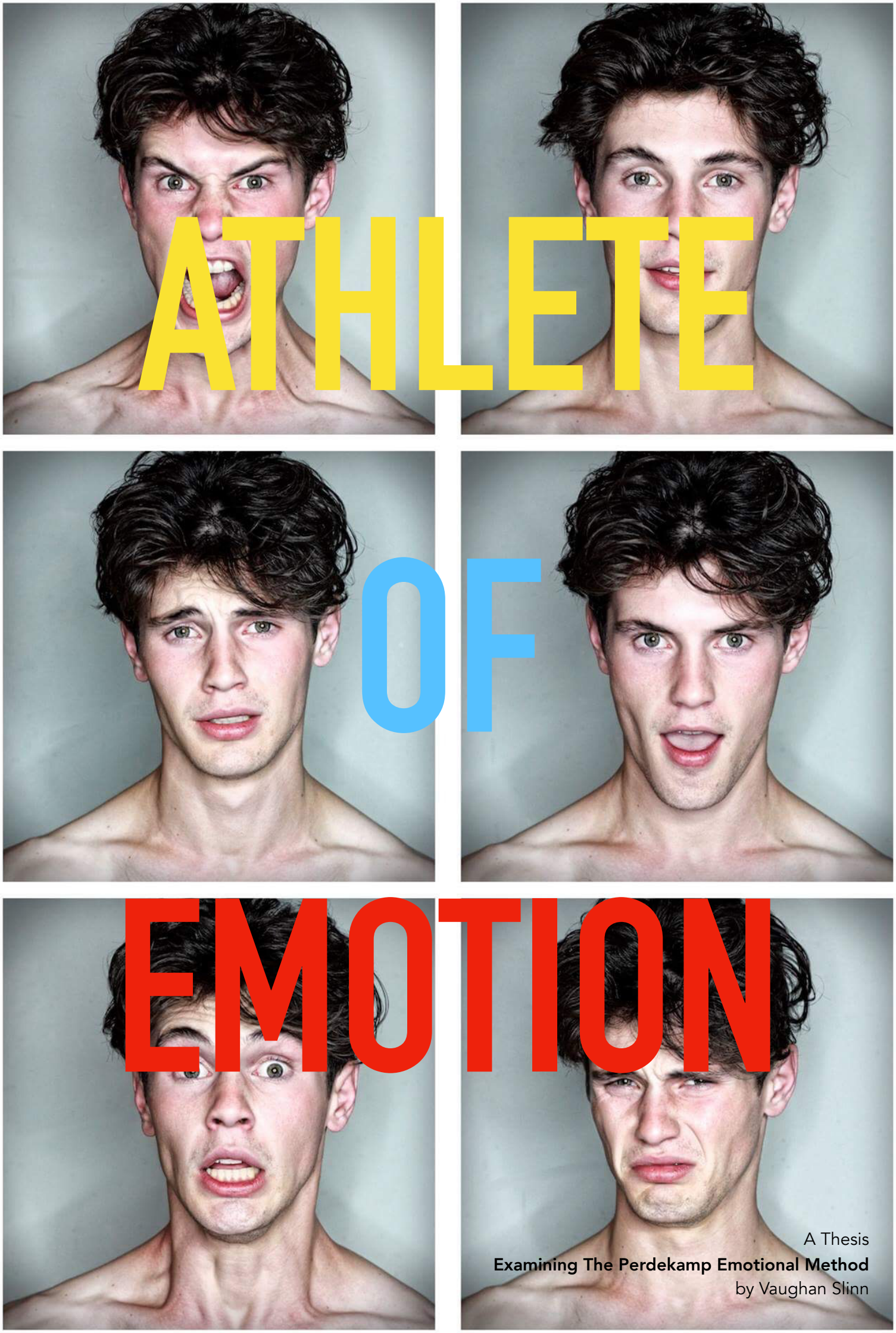

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ABSTRACT

The Perdekamp Emotional Method (PEM) is an emerging psychophysiological acting system that claims to allow actors 'safe, reliable and repeatable access' to emotion, with no recourse to their own psychology, imagination or personal experience. Developed in Germany over the last thirty years, the process regards the emotions as innate, biological movement patterns, hard-coded in human beings, that can be invoked consciously through a specific combination of physiological triggers. In light of recent international studies that point to significant psychological unwellness throughout the acting profession, there is an ethical imperative for drama schools to investigate such techniques, and evaluate their legitimacy against more commonly utilised approaches to achieving believable emotion, such as the Emotion Memory techniques of Konstantin Stanislavski and Lee Strasberg, which have courted criticism for being both inefficient and, at worst, harmful. While Austrian research has been carried out to establish the scientific legitimacy of PEM, nothing has been written about it in English, and it is only just beginning to be introduced to performance training institutions around the world. This thesis investigates PEM's claims in order to contribute critically to the depth and understanding of this system, and to evaluate the potential value of introducing PEM into the conservatoire model of a tertiary Drama School, using practical experiments and teaching observations at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School as a case study. Its research results are evaluated through a combination of a historical review of acting approaches to producing emotion, interviews with PEM creator Stephen Perdekamp and Master Instructor Sarah Victoria about the pedagogy of PEM and its theoretical underpinnings (and evaluating this against current neuroscience theories concerning emotion), observations of and interviews with students learning PEM through workshop instruction, and practical experiments of applying PEM to screen work with student performers through a period from March 2017 to November 2018.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT 3
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 4
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 9
1.1 The PEM Proposition 9
1.2 The Inaugural New Zealand PEM Workshop, Wellington, 2016 19
1.3 Methodology 24
1.4 The Emotional Athlete 27
CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO EMOTION 30
2.1 The Emotion Problem 30
2.2 Diderot 32
2.3 Stanislavski and Emotion: From Memory to Active Analysis 33
2.4 Michael Chekhov 36
2.5 Lee Strasberg and the Method 38
2.6 Defining Emotion 42
2.7 Damasio and Emotion 44
2.8 Paul Ekman: The Theory of Universal Emotions 48
2.9 Susana Bloch: Alba Emoting 50
2.10 Summary 52
CHAPTER 3: THE PERDEKAMP EMOTIONAL METHOD 54
3.1 Current PEM Pedagogical Overview 54
3.2 Origins and Development of PEM 58
3.3 Development of the Facial Masks and Organ-Emotion Triggers 62
3.4 Training PEM 67
3.5 PEM and Character 69
3.6 The Main Leading Centre 71

3.7 Subcentres 75
3.8 The Emotional Score 76
3.9 Summary 77
CHAPTER 4: TESTING PEM 79
4.1 Introduction 79
4.2 PEM Instruction at Toi Whakaari 81
4.3 The Court Youth Company Workshop 84
4.4 Screen Experiment 1: Mise En Scène, American Hustle 87
4.5 PEM Screen Experiment 2: Rachel Gets Married 93
4.6 Screen Experiment 3: Youth 98
4.7 Critical Evaluation of Screen Experiments and Workshop Instruction 107
CHAPTER 5: CRITICAL ANALYSIS 116
5.1 Introduction 116
5.2 Universal Emotions and the Constructionist Counter View 119
5.3 Investigating the Organ-Emotion Relationship 123
5.4 Imagination and the Organ-Emotion Triggers 129
5.5 PEM Character Work in relation to Alba Emoting 133
5.6 PEM in relation to Psychophysical Techniques 139
5.7 Analysis of Main Leading Centres and Subcentres 140
5.8 The Imagination and PEM Character Work 142
5.9 Risks of PEM 146
5.10 Scoring the Emotions versus Actions 148
5.11 Evaluating Participant Reactions to PEM 151
5.12 PEM and Wellness 153
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION 162
BIBLIOGRAPHY 170
Appendix A: List of Interviewees 178
Appendix B: Valeria Mendoza-Davis 179
Appendix C: Ethics Approval 180
Appendix D: Toi Whakaari Approval Form 181
Appendix E: Interview Information Sheet 182
Appendix F: Workshop (Screen Experiment) Information Sheet 184

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Jack Parker. Aggression Mask, 2017. Photographer Jon Hunter. 8

Fig. 2. Jack Parker. Lust Mask, 2017. Photographer Jon Hunter. 29

Fig. 3. Jack Parker. Grief Mask, 2017. Photographer Jon Hunter. 53

Fig. 4. Jack Parker. Happiness Mask, 2017. Photographer Jon Hunter 78

Fig. 5. Darneen Christian, Separation of Means Exercise. Toi Whakaari, 2017. Photographer Vaughan Slinn. 81

Fig. 6. Jack Hauschild, Marshayla Christie. American Hustle, 2017. Photographer Philip Merry. 87

Fig. 7. Andrew Eddy. American Hustle, 2017. Screenshot. 91

Fig. 8. Valeria Mendoza-Davis. Screen Experiment 3, 2018. Screenshot. 99

Fig. 9. Jack Parker. Fear Mask, 2017. Photographer Jon Hunter. 115

Fig. 10. Jack Parker. Revulsion Mask, 2017. Photographer Jon Hunter. 161

Fig. 1. Jack Parker. *Aggression Mask*, 2017. Toi Whakaari. Photographer Jon Hunter.

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 The PEM Proposition

December, 2016. *Journal Entry from PEM Workshop, Wellington.*

> *My turn. I'm playing Hamlet.*
> *I'm flying through the room, pouring sweat. My right hand has taken over my body. (I'm aware of how that sounds). I am whirling, exploding, crying, screaming, laughing, mocking, debating, pleading, a thousand electric pinballs of impulse.*
>
> *As the text begins, it's a stranger's voice I hear spitting out words from my mouth. Sulphuric and serpentine. Hamlet? We watch the funeral procession. Viscerally, I experience the warring machinery of motivations at his core. An inner alchemy of bile and blood. A batch of black slippery eels in my liver and stomach. Hamlet, literally, from my guts. This friction of inner energies produce the tears, as taught.*
>
> *Yet I retain control. Sarah instructs me to move "into the close up."*
> *I come to stillness. The imagined camera moves in.*
> *And yet the currents of internal impulse sustain: the heart's bioelectrical charge pushing downwards, rupturing against the charge raging upwards from my small intestine. I allow breath to drop into this sensation. Again, the resulting friction provokes tears to stream as I now whisper the text into the camera lens.*
>
> *Sarah calls cut. I jump to shake my diaphragm, clearing the charge.*
> *I return to a neutral state. Yet the atmosphere of the room is still charged: the group is moved. Sarah gently nods. Quietly, she says, "Good. Again."*
> *This is acting with PEM.*

The Perdekamp Emotional Method (PEM) offers a compelling central proposition to actors: the ability to gain "instant, safe, and controllable access" to the emotions, without using one's own personal experiences.[1] Developed in Germany over the last

[1] Sarah Victoria, "PEM Explained." pem-acting.com/pem-explained

thirty years, this proposition is perhaps the driving force behind PEM attracting international supporters and inching onto the radars of actor training institutions around the world. Certainly, it's this central proposition that draws the participants gathered for PEM's inaugural New Zealand workshop, in Wellington, late 2016: a mixture of highly seasoned professional actors (such as Serena Cotton and Jonathan Martin), recent drama school graduates and drama students in training (such as Justin Rogers, Jack Parker, Jess Quilter), and drama tutors (including Jon Hunter: Voice Specialist to Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School, and myself: Vaughan Slinn, Senior Tutor of Screen, Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School).

From the outset, there is a mixture of fascination and scepticism with PEM's central proposition and selling point. Justin Rogers, a graduate of Toi Whakaari's 2014 class, describes his interest in the technique as its potential to be a "cheat code for acting:" a means to bypass all the tasks traditionally attributed to the craft, such as lengthy character lists, the analysis and construction of backstory, the mining of *super-objective* and associated guess work required to understand the character's deeply embedded motivational drivers, and the ability to "bypass the endless trial and error of finding action words" that will invoke authentic character behaviour.[2] Rogers also comments on the attractiveness of a technique purportedly aligned with the latest scientific knowledge;[3] certainly PEM's alleged "basis in biology" is a particularly appealing draw to the rest of the group as well.[4] Serena Cotton is intrigued that PEM uses "no use of personal experience, and is not based on psychology" and thus, potentially, is a more sustainable acting approach.[5] As a much sought after actress who portrays roles with high emotional demands, PEM's

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[2] Justin Rogers, interview by author, March 12, 2017.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Victoria, "PEM Explained."

[5] Serena Cotton, email correspondence, May 5, 2019.

claims are of significant interest and importance to her. Jack Parker, a Toi Whakaari third year student, cites the possibility that PEM could allow him to play situations and emotions he himself has never before experienced, thereby offering a key to playing a wider range of characters.[6] Jonathan Martin, however, speaks to an underlying scepticism many in the group share: such a technique "sounds too good to be true."[7]

Most participants are drawn from performance practice questions; I am drawn from a perspective of deepening my performance pedagogy. As a teacher whose primary responsibility is screen acting, much of my own approach draws from North American screen traditions and, in particular, coaches such as Susan Batson, Larry Moss, Stella Adler — all practitioners connected through the lineage of Konstantin Stanislavski. However, through eight years of directing and teaching in this way, I had begun interrogating whether certain elements of such practices were both inefficient and, at worst, harmful to the student. This sense was crystallised in an experience with a student in early 2014 when, in coaching them for an audition and sensing them moving beyond 'pretending' and into the accessing of a real and recent personal tragedy, I had little professional language or structures to help steer them away and back from this. At the very least, I questioned limitations in my practice in supporting actors entering and exiting the pressures of scenes with deep emotion: more craft and sensitivity was required in handling these situations. As the expression of authentic emotion is an essential attribute for the screen actor, expanding my pedagogical craft in this area was paramount. Accordingly, a key research question became one of emotion: how can I support screen actors to access emotional expression most safely, reliably, and persuasively?

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[6] Jack Parker, interview by author, March 21, 2017.

[7] Jonathan Martin, interview by author, March 5, 2018.

A key word here is *safely.* Despite the obvious criterion of performance efficacy, there is a deeper rationale for exploring PEM: the state of 'unwellness' in acting communities. Behind a glamorous facade, acting industries are beset with mental illness, unemployment, and workplace dissatisfaction. Recent international qualitative and quantitative studies of actors' health and wellbeing from Canada[8] and Australia[9] illustrate that working actors have significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety and substance abuse than the general population, and spotlight contributing hazards for actors such as performance anxiety, financial and relational stress, bullying and harassment. These studies back up anecdotal 'war' stories of coping mechanisms inside a challenging profession: more than one third of Australian actors surveyed reported drinking alcohol to help cope with problems related to their performing careers, and 80 percent used illegal or legal drugs.[10] In Aotearoa New Zealand, a close-knit acting community has been besieged with similar issues, and a recent series of suicides prompted the forming and establishment in 2016 of an Auckland community task force, Whariki Hauora, to look at the question, "why are our actors so at risk?"[11]

These statistics perhaps reflect the entertainment industry's competitive nature: a volatile environment where the subjective opinion of a select few (producers, distributers, casting directors) dictate livelihoods. But finding work is only half the struggle. Once employed, it is often difficult for an actor to separate their own sense of 'self' from their work — whereas a tradesperson might be judged on the

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[8] Danielle Szlawieniec-Haw, "Telling Tales Within School: Representing Human Suffering, Distress, and/or Violence in Post-Secondary Acting Programs, " in Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) Conference (Washington, DC. 2012).

[9] Ian Maxwell and Mark Seton, "The Australian Actors' Wellbeing Study: a Preliminary Report," *About Performance*, no. 13 (2015): 69-235.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Whariki Hauora (weaving the mat of well-being) is thought to be the world's first specialised mental health support group for performers. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/news/article.cfm?c_id=1501119&objectid=11726670

robustness of a retaining wall, the actor is judged on their ability to express emotion, to entertain and make an audience 'believe' — all intangible and utterly subjective measures. In response to critique, many actors often find it difficult to treat their art objectively, separate to themselves, instead treating criticism of their work as somehow criticism of themselves, for "the actor *is* the work."[12]

Furthermore, the act of performance itself can be a highly adrenalised, athletic act, demanding an ability to work 'live,' under pressure, producing an adrenal high not unlike a performance athlete.[13] This performance arousal state can be difficult to return from. In a Sydney University study, 40 percent of Australian actors surveyed had difficulties relaxing or "letting go" after performing an emotionally demanding role.[14] The emotional demands on the actor extend beyond the performance arousal state to the requirement of actors to convincingly play emotions, which involve challenges that have long been identified. In 1992, the Performing Arts Medicine Association's (PAMA) founder, Alice Brandfonbrener, identified "psychological hazards" for actors involved in producing the emotions of characters, which:

> … can put them in touch with some of their own feelings for the first time. For some this is a positive experience, but for others the process can range from difficult to unbearable. Even the most mature, stable, and experienced actor suffers the effects of playing Willy Loman night after night, and this is not confined to what transpires on the stage. This consequence is one that all of us should think about when we go to the theatre and especially when we are treating the medical problems of actors and actresses.[15]

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[12] Larry Moss, *The Intent to Live* (Los Angeles: Bantam Books, 2002), 13.

[13] Elly A. Konijn, *Acting Emotions* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), 12.

[14] Maxwell and Seton, "The Australian Actors' Wellbeing Study," 93.

[15] Alice Brandfonbrener, "The Forgotten Patients," *Medical Problems of Performing Artists* 7, no. 4 (1992): 101-102.

In Germany, the problems of such performance pressures are so well acknowledged that actors have reduced legal liability for up to three hours after a performance — a law tested to its limit twenty years ago in a case where, after an actress nearly killed her husband with a kitchen knife after a performance, she was excused for "still being in role."[16] Although an extreme example, many actors sympathise with employing measures that are potentially self-harming as they struggle in pursuit of the essential acting question: how to make characters and emotions as believable as possible, so that the audience no longer sees the actor, but *believes* the actor is the character. Central to the actor's ability to persuade is their ability to express and portray convincing emotion.

How best to do this has been subject of intense debate, where a central question in the controversy is the relationship between the emotions of the actor and those of the character.[17] Does the actor's personal emotional state need to coincide with the character? Is this necessary? Or even, possible? On polar ends of this argument sit French philosopher Denis Diderot, who argues the actor should feel nothing, but rather be concerned with the feeling created in the audience, and North American disciples of Stanislavski, of which Lee Strasberg is a leading figure, who placed the enmeshing of actor and character into a unified emotional complex as their primary goal.[18] In screen acting, Lee Strasberg's 'Method' has become both dominant and iconic, no doubt in part due to the advocacy of high profile pupils such as Marlon Brando, James Dean and Kim Stanley, but also because, as Elly Konijn suggests, the visual nature and intimacy of cinema favours the work and acting style this approach produces: "quirky, charismatic personality, short, sustained bursts of emotion,

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[16] Jane Jones, "Innate Patterns of Emotion," *Human Givens Journal* 23, no. 1 (2016): 28.

[17] Discussed further in Chapter 2.

[18] Konijn, *Acting Emotions*, 9-12.

inward focus, and no small measure of sexuality."[19] While there is well established value in Strasberg's system, the basis of the primary goal of his method, of prioritising psychological realism through the convergence of actor and character, deserves questioning for one key reason: in practice, it is rarely achieved. As Yale Professor of Acting and Drama David Chambers states: "Even the most talented actors will admit that the kind of emotional coincidence with their characters that they have been taught is the essence of acting never actually happens to them onstage."[20]

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the use of an actor's own feelings, experiences and traumas can have damaging effects.[21] In particular, the use of Emotion Memory, a technique where actors draw on personal experiences to produce emotion that was initially posited, but later mostly abandoned, by Stanislavski,[22] and which became a core tenet of Lee Strasberg's Method, has attracted particular derision and been "frequently maligned and dismissed" by critics.[23] In a 2012 study, American psychologists Paula Thomson and S. Victoria Jacque link what they describe as a "greater vulnerability for psychological distress" inherently found in actors to the acting practice of holding "a mirror up to their own past trauma and loss-related experiences."[24] Australian researcher Marc Seton, who has written widely about the wellbeing of actors, also identifies Emotion Memory as

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[19] Konijn, *Acting Emotions,* 10.

[20] Konijn, *Acting Emotions,* 11.

[21] Paula Thomson and S. Victoria Jaque, "Holding a Mirror Up to Nature: Psychological Vulnerability in Actors," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 6, no. 4 (2012): 367.

[22] Bella Merlin, *Acting: The Basics* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 161-166.

[23] David Shirley, "His Dream of Passion: Reflections on the Work of Lee Strasberg and His Influence on British Actor Training," *Stanislavski Studies* 4, no. 1 (2016): 47.

[24] Thomson and Jacque, "Holding a Mirror Up to Nature," 367.

problematic, coining the term "post-dramatic stress" to evoke the serious distress he argues this practice can inflict.[25] Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School Senior Tutor and trained psychologist, Dr. Bert Van Dijk, supports Seton's position:

> Emotional recall only works when the emotional trauma or upset has been left unresolved. As soon as it is resolved it no longer produces the required emotions, therefore the actor needs to deliberately keep emotionally upset and unresolved. As a psychologist I have seen and experienced the devastating effects of this on the wellness of the actor or acting student.[26]

Furthermore, when success in generating deep emotion through Emotion Memory exercises *does* occur, often it is unreliable, erratic, and unable to be accurately repeated, and so it becomes an elusive, fleeting visitation of inspiration the actor is irregularly able to summon. In *An Actor Prepares,* although Stanislavski places great emphasis on the importance of Emotion Memory, he also resists stating that this technique can provide the ability to control the feelings invoked:

> They are direct, strong, vivid but they don't occur onstage in the way you imagine, that is for long periods, or for an entire act. They burst through, here and there, but only as discrete moments… One word of warning. We aren't masters of spur-of-the moment experiences, they master us. And so all we can do is leave it to nature, and say to ourselves, if spontaneous feelings do arise, then let them appear when they are needed, lest they run counter to the play and the role.[27]

Despite such concerns and potential inefficiency, Emotion Memory remains a widely taught, default approach for many actors in approaching emotion, not only in the

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[25] Mark Seton, "Post-dramatic Stress: Negotiating Vulnerability for Performance," in *Being There: After-Proceedings of the 2006 Conference of the Australasian Association for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies*, edited by Ian Maxwell (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2008).

[26] Bert van Dijk, email communication to author, April 17, 2019.

[27] Konstantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, trans. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008), 195.

United States, but also here in Australasia.[28] In 2016, researcher Susan Leigh Taylor undertook an extensive study of major Australian drama schools NIDA,[29] WAAPA[30] and VCA,[31] and their respective approaches to working with emotion. This study expressed concerns that many current pedagogical practices utilised by these schools placed students at "high emotional risk," particularly through a widespread, ongoing use of Emotion Memory techniques.[32] The strong recommendation of Taylor's study was that drama schools investigate offering alternative approaches that accessed emotions *physically* instead of *psychologically*.[33]

To this end, the primary alternative Taylor proposed was Alba Emoting. Developed in Chile by neuroscientist Susana Bloch, Alba uses breath and the body to synthesise six "effector patterns" that stimulate what she considers to be basic emotions — anger, tenderness, fear, eroticism, sadness and joy. Each emotion corresponds to a distinct pattern of physiological changes, and can be controlled and summoned voluntarily through "breath, facial musculature and postural attitude."[34] Alba emerged from the 1970s and shares key similarities with PEM, not only in its focus on the emotions, but also in its use of physiological triggers to activate them.[35]

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[28] Shirley, *His Dream of Passion*, 47 - 62.

[29] The National Institute of Dramatic Art, Sydney.

[30] The Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Perth.

[31] Victorian College of Arts, Melbourne.

[32] Susan Taylor, "Actor Training and Emotions: Finding a Balance," (PhD diss., Edith Cowan University, 2016), 89.

[33] Ibid: 250-266.

[34] Beck, Jessica M. "Alba Emoting and Emotional Melody: Surfing the Emotional Wave in Cachagua, Chile," *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 1, no. 2 (2010): 143.

[35] This relationship will be discussed in Chapter 2.9 and 5.5.

PEM began its own emergence in the late 1990s. The case of the German actress mentioned earlier, who was so 'in role' that she nearly killed her husband, was a triggering point in the career of Stephan Perdekamp — a theatre director and writer with an interest in biology — to begin experiments in accessing emotion through a physiological process rather than a psychological one.[36] Perdekamp identified the actor's relationship to producing emotion through personal memory as problematic, and considered such practice "exploitative,"[37] symptomatic of an "abusive profession."[38] His desire was to create a system that improved the effectiveness and consistency of performance through achieving more easeful and repeatable access to the emotions, and to improve the actor's wellbeing through providing them a technique that meant they did not have to access their own memories and experiences to embody those of the character.

Over thirty years later, PEM has now developed into a "holistic acting system."[39] According to Perdekamp, PEM has tested its methods across a broad cross-section of participants and been taught to over 7000 students from 55 countries, from a diverse range of cultural and social backgrounds.[40] Increasingly, its applications have been taught in other areas outside the fields of acting and theatre. Perdekamp himself works with people with autism, chronic fatigue, depression and other such issues to improve their emotional and holistic wellbeing. Furthermore, its application for the treatment of autism is quickly growing and gaining recognition. In 2018, Dr. Tony Attwood, an expert on Asperger's Syndrome and a Professor at Griffith University in Australia, lauded PEM as "a key strategy of emotion

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[36] Jones, "Innate Patterns of Emotion," 28.

[37] Sarah Giller, "Das Emotionsbild des Schauspielers anhand der Schauspielmethode von Stephan Perdekamp," (diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 2004), 6.

[38] Jones, "Innate Patterns of Emotion," 28.

[39] PEM Educational Handout, from PEM inaugural NZ workshop, December 16, 2016.

[40] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 30, 2018.

management and expression… that is going to improve quality of life and give freedom (to people with autism). I am very keen on PEM… something's that's going to change lives."[41]

Yet, despite such wide-ranging international support coming from health professionals and independent theatre practitioners, drama schools and acting institutions are still slow to investigate and implement PEM. At the time of writing, only the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (London) offers regular PEM workshops, but these are introductory lessons that are not integrated further into the acting curriculum. No study has yet been written in English investigating PEM's wider claims around its value to the actor, both as a more "efficient and reliable" method of producing and communicating emotion, but also as a technique that improves wellbeing.[42] These factors led me to explore the technique firsthand, in Wellington, in 2016, as a potential answer to my own questions of directing and acting emotion.

1.2 The Inaugural New Zealand PEM Workshop, Wellington, 2016

Over six days, PEM Master Instructor Sarah Victoria introduces participants to the basic elements of PEM training, including the six basic emotions and their associated training exercises, the theoretical principles underpinning the work, and the beginnings of PEM character work. From day one, the group is challenged with ideas provocative both to our conception of the emotions, as well as our collective notion of acting. As part of the introduction, PEM Australia Representative Rik Stowman proposes that accessing emotions is actually the buried desire of *all* acting systems:

> Emotions are secretly the holy grail of acting… but we're not

[41] PEM International. "Interview about PEM with Professor Dr. Tony Atwood." YouTube video, 7.49. Posted Dec 18, 2018. https://youtu.be/4CfK9jXwBig

[42] Victoria, "PEM Explained."

> allowed to say this. What the director really wants to say to you is could you be more upset, could you be more angry, etc. But we have to go through a long, drawn out way of doing this… creating complicated backstories so we can better identify and empathise with the character's situation, coming up with various and complicated action words to invoke the desired result. But what if we could bypass this, and simply play the emotion the director desired, on demand? What if this could be perfectly scaleable, controllable?[43]

Stowman's comment is immediately provocative as it challenges many of the established notions of acting methodology familiar to participants in the workshop, my own included. The idea of playing *emotions*, rather than playing *actions*, is antithetical to the basis of Stanislavski-based methods, which dominate drama education both at a high school and tertiary level in New Zealand, just as they do in many Western countries.[44] Such approaches often instruct students *not* to play emotion, because it leads to generalised, bad acting.[45] As performance theorist Richard Schechner explains:

> According to Stanislavsky-based Euro-American acting, one does not "play an emotion." One plays the "given circumstances," the "objectives," the "through-line of action," the "magic if." If this is done right, "real" feelings will be experienced and "natural" emotions will be displayed.[46]

But PEM's argument is that Stanislavski was making assessment on a now outdated paradigm: the premise that the emotions were not trainable. "The paradigm shift is that we now have a technique that makes the emotions trainable, and manageable,

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[43] Rik Stowman, workshop instruction, December 5, 2016.

[44] Toi Whakaari and Unitec, New Zealand's most established tertiary drama institutions, both traditionally use Stanislavski-based approaches as core text methodology, as do NCEA programmes at high school level.

[45] Richard Schechner, "Rasaesthetics," *TDR/The Drama Review* 45 no. 3 (2001): 33.

[46] Ibid.

by the actor."[47] Victoria emphasises this point throughout the workshop, and clarifies how this is possible: "PEM is about opening up and leveraging the subconscious knowledge and innate functions of the body, and learning to control them."[48] Part of this knowledge of the body is the emotions themselves. In the PEM system, emotions are regarded as distinct physiological movement patterns, hard-coded into our genetic makeup, and triggered as necessary by the autonomous functions of the body to deal with external or internal threats. Emotions are considered universal: all humans are programmed with the same basic, archetypal emotions, regardless of cultural conditioning. Their biological purpose is survival and homeostasis — the attempt by the body to maintain the physical and chemical equilibrium required for continued life function. Internal and external stimuli disrupt that equilibrium, and the body reacts to restore balance through triggering emotions as required. This process occurs constantly and often operates subconsciously, yet emotions are defined by their tangible physiological affect: if there is not a measurable, physical change in the body state, there is no emotion. PEM argues that because the emotions are physical and have distinct physiological effects, they can be trained.

PEM training begins with breath. "Breath is the core of our craft… the gas pedal of the emotions."[49] On the workshop's first morning, Victoria demonstrates diaphragmatic breathing, and explains how control of the breath allows the management of emotions like a sliding scale, allowing the actor to dial up the intensity of a given emotion or make it more subtle, depending on performative requirements. Once the group has successfully achieved this, we are introduced to the first of PEM's basic emotions, *aggression*.

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[47] Sarah Victoria, instruction at Wellington Workshop, December 16, 2016. Repeated in interview with author, March 27, 2018.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

Here, one of the defining differences of PEM, and one that will provoke controversy, is introduced: the focus on internal organs as the specific activators of their six basic emotions. The basis of the PEM method is the combination of breath, the manipulation of facial and postural muscles, and the process of condensing an energetic charge through specific internal organs of the body, to stimulate the desired emotion. Each of the six basic emotions has a specific internal organ that triggers them. *Aggression*, for example, is triggered through a charge in the liver, whereas g*rief* is activated through the small intestine. More complex emotions, which PEM describes as secondary emotions, are created through combinations of organ activation, and thus through the blending of the basic emotions.

As explained to us in the workshop, building up this 'bioelectrical charge,' sent through the required internal organ, is based on the concept of *spannung*, a German word translating to a 'charge,' or the 'tension between', which makes up one of the six foundational energetic principles of PEM.[50] Students are introduced to the practical experience of this through rubbing their palms together, and attempting to feel the electrical charge that is palpable between the hands. From there, they are asked to experiment with other parts of the body, allowing themselves to feel the effect of the charge on their skin, their hair, their forehead. When this is felt, students repeat the exercise, and place them in front of the parts of the body corresponding with different organs, beginning with the liver. Once the energy is felt on the skin, the student attempts to generate the same energy in the organ. From there, the facial and postural positions related to that emotion are added in physically, and the breath is engaged to begin to build up the force of that emotion.

This first phase of the work, in meeting the organ-emotion triggers and attempting

[50] Discussed in Chapter 3.

to experience them, is immediately challenging for the workshop group. Victoria acknowledges this by explaining to the group that "part of the learning phase is the ability to quieten the protests of the mind in order to listen in to the body."[51] My own experience mirrors these protests as I initially struggle to contain multiple questions: *How could this be possible? Don't emotions solely derive from the limbic system? How can I feel and channel energy in my liver?*

And yet, in making the commitment to explore the work as fully as possible over the workshop period, once the initial protests died down, there was a tangible physical experience: very subtle at first, but as we worked with the liver over a period of thirty minutes, a sensation did start to wake up, and an impulse to move forward that extended through the whole body. This subtle sensation seemed to increase over the duration of the workshop, and by the final day, I was able to feel sensation and different movement impulses in each of the organs, through drawing focus and attention to that part of the body.

This tension, in learning the work, between opening to experiential somatic information, and scrambling to match that up to an intellectual understanding of that experience, is a hallmark of PEM, both inside the workshop, and also, I would later discover, in teaching the work to wider audiences. Over the Wellington workshop, however, this suspicion eases and the small group quickly grasps the fundamentals of the work, particularly when the full potency of the emotions are evidenced. In the workshop, PEM delivers on its promise: powerful emotions are activated, are repeatable, and produce the results required. While the question of *how* PEM works maybe difficult to grasp, in the Wellington workshop, the results are undeniable.

Accordingly, at the conclusion of the Wellington inaugural workshop, the experience

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[51] Sarah Victoria, workshop instruction, December 8, 2016.

of working with PEM is celebrated. Experienced professional actress Serena Cotton describes the technique as "highly useful," citing her ability to use the technique to repeatedly access the emotion of grief over a long period of time.[52] Jon Hunter describes the work as "the most elegant and precise training I've encountered to learn awareness of physical energy in the body… useful for the performer, essential for the human."[53] Student Jessica Quilter labels it as "the most important technique I have learned about acting… the first thing I've found that truly works for me."[54]

Yet wider questions remain. PEM's application to text is a central question, as emotion alone does not make a character. Aspects of PEM's foundational theory, such as its classification of emotions as universal, require further investigation: if the argument of universal emotions is disproven, for instance, then PEM potentially loses legitimacy. The emotion-organ triggers are controversial, and a divisive sticking point with colleagues who begin to investigate the technique and argue they must be "psycho-somatic."[55] Furthermore, a central potential benefit of PEM, of greater wellness, requires wider research and data. The experience of this workshop, coupled with the questions that arose from it, provided stimulus for a more formal and extended study of PEM and its pedagogical underpinnings.

1.3 Methodology

This research project aims to undertake such examination, focusing specifically on the PEM technique, of which no scholarly study has yet been undertaken in English. Investigation of PEM's claims is undertaken in order to contribute critically to the

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[52] Serena Cotton, interview with author, March 17, 2017.

[53] Kata Klug, "What New Zealand PEM representative Jon Hunter says about PEM." PEM Acting, posted February 10 2018. http://pem-acting.com/new-zealand-pem-representative-jon-hunter-says-about-pem

[54] Jessica Quilter, interview with author, September 17, 2017.

[55] Colleague prefers to remain anonymous.

depth and understanding of this system, and to evaluate the potential value of introducing PEM into the conservatoire models of tertiary Drama Schools, using experiments and teaching at Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School as a case study. Whilst my own initial experience with PEM was promising, there are many questions to answer, including its application to wider student audiences, its application to text, its ability to be integrated in combination with other techniques, and its effectiveness for screen acting. These questions have been focused into my key research question: can PEM support trainee screen actors to access emotional expression more safely, reliably, and persuasively? Research results are evaluated from a historical review of acting approaches to producing emotion, evaluation of current emotion theory from a neuroscience perspective, interviews with PEM creator Stephan Perdekamp and Master Instructor Sarah Victoria about the pedagogy of PEM and its theoretical basis, observations of and interviews with actors learning PEM through workshop instruction, and practical experiments of applying PEM to screen work with student performers through a period of 18 months, from March 2017 to November 2018.[56]

Furthermore, as the primary investigator in this study I am including my own experiences in working with PEM as part of this research, both as insider, experiencing the work firsthand, and outsider, observing the work being taught and practiced. As an experienced actor and teacher of over fifteen years, my firsthand experience is worthy of inclusion in the discussion, and is intended to give the reader a more embodied understanding of what it is to physically encounter PEM, a relatively unknown acting methodology. In this regard I have followed the participant-observation examples of researchers such as Roxanne Rix and Jessica

[56] See Appendix A for a list of interviewees.

Beck in writing similarly about Alba Emoting.[57]

Research based on observing rehearsal and classroom situations in a teaching institution pose ethical considerations around privacy, power and the intellectual ownership of material from subject participants.[58] In this regard, my study has involved working with and observing students in the institution I am currently employed in as a teacher. However, I have made it clear to students that interviews and contributions to this study are entirely voluntary and do not influence my assessing or grading of any project, and that they are able to remove their comments or participation in my investigation at any point. All research practices undertaken and described herein have been approved by the Victoria University Ethics Committee and by my own institution, Toi Whakaari.[59]

Finally, the thesis contains six chapters and a resource video.[60] Chapter Two (*Historical Approaches To Emotion*) examines the problem of producing emotion for the actor. It contextualises my own relationship, as a trained, professional actor, to the 'emotion' question and debate by examining key theories and arguments, both historical and contemporary, around how actors might best produce or express emotion in performance. It then surveys how definitions of emotion itself have changed over time, and how current debate has been heavily influenced by recent discoveries in cognitive science and neuroscience, which in turn informs discussion of PEM's theoretical underpinnings.

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[57] Both Beck (*Alba Emoting and Emotional Melody: Surfing the Emotional Wave in Cachagua, Chile*) and Rix (*A Revolution in Emotion for the Actor.* London: Routledge, 2002) position their own experiences in learning Alba Emoting at the centre of their own research.

[58] Gay McAuley, *Not Magic but Work: An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Process,* Manchester (New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), 12-14.

[59] See Appendix C and D.

[60] See Appendix B for link to video.

Chapter Three (*The Perdekamp Emotional Method*) gives an overview of the development and origins of the technique, charting Stephan Perdekamp's journey from director and stage manager in the German theatre, to the current iteration of the PEM technique, giving an overview of its principles and theory today, moving from training to character work.

Chapter Four (*Testing PEM*) explains and evaluates experiments undertaken by myself at Toi Whakaari to test the technique in practice over three major screen experiments, and makes observations on students learning PEM through workshop instruction from 2016 to 2018. It also examines participant feedback and performance, and examines and collates trends across that data sample.

Chapter Five (*Critical Evaluation*) critically evaluates the information presented throughout the thesis. It examines the underlying theories on human emotion on which PEM is built on, investigates their organ-emotion connection, draws comparison between other techniques, and evaluates PEM's ability to support greater wellness of the actor.

Chapter Six (*Conclusion*) draws conclusions from all the information and experiments, and then evaluates PEM's suitability for inclusion at a conservatoire training institution, such as the one in which I teach.

1.4 The Emotional Athlete

The PEM proposition, as outlined earlier, may be ultimately one of promise: that there can be a paradigm shift in a culture of suffering many actors deem necessary for their craft. Al Pacino once described the acting process as becoming "an

emotional athlete" where "it is painful… my personal life suffers."[61] Inherent in Pacino's quote is the notion that this suffering is a fait accompli of working with emotion, simply part of the job. This perhaps reflects the ethos of his own training, firmly steeped in the Strasberg Method, but it is a notion reflected by countless actors across the world who seem to believe that "successful acting requires psychologically unhealthy behaviour."[62] Yet to take Pacino's analogy a step further, surely any *athlete* whose training causes repeated injury needs to re-examine their fundamental technique. No such athlete could ever have a sustainable, professional career.

Convincing emotional expression is an essential requirement of the actor yet, as Pacino illustrates, at a cost. The challenge of providing this expression is arguably increased in screen acting, where the camera lens closes the proximity between actor and spectator; thus inauthentic emotion can more easily be detected. Furthermore, screen work requires the actor to produce this emotion repeatedly, over many takes, on demand — a feat of emotional athleticism. Achieving such emotion through Emotion Memory, a widely used technique, has been linked with the unwellness systemic throughout the acting profession. As this thesis examines, it is also a default approach for many drama students in training. In light of this, there is an ethical imperative for drama administrations and teachers to explore other approaches to emotion, such as PEM. This is the rationale and ultimate purpose behind this research, and the examination of Perdekamp's attempt to train the actor as a more sustainable and effective *athlete of emotion*.

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[61] Thomas K. Arnold, "Tower of Babbleonia for Pacino," *Hollywood Reporter*, June 7 2007, 35.

[62] Holly J. Deer, "#MeToo and The Method," accessed June 15, 2019, https://howlround.com/metoo-and-method

Fig. 2. Jack Parker. *Lust Mask*, 2017. Toi Whakaari. Photographer Jon Hunter.

CHAPTER 2:
HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO EMOTION

2.1 The Emotion Problem

In early 2006, as a recent drama school graduate, and years before I would encounter the PEM technique, I attended an audition for an airline commercial with a prominent New Zealand Casting Director. The commercial paid well; for a young actor with significant student debt, there was immense pressure to do well, and thus I had prepared as thoroughly as possible. The content of the commercial, concerning the pain of loved ones separating at an airport gate, required a convincing emotional performance from the actors involved: the brief repeatedly emphasised the actor's ability to portray 'real' feelings as the primary pre-requisite of casting. In my audition, the job was to portray a young man who has had a serious argument with his girlfriend prior to her departure overseas, and who watches her walk through the gate, upset and troubled he may never see her again.

In the audition, the casting director stopped me immediately in my first take, explaining: "You're giving me nothing… *you really have to go there*." However, after two or three takes of attempting to 'go there' (and clearly being confused about how to do so), the director stopped the audition and took me aside in the corner of the audition room. The casting director was privy to the knowledge that, six months prior, my mother had died suddenly after getting sick in Hawaii and developing complications from pancreatitis. Their direction was to think of the moment my mother died and to access the grief of that experience, substituting the

real grief I felt for her death for the emotions of the character having an argument with his girlfriend.

Desperate to do well, I agreed, and tried as deeply as I knew how to do this through the Strasberg-derived emotional memory exercises I had been taught at drama school: I pictured the details of that hospital room, I remembered the slow countdown of the heart monitor, I conjured the violence of the assisted breathing machines. And yet, no emotion came. Instead, I became more and more paralysed, increasingly 'blocked.' By the end of the audition, I was standing in the room, feeling deeply self-conscious, aware that the performance was a failure. The casting director thanked me pleasantly; I left despondent. As I walked out, I overheard them conferring with their reader through the still open door: "Three years of drama school… still can't act."

When I share this story, many actors acknowledge similar experiences. The problem of playing 'real' emotion is commonplace, and a problem actors must solve on a daily basis — if the script requires tears, and you are in a screen test, there is a requirement to deliver this: the camera can see if the eyes well with tears, or not. Many actors dread such scenes, pointing to the difficulty and inconsistency of accessing emotion as a primary reason; until PEM, I was unaware of any technique specialising in producing them. In the absence of reliable techniques, many actors resort to extreme approaches to guarantee emotion will be accessible. Famous Australian actor, Marcus Graham, for example, advised me to deprive myself of sleep for two days before a scene requiring high emotion — as a fail safe way to ensure tears would be accessible on demand (I can report this worked, yet at high cost).[63] Secondly, an actor cannot rely on a film director to provide techniques or support to facilitate this: very few have deep awareness of performance craft, and (rightfully) place onus on the actor to take care of their own performance. Thirdly,

[63] Marcus Graham, email correspondence with author, 2012.

this story illustrates how an evaluation on an actor's ability is often tied to their ability to play emotion — a longstanding phenomenon throughout the history of performance.

In examining the history of acting, the challenge of embodying and accessing emotion is a key focus of many actor training pedagogies, and the ability to do so has been identified as a key indicator of the level of an actor's craft for centuries. The associated question, of the actor's emotional *involvement* in acting those emotions, has long held a prominent position in debates about acting and is an important one to return to in evaluating the relevancy, need and precedent for a technique such as PEM. As identified in the introduction, three key practitioners in examining this debate are Denis Diderot, Konstantin Stanislavski and Lee Strasberg. This chapter provides an overview of such approaches and provides the historical backdrop to the emergence of PEM.

2.2 Diderot

Denis Diderot's *The Paradox of the Actor,* written in 1773, is perhaps the most famous and early work to tackle questions of acting and emotion. Diderot rejected the actor's emotional involvement in performance due to its unreliability and ineffectiveness, and instead advocated the simulation of emotion through studying and adopting its physical symptoms: "The most effective actor — that is, the one who has the greatest effect on an audience — is one who is able to demonstrate mastery over his feelings so as to imitate emotion."[64] Diderot chastised those actors who immersed themselves in the feelings of the character as ineffective and inconsistent: "their playing is alternately strong and feeble, fury and cold, dull and

[64] Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1955), 12.

sublime."[65]

By comparison, Diderot's ideal actor is guided completely by intellect, utilising their skill of observation and mimicry to create the illusion of realistic behaviour on stage and to affect the audience. This actor "does not feel while acting, but makes his impression on the audience by rendering so exactly the outward signs of feeling."[66] Above all, Diderot's provocation was a call for craft and technique in acting — a desire to elevate and refine the art form beyond "the unevenness of playing from heart."[67] His paradox is that the emotions of the audience are stimulated by an unemotional imitation of emotions by the actor. Diderot's paradox did much to influence the development of techniques of acting, and his influence will be one we return to frequently in following chapters.

2.3 Stanislavski and Emotion: From Memory to Active Analysis

Today, concepts of emotion in actor training are still largely derived from variations of the approach of Konstantin Stanislavski, widely cited as the most influential figure in Western acting pedagogy for the last 100 years.[68] Stanislavski, like Diderot, was also heavily interested in the question of the actor's emotional involvement with the character, and how best to portray emotion convincingly; he too saw the necessity of mastering the portrayal of emotion as key to mastering the craft of acting.[69] However, a large part of Stanislavski's career was invested in generating emotion through a focus on the *inner life* of the character, defined as the complex set of

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[65] Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, 15.

[66] Ibid: 19.

[67] Ibid: 15.

[68] Merlin, *Acting: The Basics,* 161-166.

[69] Ibid.

inner motivations and desires that he believed guided behaviour.[70]

Although often regarded as diametrically oppositional, Diderot's paradox was an influence on Stanislavski and foreshadows much of his system. Key components such as dual consciousness, the score of a role, and the delicate balance between technique and spontaneity all trace lineage to Diderot.[71] A key difference, however, was their stance on the nature and necessity of the actor's internal experience. Although Stanislavski's views continually evolved, through much of his career he argued that realistic performance was created through mining the *inner life* of the character, which in turn generated the appropriate physical reactions and external behaviours required for a scene. As he stated, "an actor is under the obligation to live his part inwardly, and then to give to his experience an external embodiment."[72] Diderot, by comparison, cared only for what the audience saw and experienced, and argued that the actor's internal feelings and experiences were ultimately moot in comparison to what was communicated externally to the spectators.

To create the character's inner life required working in the realm of the subconscious. Believing this inaccessible to the conscious mind, and beyond the control of the will, Stanislavski's mission was to create an approach "allowing the actor to use subconscious forces through conscious techniques."[73] One such technique he labelled Emotion Memory. Although later abandoned in his career, Emotion Memory was one of Stanislavski's pivotal early strategies for the problem of working with emotion in performance. A key influence in developing this work was

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Merlin, *Acting: The Basics,* 20.

[72] Konstantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares,* trans. Elizabeth Hapgood (London: Methuen, 1986), 15.

[73] Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe, *Theatre and Consciousness: Explanatory Scope and Future Potential,* (Bristol, Oregon: Proquest, 2005), 60.

experimental psychologist Théodule Ribot and his research on the memory of emotions. Ribot divided memories into two categories: "concrete" or "abstract." Concrete memories were felt in the body, in the same way as the original emotion was experienced. Abstract memories, by comparison, were "intellectual" — affecting only the mind, and not the body. Stanislavski theorised that actors could develop the ability to harness concrete memories to stimulate emotion through becoming more attuned to the sensations of the senses:

> Once you can grow pale or blush at the memory of something you have experienced, once you are frightened to think about something unhappy that you lived through long ago, you have a memory for *chuvstva* (feelings, senses), or a memory for emotion.[74]

What's interesting to consider about Ribot's research, and thus, its influence on Stanislavski's system, is that it moved beyond the influence of Cartesian Dualism, Descartes' strict separation between body and mind, to focus more on the interrelated nature of the two. Stanislavski, through his pioneering technique of accessing personal memory to generate emotion in an actor, was well aware of this deep mind/body interrelationship. His later work, towards the end of his career, on physical action, illustrates his deep interest in the body's significant ability to influence the mind. The system he produced from this focus, called Active Analysis, became an eventual cornerstone of his practice.[75]

Active Analysis was, essentially, a physical approach to exploring the text on the rehearsal room floor. Stanislavski adopted this approach after becoming frustrated with his earlier rehearsal processes of long table reads, followed by extensive

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[74] Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares,* 19.

[75] Merlin, *Acting: The Basics,* 161-166.

discussion of the scene,[76] which led to "dead acting, devoid of life."[77] Through this process, in which improvisations are used to connect actors to physical aspects of the scenes, Stanislavski found evidence that external action can induce an internal state and that physical initiation can lead feeling, just as Diderot had earlier claimed.[78] This discovery informed the idea that "the character of a person is his system of movements," which became a foundational blueprint of Stanislavski's acting system, and also supported an approach to working *through the body* towards emotion.[79] By the end of his career, Emotion Memory exercises were regarded as a "last resort."[80]

2.4 Michael Chekhov

Michael Chekhov, a former pupil of Stanislavski, was an accomplished actor and teacher in his own right, who shared his teacher's interest in the interrelated nature of the body and mind, and developed this aspect further into his own compelling acting technique that placed this investigation central to its overarching pedagogy. Current performance theorists, such as Rick Kemp, identify this focus positioned Chekhov as ahead of his time.[81] In the opening to his book, *To The Actor,* Chekhov presciently states that "it is a known fact that the human body and psychology influence each other and are in constant interplay."[82] Despite empirically derived

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[76] Rick Kemp, *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 145.

[77] Susan Carnicke, "Stanislavsky's System," in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (London, Routledge: 2000), 34.

[78] Meyer-Dinkgrafe, *Theatre and Consciousness*, 63-67.

[79] Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares,* 13.

[80] Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life And Art* (London: Methuen, 1999), 351.

[81] Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 117-128.

[82] Michael Chekhov, *To The Actor (*New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 1.

proof of that notion, it is "only now finding its way into discussions of acting."[83] Chekhov's work, while not as dominant as the pedagogy of Stanislavski, has undergone a renaissance in recent years, and has particularly been celebrated by theorists such as Rhonda Blair, Phillip Zarrilli and Kemp, all of whom, to varying degrees, have used the lens of cognitive science to evaluate acting methodologies.[84] Kemp, in particular, praises Chekhov for deserving credit for "intuitively creating an approach that is in accord with the current understanding of the bodymind,"[85] a term that Zarrilli, Kemp and Blair now use ubiquitously to emphasise how the physical and psychological aspects of a person are one connected system.[86]

Through understanding the body and mind as one interconnected system, Chekhov developed techniques that physically stimulated the actor's imagination to access emotion, as "the actor imagines with his body."[87] Chekhov dismissed Stanislavski's use of Emotion Memory to activate emotion as reductive, limiting the character's emotional experiences and expressions to those that coincide with the actor, and stated, "it is a crime to chain and imprison an actor within the limits of his so-called 'personality,' thus making him an enslaved labourer rather than an artist."[88] Furthermore, he believed Emotion Memory could cause harm to the actor, after his own personal experiences in working under Stanislavski involved suffering a nervous breakdown, allegedly triggered by working insistently with Emotion Memory in

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[83] Kemp, *Embodied Acting,* 127.

[84] Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), Kemp, *Embodied Acting,* Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavksi (*New York, NY: Routledge, 2009).

[85] Kemp, *Embodied Acting,* 127.

[86] Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting,* 7-9.

[87] Chekhov, *To The Actor,* 27-28.

[88] Ibid: 91.

studio exploration.[89]

Whilst Chekhov's approach might initially seem far removed from PEM, on closer analysis there are strong alignments between respective character exercises. In particular, Chekhov's use of Imaginary Centres and Psychological Gestures share strong similarities to PEM's system of Main Leading and Subcentres. Additionally, PEM's pedagogy echoes Chekhov's in that it is designed to free the actor from the limitations of their own experience, and provide practical tools to play emotions to which they have no personal relationship.[90]

2.5 Lee Strasberg and the Method

Although Stanislavski's insistence on memory as the resource for emotions and feelings gave way to his belief in physical actions, Emotion Memory still became a dominant force in US actor training across the 20th Century due to the influence of Lee Strasberg and his Actor's Studio. Strasberg, who came across the concept from Stanislavski-trained actor Richard Boleslavksy, made Emotion Memory central to his Method: the connective tissue between actor and character, that would heavily influence styles of screen work for decades to come — the hyper 'natural,' intimate delivery of many American dramatic performances trace lineage to Method Acting's dedicated pursuit of the character's inner psychology.[91]

The great irony about Strasberg's reinterpretation of Stanislavski, however, is that he based his version almost entirely on the American publication of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*: only the first third of the entire volume Stanislavski intended to

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[89] Merlin, *Acting: The Basics*, 171.

[90] These alignments and similarities are explored in depth in Chapter 5.

[91] Merlin, *Acting: The Basics,* 175-176.

publish.[92] This version left out all of his later work on Active Analysis and physical action, and as a result, Strasberg focused almost entirely on the actor's biographical experience as a means to access emotion and to prepare for a role. Thus, in Strasberg's method, the actor can only create "truth" in performance through the recall of lived experience:

> Affective memory is the basic material for reliving on the stage, and therefore for the creation of a real experience on the stage. What the actor repeats in performance after performance is not just the words and movements he practiced in rehearsal, but the memory of emotion. He reaches his emotion through the memory of thought and sensation.[93]

Strasberg's method is especially notable in this discussion because of the enduring cultural influence of Method Acting, and its approach to producing emotion. As examined in Chapters 4 and 5, many students interviewed across this study regard the actor's essential job in Strasbergian terms, embracing the notion their feelings must coincide with that of the character to most convincingly embody their role. This notion is Method Acting's enduring legacy, no doubt aided by Hollywood studio marketing departments desiring to increase the mystique of their stars, and has formed a popular culture idea of what 'great' acting requires.[94]

In recent years Strasberg's legacy has become a hot point for constant criticism, both for his "abusive teaching style, which bordered on psychoanalytical,"[95] and

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[92] Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 145- 148.

[93] Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method*, (New York: Plume, 1987), 113.

[94] Angelica Jade Bastien, "Hollywood Has Ruined Method Acting," The Atlantic, August 11, 2016. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/08/hollywood-has-ruined-method-acting/494777/

[95] Shirley, *His Dream of Passion*, 57. For further Strasberg criticism, see: John Harrop, *Acting (*London: Routledge, 1992), 39-4, Richard Hornby, *The End of Acting - A Radical View (*New York, NY: Applause Books, 1992), 173-186, Rosemary Malague, Malague, *An Actress Prepares - Women and 'The Method'* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012) 30-71.

especially for his prioritisation of Emotion Memory. Theorists such as Elly Konijn describe this approach as "problematic, as it elevates the importance of actor over character,"[96] and in the foreword to *Acting Emotions*, David Chambers, Professor of Acting and Drama at Yale, goes so far as to equate Strasberg's method with the downfall of American Theatre, limiting actors to playing versions of themselves rather than with the imagination to play wider and broader characters:

> Strasberg's profoundly misguided and astonishingly self-serving plundering of Stanislavski's experiments has probably done more damage to American theatre than any other single factor… Privileging inner life over outer form, psychoanalysis over textual analysis, infantile self-absorption over mature observation of human nature and society, the Method has as its hollow core the essentially conundrum supposition that an actor can form an empathetic, affective transference with a set of glyphs on paper called a character.[97]

Chamber's and Konijn's critiques are compelling: although Strasberg's Emotion Memory may increase the actor's depth of feeling, the danger is it limits the scope of their playing to their own experience, negating the crucial role *imagination* plays in the actor's approach, and, as Chambers alludes to, the actor becomes locked solely into accessing emotions already familiar to them.

Other critics use recent arguments in cognitive science and neuroscience to debunk Strasberg and Emotion Memory. Kemp, for instance, argues that Strasberg's central reliance on the actor's autobiographical experience as the basis for truthful emotional performance requires a belief that it is memory alone that provokes emotion. This insistence is based on an "outdated understanding," as research in neuroscience and experimental psychology have radically shifted conceptions and understanding of how the brain works, particularly in relation to consciousness,

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[96] Konijn, *Acting Emotions*, 12.

[97] Konijn, *Acting Emotions*, 10.

memory and emotion.[98] Memory, for example, is now considered not as permanent recordings in the brain, but rather as experiences that are constantly re-written, and reconstructed, in relationship to new information and experiences that a person continues to have through life.[99] Kemp further argues that, through this lens, Strasberg's Emotion Memory is "as much an imaginative exercise as it is one of recall," rendering its value moot, as actors are better directed to use purely imaginative exercises which prioritise the character's imagined memories and experiences over their own.[100]

Yet despite such widespread criticism, Strasberg's influence continues to endure and maintains huge popularity across the world.[101] This is particularly so in screen acting, where psychological realism is commonly prioritised, and the practice of 'immersion' — staying in character throughout a shooting period — is still adopted by many successful mainstream actors, such as Daniel Day-Lewis, Hilary Swank, and Jared Leto. Such actors have won plaudits for immersing themselves physically in roles, which frequently involve a degree of suffering: perhaps young actors could be forgiven then, in light of such high profile examples, for assuming great acting requires their own personal emotional involvement.[102]

Therefore, it is important not to deny Emotion Memory can be an effective tool for an actor. Yet it is crucial to dismantle the notion that only autobiographical experience can produce 'truth' in performance. Furthermore, neuroscience research reveals how unreliable the 'truth' created through that emotion memory might be in

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[98] Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 161 -163.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 162.

[101] Shirley, *His Dream of Passion*, 48.

[102] Many Toi Whakaari students interviewed expressed this position, discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

performance. Neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux, in his book *The Synaptic Self,* reveals why Emotion Memory can initially be such an impactful experience for the actor, but also inadequate as a reliable performance tool. LeDoux points out that "explicit memories established during emotional situations are often especially vivid and enduring," which explains the initial attraction to Emotion Memory exercises from Stanislavski, Strasberg and others.[103] However, LeDoux illustrates that "memories are more easily retrieved when the emotional state at the time of memory formation matches the state at the time of retrieval."[104] This, of course, produces a problem for the actor, as the conditions of a rehearsal or in performance are unlikely by themselves to provoke an emotional state congruent with that of the memory — and if they did, the emotional memory would be redundant in the first place: "the unreliability of remembered emotion […] may be related to the fact that the emotional state at the time of retrieval will by necessity be somewhat different from the state of the original experience."[105] In light of these arguments, it is understandable Strasberg's approach to emotion does not work for all actors, and remains, in the eyes of much recent critical analysis, out of vogue.

2.6 Defining Emotion

The central debate between emotional involvement and technique at the heart of Diderot's *Paradox* is difficult to effectively argue without understanding more about the nature of emotion itself. Intense debate has long plagued theories of emotion, beginning with its definition. The central argument about definition concerns the question of whether emotion is a physiological event, or a cognitive one. This

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[103] Joseph LeDoux, *The Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 221.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

question has been prominent since at least 1649 when Rene Descartes, bridging ancient and modern theories of emotion, promoted a dualistic notion of body and soul, proposing that the body was a "machine which experiences emotion as a result of the agitation of the soul discharging spirits through glands, nerves and blood vessels."[106] Descartes' theory argued that the mind was separate from the body, as was rationality from emotion. Descartes has widely influenced theories of emotion since, creating what is often referred to as 'the mind-body problem,' and is perhaps primarily responsible for a Western perspective of the mind's importance over the body, a bias that has in turn heavily influenced Western actor training.[107]

This mind-body dichotomy has provided the two primary oppositional arguments in the attempt to define what emotions are. The first view argues that emotions are the bodily reactions to a stimulus, which in turn "control and determine what we feel."[108] The second view posits that bodily reactions are secondary effects — the indicators of emotions.

American Psychologist William James (1842-1910) provided a simple contrast between the two. The first view could be described as:

I see a bear, ***I tremble, I feel afraid.***

Whereas the second, opposing view:

I see a bear, ***I feel afraid, I tremble.***

James championed this first view, stating that the subjective experience of emotion

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[106] Harry Norman Gardiner, Ruth Metcalf and John Beebe-Center, *Feeling and Emotion*. (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), 7.

[107] Gardiner et al, *Feeling and Emotion*, 7.

[108] William W. Grings and Michael E. Dawson, *Emotions and Bodily Responses* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 3.

is "nothing but the feeling of a bodily state."[109] The consensus amongst latest researchers, particularly in the field of neuroscience, supports this view and sequence. LeDoux, who has written extensively on the subject of consciousness and emotions in relationship to the brain, illustrates that the sequence of emotion occurs as sensory signals cause an involuntary physical response before reaching the thinking brain, which then refines the response.[110]

2.7 Damasio and Emotion

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio has been a prominent figure in emotion theory for over thirty years, offering insight into the relationship between the brain, body and emotion. His research has enabled a shift in the discussion of emotion from the psychological preoccupation of many twentieth century theories, toward the neural and endocrinal processes that stimulate the physiological symptoms we interpret as emotion.[111] Similar to Perdekamp, Damasio has long posited the view that emotions are innate biological processes, hard-wired into the organic system of all human beings, all in service of homeostasis — both the regulation of the body's internal state and functioning, but also its ability to deal with external threats and opportunities it may encounter, such as the ability to run from danger, to procreate, to find food. A significant aspect of Damasio's research, that we will return to throughout this study, is the clear demarcation between Emotions (essentially, complex autonomous bodily reactions) and Feelings (the mental cognition of those reactions):

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[109] William James, "Williams James on Emotion," in *Emotion: Bodily Change*, ed D.K Candland (Princeton NJ, Toronto and London: D. Van Nostrand Company Incorporated, 1962), 11-12.

[110] Joseph LeDoux, cited in Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 15-17.

[111] See: Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* (London: Vintage, 2000).

> For neuroscience, **Emotions** are more or less the complex reactions the body has to certain stimuli. When we are afraid of something, our hearts begin to race, our mouths become dry, our skin turns pale and our muscles contract. This emotional reaction occurs automatically and unconsciously. **Feelings** occur after we become aware in our brain of such physical changes; only then do we experience the feeling of fear.[112]

This distinction is crucial to acting, and to the PEM debate. Throughout his research, Damasio demonstrates that the conscious experience (Feeling) of Emotion is dependent on physical symptoms.[113] The implication for acting methodologies is important, as it posits that the conscious usage and control of physiological actions, such as breathing, eye movement, postural changes, muscular tension and so forth, not only communicate emotion to the audience, but also can generate an emotional experience for the actor.[114] Therefore, Damasio's research illustrates that Diderot's provocation — does the actor have to feel an emotion to express it, or do they simply have to reproduce the physical signs of the emotion? — is not an either/or question. As performance theorist Kemp states, "since physiological indicators are the stimulators of feeling in many emotions, the conscious reproduction of those symptoms can provide the affective experience of emotion."[115]

Damasio's research is finding increasing influence on acting. Katie Mitchell, a Stanislavskian trained director prominent in the UK, cites this influence, saying the "physiology of emotions replaced psychology as my key point of reference for

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[112] Manuela Lenzen, "Feeling Our Emotions: Interview with Antonio Damasio." Scientific American Mind, 16(1). Posted April 1, 2005. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/feeling-our-emotions/

[113] Damasio's books on the subject include *Descartes' Error, The Feeling of What Happens,* and *Looking for Spinoza.*

[114] This point is supported by other significant research, such as Paul Ekman's, discussed in the next section.

[115] Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 164.

talking about — and working on — acting."[116] The primary motivation for this influence, as theatre professor David Jackson states, seems to be the desire for acting practices that build on an increasing understanding of natural and biological processes, and "that [by going] beyond the subjective, is durable and universal."[117] Of course, such a desire has long been the aim of many acting methodologies, including Stanislavski and Diderot; the only difference now is the influence new discoveries in neuroscience and cognitive science are providing.[118]

Furthermore, Damasio's work, from a neuroscience perspective, supports a theory of universal emotions that is intrinsic to PEM's own foundational emotion theory. According to Damasio, the brain induces emotions from a very small series of brain sites, mostly located below the cerebral cortex in the area known as subcortical. These subcortical regions mainly exist in the brain-stem area, hypothalamus, and basal forebrain. Through PET imaging, Damasio (alongside other neuroscientists such as LeDoux) discovered that different emotions emerge in different areas of these sites, with distinctive movement patterns. Grief, for example "activates the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, hypothalamus and brain stem, whereas anger or fear activate neither the prefrontal cortex or hypothalamus." Each emotion has a specific and distinct mapping system in these areas of the brain, and also a specific pattern of activation within the body. Damasio argues therefore that the basic emotions are universal, producing recognisable patterns of movement within brains and bodies across cultures. Such a finding gives credence to PEM's foundational theory, that universal emotions exist, and, at their purest form, beneath the influence of cultural

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116 Katie Mitchell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 232.

117 David Jackson, "Stanislavski, Emotion and the Future of the UK Conservatoire," *Stanislavski Studies* 5, no. 1 (2017): 76.

118 See Blair, *The Actor, Image and Acting* and Kemp, *Embodied Acting,* for further discussion about this influence on acting.

and social conditioning, provide physiologically consistent indicators.[119]

Throughout his body of work, Damasio has displayed a fascination with artists and actors, as some of the very few people who are able to understand, channel and, in the case of gifted performers, *control* emotion. When asked about his 'hero' of neuroscience, Damasio points to Shakespeare: "Shakespeare understands the machinery of motivation[…] the negotiation between emotion and feeling, biology and psychology, that makes poor Hamlet so at the mercy of his feelings."[120] Damasio only began to consider emotions could be consciously controlled through his engagement with the pianist Maria Joan Pires. Pires claimed that when she played, she had the ability to consciously "reduce or allow the flow of emotion to her body."[121] Damasio was initially sceptical of this claim, but set up an experiment where Pires was wired to machines that could measure specific changes in her physiological state. She then played short musical pieces, where she was instructed to either consciously *allow emotion*, or to consciously *inhibit emotion*. When she allowed emotion, her skin conductance record was full of peaks and valleys, linked to specific passages in the compositions. When listening with emotion voluntarily inhibited, Damasio discovered what he had initially thought unachievable: Pires was able to alter her skin-conductance graph at will and change her heart rate accordingly. Additionally, he recorded behavioural changes: "The profile of background emotions was rearranged, and some of the specific emotive behaviours were eliminated[…] there was less movement of the head and facial musculature."[122] In disbelief, they repeated the entire experiment and found exactly

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[119] The influence of social-cultural conditioning on the expression of emotions is discussed in Chapter 5.5.

[120] Thomas Merton. "The Brain Is The Servant Of The Body - Interview with Antonio Damasio." YouTube Video, 13:36. Posted 11 November 2017. https://youtu.be/x5GFB5NjfYw

[121] Damasio, *The Feeling Of What Happens,* 34.

[122] Ibid: 35-36.

the same results: Pires was able to repeat it. In subsequent interviews, Damasio has regularly qualified statements around emotions being autonomous, and uncontrollable, with the caveat: "unless, of course, you are a gifted actor."[123] This experiment points to the prospect that emotions, despite being autonomous reactions, *can* be trained. This is significant, as many acting approaches to emotion, such as Stanislavski and Strasberg, work on the opposite assumption.

2.8 Paul Ekman: The Theory of Universal Emotions

Paul Ekman, an anthropologist and behavioural psychologist, is another crucial figure in dominant emotion theory, whom Damasio cites to support his own findings.[124] Through a significant body of widely cited research, Ekman formulated his own theory of emotions as universal: in their pure form, able to transcend boundaries of culture, race and language.[125] This theory was cultivated through research that centred on the expression of emotion through the human face across many cultures, alongside research on the relationship between emotion and the Autonomous Nervous System.[126] Through his theory, Ekman proposed six basic emotions, innate to all human beings: surprise, disgust, grief, anger, fear and happiness. Ekman's theory aligns with Damasio and closely echoes Perdekamp's.[127]

Ekman also applied his theory to experiments with actors. In 1986, observed by

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[123] Copernicus Center for Interdisciplinary Studies. "Antonio and Hanna Damasio Discuss The Strange Order Of Things." YouTube Video, 1:05:59. Posted 4 September, 2017. https://youtu.be/CAmkDrVvJ68

[124] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 37.

[125] See Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life,* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007).

[126] Paul Ekman and Richard Schechner, "What Interests Me About Performance," *TDR* 32, no. 4 (1988): 80.

[127] There is only a single difference in Ekman and Perdekamp's respective definitions of the basic emotions: Perdekamp proposes *lust* as opposed to *surprise*.

performance studies theorist Richard Schechner, he conducted experiments investigating the relationship between the Autonomous Nervous System (ANS) and the process of acting emotion. Part of the purpose of this experiment was to evaluate the efficacy of producing emotion through emotional memory, as defined by Strasberg's Method, in comparison to creating the prototypes of emotion "muscle by muscle" on the face. Several key findings came from this experiment that support PEM's thesis. Firstly, that the ANS is "emotion specific," meaning that different emotions evoke distinct and measurable patterns in the ANS, as measured by heart rate, skin conductive tests and infrared imaging. Secondly, that the physical movement of the facial muscles affected stronger physiological changes in the ANS than the recollection of emotions. As Ekman notes, "producing the emotion-prototype patterns of facial muscle action resulted in autonomic changes of large magnitude that were more clear-cut than those produced by reliving emotions."[128] In other words, the mechanical, step-by-step instruction to change the facial expression into the physical mask of the emotion "worked better than getting the actor to feel."[129] This, of course, goes counter to the Strasberg canon, and provokes questions about the notion of authenticity and 'truthfulness' in acting. Richard Schechner, observing Ekman's experiments, remarked:

> Maybe then, the 'deepest' acting goes on at the neurological level. Paul Ekman's work actually meshes productively with it… the key difference between *ordinary behaviour* and *acting* is purely one of reflexivity — professional actors are aware that they are acting.[130]

As Schechner indicates, Ekman illustrated that this "deepest" acting can indeed be

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[128] Robert Levenson, Paul Ekman, and Wallace Freisen. "Voluntary Facial Action Generates Emotion-Specific Autonomic Nervous System Activity," *Psychophysiology* 27, no. 4 (1990): 374.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 30.

manipulated and invoked through conscious, physiological technique.[131]

2.9 Susana Bloch: Alba Emoting

Perhaps the earliest Western approach to formalise a completely physiological technique for activating emotions was Alba Emoting, arguably the closest methodology to PEM. Developed in the 1970s by neuroscientist Susana Bloch, it precedes much of Damasio's research yet its underlying pedagogy remains congruent to it: specifically, the way experience (feeling) of emotion arises from physiological symptoms, and that "the basic emotions are hardwired, etched into our neural circuitry by our genes rather than by our culture."[132] Alba Emoting defines these emotions almost exactly as Damasio and PEM do:

> (E)motions are reactions integrated in the neuroendocrine system, triggered by a specific stimulus (emotogenic stimulus), involving a particular area of the effector organs (visceral, humoral, and muscular effectors), and evoking a particular subjective activation (feelings).[133]

Bloch identified "effector patterns of emotions," proposing that each emotion has a distinct pattern of movement in the body.[134] These effector patterns are configurations of reactions, including the respiratory-postural-facial muscles, blood pressure, heart rate, viscera and glands. According to Bloch, in any emotional

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[131] Ibid.

[132] Jeannette Ginslov, "Emotional Intelligence and the Actor," June 19 2004. http://www.jginslov.com/uploads/2/1/9/5/21959466/jginslov_emotional_intelligence_and_the_actor_2004.pdf

[133] Susana Bloch and Guy Santibanez, "A Qualitative Analysis of Emotional Effector Patterns and Their Feedback," *The Pavlovian Journal of Biological Science* 21, no. 3 (1986): 108.

[134] Roxanne Rix, *A Revolution in Emotion for the Actor* (NY, London: Routledge, 2002) 206.

reaction there are three stages that are always interacting with each other: the physiological, the expressive and then the subjective.[135] Alba practitioner Jeannette Ginslov explains how this works:

> The autonomic intake of breath pre-empts the emotion, then the visceral, endocrine, chemical, limbic system and molecular reactions occur. The expressive reactions include the somatic, the muscular, postural, gestural, facial expressions, vocal intonations and then controlled respiratory movement. Finally the subjective reactions occur and include one's feelings, personal, idiosyncratic, cultural and then come social/personal values and memories. Emotions and feelings work together. As human beings we are always experiencing an emotion.[136]

Critics, however, point to the coarseness of Alba's technique when applied to character and scene work.[137] Alba, therefore, arguably provides more value as a training tool than as an acting methodology. From examining Bloch's numerous texts on Alba, it certainly seems that the application of performance is less of an interest and concern than the nature of emotions themselves, and the application of her techniques in a variety of therapeutic settings, which is perhaps understandable given her background as a scientist, not a dramatist. Bloch herself argues that these other elements are already well covered by drama schools, yet what is lacking is the training of emotion:

> What in our opinion is lacking in the curricula in most drama schools are instrumental techniques for learning how to express emotion. While the Gnostic-verbal (literary) and the body-expressive (physical) aspects of acting behaviour are quite well covered pedagogically, the emotional expressive (psychophysiological) aspects are almost entirely left to the intuition, life experience or "emotional memory" of the student

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[135] Susana Bloch et al, "Effector Patterns of Basic Emotions: A Psychophysical Method for Training Actors," in *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practice,* ed Philip B. Zarrilli (London and New York: Routledge) 220.

[136] Ginslov, "Emotional Intelligence and the Actor."

[137] Rix, *A Revolution in Emotion*, 210.

actor, with little or no technical support.[138]

Considering the historical importance of producing emotion in performance, it is indeed curious that emotion training is neglected by most drama schools in comparison to the training of the body, the imagination, and the intellect. Yet part of this neglect may be due to a problem of application with practices such as Alba: as its critics assert, emotion in itself is for naught if it cannot be effectively integrated into text and character. This question of application is particularly salient in investigating PEM, as examined in subsequent chapters.

2.10 Summary

Playing emotion is arguably as challenging to the actor as any other aspect of their work. In Western actor training, an innate assumption in tackling this problem has been the widespread notion that emotion, as an autonomous reaction, is beyond the control of the will, inaccessible to the control of the mind. Thus acting strategies have been developed to solve a physiological problem (the reactions of emotion) through the use of cognitive solutions: most commonly through the use of Emotion Memory, or techniques of the imagination (such as Stanislavski's 'magic if') to simulate the environment and emotional predicament of the character. These cognitive techniques can work but are unreliable, perhaps due to the interrelated nature of memory and imagination as creative acts of construction, reinterpretation and re-writing, which mean they are different each time they are accessed. Yet the research of Damasio, Ekman and Bloch proposes that emotion can be trained physically, as consciously adopting specific and distinct physical attributes of an emotion can trigger the holistic pattern of that emotion in the entire body. Working with the physiology in this way, then, illustrates that we do not ultimately have to choose a side of Diderot's provocation, but that both can be true. Therefore, there is sound value in exploring the PEM technique in more depth.

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[138] Bloch et al, "Effector Patterns of Basic Emotions," 222.

Fig. 3. Jack Parker. *Grief Mask*, 2017. Toi Whakaari. Photographer Jon Hunter.

CHAPTER 3:
THE PERDEKAMP EMOTIONAL METHOD

3.1 Current PEM Pedagogical Overview

Although a system involved in on-going development, it is possible to define PEM's pedagogical tenets as they currently stand. PEM trains the actor in emotional athleticism, through training the ability to consciously execute innate emotional movement and actions of the body. Part of this training involves the releasing of energetic and emotional "blocks" and muscular tensions influenced by the actor's personal experience and socio-cultural conditioning.[139] This occurs through a series of sequential exercises that facilitate the actor experiencing and learning to activate emotions at their 'pure' level, and then teaching them to blend those in service of embodying a character.[140]

Training these 'pure' emotions requires clear pedagogical terminology and definitions. PEM regards the emotions as "the motor of our movements" and, like Damasio, draws a clear distinction between *emotion* and *feeling*.[141] In PEM, emotions "are fundamental, innate, universally valid action patterns," whereas feelings "are complex and subjective processes that depend on a certain situation and past experiences."[142] In more simple terms, emotions are *movements*, and feelings are conscious *feedback* to those movements. Perdekamp argues that although the emotions always have a physiological affect, they are not always

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[139] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 30, 2017.

[140] Ibid.

[141] As discussed in Chapter 2.7.

[142] "Summary of the Emotional Theories of PEM," Workshop Handout.

noticed: generally, the emotions only become evident to us when there is a problem with their optimal function, such as a blockage or friction:

> Successful emotional actions can remain unnoticed and have no need for processing or memorising. However, if there are contradictory options of movement (*fight or flight*) or emotional blockages, the body cannot act clearly and unhindered. These blockages, frictions, mixtures of emotions or particularly important (positive and negative) situations require conscious processing. The feedback of the emotional system to the conscious mind are called *feelings*.[143]

This distinction, between emotion and feeling, is crucial to the teaching and execution of the PEM system. It is the identification of *emotions* as physical, distinct movement patterns, that allows them to be trainable. According to Perdekamp, *feelings*, by comparison, remain elusive, subjective and indistinct, influenced by the individual's own psychology, and therefore are more difficult to generate reliable performance results from.

The focus on emotional training, however, is in service of a broader aim. An underlying purpose of PEM, as articulated by Perdekamp, is achieving "holistic communication," which Perdekamp identifies as the key to authentic and affecting communication — and thus, performance — of the actor.[144] In the educational material supplied to workshop participants of PEM, titled the "Summary of the Emotional Theories of PEM," Perdekamp articulates the purpose of PEM as training the actor to be a master communicator — an artist who is adept at consciously shaping information to the audience and other performers on a verbal, subtextual and energetic level. To do this, he defines and distinguishes three levels of "human communication" as a basis for PEM:

• the communication of the **intellect**

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[143] Ibid.

[144] Ibid.

• the communication of the **body**

• the communication of **emotion**

In Perdekamp's definition, the **intellect** is concerned with processing and communicating abstract and cognitive occurrences both inwardly (through the process of thought) and outwardly (speaking, utilising language). The intellect is connected to *experience* — making cognitive interpretation of the stimulus and event of experiences and emotions, and "may be described as the connection to and influence of the conscious mind."[145] Compared to actions in the body, the activities of the intellect are slower, and its purpose is for communicating and processing complex and abstract information.[146]

By comparison, the **body** communicates unconscious reactions and reflexes. These are relatively simple patterns of response, which on the deepest level can include metabolic regulation and the biological machinery behind what will become pain and pleasure, drives and motivations. Perdekamp distinguishes between the autonomous nature of these reflexes and reactions, and emotions:

> These reactions characteristically happen fast, linearly and directly. Opposed to the emotional level, the entire body is not actively involved but individual body parts can be affected. For example, one hand (including shoulder and arm) pulls away from a hot stove or the eyelid closes when something penetrates the eye. These are straight movements which do not necessarily entail complex and target-oriented movement or behaviour patterns — unlike emotions. The reflex does not include an assessment of the situation — which is why rationally processing reflexes can often be confusing.[147]

Emotions are defines as innate holistic muscular movement *(action)* patterns, distinguished by their function and direction. In contrast to reflexes, emotions

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[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

appear "due to conscious, semi-conscious or subconscious assessments of a situation which trigger an innate holistic movement pattern."[148] In this way, they are a more complicated programme of response, setting the body into action in response to the stimulus of threat (potential danger), or opportunity (potential food, potential procreation).

According to Perdekamp, these three levels — intellect, body and emotion — must be *equally* utilised to ensure holistic (and therefore, *authentic*) communication, which he regards as the foundation of affecting performance. Perdekamp believes that, due to the impact of widespread societal and cultural conditioning which "prioritises rational thought over emotion," it is especially the levels of body and emotion that need to be strengthened in the majority of actors.[149] Perdekamp explains, "until recently in Western cultures the intellect (as the sole seat of our self), has been communicatively overrated; the body has been regarded as completely subordinate to the intellect and emotions have been defined as disruptive opposition to the mind."[150] It is this reason the training focuses primarily on emotion.

Thus the PEM training exercises are designed to give the actor a sort of somatic re-education: waking them up to the innate emotional movement patterns and allowing these to fulfil their intended functions, creating greater internal physiological awareness and putting the actor more in balance with their entire organic system. Perdekamp argues that training in this way not only allows an actor to access emotions more effectively, but also has an added wellness benefit of allowing the entire organic system to work more optimally, releasing emotional buildup and retraining optimal function. This is core to the purpose of the

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[148] Ibid.

[149] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 30, 2017.

[150] "Summary of the Emotional Theories of PEM," Workshop Handout.

pedagogy, and a reason why Perdekamp has wide-ranging aspirations for PEM outside of performance applications.[151] He finds fault with what he describes as the "inept – and particularly repressive – handling of emotions," which occurs across "many cultures" and "leads inevitably to an impairment for the individual and the community."[152] Such impairment is, according to Perdekamp, "not proof of the faultiness of the emotional system of the body but rather a convincing reason to learn how to deal with emotions skilfully,"[153] not just for the actor, but for society at large.

PEM continues to evolve and now purports to be an entire system, including detailed voice and movement practices, which are adjuncts to the essential emotional training. However, for the scope of this thesis, the areas primarily examined will be the basic emotion training and its application to character, as outlined in this chapter.

3.2 Origins and Development of PEM

Stephan Perdekamp's interest in the biology of emotions can be traced to his upbringing in the German village of Freiburg, where from a formative age he spent much time on the farm of his uncle, observing the emotional behaviour of animals: "How they communicated, how they knew when one of them is frightened, how they look after each other if there is the need… This form of instinctive, biological grasp of emotions interested me."[154] His family regarded theatre as a "non-

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[151] As discussed in 1.1, PEM is finding successful application to working with autism. Perdekamp's desire is to expand these applications.

[152] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 30, 2017.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Aaron Wahl, *A Gateway to Your World - How I Learned to Love My Feelings as an Autist* (Hamburg: Knaur, 2019), 103.

profession," so for much of his early adult life he resisted a pull towards the theatre, and instead trained to become a teacher at the Freiburg Teaching Academy.[155] Early in this tenure, however, he had to replace a sick member of the Academy's theatre ensemble, which re-kindled his passion for dramatic arts, and he soon left for Munich to study theatre science and German literature. During this period, he became immersed in the theatre scene of the city, attracting television and stage roles, before gravitating towards assistant directing, a period which began his theatrical career. The inciting incidents that directly sparked the development of PEM can be traced to three major events of this time.

The first event was the experience working backstage as a stage manager on a long run of a theatre show in the German cities of Munich, Cologne and Bielefeld in the late 1980s, which aroused a burgeoning curiosity to solve one of the essential riddles of the theatre: the ephemerality of exquisite performance. Seeing the same performance countless times, Perdekamp questioned why an actor could be so affecting on one particular night, and dismally underwhelming the next, without having any real understanding of why. When interrogated, Perdekamp attests actors would point to vague concepts, such as "I was just in it," or "we just felt it tonight," with what he perceived as a systemic misunderstanding of craft.[156] Despite initially finding frustration in actors referring to 'energy,' he started to identify this as a target of investigation — the inconsistency in the ability of actors to create "real, authentic energy between people."[157]

The second event was the stabbing discussed in the introduction — the colleague of his, who attacked her husband with a knife, blaming an inability to release herself

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[155] Ibid.

[156] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 19, 2017.

[157] Jones, *Innate Patterns of Emotion*, 28.

from an overwhelming emotional state generated through performance. Although an extreme case, this incident was indicative of a general trend Perdekamp witnessed amongst the German acting community:

> Actors, much more than dancers or singers, were likely to take drugs, mostly alcohol, both to free up enough to get into their part and, even more so, after the performance, to get out of their high-emotion state and the traumas they had been performing. It looked like a very abusive profession.[158]

The third was when an acting colleague "ran the emotional well of memory dry."[159] In the late 1980s, Perdekamp recalls being backstage moments before a performance began when an actress came to him in a desperate state, telling him "I can't do it — it's gone."[160] Renowned for being an actress with an innate ability to produce deep, convincing emotion, the actress complained that the memories she had used to produce those states were suddenly not working — she had gone over them so many times to provoke trauma, that they no longer triggered her. Without the use of these memories, she had no other technique or ability to embody emotion, and she was paralysed, unable to go on stage: her career ended soon afterwards.[161]

From these incidents, a primary thematic emerged across Perdekamp's developing research: the need to redefine the actor's relationship to producing and controlling energy and emotion. In pursuit of this, he identified the ineffectiveness and instability of using "psychological" approaches employing memories, and instead sought to develop a technique that was more reliable and safer for the performer.[162]

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[158] Jones, *Innate Patterns of Emotion*, 28.

[159] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 30, 2017.

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Jones, *Innate Patterns of Emotion*, 28.

Consequently, he formulated a working hypothesis of the emotions as, at their essence, bioenergetic — made up of the same bioelectrical charges that allow the heart to beat, and musculature to tense. The biology of the human body, and its relationship to creating emotion and movement, became the major thrust of subsequent research:

> …nobody could show me how to create energy or reliably or how to get into emotions without damage… so I started researching how to create energy in the body and I looked first at the muscle movements, because we use energy to enable muscle movement. We started to analyse facial expressions first and, later, body movements, to find out where those energies come from. We experimented with dozens, and then hundreds, of people and realised that emotions have their own energy and their own associated physical movement patterns.[163]

Perdekamp's early experiments involved investigating conscious access to this *bioenergy* — the production of electricity in nerves and muscles. These experiments illustrated to him that "if the actor's muscles are engaged by the right neural impulses, the body behaves as if it 'lives' in a particular situation."[164] In other words, consciously adopting specific physiological movements and affects of emotions could trigger the body into holistic, *authentic* reactions. Perdekamp observed that, at the same time, if those same neural impulses were engaged, the "neural mirror-effect draws the audience in a semi-physical encounter of the scene," creating the conditions of exquisite performance he had sought to capture.[165] This observation inspired Perdekamp into years of research where the primary site of investigation became the actor's body, and its physiological, energetic system of emotion.

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[163] Ibid.

[164] Wahl, *A Gateway to Your World*, 38.

[165] Ibid.

3.3 Development of the Facial Masks and Organ-Emotion Triggers

One of Perdekamp's key early experiments involved using the facial expressions of basic emotions. Although independent from Ekman's research, these experiments made similar conclusions about the universal nature of emotions, and allowed Perdekamp to find tangible physiological triggers that stimulated holistic emotion. Adopting these archetypal facial masks became an important part in PEM's emotion training exercises, and are still used today.

Perdekamp's facial expression experiments with actors began around 1997, which led to his realisation that emotions had the same expressions in everyone, and that clearly identifiable were a set of prototypical emotional 'masks,' which related to six basic emotions. Just as Ekman observed the effects on the ANS and entire body of strongly adopting the facial mask prototypes,[166] Perdekamp's own research revealed a similar impact, and led to his own hypothesis that emotions were in fact innate movement patterns which created basic, holistic movements in the body.[167] Perdekamp explains:

> Since all the experiments with masks led to the same movement impulses, it became clear that — underneath the cultural behaviour — there was a layer of biological movements, that all who used masks, executed in the same way. In this time it became also apparent, that the movement patterns that corresponded to masks had basic movement qualities: Push through, flee, hold on to, let go, pull towards, push away.[168]

From this observation Perdekamp hypothesised that emotional behaviour was based on logical functions. These functions were not based on psychological states,

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[166] Levenson et al, "Voluntary Facial Action Generates Emotion-Specific Autonomic Nervous System Activity," *Psychophysiology* 27, no. 4 (1990): 374.

[167] Perdekamp dates this initial hypothesis to 1998.

[168] Stephan Perdekamp, email correspondence, June 10, 2019.

but rather on meeting the needs of the body "to move to cope with life."[169] This notion echoed Damasio's parallel research that was drawing similar conclusions about the emotions as a biological method of maintaining homeostasis.[170]

Whilst observing these pure emotions and movement patterns, this research also led to a realisation that there was a difference between the pure emotional facial expression, and "culturally/socially permitted expressions."[171] Perdekamp began to identify the impact of cultural and social influence on emotional expression throughout the entire body, and hypothesised that such influence led to an impairment of the emotional system as it was biologically designed. In other words, as we are taught to control and suppress our innate emotional expressions, problems in the emotional system can occur in the form of emotional "blockages."[172] This observation would become key to the purpose of PEM's training exercises, which aim to clear such blockages and re-train the actor to execute these biological emotional movement patterns.

Despite advancing his research, Perdekamp quickly found limitations in the facial experiments. The facial masks were essentially too exaggerated to be of use in an acting methodology that was able to capture the nuance, detail and scale of more realistic performances. Therefore, Perdekamp began to investigate the possibility of internal physiological triggers. Part of this investigation was provoked by the observation that when the facial mask prototypes were strongly adopted by actors, they created an impulse for a corresponding movement pattern. Anger (or *Aggression*, as Perdekamp prefers to label it) for example, when strongly and

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[169] Ibid.

[170] As discussed, Chapter 2.7.

[171] Stephan Perdekamp, email correspondence, June 10, 2019..

[172] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 30, 2017.

accurately created in the face, sometimes "meant that the individual wanted to take a step forward, or there was the impulse in the neck to move forward."[173]

Consequently, Perdekamp began experimenting with internal triggers that created the same external physical effect. Eventually, he discovered the ability to stimulate this movement through concentrating and sending an electrical 'charge' into certain internal organs. The first organ he identified that possessed this capacity was the liver. Perdekamp recalls, finding this charge "made my whole body move forward… it gave me the impulse and experience of moving."[174] In researching whether others had made this connection, he found literature connecting North American tribes and the relationship they made between the liver, and anger: if the liver of another animal was consumed, you took on that animal's anger, and power. Furthermore, in the German language, a well-known colloquial saying, 'a louse ran over my liver,' is used in instances where one becomes angry. Perdekamp hypothesised that perhaps there was actually no coincidence between these associations and the innate physiological functions of the body.

In 2018, Perdekamp discussed this process further:

> The impulse in the organ is actually a place where a code is triggered. So, if this spot in the liver gets switched on, the energy flows into all the muscles it needs to in order to (fulfil the movement pattern to) push forward. And that's innate. Like the breathing process. We don't practice that. The baby does that from the beginning. Same with digestion. Nobody practices digestion. So there are obviously, many programmes that are innate.[175]

Requiring further qualitative data, he began blind trials with actors, around 1998.

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[173] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 15, 2018.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid.

Beginning with the liver, he confirmed that there was a repeatably observable pattern of movement which this organic trigger created, in multiple bodies: the impulse to move forward and to push through, accompanied by the physical attributes of the facial mask of aggression. This confirmation lead to experiments investigating the other organs. After a long period of practical research involving hundreds of participants, he defined a set of six internal triggers, which produced six innate movement patterns, that he linked to the six basic emotions.

EMOTION	ORGAN	MOVEMENT PATTERN & FUNCTION
AGGRESSION	LIVER	TO PUSH THROUGH
HAPPINESS	HEART	TO RELAX, TO CALM
GRIEF	SMALL INTESTINE	TO HOLD ON
LUST	SEXUAL ORGANS	TO GET, TO GRAB
FEAR	SEXUAL ORGANS	TO FLEE
REVULSION	STOMACH	TO PUSH AWAY

Whilst the organs provided the triggers, the degree of force and scale of the emotional expression was dependent on the amount of breath that accompanied the movement. Furthermore, each bioelectrical charge that stimulates each emotion requires a specific direction. This explains how the sexual organs can stimulate both lust and fear.

EMOTION	ORGAN + DIRECTION OF ENERGY
AGGRESSION	LIVER **FORWARDS**
HAPPINESS	HEART **OPENING IN 3D (ALL DIRECTIONS)**
GRIEF	SMALL INTESTINE **BACKWARDS**
LUST	SEXUAL ORGANS **FORWARDS**
FEAR	SEXUAL ORGANS **BACKWARDS**
REVULSION	STOMACH **BACKWARDS**

Understandably, for some, the organ-emotion triggers are a controversial aspect of PEM. This is a key aspect of learning the work, and, in my observations, an area where student resistance can occur.[176] Asking a student to move their liver forwards, for example, is a provocative instruction — an immediate response: *how is that possible?* Perdekamp's answer is in the transference of bioelectricity through the body, that can be trained as simply as the ability to catch a ball. Actors are taught to focus the charge of the bioelectricity in the corresponding organ, and channel this into a direction. This is achieved through growing the actor's sensorial and energetic awareness of organs of the body. In early phases of this training, when learning to do this, students are instructed to tense muscles in the corresponding part of the body, to support this awareness. For instance, in working with the small intestine, it is the tension created through pulling the abdominal muscles backwards that aids the student in channeling the bioelectrical charge into the desired direction. When students become more attuned to the energy potential in these distinct parts of the body, they can begin to work with finer and subtler energies attributed to them.

This internal bioelectrical aspect of PEM is hardest to detail and to write about (without experiencing it), and on-going research in biology is still uncovering how these mechanisms work.[177] However, Perdekamp and his colleagues undertook scientific experiments in Vienna, in 2013, to illustrate the validity of the organ-emotion triggers.[178] According to Perdekamp, these experiments "validated the traceability of emotions to organic impulses on a scientific basis," and provide measurable data to illustrate that, through PEM, an actor can affect emotion-specific

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[176] Examined in Chapter 4.

[177] Examined in Chapter 4.3.

[178] Although not available in English, the Vienna Experiment is cited on PEM's webpage, and is accredited by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG): http://pem-acting.com/pem-ressource-archive/evaluation-by-specialists

changes in the Autonomic Nervous System on demand.[179] However, the technology was not sophisticated enough to explain *how* this occurs in the body, which requires further research.[180] Yet there are some developing theories to suggest how this organ-emotion triggers could occur biologically. In 2018, a study undertaken by Australian sports scientists has explored how the cells communicate with one another during exercise, carrying biochemical messages.[181] This study uncovers how the body's internal organs are "as gossipy and socially tangled as any 8th grade classroom" through vesicles: microscopic globules within cells containing biological material, that hold genetic material and proteins that convert biological messages to other cells.[182] The study also illustrates how influential major organs are in the production and channeling of energy through the internal system — during exercise, the liver, for example, goes into energy production overdrive. Further critical analysis of this process will occur in Chapter 5.

3.4 Training PEM

PEM training occurs through an integrated series of exercises, that build both emotional pliability and the ability to achieve multiple tasks simultaneously. In its initial training, PEM provides a series of specific exercises for each emotion, beginning with *Aggression*, then moving through *Happiness*, *Grief, Lust, Fear*, and *Revulsion.* To begin training each emotion, the student is taken through both the activation of the respective organ trigger and prototypical facial mask. A dynamic,

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[179] Ibid.

[180] This experiment and its limitations are examined in depth in Chapter 5.3.

[181] Martin Whitham et al, "Extracellular Vesicles Provide a Means for Tissue Crosstalk during Exercise," *Cell Metabolism* 27, no. 1 (2018): 237-51.

[182] Gretchen Reynolds, "The Mysterious Interior World of Exercise," Jan 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/24/well/move/the-mysterious-interior-world-of-exercise.html

full-body "helping" activity is often also involved, to support the student experiencing the emotion through the whole body. For example, *Grief* is achieved through activating the small intestine backwards, alongside the facial mask of grief: eyebrows raised in the centre of the forehead and knitted together, mouth open, eyes widening as the pupils push forward, reaching out to "hold on." Alongside this, a helping exercise occurs as students grab the arms of a partner, and pull strongly against them, using the world "please." The more the entire body is engaged to fulfil the movement pattern of grief, which is *to hold on*, the more the emotion is activated through the entire system. The combination of all three elements — organ, facial mask, and dynamic full body movement — in concert with diaphragmatic breathing, allows the student to build up to the extremity of the emotion; once they have experienced this full force, working with the emotion in more subtle forces can be more easily achieved.

Each emotion module has between three to five different helping exercises, which are taught depending on the length of the workshop. Although PEM can be taught efficiently and quickly — a weekend workshop can introduce a student to the basic emotions, and provide enough information to practice and begin to apply them — fulfilling the full variety of exercises for each emotion is preferable, and deepens the student's ability. For example, a full *Aggression* module comprises multiple exercises, such as the *'S' Exercise* (where students adopt carefully prescribed warrior-type poses and work to channel full force aggression through the body towards a fixed target, in combination with voice), the *Duel* (learning to channel aggression into text and facing off against a partner, working at the extremity of this emotion whilst retaining safe distance), the *Gorilla Walk* (exploring the application of emotion to an extreme physicality of the body), and the *Karate Exercise* (punching boxing pads with a partner, whilst moving through the space, combining full force of aggression with precise targeting and control).

Throughout the instruction of emotion modules, a series of basic group exercises are taught and woven into the training. These exercises include the *Clap Circle*, where students stand in a circle and pass energy to the person next to them using a specific physical movement, and the *Separation of Means*, which entails a series of increasingly difficult physical activities that build from simple rhythmic clapping patterns to the integration of several complex actions, such as moving backwards and forwards, reciting the alphabet backwards, all in different rhythms to the baseline clap pattern. As the students learn different emotions, they are applied to these exercises, to inform and qualify the physical tasks. The purpose here is the ability to achieve multiple tasks at once, as is required in performance, and channeling the emotions through specific and technical activities. Once the six basic emotions are learnt and able to be integrated into these exercises, the application to character can begin.

3.5 PEM and Character

Just as PEM takes a physiological approach to emotion, the approach to character is primarily focused on the body. Whereas the training component of PEM retrains the actor's ability to play the pure emotions through releasing emotional and physical blockages and making the pure movement patterns of basic emotions more accessible, part of applying PEM to character is a process of consciously layering back into the body the energetic blockages and physical traits the *character* has unconsciously adopted through their socio-cultural experiences. In other words, whilst the actor trains to increase their emotional range and bandwidth, the character work then specifies and reduces that bandwidth in accordance with the given circumstances of the text. As Perdekamp states, "the actor needs to understand the biological system first, then put the cultural systems on top, in order

to really become another person of another culture and time."[183] Perdekamp believes those "cultural systems" — what Perdekamp would define as the character's experiences, traumas, social and cultural influences, that in turn influence the character's *feelings*, which are not unlike Stanislavski's given circumstances — manifest in the body: a repeated idea in workshops is that "the body remembers," and that experiences are written into the armature of the body, like knots of tension in a muscle.[184] For example, to train an actor to play Hamlet through PEM, first the actor must train to work through their own energetic blockages and open up the full palette of possible emotional expression, and then make conscious decisions about the energetic blockages that exist in Hamlet, and where those blockages, experiences and memories manifest in the character's body. These decisions, as explained later in the chapter, are mined from a close reading of the text, and then layered meticulously into the body through rehearsals, using what PEM calls Main Leading Centre and Subcentres.

The goal of the character work is to work towards "character stability:" practicing the specific physicality and movements of the character until they can become seamlessly adopted by the actor on demand.[185] If this is successful, and the actor fully inhabits the specific details of the character's body, then PEM's argument is that any behaviours and reactions to stimuli arising in a scene — reactions to the other actor, the situation of the scene, and so forth — can *only* be those of the character, because the reactions available to the actor playing the character are strictly dictated by the armature of their physiology, which is in turn informed by cultural and social influence, alongside innate biological programming. Damasio often states that the "emotions use the body as their theatre;" PEM argues that the ability

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[183] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 30, 2017.

[184] Sarah Victoria, Wellington Workshop, December 17, 2016.

[185] This term was used repeatedly in Wellington Workshops throughout 2016 and 2017.

to consciously change and shape the dynamic of that 'theatre' influences the way that emotion will inwardly and outwardly be expressed.[186] This is the essential thesis of PEM's approach to character.

3.6 The Main Leading Centre

Building the PEM character body begins with the Main Leading Centre (MLC). In the PEM vernacular, the Main Leading Centre of the character is the "inner core that the character is born with" — a core that is innate, derived from birth, and unchangeable throughout the character's journey through their lives and the story."[187] The MLC could be considered something genetic, predisposed, written into the character's DNA. PEM always attribute this to a specific, physical part of the body. The MLC is where all movement of the character begins: quite literally, the part of the body that *leads* the character.

The MLC could be an internal organ as much as it could be an extremity, the heart as much as the right index finger. Importantly, the MLC must have a specific direction of movement (forward, backwards, up, down) and intensity of force (strong, medium, subtle). The MLC can also be endowed with the energy of a particular organ — for example, my own initial exploration of Hamlet's MLC was: *the right eyebrow, medium force, forward direction, with energy of the liver (aggression).*

The MLC is chosen by the actor, through a process of text analysis and trial and error on the rehearsal room floor. There are some basic categories that can help an actor identify appropriate areas of the body to begin. For example, a highly athletic

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[186] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 51.

[187] Victoria and Perdekamp, interview with author, March 19, 2017.

character might have a MLC in the lower body, an intellectual character may have a MLC in the region of the head, and a deeply sensitive, reactive character might have an MLC in the torso, (externally or internally). In conversations with Victoria, the character's profession can be a clue: lawyers, academics and teachers often have MLCs in the head; athletes, warriors or tradespeople in the lower body; tactile people such as artists, painters, in the hands. However, these are never immutable rules; the process of choosing prioritises physical experimentation over intellectual analysis. For example, in my own work with Hamlet, my initial MLC (*right eyebrow, medium force, forward direction, with emotion of aggression)* was based on a simple analysis of Hamlet as highly intellectual and deeply concentrated: hence the choice of an MLC in the head, and the emotion of aggression used to propel the character forward with concentrated focus. However, through experimentation on the rehearsal room floor, I found more potency in first changing the direction (twisting side to side, rather than forward, giving me a sensation of searching, spiralling) and then the position in the body — finally ending up with the right wrist, in all directions, with a strong force. The result of this MLC was that I found an explosiveness and drive through the text, and a sensation of working with Hamlet through the whole body: perhaps the stimulation of moving the MLC from head to body, and thus making a more embodied choice that engaged the full body, opened up new pathways into playing the character, and gave me a gestural language of wringing his hands, and being tactile with objects in the space. Leading through the hand liberated much of my fixed (and somewhat superficial) conceptual thinking about how to play Hamlet, and instead required me to explore and encounter the text in a radically different way, through the whole body. When I asked Victoria about this, she agreed that part of the approach here is to "leverage and access the knowledge of the body" in playing the character, rather than just playing from idea or fixed intellectual concept.[188] Furthermore, the experience of 'feeling' the body being lead and driven by a force in the body — and relinquishing

[188] Sarah Victoria, workshop instruction, December 11, 2016.

control to an instinctual, physical exploration of this — liberated a playfulness and liveness I hadn't felt through working with a more conventional super-objective: I felt very much 'out of my head,' losing any self consciousness or fear of 'getting it wrong,' a fear familiar to many actors. There was no need to understand why this was the case; the choice to continue working with this MLC was made on the basis of what the audience (or director) witnessed and felt through witnessing the actor play in this fashion. This is a central tenet of PEM's physical approach to character: a process of physical investigation, until the actor finds an MLC that produces a desired effect in the audience — in other words, the most important aspect is what the audience sees through the body, not the cognitive rationale of the actor behind the decision to play that way.

To embody the MLC, the actor is instructed to spend time imaginatively relinquishing control to the MLC, allowing it literally to lead them through the space. This happens at different intensities of force; often it is easier to feel the impact of the MLC over the entire body by working at the largest scale. Typical instruction of this is as follows:

MLC Step One: Awakening the Impulse

1. Stand, feet shoulder width apart. Close the eyes.
2. Breathe. Notice the sensation of the breath in the body.
3. Keeping the eyes closed, raise the hands in front of the body, holding palms out and down toward the floor.
4. Draw awareness to the minute sensations of the palms. As the palms contain a high concentration of nerve endings, there is huge sensation to be experienced if it can be listened to.
5. Wait for an impulse to be triggered. Keep eyes closed and listen for tiny impulses. Don't manufacture movement. Allow the palms to be moved slightly as these impulses begin to manifest.

6. As impulses in the hands emerge, let them magnify and extend through the arm and shoulder. Follow it. Allow the impulse to extend through the whole body.
7. After a time, open your eyes. Allow yourself to explore the impulse through the room. (*This is repeated for over ten minutes*).
8. Choose one specific area of the hand and focus on allowing impulse from this one spot. For example, the right index finger. Allow it to move of its own volition. After a period of exploration, allow this to lead the entire body.
9. Now allow the movement and impulse to be informed by the instruction of the teacher. These instructions will direct different intensities of force: small, medium, strong. Explore.

MLC Step 2: Experiencing and Testing the Main Leading Centre

1. Choose an MLC to explore. Be specific: for example, *belly button, with forward direction, maximum strength*.
2. Close the eyes. Place two fingers on the MLC. Locate the specific part of the body with touch. Let the hands go, focus on that spot.
3. Open your eyes and start moving from that spot. Let it change your movement, just like the impulses from the palms did. Every decision the body makes about movement comes from this point.
4. Now prescribe different emotions to the MLC. To do this, charge up the emotion in the organ (i.e. for happiness, the heart open). Then 'transition' that energy through the body into the MLC.
5. Eventually, allow sound of the voice to match the movement and emotion exploration.
6. Take notes, then repeat with different combinations.

Whilst the MLC concerns the innate, biological programming of the character, they

do not account for the cultural and social conditioning that affects that character. This is instead embodied through the use of *Subcentres*.

3.7 Subcentres

Subcentres are similar to the MLC: they are physical points in the body, that lead the character in different moments of their lives and the story. Yet whereas the MLC is innate, subcentres are formed as a result of the character's formative life experiences. In her instruction, Sarah Victoria groups the possible subcentres of character into the following categories:

EXPERIENCES
TRAUMAS
UPBRINGING
BEHAVIOURS
SOCIAL GESTURES
EDUCATION[189]

The subcentres could be considered the body's experiential memory. An example Sarah Victoria regularly provides is to imagine a character has been bitten on the calf as a child, by a black snarling dog that lived in a neighbour's house.[190] Victoria explains that for this character, there will be a subconscious reaction once that character sees a similar dog as an adult, as there is a stored emotional memory in that part of the body. Additionally, that experience will have unconsciously affected the character's postural alignments and physical movement patterns, becoming part of who they physically are. To play that character, the actor must layer in that

[189] As instructed in the Wellington Workshop, December 2016.

[190] Sarah Victoria, workshop instruction on subcentres, December 2016, March 2017, March 2018.

experience into the body as a *subcentre.* The actor is instructed to charge up the emotion of fear (through accessing the sexual organs backwards, in combination with the breath), and to then *transition* that energy into the calf muscle, again attributing a direction and force to that point. This is repeated many times in rehearsal to the point the actor can integrate this seamlessly and physically on demand.[191] Whilst the character can only have one MLC, the potential number of subcentres is limitless. The more subcentres the actor layers into the character, "the more layered the character appears to an audience."[192]

3.8 The Emotional Score

Once the physical aspects of the character are established and the actor has achieved *character stability*, the actor can begin to approach the text. In directing his own work, Perdekamp treats the text as an emotional score. Instead of breaking down the script into units of action, he scores the changes in the scenes by noting the changes of emotion that must be played. Perdekamp describes this more like a musical score, discussing the emotions as music and tones each individual actor must hold to affect the overall scenic atmosphere and composition. In rehearsal, working through trial and error, the actors experiment with different emotion combinations to start the scene. The beginning of the scene is always the most crucial; as Victoria states, if the emotional organ mix is correct at the beginning of the scene, the rest of the scene should then flow like a line of falling dominos: each action then triggering the appropriate reaction throughout the scene.[193] Sometimes, changes are scored technically, yet the ideal is to get the initial emotions right and

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[191] Analysis of this process will be discussed in Chapter 5.7.

[192] Sarah Victoria, interview with author, March 18, 2017.

[193] Sarah Victoria, interview with author, March 30, 2018.

trust the flow of the scene.[194]

3.9 Summary

Over thirty years, PEM has developed into what Perdekamp argues is a comprehensive system for the actor, that extends from training the actor's body and emotions through to character and text application. Throughout its development, the emotions and, specifically, the organ-emotion relationship, are its defining features, a distinct point of difference from other approaches. The training of PEM concerns the retraining of 'pure' emotional movements in the body, so that the actor may consciously activate them at will, and blend the basic emotions to create secondary emotions as required by the character they are playing. Through my own experience of PEM instruction, I found it to be a highly sequential, logical and easily integrated technique, that provided me with a reliable approach to accessing emotion. I found further value in PEM's character work, and the ability to wield combinations of emotions in text work, through the playing of Hamlet in particular, yielded exciting personal results. Yet I questioned how my own previous acting training and experience affected my personal assessment of the technique. Would PEM work equally as well for less trained actors? Or were the results I initially observed skewed by a particularly strong workshop group, made up of talented actors who already possessed innate emotional access, and would perform strongly regardless of technique? To assess PEM thoroughly it became crucial to observe a wider data sample. From this impetus, I began practical experimentation at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School, in 2017.

[194] This processed is discussed and analysed in Chapters 4.3 and 5.7.

Fig. 4. Jack Parker. *Happiness Mask*, 2017. Toi Whakaari. Photographer Jon Hunter.

CHAPTER 4:
TESTING PEM

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the application of PEM to specifically designed screen experiments and workshop instruction inside the conservatoire training environment of Te Kura Toi Whakaari O Aotearoa: New Zealand Drama School. Toi Whakaari, like other Australasian drama schools, is based on an 'eclectic' conservatoire model where students are exposed to a wide range of acting approaches. Part of the rationale of testing PEM at Toi Whakaari was linked to an awareness that its current emotional approaches might be lacking. This was based both on my individual concerns as a teacher as well as comparative studies undertaken in Australia, where drama schools deliver comparable programmes. In 2016, researcher Susan Leigh Taylor undertook an extensive study of the major drama schools, The National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA), The Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), and the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), and their respective approaches to working with emotion.[195] This study highlighted concerns that many current pedagogical practices utilised by these schools placed students at risk of "severe emotional repercussions"— particularly a widespread, ongoing use of Emotion Memory techniques.[196] These techniques were being used as defaults by students, even when not overtly instructed by tutors to do so. In the conclusion to this study, part of Taylor's recommendation was that Alba Emoting be examined as a viable alternative to current methods, because of its primarily physiological approach to emotions and its ability to separate emotion from personal experience.[197] Taylor's study however, never reviewed the implementation of Alba in

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[195] Taylor, *Actor Training and Emotions.*

[196] Taylor, *Actor Training and Emotions,* ii.

[197] Taylor, *Actor Training and Emotions,* 250 - 266.

practice, nor observed Alba personally, and therefore this recommendation was based upon a theoretical rather than practical understanding of this work. In conversation with my colleague, Senior Tutor Jon Hunter, we agreed that PEM was worth experiencing and trialing at Toi Whakaari, to fulfil a similar need of arming students with more diverse approaches to emotional expression.

At Toi Whakaari in 2016/2017, at the time of the PEM experiments, the school's main pedagogical strands could be described as a mixture of Stanislavski-based text methods, Estill Voice Training, contemporary movement training, and Philippe Gaulier's *Le Jeu* work.[198] Whilst Emotion Memory was not overtly taught, like the Australian schools in Taylor's study, students interviewed agreed that it was often used as a default: as one second year student commented: "it was what you did since you were a kid doing drama… if you wanted to act sad, you thought of something sad that happened to you."[199]

The specific lens of experiments investigate PEM's application to screen work, as well as its ability to be used in combination with other acting techniques. PEM appeals as potentially invaluable to screen work, as a tool to access emotions quickly and persuasively, over many takes. Overall, across screen experiments and workshop instruction, approximately 73 students were exposed to PEM. These students represented a diverse cultural and socio-economic range, including Māori, Pasifika, Swedish, Pākehā, Estonian, Brazilian, Australian, Columbian, Iranian, Chinese, and an age range from 18 — 31, with a median age of 21. The results of these workshops are presented in this chapter, and further critical evaluation is undertaken in Chapter Five.

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[198] As this MA thesis has been conducted on a part-time basis, the experiments examined in this study reflect a wider sample time than a full-time study.

[199] Darneen Christian, conversation with author, May 12, 2017.

Fig. 5. Darneen Christian, *Separation of Means Exercise.* Toi Whakaari, 2017. Photographer Vaughan Slinn.

4.2 PEM Instruction at Toi Whakaari

PEM was introduced into Toi Whakaari and taught by PEM practitioners over two years, from 2017 and 2018, primarily through a series of two-week intensives taking place at the start of the respective school years. Students at first and second year level received grounding in the six basic emotions, the ability to blend the emotions, and an introduction into PEM character work. Additionally, some members of the third year class attended the workshops. In 2017, the second year students also received instruction in the PEM voice work. In 2017, approximately 50 students were taught the technique, in 2018, 23 first year students.

In 2017, PEM was taught to students by senior PEM practitioners and teachers Stephan Perdekamp, Sarah Victoria, and Kristina Hauser (PEM voice). They were supported by PEM trainee teachers Liana Brener, Rik Stowman, and observed by

Jon Hunter and myself. In 2018, PEM was taught to the first year class, by Sarah Victoria and Jon Hunter. Over both years, this learning was consolidated and extended through other areas of the Toi Whakaari acting curriculum, primarily through the Voice line.

To collate data towards this study students were asked to participate in an anonymous survey at the conclusion of workshop instruction in 2017. 28 students responded; a representative sample of these results and comments are included below. Eight other students were interviewed, and gave in-depth analysis and feedback from their experiences, which are also included.

Results of Block Course Instruction

A primary observation from watching PEM being taught to over 70 students, from both myself and Jon Hunter, was that the majority were able to grasp and access the six basic emotions by the end of three days.[200] Students were able also to use these emotions at a variety of scales, both for screen and for live performance. This observation was backed up by survey data, which showed that respondents largely felt the technique was effective as an approach to accessing emotion. Furthermore, respondents were also generally positive to PEM being taught again within the programme (70%).

However, the majority of interviewed students (65%) said that, despite the effectiveness of the approach, they would not continue to use it. For those that stated this, a variety of reasons were recorded: some were confused about the application of the technique to character (35%); others felt it was simply not necessary as they felt emotion was easily accessible through their other acting approaches (45%); others found it too complicated and requiring "too much

[200] Jon Hunter, interview with author, April 2018.

practice" to master (10%).[201] Other students, such as Ashleigh Williams, commented that, despite being framed as a technique that makes working with deep emotion more easeful, they found it as affecting as 'real' emotion:

> Even though the technique allows you a quicker way into grief, it doesn't make the grief any less affecting. The grief wall exercise…. I hated. Yes it was real, and yes I knew I was acting, but I felt so completely shaken by it… I found it hard and awful to be inside it. The feeling didn't linger… but I didn't get the experience of any difference or separation from emotion and feeling… I felt it as deeply as the real thing. It was hard, and actually felt really awful, to train in those exercises.[202]

Furthermore, students Darneen Christian and Mosese Vea'ila both expressed fears about working with PEM, because they felt they simply could not trust themselves to work with emotion in full force. This fear was especially prevalent when working with aggression. In Christian's words, the anger exercises "got me too rarked up… I couldn't go further with them… I would have hit someone."[203] This fear of losing control was so deep that it rendered them unable to engage with or utilise the technique. Vea'ila, in particular, expressed a sense of frustration with his own inability to reach emotions, and withdrew participation from the workshops. Vea'ila expressed that some of his difficulty with PEM was that, "in my family and culture… we just don't show those things."[204] Vea'ila, a student who hails from Tonga, illustrates how one's own cultural background can impact the ability to access certain emotions.[205]

Williams' and Christian's comments recall Roxanne Rix's statement about the

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[201] Comment from anonymous survey participant.

[202] Ashleigh Williams, conversation with author, March 15, 2017.

[203] Darneen Christian, interview with author, May 12, 2017.

[204] Mosese Vea'ila, interview with author, March 13, 2017.

[205] Discussed further in Chapter 5.5.

experience of working with ALBA Emoting: "The paradox of approaching emotion through physical patterning is that it is at once safer than psychological techniques, in that it does not ask the actor to mine personal experiences, and at the same time potentially more volatile, because it goes directly to the core of physiological experience."[206] From my observations of student workshops, this statement is directly applicable to PEM, and accounts for some of the fear and apprehension that some students encounter in working with the emotions at extreme levels of force. Whilst my own experience of meeting the technique removed much of the fear of working with large-scale emotion, workshop observation illustrated that this experience varies between actors.

However, working with emotion is unavoidable for an actor: it is like asking a rugby player to avoid contact when tackling the opposition. No technique for emotion can be a panacea that removes all impact of achieving emotional states for the actor. Resolution of feelings from life experiences are necessary for any actor to portray a full range of emotional expressiveness; the difference between techniques like PEM and Alba Emoting is that they render awareness and confrontation of such feelings unavoidable and place them at the beginning of their training. For the majority of participants observed in the PEM workshops, this confrontation provided deeper understanding and awareness of one's own patterns and emotional responses. However, these results were not universal, and some found this confrontation uncomfortable.

4.3 The Court Youth Company Workshop

During Sarah Victoria's third visit to New Zealand, in March 2018, she instructed a series of public workshops in addition to her teaching at Toi Whakaari. These took place in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch, with approximately 20 participants

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[206] Rix, *A Revolution in Emotion*, 214.

in attendance at each. Through observing these workshops, a noticeable trend emerged, in the relative ease and lack of resistance from participants in learning PEM. In comparison to the Toi Whakaari classes, these workshops featured less voiced scepticism and confusion about the organ-emotion relationship, and participants moved far more quickly through the basic emotions into application to text. Observing the relative depth of engagement led me to question PEM's fit inside a drama school curriculum, as opposed to the benefits of students training with the technique in its own school: there seemed to be an importance in students seeking out the technique on their own terms, rather than it being part of a compulsory curriculum.

The experience with the Christchurch Court Youth Company was particularly notable.[207] Occurring over one intensive day, March 24th 2018, and made up of participants ranging in age from sixteen to twenty, the workshop was one of the most successful PEM teaching sessions observed, measured through the depth of participant engagement, the speed of grasping the basic emotions, and sophistication of participant feedback insofar as it revealed an ability to understand and strongly reflect PEM pedagogy. Notions such as the difference between *emotion* versus *feeling* were quickly understood. As one student noted, "It feels cathartic, to experience the *emotion* of aggression without *feeling* angry,"[208] and the benefits of the technique itself were consistently referenced: as Harrison Searancke said, "this is the closest thing I've felt to pure acting… how little I need to do to be affecting, if I learn how to focus my energy in the body… this is profound."[209]

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[207] The Christchurch Court Youth Company is a development programme for emerging actors aged 16 - 21, run by the Court Theatre company.

[208] Workshop participant, name withheld, Court Youth Company Workshop, March 24th, 2018.

[209] Harrison Searancke, Court Youth Company Workshop, March 24th, 2018.

The workshop also provided clear evidence of how PEM can contribute to greater wellness of the actor. During the workshop, many of the students, all of whom had experienced the Christchurch earthquakes in 2011, pointed to the training as giving them a deeper awareness of their own buried emotional and feeling states, and discovered the ability to clear and manage them. After the training exercises accessing and clearing the emotion of Fear, participant Rachel Ryger said:

> This is the one (emotion) I felt happiest after… I've been in fear because of the earthquakes for months at a time… I realise through this exercise that this is kind of my normal state now… a constant anxiety. It feels incredible to feel it released now… and to understand it was there, in the background, in the first place.[210]

This connection between the experience of living through Christchurch's ongoing earthquakes, and existing with constant underlying fear, was supported and referenced by further participants in the workshop's reflection. Responding to these observations, Sarah Victoria clarified PEM's emotional training purpose:

> We practice the emotion patterns, to clear up pent up emotion. The point is not to remove all fear, but rather, to allow the fear and energy to flow smoothly, as the body intends it to.[211]

This exchange crystallised some of PEM's potential value for students who seek it out: a training system that helps them better access emotional expression, both towards the realisation of a character and also in service of that expression in their own lives. The reflection held at the conclusion of the Court Youth Company workshop was unique in that participants pointed to PEM's value as a tool to improve their personal wellness, as much its value as an acting method.[212]

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[210] Rachel Ryger, Court Youth Company Workshop, March 24th, 2018.

[211] Sarah Victoria, Court Youth Company Workshop, March 24th, 2018.

[212] Former Toi Whakaari Senior Tutor Jon Hunter also attended and supported this workshop, and corroborates the focus and support participants gave to PEM's value as a method that improved personal wellness, as much as acting.

Fig. 6. Jack Hauschild, Marshayla Christie. *American Hustle,* 2017. Photographer Philip Merry.

4.4 Screen Experiment 1: Mise En Scène, *American Hustle*

Participants: A2 Acting Class, May - June 2017.

The first Screen Experiment undertaken for this research examined PEM's ability to be used *in combination* with a Stanislavski-based method. If PEM can be integrated and used to deepen existing methodologies, as well as being used separately on its own, its potential scope of implementation inside drama schools widens. The vehicle for this experiment was a Toi Whakaari screen project, *Mise En Scène*, which occurs in the second year of actor training. The pedagogical purpose of this project is to lead students through a rehearsal and filming process, supporting their application of the tools and approaches absorbed through their training up until

that point. As the 2017 year two class had been a recipient of the PEM introductory block course, there was opportunity to deepen and test their understanding of PEM, in combination with the approach to text they had become familiar with: a Stanislavski-based process of breaking down given circumstances, action, objective, and then working to physicalise and embody action on the rehearsal room floor.

The text, *American Hustle*, is an American black comedy that concerns a conman and his partner, who get blackmailed into working alongside the FBI in bringing down a corrupt New Jersey politician.[213] It provided a significant performance challenge as it required young actors to play significantly older characters, on screen. To adequately embody these characters, they could not rely on comparable autobiographical experience — they needed to transform physically, vocally, and be able to embody behavioural actions far outside their own experience. This challenge seemed ideally suited to investigate PEM's ability to support authentic performance of roles far removed from the actor.

PEM elements integrated into this process were main leading centres, subcentres, and the essential emotion framework. Scenes were scored both through action, and through emotion. To support this integration, Sarah Victoria worked on the project in an advisory capacity. She provided guidance to myself and Jon Hunter, the two directors, in applying the PEM techniques to the process, and proposed an initial offer of the main leading centres of each of the main characters to test in rehearsal. These were defined as follows:

Irving Rosenfield: *HEART squeezed*. Sarah spoke of the rationale to arrive at this MLC: "Irving innately leads from his heart… but this has been conditioned out of him through life experience. His heart problems in the script are a useful touchstone

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[213] David O'Russell and Eric Singer, *American Hustle*. Screenplay. Directed by David O'Russell (Los Angeles: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2014).

— there is literal pressure and squeezing on this region… this is story point that is incredibly useful in creating the entire physiology of the character."[214]

Rosalind Rosenfield: *HIPS forward and down.* "Rosalind is an incredibly sensual, resolute woman. Innately she is strong, powerful, but the conditions of her environment have created the anxiety, the volatility. Underneath these conditions we need to play with deep power."[215]

Sydney Prosser: *Collarbone forward and up.* "Sydney is a shapeshifter… a survivor of huge intelligence. She is fierce and resolute in the face of challenge. The collarbone gives us the steel of this character. She is elegant, feminine, beautiful."[216]

Richie DiMasio: *Sexual organs forward.* "Richie is aggression, lust, and greed personified. The most self- absorbed of all the characters… there is particular male energy we need to see through him, that this MLC will give us."[217]

Through leading this process, it became clear that the MLCs could be derived from both literal, physiological elements and figurative, symbolic elements of the character found through the text. Irving's heart problem is a good example. In the text, he consistently pops heart pills to lower his blood pressure, and a key plot point sees him having an angina attack when caught between his love for Sydney, and his inexorable pull back to Rosalind. He has a *literal* heart problem, as well as a *figurative* problem of the heart concerning two key intimate relationships with his wife and mistress: through a PEM lens, there is complete logic to the interrelated

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[214] Sarah Victoria, Skype consultation with author, May 2, 2017.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Ibid.

nature of the two. As Richie's MLC, the heart also makes sense of his innate nature — a need to protect, nurture, look after others, and be in relationships.

In the first week, these MLCs were tested with each character group on the rehearsal room floor, for approximately an hour per character. The actors experimented with different forces and scales of energy, being led by the MLC, and began to experiment with how the voice might be impacted through this choice of physicality. Actors gave feedback and were allowed to offer alternatives; all were explored and then refined, with the ultimate choice chosen by the actor. Once MLCs were decided upon and established into the character's physicality, subcentres were added in week two. Week three and four involved scoring and rehearsing the text, through both actions and emotions.

Another main PEM framework utilised throughout rehearsal was the *showdown* exercise.[218] This was used as a means for actors to work through key moments of inter-character relationships in long form improvisations, lead by the directors. The exercise has simple rules: they must only move forward or backwards from the other actor if instructed by the director, and no physical contact is allowed at any point. They are then asked to improvise different formative moments of the character's relationship to each other, using the emotion framework. The purpose here was essentially to explore the character's backstory experientially, to then write in those moments into the character's subcentres. For example, moments Irving and Rosalind explored included the moment of first seeing each other, the moment of first love, Rosalind's pregnancy, and the moment she suspected his affairs.

[218] Discussed further in 4.5.

Fig. 7. Andrew Eddy. *American Hustle*, 2017. Screenshot.

Results

The use of the main leading centres and subcentres provided efficient means to building character physicality and posture. This physicality strongly informed the vocal modalities, movements, and gestural languages of the characters. Furthermore, this physicality affected the way character were read by the camera angle and frame. For instance, a subtle shift of the *chin down*, *collarbone up,* provided immense difference in a close up from the actor's own habitual physicality; when adopted successfully, this process allowed a degree of transformation from actor into distinct character. The criticism, however, was that the character bodies built by the students initially tended to be suited more for the theatre than the screen: many offers tended towards a style of performance that was outside the realism required to serve the form. When asked to integrate such offers into their bodies more, to make them more subtle, many students completely lost the physical differentiation between the character's body and their own. Although this was partly a result of casting much younger actors in the roles than described in the text, which would be unlikely to happen in a professional film, this illustrated that to work for camera, a longer rehearsal period would perhaps be required.

Student feedback largely supported the integration of MLCs and subcentres, and some placed this aspect of PEM as the most valuable element of the entire approach. As Shaquille Stirling stated:

> At first I was against PEM… it just didn't work for me, and I really questioned why I was at the school learning this. But in Mise En Scène I loved the Main Leading Centre work… it was clear and made sense. I could feel completely different as a person through working physically…I've never been that inside a character before. That stuff works for me.[219]

By comparison, the use of the emotional score, in combination with the scoring of action, was a mixed success, as many students preferred the use of action scoring they were used to. Nathalie Morris found the addition of the emotional score to action redundant:

> ...the action score felt clearer, and more specific. I felt like I started thinking about which organ it had to go to, rather than working live in the moment. What *action* gives me is something I can work in rehearsal, then throw away when I play… *action* is always there for me, and is more specific.[220]

However, Jessica Hong commented on how the emotional score deepened her investigation and ability to reliably achieve the emotion of the character, particularly in combination with the incorporation of the character's MLC and subcentres.

> Investigating actions through the lens of the character's body and emotions allowed a deeper embodiment of the character… I felt I built up an emotional memory of those scenes, so I didn't have to worry or think about it… the emotion flowed freely and easily when I got to film them.[221]

The *showdown* rehearsal exercises proved effective, and actors specifically commented on their value in making deeper character discoveries. Anthony Crum

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[219] Shaquille Stirling, rehearsal conversation with author, May 20, 2017.

[220] Nathalie Morris, rehearsal conversation with author, May 8, 2017.

[221] Jessica Hong, rehearsal conversation with author, May 6, 2017.

was struck how, "I never realised how real Irving's love was for Rosalind… in reading the script, I dismissed her as a trophy wife… but the love was actually incredibly pure, and tender… I found a deeper insight, and less judgement on Irving."[222] Similarly, discovered in Rosalind was a sense of motherly tenderness and power that initially seemed counter to the screenplay. Said Jessica Hong: "My initial character quality for Rosalind was 'hot mess…' but she is a deeply powerful, fierce, sensual woman… the society of the 70s is what keeps her paranoid and anxious, not a fault of her own… I felt how deep her love was for this man, what he represented to her… and the pain and righteousness she felt when she knew he had betrayed her."[223]

Overall, the experiment illustrated the possibility of a successful integration of PEM and a Stanislavski-based action methodology, when desired by the actors. PEM supported significant discoveries of character traits and backstory, through a clear facilitation of physical investigation, provided through the showdown framework and the adoption of the main leading centres and subcentres. Yet, under the pressure of filming, many actors reverted back to the approach more familiar to them, and some questioned whether the incorporation of the emotional score, alongside the scoring of actions, was excessive. The observations of this experiment suggest that if PEM is integrated into an action based approach, it will be more likely applied in specific and challenging performance moments, to access emotion, rather than woven throughout an entire scene.

4.5 PEM Screen Experiment 2: *Rachel Gets Married*

Participants: Olivia Parker, Jessica Quilter (Toi Whakaari Graduates 2017).

Screen Experiment 2 focused on a comparative study between a PEM approach and

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[222] Anthony Crum, rehearsal conversation with author, May 6, 2017.

[223] Jessica Hong, rehearsal conversation with author, May 6, 2017.

a Stanislavski-based method, over two weeks, involving two actors, Olivia Parker and Jessica Quilter. The purpose of this investigation was to explore the playing of emotion (PEM) versus the playing of action (Stanislavski), and to contrast the results. As detailed in Chapter 5.3, this is one of the primary tensions between PEM and more established methods, as Stanislavski-based methods often instruct against the playing of emotion, and associate such practice with generalised, inauthentic performance.[224] Part of the experiment, therefore, was to investigate if there were notable results generated from these two distinct approaches.

The text used was from *Rachel Gets Married,* written by Jenny Lumet, a cinèma vérité style film which invites highly realistic performance.[225] The monologue chosen concerns the character Kim, who reveals to an AA meeting that her longstanding drug addiction was directly responsible for her younger brother's death. The scene poses a typically difficult problem for an actor in accessing deep emotions; it also invites the possibility of playing with different *forces* of emotion. Although the scene arguably represents the emotional climax of the film, the text itself comfortably offers a range of performance choices for the actor playing Kim, from complete emotional breakdown, to a numb retelling of the facts of her brother's death. My personal directorial bias, not communicated to the actors, was that the complex emotions of the scene needed to be present but internalised by the character; however I was interested to discover readings and performances of the text I was not expecting.

Parker and Quilter were invited to be participants due to their contrasting capacities and habitual methods of accessing emotion. Both were interested in deepening these capacities for camera work. Each had developed specific working questions to

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[224] Schechner, *Rasaesthetics,* 33.

[225] Jenny Lumet, *Rachel Gets Married*. Screenplay. Directed by Jonathan Demme (Los Angeles: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2009).

test inside the experiment. Parker, naturally adept at accessing emotion on camera, was looking to test deeper endurance and sustainability of emotional access, and the ability to gain more scalable control. Parker identified her established technique to access emotion as strongly imaginative:

> I think I just use images… just seeing a picture in my mind, triggers me right away… sometimes there is an element of memory, I think, although its not directly conscious… the person or place or memory of something deep to me sits just inside or behind the new picture I create.[226]

Quilter, by comparison, was looking to cement and deepen what she had learned through the inaugural NZL PEM workshop.[227] Before that workshop, she had often struggled with accessing emotion, and felt at times she had become dependent on the teacher or director.[228] In referring to working across her training, she said:

> In the screen labs, I think that often I only got to emotion because of the director… it was often just a fear of failing the exercise that pushed me into an emotional state, rather than the right emotion for that character… I really didn't know how to direct myself into those areas. Action words didn't work for me. Before performing a scene from *Magnolia* I remember standing off set, jumping around madly to try and get *"I deflect"* into my body before playing the scene, because that was the first action … I felt like an idiot… I felt like there's gotta be an easier way.[229]

The experiment took place over two intensive weeks. Week one was spent solely investigating the text using the action based, Stanislavski-based approach that was familiar to both students through their drama school training. Using this approach the scene was divided into beats and actions, an individual objective was chosen, and the spine (or, *super-objective*) of the character was discussed. All rehearsal work was intentionally "not on the floor" — we discussed and analysed the scene, but

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[226] Olivia Parker, interview with author, August 23, 2017.

[227] Quilter was one of the inaugural workshop participants, in Wellington, December 2016.

[228] Jessica Quilter, interview with author, August 23, 2017.

[229] Ibid.

did not work to embody it before the day of filming. At the end of this week, we filmed across a three hour period, with both actors taking turns performing the monologue, and then swapping into being a member of the AA audience, to give the other actor an eye-line to play off. Week Two rehearsals, by comparison, were spent solely on instructing Parker on the basic PEM emotional framework, to prepare for another three-hour filming session.

Results

In filming, both the use of action and the PEM Emotional Framework produced effective access to the emotions, for both participants. Both approaches accommodated detailed directorial instruction. The key difference between the two approaches was sustainability and scalability. Whilst it could not be argued that the PEM approach was more effective in performance terms, as it did not produce any markedly richer sense of emotion, or any more of a convincing performance, what was noticeably different was the ability to more easily scale the emotion and, in particular, the sustainability of emotion both could achieve. In one continuous long take working with PEM, the participants experimented with how long both could stay in grief and perform the scene effectively, 'surfing' the emotion and switching back and forth between the two actors. This experiment lasted over 45 minutes, quite easily; the participants both commented that they could have easily gone longer, and that if they felt themselves drifting out of the required emotional state, they could both connect back into it through accessing the physical triggers.

What was useful about this increased sustainability was that it allowed the participants to explore the bleak atmosphere and circumstance of the character's situation for an increased period of time (in this case, deep grief, crying). Essentially, the filmed PEM experiment acted as a long, immersive rehearsal. From a directorial perspective, what was exciting here was to allow the actors time to keep burrowing

under their initial *idea* of the scene (how the emotions of grief and shame would be experienced and communicated by this character during the AA meeting confession) and to keep *discovering* and *experiencing* the emotional journey of this scene instead. The actors surprised themselves with new ways of playing the scene, that they "wouldn't have discovered by thinking about it:" rather than becoming trapped inside one repetitive offer, both uncovered new and spontaneous nuances inside the text, that were surprising and (often) counter to what we identified as the logical way to play the scene with the Stanislavski-based approach.[230] Whilst this is not unusual — any good rehearsal process will support actors making similar discoveries — what was different here was that they could make these discoveries and retain control *inside deep emotional states.* The conventional approach to playing scenes requiring deep emotion, on a film set, is often to 'save it for the take' — in other words, because emotions are still generally considered unreliable, that the actor will only be able to reach this place a limited number of times. The value of having a tool that allows the actor access to these states, in a sustainable and controllable way, and make choices about how to guide and direct that depth of emotion, is high.

What helped to deepen this exploration was further use of the PEM *showdown* exercise. In training the PEM emotions, the *showdown* is used essentially as a stand off between two actors, initially in practicing the emotion of aggression. Actors pair up and inhabit a particular emotion, and practice walking closer together or further apart; text is dropped in and explored when the actors become more advanced. The *showdown* offers a mirror to another actor, so that technically both can mimic each other where required (for example, in refining the aggression facial mask: flaring the nostrils more, capturing the exact downward impression of the eyebrows), but also to allow the energy generated by the other performer to affect them. This basic exercise, of course, is similar to many other listening exercises in

[230] Quilter and Parker, joint interview with author, August 28, 2017.

many methodologies, in teaching the dynamic listening required to be true to the present moment of the scene in concert with the given circumstances and objective their character is trying to achieve. Both performers used the energy generated between them to deepen their own emotional expression.

When interviewed about the differences of the techniques, both identified sustainability as the major difference. Parker said she felt "far less drained using the PEM technique… it was almost invigorating to spend that much time surfing the grief."[231] However, when asked if she found limitations between the two, Parker said she felt limited by the instruction to work physically first, and not to use her imagination:

> Imagination… and images are key to me. I'm coming to learn how important they are to me… trying not to see them didn't feel as fun or as rich. PEM worked, but I wouldn't use it before what I do normally… but I guess, why does it have to be an either or?[232]

Parker illustrates a recurring sentiment from participants across the workshops and screen experiments: that PEM was an effective tool for accessing emotion, but would not replace existing approaches — it was a useful part of their acting toolkit, but they would only ever use it in combination with other techniques.

4.6 Screen Experiment 3: *Youth*

Participant: Valeria Mendoza-Davis (Toi Whakaari Graduate, 2016).

Screen Experiment 3 was designed to provide further insight into the application of the PEM emotional system to screen work, and placed specific emphasis on the ability to scale emotional expression to the requirements of a screen close up. For this test an actor was invited to learn and perform a monologue from the film *Youth*,

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[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid.

Fig. 8. Valeria Mendoza-Davis. Screen Experiment 3, 2018. Screenshot.

by Paolo Sorrentino.[233] *Youth* was chosen because it provides a suitably challenging emotional territory: the scene concerned is a monologue by an adult daughter, talking to her father, who reveals the long-buried pain caused by her father's homosexual marital indiscretions. It is also a challenging text in its verbosity and length; to play it successfully requires the ability to work effectively with detailed and relatively complex language, alongside a gamut of emotions.

[233] Paolo Sorrentino, *Youth* (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2015).

The actor involved, Valeria Mendoza-Davis, received instruction in the PEM technique through attending two weeks of block course instruction with Sarah Victoria; she was well versed in the six basic emotions, and had begun practicing an ability to blend the emotions in different combinations. For this experiment, I was particularly interested in the ability to direct the screen performance solely using the PEM emotional framework. No character backstory or any given circumstances were discussed before working on the monologue. In fact, no reference was made at all to the character or the character's task, objective, or action in the scene: all typically Stanislavskian tenets were consciously avoided. Furthermore, the performance was shot in a close up, with the actor instructed to look down the camera lens: I was interested to see how subtle the emotions could be portrayed, and if the performance would still read effectively on camera if the actor was instructed to use nothing of the facial masks, and concentrate solely on activating the organs internally. Repeatedly through the filming, I instructed the actor to "not push or try to act anything, just allow the organ to affect you." My curiosity was to see if the PEM somatic shorthand would increase the actor's capacity to craft the emotional inner life of the scene, and how fine and detailed the subtlety of the energies could be, yet remain perceptible to the camera.

Furthermore, the experiment was designed to test the sustainability of working with the PEM emotional framework. It involved shooting over twenty long takes, across two three-hour-long filming sessions. The actor was told they could stop at any point, for any reason, and take any break that they required; there was no pressure to continue if they felt they didn't want to.

The first half of each session was devoted to cycling through the basic emotions, in the close up. The actor was lead through the basic organic instruction for each emotion, and then asked to transition through all of them of their own volition. Then

combinations of emotions were tested. In the second half, the actor was invited to perform the monologue, allowing the emotions to inform their delivery. Different organ "mixes" were trialled at the beginning of each new take.

Mendoza-Davis appealed as an ideal candidate for this experiment because of her already strong ability to portray certain states of emotion and feeling (sadness, inner torment, grief), countered by her own perceived difficulty to work with more 'assertive' and aggressive feeling states. When interviewed, she commented: "The watery emotions definitely come easier to me than the fiery ones… I felt blocked playing emotions like love, or lust, or anger... the feedback I got about that at drama school was constant."[234] In discussing those blocks further, Mendoza-Davis pointed to a key issue: "Certain things feel too personal."[235] Mendoza-Davis stated this as a key to the difficulty in playing "love scenes" — scenes that required a physical or imagined intimacy. This conversation was sparked from us working a scene from the film *American Hustle* together utilising beats and action words — she chose the verb 'seduce' in a certain beat of a scene, but struggled hugely to embody it. We worked to find alternative verbs that would create the same sense of action to the audience — such as *taunt, caress, soothe, tempt.* But all of these replacements did not serve to solve the underlying issue: she felt unable to create a connection with her scene partner, that she felt revealed something of her own behaviour in comparable real life situations.

Through further conversation, Mendoza-Davis queried if her inability to differentiate between her own feelings, and those of the characters, was a major stumbling block in her work. The vulnerability and fear she felt consistently as an actor were unable to be overcome and became consistently translated into character, regardless of

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[234] Valeria Mendoza-Davis, interview with author, March 30, 2018.

[235] Ibid.

whether this was a situational requirement of the story. In other words, she became trapped inside habitual feeling states and emotional patterns, and thus characters she portrayed became similar, plagued by similar blocks, similar tensions, all operating within the same bandwidth of behaviour. Mendoza-Davis consistently felt she was revealing the intimate parts of her *own* feeling states, rather than that of the character's, and this lead to a feeling of "nakedness" in performance that sometimes became crippling. And yet, as we will see indicated from Mendoza-Davis' assessment of PEM, the integration of her own feeling with that of the character's is one of the primary reasons she enjoys performance in the first place. It is this imagined catharsis, of a sense of exorcizing her own difficult emotions and feelings through the lens of character, that draws her to performance, and that she considers part of her role as artist.[236]

Mendoza-Davis also represented, to me, a frustration within my own pedagogy, and the limitations of a conservatoire drama school. She has, seemingly, all the tools a teacher could ask for in a training drama student: focused work ethic, the ability to be responsive and affected by imagined circumstances (even if within a limited bandwidth of expression), and a high ambition to deepen her craft. Yet my assessment as a teacher was, at that time, the school was limited in the approaches to emotion that it offered: whilst the traditional approaches worked for many, they did not work for all. She provided a key case study in the types of problems I wanted to solve.

One of the primary differences between the first two experiments and Screen Experiment 3 is that Mendoza-Davis does not have the benefit of working across from another actor, in order to help generate the emotional energy required for the scene. In a screen environment, an actor may be asked to perform a highly emotional scene in isolation — for example, if working with green screen and being

[236] Ibid.

asking to act opposite a tennis ball (a regular occurrence in big budget filmmaking with lots of CGI effects), or without their regular acting scene partner (on occasion, to get the desirable camera angle, a screen actor may be required to deliver their scene to a mark on the wall, or the side of the camera lens, as opposed to looking at the eyes of their scene partner). It was important to test this complexity, as the screen actor cannot rely on working opposite their scene partner's eye-line.

Results

Through both working sessions, the experiment illustrated PEM's emotional framework was effective in several areas. Mendoza-Davis worked consistently inside the emotional framework, almost without break, for both three hour sessions: she felt the technique provided strong support in this area. Furthermore, it aided in specificity of repetition: she was able to repeat the same depth of emotion, and repeat organ specific combinations on more than one occasion. Notably, the transitions between internal emotion triggers were clear, readable, and potent. The emotional inner life was readable at many points, and clear shifts were perceptible between the emotions despite the instruction to resist any movement of the face. When reviewing the footage with Mendoza-Davis, she was surprised by this: "the experience of cycling through the emotions felt as if I was doing nothing at all… I felt like I was just sitting there. Interesting to see strong changes… there is the sense lots is going on."[237]

This is a notable observation in the experiment: the emotions are particularly effective for screen performance, when activated using the organ triggers independent of the facial triggers. In fact, adding in the facial mask reads as too intense for the close up camera frame, and should only be used as an additional trigger when the actor is having issues activating the emotion. The specificity and repeatability achieved through the director and actor in these instances illustrate

[237] Valeria Mendoza-Davis, interview with author, March 30, 2018.

that the PEM somatic shorthand is an effective directorial tool to direct the inner life and inner emotional state of the character. This is a key application of the PEM technique, and incredibly valuable for screen performance work.

One unexpected outcome of the experiment was what Mendoza-Davis described as "the ability to wield strong emotions in stillness" through employing the technique:

> A key thing for working with a camera — a really hard thing — is how you be super still, when you're inside a huge emotion. The best screen actors seem to be able to channel huge feeling, even when the face and the body is completely still. Stillness is such an underrated yet important skill for camera work… the art of being still, yet still alive … is so important. So this was cool to see. Cycling through the emotions internally, and trusting they will be read, works… it's convincing. Without pushing my face, pushing the breath, pushing the emotion. This is different to what I expected in learning the technique. (PEM's) best application might be for this… for screen… and the interior world of the character, if that makes sense."[238]

Alongside general screen work, Mendoza-Davis made specific mention of PEM's potential useful application towards screen auditions. "I can see it is very useful for auditions — to quickly switch out of the state I'm in the day, and put myself in the required state for the character."[239] Through discussion we identified an auxiliary benefit of the technique being the ability to manage one's personal state in the waiting room as much as the audition room itself: the anxiety and nerves before the audition can be crippling, and contribute negatively to the actor's tightness during the audition. To counter this, accessing the combination of *heart open*, and *liver forward (low level force)*, lends both relaxation and focus, and is ideal in preparation to perform.[240] The application of PEM to address nerves in multiple settings is a clear benefit of the technique, that was identified and echoed throughout the other

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[238] Ibid.

[239] Ibid.

[240] This combination was recommended by Sarah Victoria, March 5, 2017.

workshops with student and professional actors alike.[241]

Importantly, working with PEM allowed Mendoza-Davis to address some of the blocks identified earlier, particularly in the emotion of lust. Mendoza-Davis stated that generating this particular emotion physiologically through PEM allowed her to access it more effectively. "Because it was technical, and of the body, I felt more comfortable doing that… rather feeling it was too personal, creating the effect of the action *seduce* was as easy as consciously lifting an eyebrow."[242] This was a significant discovery, and strong advocacy for the application of PEM to emotions that an actor finds difficult to access.

The ability to direct through a somatic shorthand (for example, *liver forward, small intestine backwards*) provides a very different experience for both director and actor to conventional performance direction. As a director, I found listening to what was required in the scene very different — *feeling* through the problems of the scene viscerally as opposed to thinking about them. The simplicity of the language adds clarity and specificity. Instead of explaining, for example, the given circumstances and psychological backstory of the character that had lead to the character's current expression of disgust and anger at her father building through the monologue, I found I could coach Mendoza-Davis to engage *stomach backwards, liver forward* and arrive at the required result. This was useful from a screen directing perspective — I felt able to work directly with the raw materials of the actor, almost as a painter would, composing exactly what I wanted to see on screen, with high efficiency and without any psychological backstory.

Yet I could equally understand this enthusiasm for the somatic shorthand was not

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[241] This attribute was mentioned in multiple workshops in Wellington, December 2016, March 2017, and March 2018.

[242] Valeria Mendoza-Davis, interview with author, March 23, 2018.

ultimately shared by Mendoza-Davis. Although she identified that the experiment produced affecting performance of "deep emotional authenticity," and that the shorthand provided effective means of communication between director and actor, she felt that the ultimate result was a sense of diminishing agency on the actor's part.[243] Here Mendoza-Davis raised an interesting question about the actor's "choices" as an artist:

> How does the actor choose what emotion to employ… or what behaviour they are to access and portray… PEM feels like it is always a reactive method… surfing off the feeling and emotion of the scene, without pre-planning anything. If I didn't have my actor's brain on… the way that I know now to instinctively break down a text… how would I know how to apply the technique… and make choices on what needs to be played to reveal the character?[244]

Furthermore, I questioned my own experience as a director. Whilst I enjoyed the precision the somatic shorthand delivered, I queried whether, eventually, I would miss the more wide-ranging discussions that typically occur between director and actor in my usual directorial process. Teasing out ambiguities, discussing overarching story thematics, and using a range of language, processes and metaphors to communicate ideas with actors always provided me with inspiration, and added fertile creative insight to my conception of the whole text and mise en scène. I feared that there could be a reductive element of working in this manner, that would create performances that were too surgical, too precise, lacking perhaps the chaotic elements of humanity and artistry that I believe add texture and life to a production. Whilst I saw immense value in PEM as a somatic tool, I doubted I could adopt it as a sole directorial approach.

Mendoza-Davis echoed a similar sentiment, in terms of using PEM as a sole acting

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[243] Ibid.

[244] Ibid.

technique. At the end of our interview, I asked whether Mendoza-Davis would use the technique again. She said she would, but only as a specific tool for accessing emotion where other approaches failed her, and certainly not as the basis for her primary acting method: "I felt able to use PEM well… and I found it a useful way to access the emotions that did not come as easily to me… but at the end of the day, it felt like cheating to use PEM… it felt too easy. I felt that I did not have the connection to character that I needed to play the role."[245] When I asked her to consider what she thought the job of the actor was, if not to pretend, she replied: "I think the problem is that PEM gives you a way to play the emotion, but not to feel it… for me, this left me cold."[246] This is a fascinating comment, that was echoed by other student participants who rejected PEM, that will be evaluated in the next section.

4.7 Critical Evaluation of Screen Experiments and Workshop Instruction

The screen experiments largely provided results commensurate with the expectation that PEM would be an invaluable tool for screen work. Value was observed particularly in PEM's ability to provide greater sustainability and repeatability of emotional expression. Additionally, the ability to consciously scale emotional expression to respective requirements of different shot sizes, without losing the believability of that expression, was observed repeatedly in the work of Valeria Mendoza-Davis, Olivia Parker and Jess Quilter: this aspect alone marks PEM as a tool that is valuable to any screen actor. However, alongside the successful implementation of the technique, actors expressed criticism that requires further discussion.

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[245] Valeria Mendoza-Davis, interview with author, March 30, 2018.

[246] Ibid.

Much of this criticism concerned confusions about the application of PEM to character and text work. An example of this was Mendoza-Davis' labelling of PEM as "a reactive method,"[247] implying the actor was too greatly at the mercy of spontaneity, and that their ability to make artistic interpretive choices, about how the scene should be shaped and played, was compromised. This is an understandable but ultimately unfair critique. Throughout my observation the PEM text work has, ironically, some similarity to Sanford Meisner's work, who positioned the spontaneous, live delivery of the text above all pre-planned decisions.[248] Meisner's scene work, like PEM, is often prized for its simplicity and 'organic' nature — and suits screen work particularly, where actors have the advantage of creating a performance over repeated takes, as opposed to live performance where there is but a single chance per night.[249] Like Meisner, in Perdekamp's work the scene will be scored as simply as possibly, trying to keep pre-planning to a minimum: Perdekamp asks the actors to find the desired 'organ mix' at the beginning of the scene (for example, *liver forward, small intestine backward, sexual organs forward*), and then asks them to trust the body's intuitive reaction to what then occurs as a result throughout the scene. This focuses the actor on experiencing and serving the organic interaction of emotional action and reaction, cause and effect, after the first organ mix establishes the initial trigger point (or inciting action) for the rest of the events of the scene. The purpose here is, like many techniques, to play only what is truthfully (or rather, *organically*) occurring between the actors in the scene, and not to impose behaviours that are not congruent with the natural flow of interaction and stimulus provided by the given circumstances, the other actor, and their own instinctual reactions.

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[247] Valeria Mendoza-Davis, interview with author, March 30, 2018.

[248] The irony here is that Meisner's technique is often closely linked to the Strasberg canon.

[249] See: Sanford Meisner, *On Acting* (New York: Random House, 1990).

However, PEM does allow actors to score scenes in minute detail, if so desired. This was implemented in the *American Hustle* experiment, where the Emotional Score was applied line by line (alongside corresponding actions), and notated as a series of somatic markers: for example, a character may begin the scene in a combination of lust and aggression (*sexual organs forwards, liver forwards*) and then (say, when confronted by a sudden reversal in the power balance in the scene) be required to move into fear (*sexual organs backwards*). Perdekamp and Victoria often seem to implement such fine scoring only if directly requested by an actor, as there is a risk that the scoring can become an overly complicated, cognitive exercise that limits the actor's ability to be available to the body's innate responses, and makes access to the flow of energy and emotion more difficult.

Throughout my experiments, scenes were scored with varying degrees of detail. *American Hustle* was the most detailed, scored using Stanislavskian beats of action in combination with corresponding PEM emotions — for example, a beat might contain the action *attack* alongside the emotion organ mix of *liver forward, sexual organs backward*, indicating the nature of that attack might be carried out with a bodily sensation mixing both aggression and fear. This way of scoring required analysis both intellectually and experientially, through making conscious decisions about the character's behaviour through textual analysis, and then trialling them on the rehearsal room floor. This approach was highly specific and detailed, and produced performances showcasing a wide range of nuanced and idiosyncratic character behaviours: particularly in the rendering of Rosalyn, who, in our version of the character, became a figure of matriarchal righteousness and repressed power, a woman of intellect and cunning dealt an unwinnable hand of existing in a heavily patriarchal world, instead of the rather archetypal "unhinged trophy wife" that director David O'Russell and actor Jennifer Lawrence present in the original film.[250]

[250] Actor Jessica Hong's description of the film's version of Rosalyn, mentioned in rehearsal, May 2017.

Moreover, at its best, the combination of both *emotion* and *action* facilitated a deeply embodied understanding of the character's moment by moment behaviour, and allowed a highly specific performance framework that was logical to the story and repeatably playable by the actor, without compromising believability or the actor's individual interpretive artistry: no two versions of the character were the same, despite fulfilling the character arcs laid out for them through the givens of the screenplay. Throughout all the experiments and observations of this thesis, the integration of PEM emotions with Stanislavskian actions proved repeatedly to be one of the strongest applications of PEM to character and text, and provoked some of the strongest performance moments of any of the experiments, producing character portrayals that were more layered, nuanced and affecting than either *action* or *emotion* alone. It is this combination that, finally, I found to be the strongest use of PEM in relationship to script, and the approach I use myself in my day to day performance work, in both acting and directing.

However, the technique also proved effective when used with less detailed scoring, or no scoring at all, such as in screen experiments exploring *Rachel Gets Married* and *Youth*. This approach suits many actors who, in approaching scene work, prefer to score a scene with very broad beats of action, rather than line-by-line changes, because they feel too many changes of action tend to limit their instinctual responses and render them too "in their head." Some actors and directors take this a step further, and use beats and detailed actions only in the textual analysis and rehearsal of a scene, and then don't consciously apply them in the act of performance, trusting that the analysis has been absorbed subconsciously and will manifest regardless. Teachers such as Larry Moss, for example, advocate for students to essentially abandon the beat by beat actions once they approach performance, and instead focus solely on the objective — or *overall action* — of the scene, as all actions the character undertakes throughout that scene are in servitude

of their overarching (or unconscious) agenda.[251] In the screen experiment filming *Rachel Gets Married,* the text was analysed with Stanislavskian beats of action, but performed with a primary focus on the objective, just as Moss advises. It was also then performed, from a PEM perspective, with a chosen organ mix at the start of the scene. The tests revealed that the Stanislavskian objective and the Perdekamp organ mix ultimately serve a similar function — providing an impetus and driving energy of the scene that keeps the actor on task, portraying the behaviour appropriate to serving the story, whilst still allowing moment to moment exploration and spontaneity in pursuing that task or direction. Rewatching both performance tests side by side, it is difficult to notice any major discrepancies of nuance or between the respective performances and methodologies.

In many of the performance tests, it is what PEM calls the *transitions* — the moments the actor is changing from one emotion to another, or from one action to another, that are particularly potent, and exciting: these moments often seem more layered, more complex, more human. Such transitions are seen repeatedly in the *Youth* experiment — the journey of how Mendoza-Davis travels from grief to happiness is riveting, as much as either of those states is themselves.[252] This is another reason PEM advocates the stripping back of scene scoring to its bare essentials: giving the actor more time to wrestle inside the emotional and motivational transitions of a scene. Just as Moss instructs the actor to relinquish conscious engagement of the scored actions when they are in the moment of performance, and trust that those actions will manifest accordingly to their commitment to a character's scene objective, the PEM actor commits to the initial organ mix, and trusts that this will initiate the required chain reaction of cause and effect that will lead them correctly through the scene.

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[251] Moss, *The Intent to Live,* 6.

[252] An example of this work can be viewed in the resource video.

Another key criticism to be unpacked from the screen experiments, highlighted by Mendoza-Davis, links back to the historical acting debate between emotional involvement versus technique.[253] Despite quickly and effectively implementing and wielding PEM, Mendoza-Davis ultimately rejects further study and usage of the technique, because "it feels too easy… it feels like cheating."[254] This feedback chimes with many other student participants interviewed at Toi Whakaari, who also experienced the ability to harness and effectively work with the physiological emotion states, yet complained about the lack of *feeling* that accompanied them, and thus found working with PEM "inauthentic," "joyless" or "not fun."[255] Furthermore, the fear that PEM emotions were somehow less authentic or effective than the actor's own emotions and feelings was reported repeatedly. Like Mendoza-Davis, around 55% of those surveyed and interviewed felt that their performances using PEM were bereft of deeper effectiveness because their own feelings were not as involved in producing them. Despite my own experiences teaching undergraduate actors for five years, it was still surprising to meet their bias so strongly: that the actor must suffer, or literally experience the torment of the character, in order to embody and render the most authentic portrayal. Here, in many cases of student survey feedback, PEM was being disregarded by students, not because it didn't work, but primarily because it worked *exactly as it claimed* it did. This point seems an interesting microcosm of what PEM teachers have found across the world: Perdekamp and Victoria both have experienced similar feedback, with students saying that working with PEM makes emotions "too easy."[256] This reaction should not be an indictment of PEM, but rather an indication of differing beliefs on the essential nature of what acting is in the first place. When questioned

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[253] As discussed in the Introduction, and Chapter 2.2.

[254] Valeria Mendoza-Davis, interview with author, March 30, 2018.

[255] As discussed in Chapter 3.2.

[256] Stephan Perdekamp and Sarah Victoria, interview with author, November 5, 2018.

further on why they believed their own emotional involvement was so necessary, students often pointed to high profile role models such as Kate Winslet, Leonardo DiCaprio, Daniel Day Lewis, Angelina Jolie, actors popularly associated with the Method, known and celebrated for their emotional and physical sacrifice in pursuit of high performance. As an acting teacher it can be challenging to argue against the results such superstars produce — if it works for Meryl, why can't it work for them? The popular culture notion of the value of 'method acting' is still particularly strong, especially in first year actors, and can provide an impenetrable bias.[257]

But this desire to retain the involvement of personal feeling was not solely about performance authenticity or effectiveness. Some pointed to the expression of their own personal feeling as being primary to their *pleasure* in performance. As Mendoza-Davis stated:

> I *want* to feel… its part of why I do it in the first place… I want the catharsis of expressing my own shit, through the character. To not do that, to me, removes the release of the performance… and the romance of the whole thing.[258]

But this concern — that PEM attempts to remove all personal feeling from performance — again highlights a confusion about the technique. Whilst the aim is to limit the 'feeling' derived from personal memory, in my experience the body is actually alive to a broader range of physiological sensation. Personal feeling is an optional by-product, not required, but also not strictly rejected. The point is simply that the actor does not have to be limited by their own feelings and experiences; through PEM they have access to a set of archetypal emotions of any character. It also offers them the control to separate themselves from feeling when necessary: in learning the technique, students must practice the discipline of attempting to divorce the pure emotional movement patterns from subjective feelings, in order to

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[257] Through my own experience teaching undergraduate actors for six years, this trend has been consistent.

[258] Valeria Mendoza-Davis, interview with author, March 30, 2018.

learn to access them most effectively. It is understandable, perhaps, that in a conservatoire environment that teaches an eclectic model of many methodologies, that students quickly evaluate and make assessment of new techniques such as PEM, but this can limit their deeper understanding of them. This happened with PEM at Toi Whakaari, and many survey responses highlight how, ultimately, students often too quickly make definitive assessments on approaches they still know relatively little about.

Perhaps the final observation from the PEM workshops, from 2016 - 2018, was that the most open to the technique were either the most experienced actors, or the least experienced actors. Those in the middle of their training, from Toi Whakaari, were more sceptical of the technique. By comparison, the Youth Court Theatre Company in Christchurch, detailed in Chapter 3.3, provided the backdrop for one of the most successful workshops I've witnessed, in terms of openness and uptake. Similarly, the inaugural Wellington Workshop was noted by Sarah Victoria as equally strong. This lends me to believe that PEM is perhaps best taught outside of a conservatoire model, where students seek it out on their own terms, rather than learn it as a component of an eclectic curriculum. PEM is not for everyone, but for those who seek it out to answer specific performance questions around the playing of emotion, it delivers on its central proposition.

Fig. 9. Jack Parker. *Fear Mask*, 2017. Toi Whakaari. Photographer Jon Hunter.

CHAPTER 5:
CRITICAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

As illustrated through previous chapters, there is clear theoretical and practical evidence to support PEM's claim to being an effective and efficient tool for accessing the emotions. This tool is predicated on the definition of emotions as innate, universal movement programmes, hard-wired into our biological systems. To stimulate those programmes, PEM uses specific physiological triggers in the body, that can be consciously activated and controlled as required by the demands of the performance score or character situation.

However this evidence must be critically evaluated, to offer further understanding and debate around this system. This chapter undertakes such evaluation in order to examine PEM more deeply and offer a balanced perspective upon its abilities and weaknesses. The main areas of debate here are PEM's theoretical basis and the analysis of the scientific underpinnings of its approach, alongside the evaluation of the screen experiments, workshop instruction and participant interviews that examine the work in practice. This debate will lead to the conclusion, where future areas of analysis, research and potential application of PEM will be identified.

Before beginning this chapter, questions need to be raised: is PEM unfairly evaluated through a scientific lens? Why does PEM need to prove its scientific validity, when other acting techniques are not necessarily held up to the same standard? These are questions leading PEM teacher, Rik Stowman, posed to me in undertaking this research.[259] There are two key responses. The first is that PEM

[259] Rik Stowman, email correspondence, April 12, 2019.

invites such critique, because of its central value proposition as a technique, as stated on its website and repeatedly through workshops: that it offers "guidable access to the emotions, with no recourse to one's own psychology," and is a technique based on "biology."[260] This is such a paradigm shift against dominant thinking in Western actor training — not only the premise that the emotions can be trained and managed, but the fact this can be done without what we traditionally understand as 'feeling'— that it naturally arouses questions from Western actor training educators and students, particularly those already steeped in the American-Stanislavskian tradition. This is further compounded when the organic triggers are explained: to consider that one can experience and manipulate bio-electrical charges in one's own organs, is challenging to many who encounter the technique who have only been exposed to Western medical practices and conceptions about the body. My own exploits of learning PEM provoked a constant battle between body and intellect. Despite encountering deep, holistic bodily experiences of the emotions, seemingly triggered by consciously controlled, bio-electrical charges within my internal viscera, my intellect kept asking, *how is this possible?* Such a questioning is compounded because PEM uses very specific, scientific language, and continually asserts through workshop instruction that the organ-emotion triggers are "not an action of the psychology,"[261] or a psychosomatic response: this energy can be physically activated. Other techniques perhaps attract less attention under the lens of science, because they use more abstract metaphors and the imagination is constantly invoked.[262] PEM, by comparison, constantly references physical areas and movements of the body that feel surgical in their precision. For example, a typical direction might be, *sexual organs forward low force, liver*

[260] In all workshops I observed, this notion was mentioned repeatedly throughout instruction. It also appears on the PEM website: https://pem-acting.com

[261] Perdekamp and Victoria repeatedly have made this point, during instructional workshops throughout December 2016 and March 2017.

[262] Stanislavski and Chekhov, for example, place high importance on the role of the imagination.

forwards medium force, small intestine backwards strong force. Sarah Victoria, in workshop instruction in December 2016, explained, "we are literal in our language, not mysterious… we label things exactly as they are."[263] PEM's intention in doing so encapsulates its essential pragmatism, and its intent to address what Perdekamp perceived as the traditionally "esoteric" elements of acting.[264]

The second response is that acting techniques have *always* been held up against the scientific paradigms of their time, and informed and critiqued by them. As Joseph Roach explores in *The Player's Passion: Science in the Studies of Acting*, this is a tradition that has extended from the early Greeks, to Stanislavski, to the present day.[265] Today, the rapidly advancing areas of research in cognitive science and neurobiology are providing new insights about the nature of what the process of acting *is*, and should not be ignored in the debate. As performance theorist Rhonda Blair states:

> Since acting grows out of our biological being, what we are learning about memory and imagination, and the way emotion, reason, and physicality are ultimately inseparable in the brain's structure and function, has significant implications for how we understand what happens when we act. All acting techniques work with the same raw material, the actor's only material — the body and consciousness.[266]

In recent years such research, particularly in the areas of cognitive science and neuroscience, has been used to re-evaluate and deepen understanding of the approaches of practitioners such as Stanislavski, Chekhov and Strasberg, by

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[263] Sarah Victoria often repeats this line in initial workshop instruction, observed from Wellington 2017 to 2018.

[264] As stated in the Chapter 3.2, Perdekamp identified energy and emotion as esoteric elements of performance, that few actors had repeatable and specific craft for.

[265] Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Science in the Studies of Acting* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1985).

[266] Blair, *The Actor, Image and Action,* xii.

theorists that include Phillip Zarrilli, Rick Kemp and Rhonda Blair.[267] Such studies have added much to on-going performance research, particularly in shedding new light on what occurs neurologically during the process of acting, and have invoked debate about how acting methods might develop accordingly.[268]

Therefore, in critically evaluating the PEM technique in both theory and practice, and including some scientific discussion, it is my aim to add more reasoned understanding about it. If people are to reject the technique, as some students quickly do[269], the hope is that they do so armed with more reasoned debate and cognisance of it. From my perspective, PEM's raison d'être has been to demystify those things in acting that have always been esoteric: namely energy, and emotion. In a similar spirit, my aim is that in holding their work up to critical analysis, including some scientific debate, that this research can help demystify aspects of their work that students find challenging and confusing.

5.2 Universal Emotions and the Constructionist Counter View

As examined, central to PEM's system is its theoretical argument about the nature of emotions. This argument posits that emotions are innate, universal movement programmes, hard-coded into our biological systems. PEM's position is supported by significant research by Paul Ekman, whose cross-cultural facial mask experiments of the 1980s led to his positing of six basic universal emotions.[270] Ekman's work has in turn been influential and supported by many neuroscientists such as Damasio,

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[267] As discussed in Chapter 2.

[268] Both Blair and Kemp have advocated for embracing the influence of cognitive science on acting, through various articles and books, as listed in the bibliography.

[269] As discussed in previous chapter.

[270] As discussed in Chapter 3.2.

and LeDoux, who widely cite Ekman's research in their own writings on the subject.[271]

PEM's foundational theory greatly relies on this acceptance of universal emotions. Yet this notion is far from universally accepted. Notably, in recent years, neuroscientist and psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett has challenged the existence of an "emotion fingerprint," towards a theory of Constructed Emotions.[272] Barrett skewers Ekman's research methods as "subjective at best," and looks at similar studies undertaken with a technique called facial electromyography (FMG), which removes human perceivers from the research (one of many criticisms of Ekman's process) and evaluates hard data through computer analysis.[273] FMG research presents a challenge to the theory of universal emotions, as many of these studies illustrate that muscle movements do not reliably indicate whether someone is sad, angry, or fearful. Feldman Barrett argues similar inconsistencies with Ekman's research in infants. If facial expressions are universal and signifiers of essential emotion fingerprints, then babies should be even more likely to illustrate these patterns, as they have less time to be affected by cultural conditioning. And yet Feldman Barrett's research argues that, after examining a wide range of empirical testing, infants do not make the expected expressions.[274]

Furthermore, Feldman Barrett argues that Damasio's viewpoint on emotion as biological code is based on a "classical view" of emotion that needs to be

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[271] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 38.

[272] Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (New York: Pan Macmillan, 2017), 3.

[273] Ibid: 7.

[274] Ibid: 9.

reevaluated — a criticism that similarly applies to PEM's position.[275] Moving on to discuss significant metadata from numerous experiments of human emotion, Feldman Barrett posits "variation, not uniformity, is the norm," and that "despite tremendous time and investment, research has not revealed a consistent bodily footprint for even a single emotion."[276] She instead proposes the *Theory of Constructed Emotion,* which regards emotions as "guesses" — predictions of the world, made by the brain to help arrange the physiological machinery of the body into action.[277] Feldman Barrett does concede that her theory is similar to Damasio's Somatic Marker Hypothesis, in hypothesising that feelings reference physiological states.[278] But her theory rejects the assumption that emotions are innate action programmes, or that they are separate from feelings.

> When scientists set aside the classical view and just look at the data, a radically different explanation for emotion comes to light. We find that emotions are not universal but vary from culture to culture. They are not triggered; you create them. They emerge as a combination of the physical properties of your body, a flexible brain that wires itself to whatever environment it develops in, and your culture and upbringing.[279]

In examining this argument in relationship to PEM, it must be maintained that Feldman Barrett's view is still currently a minority, and that the majority of neuroscientific arguments remain aligned with Damasio and PEM's definitions of the

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[275] Maria Gendron and Lisa Feldman Barrett, "Reconstructing the past: a century of ideas about emotion in psychology," *Emotion Review* 1 (4): 317.

[276] Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made*, 15.

[277] Ibid: 10.

[278] Ibid: 105.

[279] Lisa Feldman Barrett, "Why Our Emotions Are Cultural - Not Built In At Birth," The Guardian. March 26, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/mar/26/why-our-emotions-are-cultural-not-hardwired-at-birth

emotions.[280] And even despite this position, there are some elements of Feldman Barrett's work that still align with PEM. She outlines a view of emotions as emotion categories — which go some way to explaining how the PEM emotions work on a spectrum. For example, when working through the *liver forward* instruction in the PEM emotion of Aggression, the use of low-level force will produce a sense of concentration in the character, whilst high-level force in the same movement pattern (to push through) produces fury. As Feldman Barrett states:

> We must consider that an emotion word, like "anger," does not refer to a specific response with a physical fingerprint but to a group of highly variable instances that are tied to specific situations… instances of anger vary in their physical manifestation (facial movements, heart rate, hormones, vocal acoustics, neural activity, and so on), and this variation might be related to the environment and context.[281]

However, PEM practitioner, Rik Stowman, argues that researchers such as Feldman Barrett are actually often discussing *feeling*, not emotion:

> There is not, at least not in specific terms, a researcher who proceeds from the understanding that emotions are inborn holistic muscle movement patterns with a specific direction and task and are quite distinct from psychologically processed feelings which are in fact emotions interrupted, suppressed, amplified or distorted. If we understand this premise and move forward we can see that the many studies on "emotion" are in fact studies on "feelings" and are not traced back to their source.[282]

Stowman illustrates the difficulty and nebulousness of some of the language when discussing emotion, as complicated as discussing subjective experiences in acting. Damasio, in a recent interview where the constructionist view of emotions was raised, responded in similar fashion, stating: "I have been discussing the difference

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[280] Feldman Barrett herself acknowledges that her research is "dwarfed" by the dominant viewpoint on emotions, which she identifies as that stated by Damasio and Ekman, and is what she calls the classical view. (Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made*, 20).

[281] Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made*, 23.

[282] Rik Stowman, email correspondence with author, April 17, 2019.

between Emotion and Feeling for eighteen years, but this definition still is confused."[283] Feldman Barrett's work does raise questions about the validity of Ekman's work and research processes, but this dissonance is still tempered by established bodies of work and evidence provided by Damasio, LeDoux, and other neuroscientists. Ultimately, PEM's theory of emotions as universal and genetically coded movement programmes is corroborated by a large volume of significant research.

5.3 Investigating the Organ-Emotion Relationship

A critical analysis of the PEM system must include the central point of difference between this technique and other acting systems: the organ-emotion relationship. All other facets of Perdekamp's system spring from this essential proposition and belief: it may be interpreted as the pedagogical hill that PEM ultimately lives or dies on. PEM's teachers have worked with thousands of students and state they have observed these organ triggers working consistently across cultures and continents.[284] They present a strong case, that the "proof is in the pudding"— when introducing the organs, they never name a corresponding emotion until after the students have experienced it, and yet the emotions produced through each organ are "uniformly the same."[285] This would indicate that all students can easily accept and access the organic triggers. However, through my own experience in experiments and workshop observation, the organ-emotion relationship is often a primary stumbling block to the understanding and uptake of the technique. Many students interviewed listed this as their primary complaint about PEM: they didn't

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[283] Antonio Damasio, "Big Think Podcast: Interview with Antonio Damasio." Posted 18 April 2018. https://bigthink.com/think-again-podcast/where-is-my-mind-nil-antonio-damasio-nil-think-again-a-big-think-podcast-144

[284] Perdekamp and Victoria, interview with author, March 28, 2018.

[285] Rik Stowman, email correspondence with author, April 17, 2019.

"believe" in this relationship, or couldn't feel it in their own bodies.[286] Therefore there was an intellectual opposition, as well as an experiential one. This section attempts to evaluate this organ-emotion relationship more deeply, and investigates further research that might explain how and if the organs actually are connected to the emotions. Whilst scientific conjecture is divided, there are emerging trends that are instructive.

As outlined throughout this thesis, the notion that we experience emotions physiologically in the body has been supported by many studies. Alongside the work of Damasio and LeDoux, empirical medical studies have been undertaken, such as a recent wide-ranging Finnish study, which show that humans across many cultures experience emotions in the body in very similar ways: the dominant position remains that emotion systems "prepare us to meet challenges encountered in the environment by adjusting the activation of the cardiovascular, skeleto-muscular, neuroendocrine, and autonomic nervous systems (ANS)."[287] However, while the relationship between bodily states and emotions is clear, the relationship between specific internal *organs* and emotion is far less clear.

Bodily organs have long been related to the emotions across many cultures, dating back to Greek physicians Hippocrates (460-370 BCE) and Galen (130-210 ACE). Both practiced medicine based on *humoral theory*: the belief that physical and psychological health or illness rested on "the state of balance or imbalance of various bodily fluids."[288] These four major fluids — or *humors* — were black bile, blood, phlegm and yellow bile, and corresponded with a specific organ: the spleen,

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[286] As discussed in Chapter 4.2.

[287] Lauri Nummenmaa et al, "Bodily Maps of Emotions." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no. 2 (2014): 646.

[288] Harvard University Library Open Collections Program, "Humoral theory. Contagion, historical views of diseases and epidemics." Retrieved from http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/humoraltheory.html

liver (or in some accounts, the heart), the brain, and the gallbladder, respectively.[289] Alongside the state of health, Galen believed that the emotional temperament of the individual was determined by "the degree to which one or another humor predominated in his or her nature,"[290] reflecting the humoral concept that personality and physical health were interdependent. Medical traditions in other cultures, such as Chinese medicine, Native American medicine, and Ayurvedic medicine in India are also based on versions of humoral theory.[291] Whilst a focus of these approaches continues to involve a relationship to the organs, in Western medicine humoral theory has been abandoned as pseudoscience since the 17th century, when English physician William Harvey published a small volume describing a series of experiments that led to his discovery of the circulation of the blood, and the role played in it by the pumping action of the heart.[292]

Today, perhaps in part due to the legacy of those ancient humoral associations, language to discuss emotion is populated by metaphorical and symbolic associations that connect the physiology and organs to emotional experience. A disappointed lover is "heartbroken," public speaking gives us "butterflies in the stomach," bad news is "a gut punch." Such associations are replete throughout many languages, and were key to Perdekamp's initial investigation into the organs, provoked by making a connection between Native American tribes who ate the liver of bears for strength (and thus, the power to *push through* obstacles that Perdekamp associated with the emotion of aggression), and the German saying "a louse ran over my liver" which indicated anger.[293] However, whilst many might

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[289] Ibid.

[290] Ibid.

[291] Ibid.

[292] Ibid.

[293] As discussed in Chapter 3.3.

accept those descriptions have a basis in felt bodily sensation, it would be fair to say that in Western cultures generally such associations are thought simply to be symbolic language, disconnected from any deeper literal association or medical significance, and while it might be possible organs experience symptoms of emotion, they are not potential causes. This viewpoint was observed in many PEM workshop participants across the breadth of this study.

Intriguingly however, mounting scientific evidence shows that some organs may have a greater role in the *cause* of emotions than previously thought. This research specifically concerns the organs contained in the gut that are connected to the autonomic process of digestion. Much of this new evidence surrounds the role of the Enteric Nervous System (ENS) — the nervous system of the gut, which includes the small intestine, the stomach, the gallbladder, and the pancreas. It controls "all processes that take place in the digestive tract, and is extraordinarily autonomous."[294] In fact, it is so independent from the brain, that even if the connection between the brain and the ENS is severed, it can continue all digestive operations — a capacity found nowhere else in the human body.[295] Moreover, due to its "size, complexity and similarity — in neurotransmitters and singling molecules — with the brain," it has now been dubbed "the second brain."[296] Just as there are many metaphors in language linking the heart to emotional intuition (i.e. *just follow your heart*), so too there are for the gut, and these metaphors are now being tested by scientists to see if there is a more literal relationship. Scientist and gastrointestinal expert Giulia Enders cites the phrases "scared shitless," "shitting ourselves with fear," "butterflies in our stomach" as examples where language gives

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[294] Giulia Enders, *Gut: The Inside Story Of Our Body's Most Underrated Organ.* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2015), 80.

[295] Michael Gershon, *The Second Brain: Your Gut Has A Mind Of Its Own* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), xiii.

[296] Emeran A. Mayer, "Gut Feelings: The Emerging Biology of Gut-Brain Communication," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 12 no. 8 (2011): 1.

indications to how the organs of the gut might actually cause emotions, and influence behaviour.[297] As Emeran A. Mayer, a professor at David Geffen School of Medicine states, "the popular statement that somebody has made a decision based on their gut feelings may have an actual neurobiological basis related to brain-gut interactions, and to interoceptive memories related to such interactions."[298] Damasio's work, as previously examined, supports this notion that the emotions are essential to decision making, both consciously and unconsciously.[299] But this new research on the ENS identifies that the organs themselves may make a specific contribution to this process.

All of the internal organs of the viscera, including those within the ENS, are connected to the brain via the vagus nerve, an enormous nerve comparable in size to the spinal cord. As biophysicist and psychologist Peter Levine explains, *ninety percent* of the information passing between gut and brain along the vagus nerve "is sensory in nature" and is travelling from *the bottom up:* "for every one motor nerve fibre that relays commands from the brain to the gut, nine sensory nerves send information about the state of the viscera to the brain."[300] This is a significant discovery, when considering only a short time ago prevailing scientific opinion believed organs of the gut were controlled by the brain.[301]

Furthermore, many studies have illuminated the relationship between the health of

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[297] Enders, *Gut: The Inside Story,* 81.

[298] Ibid: 3.

[299] Damasio examines the influence of feelings and emotions on human decision making extensively throughout "The Strange Order of Things."

[300] Peter A. Levine, *In An Unspoken Voice: How The Body Releases Trauma And Restores Goodness (*Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010) 121.

[301] Tanya Elchuk, "The Neurobiological Basis of Emotion and Imagination in Relationship to Breath and Guts: Smukler's Swamp as Case Study," *Voice and Speech Review* 12, no. 2 (2018): 147-60.

the gut and emotions: the bacterial constitution of the lower intestine and gastrointestinal tract has been linked in several studies to depression, and rebalancing that bacteria is emerging as a key treatment strategy.[302] Although not fully understood, it is clear that the gut is a major player in the emotional processes of humans: "given the magnitude and complexity of gut-based signalling systems… brain-gut interactions have to be considered an important, but largely ignored, component of the neuroscience of emotions."[303]

At this point, it is more accurate to say that the research indicates that the health and influence of our guts (and associated organs, alongside the microbiome dwelling inside those organs) *plays a role* in our mental and emotional processes, rather than to say the emotions *derive* from the viscera of the guts. However, it is fair to say that this research has opened discussion of the organs of the lower abdomen as a potential emotional source. Such research, then, supports PEM's identification of the interrelated connection between organs and emotions. Whilst it is not yet accurate to say that such evidence links specific emotions to specific organs, where previously medical opinion ruled out such a possibility, it seems a relationship between, say, grief and the small intestine could actually be possible. Therefore, as more information emerges, perhaps we can't rule out the relationship between the liver and aggression, for example, being as equally physiological as it is metaphoric.

This research also provides some insight into how the organs could work so effectively as trigger points — in the case of the small intestine and stomach, there is evidence to argue that these organs can actually *instigate an* emotion of their own volition, independent from the processing of the brain. This is important when

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[302] Zach Bush, interviewed by Bob Frost, "Brain Health Conference: Listening to the Gut," *Townsend Letter*, no. 393 (2016): 12.

[303] Mayer, "Gut Feelings," 9.

considering PEM's very specific definition of the specific organs as emotional triggers. Perhaps more difficult to answer however, is the question of how the actor engages that trigger. Is it the physiological stimulation of the muscles around the organ, an energetic charge, a concentration of electricity, or a psychophysical act of imagination? These questions are weighed in the next section.

5.4 Imagination and the Organ-Emotion Triggers

Despite research that suggests the possibility of specific emotion organ connections, some observers of PEM questioned whether the use of the organs as triggers is purely an "act of imagination" — a psychosomatic or placebo effect. Such feedback came from a range of drama school colleagues and educators, based on the premise that actors are, after all, often highly suggestive people with diverse and powerful imaginations — and the ability to shift imagination into embodied experience can be regarded as part of an actor's primary talent, as well as their job.[304] Some students interviewed also grappled with this, which led them to question the underlying validity of the technique. As Toi Whakaari student Acacia O'Connor stated:

> Initially I couldn't feel anything in the liver, but the facial mask worked and helped… I then felt that I could really feel real energy in my liver, and literally feel it moving forward. But later, outside of the class, I really questioned that… was I angry because the energy of my liver really moved forward, or because I believed that was happening? Although we weren't told what the emotion was, it was clear through the facial mask that the emotion was anger. Now I think it was all just an act of imagination… that it wasn't real.[305]

O'Connor's statement is worth examining more closely, as it is indicative of a

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[304] Colleagues who expressed this view wished to remain anonymous.

[305] Acacia O'Connor, interview with author, April 5, 2017.

noticeable trend in a number of Toi Whakaari students who encountered the technique. Although the experience of PEM was initially successful in generating emotion, certain students later rejected it because they doubted the specific organ-emotion connection was 'real,' which in turn lead them to question all other aspects of the technique accordingly. To address this scepticism, one piece of validating evidence that PEM practitioners can point to is the Vienna experiment, which verifies that, using the PEM technique, actors can consciously create measurable changes in their autonomous nervous system in line with changes in emotion.[306] The experiment revealed actors could affect measurable and repeatable energy movements in the body in the form of heart, respiratory changes and galvanic skin response. Yet the technology used in that experiment cannot reveal the exact locations of that energy in the body, the way a PET scan would, thus there is not the specific evidence to support an individual organ being 'switched' on energetically: more testing is required.

Despite the lack of comprehensive scientific corroboration, however, the question is begged: if PEM works, does it matter if it is indeed "an act of imagination," or not? Ultimately, for an acting method, results matter. A technique works for an actor, or it doesn't. Yet, to explore the counter argument, what if the triggers *are* an act of 'imagination?' Does this somehow undermine the technique, or cause a problem?

The only problem comes, perhaps, if we limit our definition of *imagination* to something that is isolated in the mind, separate from the body, in the same way a problem around PEM emerges if we fall into the trap of using outdated dichotomies of 'external' acting versus 'internal' acting to attempt to define it. Throughout my research, I have been perhaps guilty of this myself, in looking extensively for scientific or 'real' answers to the organ-emotion question purely in the physiology of

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[306] Referenced in Chapter 3.3, the Vienna experiment occurred in 2016, and measured how PEM practitioners can affect their own autonomous body functions.

the body, perhaps in the unconscious instinct that this would somehow validate this work, and my own experiences inside it, more effectively. And yet the science only ultimately serves to prove a similar point: the bodymind is a single unity, connected at every level, and the imagination affects the body just as the body affects the imagination. Or, again, as Chekhov so presciently stated, "the actor imagines with his body."[307]

In light of this notion, and in thinking further about the organ-emotion connection, perhaps a middle ground can be established: that the triggers don't have to be defined as either 'real' or 'imagined,' but rather, both imagined and real aspects can simultaneously be true. Therefore there is potentially a different, and perhaps simpler, hypothesis to how the organ-emotion connection takes place, that I believe in no way detracts from the validity of the PEM technique: that the organ-emotion triggers are *psychophysical* triggers, achieved through a combination of the "physical imagination" and the "thinking body."[308] In this hypothesis, the stimulation of the organ triggers both a physical act, something that happens literally, tangibly in the body, *and* an act of imagination. For example, the actor cannot feel their own liver, so relies on an imagined understanding of where it is located in their own body, and how the stimulation of this area might feel, and what the result might produce. This extends to organs that are more easily felt, such as the gut, and the heart: there is still the requirement of the "physical imagination" to move the energy of that organ in the required direction, as PEM instruction asks them to do.

In this hypothesis, the organ-emotion trigger is stimulated by a proficient PEM actor through a complex action of the bodymind, that is actually *initially* triggered by the

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[307] Chekhov, *To The Actor*, 89.

[308] In this classification, it can be argued the organ-triggers work in a similar way to the psychophysical triggers used by Stanislavski and Chekhov.

decision or command to engage the organ (in other words, the decision to 'act'). This command creates a chain reaction of interweaving bodily events, provoking the sensory imagination of the body which simultaneously *predicts* the required body state (preparing the body to experience the emotion through mapping its imagined, predicted effects across the body), *remembers* other instances of that bodily state, and *physically experiences* that state in the body. In this hypothesis, the triggers are examples of embodied imagination in action: imagined states that are sensorially felt.

So, on a deep level, this causal chain actually echoes, say, Emotion Memory — but instead of channelling the imagination towards the construction of a memory, the PEM actor channels the imagination to create sensorily a feeling and trigger an energy potential in a specific somatic marker of the body. This allows them to trigger the code of a specific emotion, which in turn becomes holistically experienced through the entire organism. The somatic marker is the organ — a spot in the body the emotion is mapped to, through the repeated emotion training exercises of PEM.

This hypothesis links PEM back more closely to the work of other psychophysical techniques, where the role of the imagination is more overtly positioned, such as Michael Chekhov, and even, Stanislavski (these links are even stronger in the PEM character work, explored in the next section). Such a hypothesis might more aptly explain the PEM process, and support its instruction to those that take issue with the organ-emotion connection. In such a hypothesis, the word 'real' becomes moot — and the 'act of imagination' is actually fully embraced.

Furthermore, whatever side one falls on in the debate of the validity or 'realness' of the organ-emotion connection, the question of how the actor makes the decision to *trigger* this connection and to invoke a particular emotion (in other words, making

the decision to "act"), indicates that the mind and the imagination, *must* be involved. Acknowledging this 'decision' is crucial, because it is the key that separates "acting" from "real life" — as Richard Schechner states, "the only difference between living and acting is the knowledge that I am acting."[309]

To classify or attribute an embodied imaginative aspect to the emotion-organ triggers does not, in my mind, diminish the technique, or frame it as any less 'real' — it perhaps simply serves to reiterate the integrated nature of the *bodymind*, and indicates that the organ-emotion connection may, on a neural and deeper level, work in the similar way to the imagination in psychophysical techniques.[310] Furthermore, to clarify and embrace this definition of imagination may help quell the scepticism students like O'Connor engender towards PEM despite encountering initially strong results working with it.

On the other hand, it is understandable that PEM would have a pedagogical purpose in framing the triggers as 'real,' regardless to the degree of interplay between body and imagination: belief is a powerful thing. It may be far quicker for a student with an open mind to achieve the effect of the organ-emotion triggers, simply by committing to the idea and notion that they are real — and not allowing the mind to get tangled in such a debate, before the effect of the technique is experienced. Any acting technique requires a degree of belief in it to take the actor to an embodied experience, and requires a willingness to engage.

5.5 PEM Character Work in relation to Alba Emoting

PEM shares many similarities with Alba Emoting, which is predicated on closely

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[309] Schechner, *Rasaesthetics*, 26.

[310] PEM's connection with psychophysical techniques are examined in 5.6.

comparable arguments and a similar physiological approach, utilising neuroscience research to support its theoretical underpinnings.[311] Much of the research that supports Alba's successful application to actors, and its accredited ability to create the emotions physiologically, offers firm support to PEM's approach. For example, a central connection between the techniques is the view that breath is central to the production of emotions. Alba uses the breath as key to all its *effector patterns*, and the primary means of controlling the force and intensity of each of the emotions.[312] Similarly, PEM uses the breath as "the gas pedal" of emotions, and begins its workshops by stating that "the essence of our craft begins with breath."[313] It is breath that is linked to many other techniques of accessing emotion, from Kristen Linklater to Cicely Berry, who all believed that providing deeper freedom and access to the diaphragm was key to opening and allowing access to the actor's "emotional centres."[314]

However, although Alba Emoting shares many essential similarities with PEM, Perdekamp and Victoria find such comparisons reductive, because, "Alba Emoting is an acting tool… PEM is an acting *system*."[315] This definition of Alba Emoting as tool, as opposed to system, is echoed by performance studies theorist Rhonda Blair, who describes it as a "powerful tool for consciously generating emotions… and a useful adjunct for Stanislavsky based work."[316] Blair identifies this ability to be used in concert with other systems as highly useful, but also as Alba's primary means of application to character:

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311 Susana Bloch, "Alba Emoting: A Psychophysiological Technique to Help Actors Create and Control Real Emotions," *Theatre Topics* vol. 3 no. 2 (1993): 121-138.

312 Ibid.

313 Sarah Victoria, during Workshop Instruction, December 2017.

314 Elchuk, "The Neurological Basis of Emotion," 149

315 Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, November 6, 2018.

316 Blair, *The Actor, Image and Action,* 48.

> Since this technique is for the purpose of helping the actor produce, simulate, and manage emotions, it does not address character research and text analysis; rather, its is a tool for exploring and expanding upon that research. In this regard it is a supplement to rather than a competitor against, Stanislavsky-based methods.[317]

Blair's description of Alba Emoting as a *tool* is useful in making a distinction between an acting *tool* and an acting *system* or *methodology*. A system is defined, therefore, by its ability to offer both comprehensive training for the actor, in preparing their instrument to perform, and also in the ability to be applied to render character from given text. A tool, by comparison, is an acting technique that requires integration into another system for it to be successfully applied to a fully realised performance. Like Alba, PEM has proved to be a powerful tool, as evidenced through the screen experiments.[318] Furthermore, a shared selling point of both approaches is their claimed ability to be used in conjunction with other systems: despite Perdekamp's assertion that PEM should be viewed as a system as opposed to a tool, on PEM's own website it states that it has "proven to be complementary to all other acting methods."[319] In workshops, Victoria also states that PEM can effectively be used as an adjunct of other systems.[320] However, if PEM is to be defined as a system in its own right, as it desires, then it must have its own individual character approach (that can be used independently of other approaches), and the effectiveness of that character approach must be examined and evaluated.

To undertake this evaluation, it must be emphasised that the ability to access and

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[317] Ibid.

[318] As discussed in Chapter 4.3, 4.4, 4.5.

[319] pem-acting.com/about-pem/pem-explained

[320] Sarah Victoria, during workshop instruction, December 6, 2016, March 3, 2017, and March 20, 2018.

embody pure *emotions* does not mean the actor can play a specific *character.* Whilst Perdekamp, Ekman and Damasio argue that emotions are universal bodily responses, it is important to state again that *feelings* are not: they are subjective, idiosyncratic interpretations that differ between individuals as the brain maps those bodily responses, and are influenced by culture, past experience, and future predictions:

> Once emotions are induced, people can become conscious of them (i.e., *experience* their emotions) by mentally constructing a *feeling*. Neurobiologically, constructing feelings of emotions recruits brain systems that regulate and map body responses. Psychologically, though, feelings are potentially as reliant on inferences and predictions about body states as on afferent interoceptive information.[321]

Furthermore, whilst emotions may be neurobiologically innate and universal, the *expression* of emotion and feeling differs between individuals: hence why not all characters react the same way to similar stimulus. In a 2016 study entitled *Cultural Modes of Expressing Emotions Influence How Emotions Are Experienced*, neuroscience researchers Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Xiao-Fei Yang, and Hanna Damasio give an overview of how culture and experience strongly impact how an individual expresses an emotion, illustrating how "culture influences emotional expressiveness, that is, the magnitude of individuals' bodily responses during emotion."[322] This notion was evidenced throughout the teaching of PEM at Toi Whakaari, particularly in the difference between how Pacific Island and Māori students were able to access and express certain emotions, such as anger, in comparison to their Pākehā counterparts.[323] Antonio Damasio further supports this,

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[321] Mary Helen Immordino-Yang et al, "Cultural Modes of Expressing Emotions Influence How Emotions Are Experienced," *Emotion* 16, no. 7 (2016): 1033.

[322] Ibid: 1034.

[323] As discussed in Chapter 4.2, Mosese Vea'ila and Darneen Christian, struggled with anger in particular. When interviewed, Vea'ila explained, "In my family and in my culture… we are just not allowed to show those things." (Interview, March 2017).

stating that "regardless to the degree of biological pre-setting of the Emotional machinery, development and culture have much to say about the final product."[324] This *final product* is what the actor must embody on the stage or screen: the character's specific and individual expressions of emotion *and* feeling, woven alongside that character's particular behaviour.

Therefore, the ability to access pure emotions are of little use if they cannot be modified and integrated into the specific expressions of an individual character. To embody a character's emotion and feelings, therefore, the actor must balance an expression of that character's biological and cultural influences, and reveal them through the behavioural actions of that character defined within the text. Consequently the success of PEM's character work — the process of application of accessed emotions to specific parameters of behaviour, derived from a given text — is key to achieving PEM's claim to be an acting *system* over simply being an acting *tool*.

There is strong evidence to support PEM's self-definition. As outlined through my own experiences, the PEM character work provided me with a concrete, sequential and repeatable approach to explore and perform *Hamlet*, which allowed me to successfully integrate the trained palette of PEM emotions and character work into a performed text. Similar results were evidenced through student application, particularly through the Mise En Scène rehearsal process.[325] From my personal perspective, it is through this combination of its emotion training and character work that PEM illustrates its most significant value.[326] The strengths of PEM's character system are its physical specificity and comprehensive detail, where the

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[324] Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 57.

[325] As discussed in Chapter 4.3.

[326] As discussed in Chapter 3.10

actor pays attention to each aspect of the entire body, even to the degree of the character's eye and point of seeing.[327] This careful and specific physical detailing allows the actor to embody distinctly different characters, and gives a tangible, sequential method to allow transformational performances, as defined by the actor's ability to inhabit characters far from their own experiences, social and cultural conditions, and, even, age. As evidenced through Mise En Scène, actors who went deep into this technique were able to translate such transformation onto screen.[328] For some actors, however, this strength was also its weakness, as they found the system too detailed and complex to embody physically. As Leo Maggs said, "its hard… I felt like I just spent time in rehearsal and performance trying to remember the hundred physical choices… I felt pretty bound."[329] Certainly, mastery of this system takes time, discipline and rigour. Despite dedicating a full three-week rehearsal process to this work, most student actors were only able to grasp only the broadest strokes of this system.[330] Whilst it is reasonable to expect more experienced actors (or those more deeply trained in PEM) could integrate this system into performance more efficiently, the experience of Mise En Scène, alongside observed workshop instruction, strongly indicates that the character process takes a significant time commitment in rehearsal to embed. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that actors who do invest the required rehearsal time will achieve effective results.

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[327] As discussed in Chapter 3.13

[328] Second year student Michael Hockey exemplified this. Through adopting an appropriate MLC and subcentre, he was able to effectively play Richie DiMasio, a character whose aggression, swagger, and authority Michael believed "would be hard to achieve otherwise." (Michael Hockey, conversation with author, Mise En Scène rehearsal, May 23, 2017).

[329] Leo Maggs, Reflection Session, May 30, 2017.

[330] Most students adopted one MLC and two subcentres successfully, only three or four were able to also adopt point of seeing, point of speaking, and a broader range of subcentres.

5.6 PEM in relation to Psychophysical Techniques

This basis of PEM's character approach is not unique, and has resonances with other techniques that place emphasis on physicality and aesthetics of the character's body,[331] such as the "physical, body-based method" of Jacques Lecoq.[332] A shared fundamental tenet of the PEM's character work and emotional work is that "it doesn't matter how it feels for the actor… it's how it reads on stage."[333] However, there are also connections to be drawn between PEM and techniques commonly described as *psychophysical,* such as those of Stanislavski and Chekhov.[334] The term psychophysical was used as acting terminology as early as Stanislavski to investigate and describe "an approach to Western acting focused equally on the actor's psychology and physicality applied to textually based character acting,"[335] and to find an approach that could serve the interrelated nature of body and mind: a notion that was only beginning to come to prominence, after the gradual re-evaluation of the "long-term Western binary dividing mind from body that was so problematically crystallised in the mind-body dualism… of Rene Descartes."[336] As Phillip Zarrilli outlines in *Psychophysical Acting* (2009), throughout his career Stanislavski always *attempted* to address and overcome the mind body divide, despite the "highly problematic translations of Elizabeth Hapgood" in the United States which "privileged the psychological techniques of Stanislavski's system over

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331 See: David Bridel, "In The Beginning Was The Body: From Lecoq And Laban To Michael Chekhov And Suzuki, U.S. Movement Training Derives Its Strength And Purpose From Abroad," *American Theatre*, (2011): 44.

332 Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 11.

333 Sarah Victoria, Workshop Instruction, December 7, 2016.

334 Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting*, 20.

335 Ibid: 13.

336 Ibid: 13.

those of the physical."[337] Such translations ultimately obscured wider understanding of his work until recent scholars, such as Sharon Carnicke, Rhonda Blair, and Bella Merlin have 'reclaimed' his technique as being psychophysical (as opposed to primarily psychological) and therefore more in line with current cognitive scientific thinking as it applies to actor training.[338] As discussed earlier, Chekhov's work has been reclaimed and celebrated with similar plaudits, and shares with Stanislavski an interest in the *mind*'s imaginative ability to affect the body, alongside the body's ability to affect the mind. Although PEM often define themselves as completely distinct from such approaches, and focus firmly on physiology over psychological, there are connections to be drawn between Stanislavski, Chekhov, and PEM, particularly in PEM's character work, beginning with the MLCs and Subcentres.

5.7 Analysis of Main Leading Centres and Subcentres

Whilst presented as a purely physical mechanism, the MLC could be interpreted as a physicalised *super-objective*. Certainly the notion of the idea of an inner core, unconsciously leading the character towards something in the story and their lives, echoes the language Stanislavski uses to discuss his *super-objective* (or as it is now re-translated, the *super-task).*[339] The super-objective could be defined as the ultimate goal or motivating driver of the character, propelling them through the events of the story (and their lives). The term "spine" has become commonly substituted by modern disciples of Stanislavski's system, such as Larry Moss:

> The super-objective — the dream, which comes from a deep yearning in the character — is the *spine* of the actor's performance, and the objectives of each individual scene are the

[337] Ibid: 15.

[338] Ibid: 14.

[339] See: Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary.*

> ribs connected to that spine… The super-objective is the character's ultimate, primal, unfulfilled need, that they work towards throughout the story.[340]

Moss's description speaks to the aspect of psychological motivation commonly associated with a character's super-objective in the Stanislavski-based approaches of many North American acting teachers, such as himself, Strasberg, Susan Batson, and Stella Adler. Perdekamp advocates against such an approach, due to a perceived inefficiency and ineffectiveness: "How can you really begin to know the psychological drivers of a character… how even aware are you of the psychological drivers of yourself?"[341] Working with both Perdekamp and Victoria, however, also leads me to believe that the psychological component of character is not discussed because it is completely dismissed, but simply because it does not need to be: as two sides of the same coin, the assumed implication is that the physical emotion movement pattern will also serve any psychological motivation, as the two are inextricably linked. Again, while on PEM's website the technique is claimed to be achieved "solely through the body,"[342] in interviews Perdekamp and Victoria tend to talk more of the physical body as the right "access point," as it is "more reliable" than working through a psychological lens.[343] The point is not to deny that the humans are psychological beings as well as physical beings, or that the actor must completely reject psychology in analysis and pursuit of character, but simply that if the right physicality is engaged, then the mind will follow suit. In this sense, although PEM does not define itself as such, the character work fits comfortably in a psychophysical canon.

Furthermore, the notion of Main Leading Centre and Subcentres strongly resonate

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[340] Moss, *The Intent To Live*, 20.

[341] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 17, 2017.

[342] pem-acting.com/about-pem/pem-explained

[343] Perdekamp and Victoria, interviews with author, March 17, 2017, November 6, 2018.

with Chekhov's use of the Imaginary Centre and Psychological (sometimes referred to as Archetypal) Gesture. In *To The Actor*'s chapter on Character and Characterisation, Chekhov discusses the Imaginary Body: the imagined 'fantasy' the actor creates of the character's body, which they are then instructed to mimic and "wear like a garment,"[344] in order to transform from themselves into the character and to "feel that [their] whole psychological and physical attitude" change.[345] The Imaginary Centre is added to this picture, and works similarly to the MLC:

> …the imaginary centre will suddenly or gradually co-ordinate all your movements, influence the entire bodily attitude, motivate your behaviour, action and speech, and tune your psychology in such a way that you will quite naturally experience the sensation that the thought element is germane and important to your performance.[346]

The Psychological Gesture (PG), by comparison, resonates with both the MLC and the super-objective in that "the core of the PG is in the actor defining what the character's strongest wish is."[347] The distinctiveness of the PG from the super-objective is that it "expresses the character's strongest wish in a physical and imagistic way," and is a physical movement, developed through rehearsal to "include the whole body, so that the final expression is both postural and gestural."[348] This ability to affect and co-ordinate the entire actor's body aligns closely with the purpose of the MLC.

5.8 The Imagination and PEM Character Work

In working with PGs, physical action is used to strongly invoke the imagination, and,

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[344] Chekhov, *To The Actor,* 87.

[345] Ibid: 89.

[346] Ibid.

[347] Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 125.

[348] Ibid.

as Kemp states, on a neural level this occurs as the activity "stimulates the imagination through the neuronal links between motor activity and conceptual thought."[349] This in turn is Chekhov's pathway to accessing the character's emotions and feelings:

> So we may say the *strength* of the movement stirs our will power in general; the *kind* of movement awakens in us a definite corresponding desire, and the *quality* of the same movement conjures up our feelings.[350]

In its emotion training, PEM discourages the use of imagination, to focus purely on the discipline of engaging the physiological movement pattern, as the imagination is "less reliable."[351] This discipline is clear through the workshop instruction, and also through PEM's own writing about its pedagogy.[352] However, in the application to character, the imagination becomes clearly integrated. As seen through Victoria's example of the dog biting the child's calf,[353] programming the character's subcentres requires the imagination of the physical sensations of a character's memory in specific parts of the body. Furthermore, it was my own experience that as soon as the MLC and SCs were activated, and I allowed myself to relinquish control to the leading centres and character's physicality on the rehearsal room floor for a concentrated period of time, my imagination erupted and visceral images flowed.[354] This experience was compounded when text was added to the equation: in exploring *Hamlet*'s Act II Scene 1 soliloquy, I vividly saw images and felt a tangible sensory experience — the funeral procession of my father, my mother in a

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[349] Kemp, *Embodied Acting,* 125.

[350] Chekhov, *To The Actor*, 63.

[351] Stephan Perdekamp, interview with author, March 17, 2017.

[352] As noted, their website defines PEM as providing "guidable access to the emotions on a purely physical basis." pem-acting.com/about-pem/pem-explained

[353] As discussed in Chapter 3.5.

[354] Wellington Workshop, December 2016.

death shroud, the clammy clasp of my uncle's hand on her shoulder, and the cold of snow, all felt present in the room — and this series of images, in reciprocal interplay with the internal emotional war arising within me of fury and grief, was immense: this moment of embodied imagination was one of the most visceral experiences I have ever felt as an actor, through any technique. Such an experience is completely in line with the purpose of Chekhov's psychophysical techniques. As Chekhov states, "the actor imagines with his body. He *cannot avoid* gesturing or moving without responding to his own internal influences."[355] My experiences in working with *Hamlet*, therefore, might be referred to as *psychophysical sensations* — as it involved a dynamic interplay of body, physiology, intellect, and imagination, looping and building off each other.

However, when discussing my experience with Victoria, she cautioned against attaching to this imaginative dimension, as the images, like memories, were unreliable markers if I was to try to recreate the same performance multiple times. Her advice was to return to the physical triggers, and specific focuses in the body. This was echoed by Rik Stowman, who clarified that it was not necessarily a problem if images arose through the technique, so long as the physical and body elements were the initial stimulus:

> PEM defines the actor's job as the craft of moving energies into movement on a technical level. What this means as regards to imagination is simple. Images may come up but it is the "energies into movement" that must always take priority. If images arise then that's fine as long as it doesn't interfere or interrupt with the movement of energy in the body. We just don't put the cart (mental ideation) before the horse (energy/physical reality). When it comes to repeating a movement then this becomes critical. The mind is a reality simulator. It simulates experience which means it will simulate past movement. Except it takes shortcuts and gives you a simulacrum/facsimile of the experience with a subsequent reduction in energy. When we consider that the mind was not designed to move the body but rather to replay movements

[355] Chekhov, *To The Actor,* 89.

> without affecting or disturbing the body then you see the problem. We must always repeat physically as we would if we were juggling. This worries people who misunderstand emotion as a psychological process. But emotion is physical and so can be trained and repeated physically.[356]

Stowman provides succinct clarification of the PEM approach, and makes a logical and compelling argument for its benefits. This clarification is particularly important, because it highlights a misunderstanding about the role of the imagination that many participants noted in learning PEM through workshop instruction. Of those that were dismissive of the technique, a recurring reason why was because PEM "was not fun" due to a perceived "dismissal" or "removal" of the actor's imagination.[357] As Stowman illustrates, that is not PEM's aim. Rather, it is the sequence of stimulus that is important: physical movement and energy before imagined response, as opposed to the other way around. Again, this is a sequence that Stanislavski eventually advocated in his own approach.[358]

At the same time, if PEM is viewed through a deeper understanding of the interrelated nature of mind and body, imagination and sensation, emotion and feeling, and considering the earlier hypothesis of PEM as ultimately psychophysical in nature,[359] then it can be argued that, on some level, all of PEM — both its character work, as well as its emotional triggers — can be considered acts of imagination. Or, perhaps more aptly, *embodied* or *physical* imagination. As performance theorist David Zinder states:

> …these two elements (body and imagination) of the human organism are in fact not separable, but exist in some reciprocal, mutually supportive relationship within a single organising

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[356] Rik Stowman, email correspondence with author, April 24, 2019.

[357] As discussed in Chapter 4.2, 4.3, 4.4.

[358] As discussed in Chapter 2.3, 2.4.

[359] As discussed in Chapter 5.3.

principle of human existence — the bodymind.[360]

In practical instruction to actors, however, making a distinction between body and mind is still arguably necessary, particularly for drama school students. Of all those interviewed for this study, not one student comfortably understood how mind and body work as one, and found this concept difficult to grasp. Therefore it is understandable techniques such as PEM make a pedagogical distinction between *physiological (body)* and *psychological (mind)*, and hold actors to the discipline of learning and practicing the essential physiological building blocks of the technique first. As Perdekamp explains, "in Western culture, the brain has been awarded dominance over the body," and thus such a relationship needs re-balancing through training.[361] From observation and interviews, it is clear students can better grasp the technique if they commit to experiencing the physiological sensation first, and don't add the complication of questioning the role of the imagination until they reach character work. However, more clarification about how the imagination does become part of the work, as PEM approaches character, would perhaps be useful for quelling some of the misunderstanding and opposition to the technique evidenced through this study.

5.9 Risks of PEM

PEM arguably enhances the actor's wellbeing, through clearing habitual emotional blockages and re-training the actor's innate emotional movement patterns to work optimally, as they were biologically intended.[362] The working hypothesis dictates that emotions are neither good nor bad, as the interplay of all are necessary and

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[360] David Zinder, "The Actor Imagines With His Body – Michael Chekhov: An Examination Of The Phenomenon," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 17 no. 1 (2007): 7.

[361] PEM Educational Handout, 4.

[362] Discussion of PEM and Wellness takes place in Chapter 5.12.

essential for survival and, if Damasio's argument that the emotions are intrinsically linked to homeostasis is accepted, optimal health.[363] In PEM's argument, the only way emotions can become unhealthy, therefore, is if they become repressed or trapped, unable to be physically executed, expressed and then released.[364]

If this argument is followed through, however, does not a problem therefore emerge for the actor when they approach character, and must layer in the blockages and tensions of that character (the *subcentres*), into their body? In other words, is the actor simply not then creating emotional suppressions that are, by definition, harmful? Perdekamp's response is that a trained PEM actor, who has mastered the essential emotional exercises, can adopt and then clear subcentres quite easily. The PEM actor trains in emotional athleticism; the system is prepared specifically for the demands of characterisation and performance. If there *is* difficulty coming 'out of role' in a performance — in PEM vernacular, the inability to clear the energy of the performance — then the actor is simply prescribed the training exercise connected to the emotion they are having difficulty clearing. For example, if the performer has layered in *fear* energy and memory into the lower body as a subcentre,[365] then the actor would be prescribed fear exercises to rid themselves of this, in the event of it lingering after performance. In the case of fear, one such exercise requires the actor to build up an intensity of breath alongside the charge of fear (activating the *sexual organs backwards*) over the span of a couple of minutes until it reaches a high level, and then breaking into a sprint until the energy is dispelled.

When Victoria is asked about the risks of the subcentres, she responds that: "acting

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[363] Antonio Damasio, *The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feeling and the Making of Cultures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2018), 1-52.

[364] Sarah Victoria, during workshop instruction, December 6, 2016, March 3, 2017, March 28, 2018.

[365] For example, using the instruction Victoria gave earlier in the chapter.

is ultimately a physical activity… like an athlete, there are steps one can take to minimise risk of injury, but there will always be a degree of physical cost, through the exertion and depletion of energy required."[366] Whilst PEM desires to provide a safer pathway in and out of deep emotional territories, it cannot change the fact that territory must be accessed physically for the actor to execute their job. However, the exercises assigned to 'step out' of the role are very practical, effective, and help mitigate emotional risks incurred.

5.10 Scoring the Emotions versus Actions

Scoring the text according to the underlying emotional shifts of the characters is, at first glance, controversial, as it seems to directly contradict the instruction of well-supported Stanislavski-based methods that instruct the playing of action, not emotion. However, it must be clarified that emotion, as it is defined by Perdekamp, could be interpreted as a form of action, in that it is a physical, holistic body state, that involves the coordination of the entire organism in a holistic *movement*. So, for example, if the emotion of aggression is examined through its movement pattern (to push through), then there is direct correlation to a coterie of actions playable in a Stanislavski-based method: for example, *press, force, intimidate, bulldoze.* In basic principle then, scoring the text with Perdekamp's emotions is not as dissimilar to scoring the test with Stanislavskian actions as we might first have thought. Actor Michelle Minnick, through working with Richard Schechner on *Rasaesthetics*, makes a similar observation about the connection between emotion and action: "One of the things I have discovered in working with the Rasaboxes is that, contrary to the training we have inherited from Stanislavsky, emotion, when fully played out through the body, can become action."[367] Through the lens of PEM, an actor's objective or

[366] Sarah Victoria, interview with author, March 29, 2018. Also discussed in Jones, *Innate Patterns of Emotion,* 37.

[367] Schechner, "Rasaesthetics," 41.

action derives not from a theoretical concept derived from a script, but from the visceral, immediate drives of the body. Training actors to use PEM means putting them back in touch with their own sensory, sensual lives, and means reconnecting them with the innate source of action within themselves. As Perdekamp, Damasio, and Schechner argue, this source is, ultimately, emotion itself.[368]

An argument against PEM's approach might be that such an approach lacks a specificity of action, and therefore a performance might lack detail and nuance. Certainly, teachers of Stanislavski-based methods often point to the specific choice of action as both the actor's talent (echoing Stella Adler's famous instruction, "in your choices lies your talent,")[369] and artistry (current prominent North American acting coach Joan Scheckel tells actors "the nuance of action is what gives our art form elegance").[370] Those for PEM might counter-argue that the most effective action words contain many tactics of playing and achieving those actions, and thus the emotions simply contain the opportunity for multiple tactics of action that can be instinctively employed in the scene depending on what happens live in the moment of playing. For example, Toi Whakaari Director of Actor Training, Heather Timms, teaches that action words are most effective when they contain many subtle variances inside them: there are many ways one can play *intimidate*, for example, and thus the action can stay live each time the scene is replayed, if the actor can find new ways of playing that action in relationship to the possibilities served up by the other actor in the moment.[371]

PEM's approach of using the emotional score finds support and resonances with

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[368] See: Schechner, "Rasaesthetics,"and Damasio, *The Strange Order of Things,* 1-51.

[369] Stella Adler, *The Technique of Acting* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 4.

[370] Jack Barry, interview with author, May 2, 2019. Barry trained with Scheckel in 2018.

[371] As observed through class instruction, Actor in Action, April 2017.

other techniques. Schechner's *Rasaesthetics*, for example, echoes PEM's use of an emotional score, and similarly employs emotional "recipes" to create and inform character.[372] Schechner's work trains actors in its own set of basic emotions, and then uses them as foundational tools to create the atmosphere of the scene.[373] Like *Rasaesthetics*, PEM is not necessarily meant to supplant other forms of actor training, but can be used effectively in combination with them.[374] While Stanislavski-based text analysis "can still be used effectively to answer the *what* questions of acting,"[375] PEM can be used, in conjunction, to answer the *how* questions. The PEM emotional framework is intended to give the actor the ability to play specific tonalities in their work, and rhythms, which can be modulated just as the pitch/key or the tempo/rhythm of a piece of music can be modulated. This approach of using "emotional recipes," as Schechner discusses, has a long history in Kathakali, Indian and other eastern approaches to performance, where working with the emotions as base layer is key to Rasa tradition, which he compares to working with Stanislavski:

> According to my interpretation of the [*Natyasastra*] rasic system, one can work directly on the emotions, mixing them according to "recipes" known to the great acting gurus (which means, simply, "teachers") — or even by devising new recipes. From a Stanislavskian vantage, such direct work on the emotions will result in false or mechanical acting. But anyone who has seen performers thoroughly trained in the rasic system knows these performers are every bit as effective as performers trained in Stanislavsky.[376]

My own observations and experiments offer comparable support to PEM: performers trained in this technique, and solely using PEM in performance, are equally as effective as Stanislavski-based approaches. Yet these experiments also

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[372] Schechner, "Rasaesthetics," 33.

[373] Ibid.

[374] Giller, "Das Emotionsbild des Schauspielers," 34.

[375] Schechner, "Rasaesthetics," 44.

[376] Schechner, "Rasaesthetics," 33.

point to the success of *integrating* PEM with a Stanislavski-based text approach. Students appreciate the scaffolding and architecture of a role that actioning provides; it works both to get them clearer on their job throughout a script, and serves their intellectual need to apply analytical logic to the development of character. In my own acting work, I find myself switching between the two, almost seamlessly — in analysing the text, I will score it both with units of action, and with an emotional score. The point I find in this approach is continually to layer the character's action deeper into the body, to work towards the embodiment of my imagination of the character, and that character's imagined circumstances. I find the most success in working with student actors is derived through attacking the problem of character through multiple approaches, and have found PEM provides a strong compliment to other techniques. For example, PEM deepens the investigation of Stanislavskian action, and provides a reliable tool to embody that action on an emotional level. While PEM instructors might understandably advocate for PEM to be used as a sole and distinct system, PEM's ability to be integrated with Stanislavski-based approaches should be celebrated, as this increases its potential implementation into actor's professional toolkits, and drama school curricula. For an emerging acting system such as PEM, this attribute seems crucial to its survival.

5.11 Evaluating Participant Reactions to PEM

A noticeable trend amongst a majority of participants of screen experiments and workshop instruction was that, despite finding value in PEM, they would not pursue it further, or utilise it as the basis for their primary technique. The comments of Valeria Mendoza-Davis were indicative of this position, and echoed many of the Toi Whakaari students surveyed who rejected the possibility of further instruction, training or implementation of PEM into their own acting approach.[377] For those that

[377] See Chapter 4.7.

stated this, a key and recurring criticism given against PEM was that it made acting "too scientific." This key anxiety about the technique extends beyond Toi Whakaari, and is a trend PEM practitioners have faced worldwide. Furthermore, it is an anxiety that arguably goes far beyond any acting methodology, into an essential tension between art and science. Such a binary is reminiscent of the cultural effects of Cartesian Dualism, where art versus science, emotion versus rationality, body versus mind, are all related to the same essential artificial division, between what is explainable, and what is not.

As Rhonda Blair explains, while this has always been a tension, there seems to be an increase of anxiety in artistic communities about the influence of neuroscience and cognitive science, in the misunderstanding that it may create a formula for art itself, and that it may reduce human beings to mere physiological and electrochemical processes. This was an underlying fear that seemed clearly identifiable in negative student feedback towards PEM at Toi Whakaari. Furthermore, Mendoza-Davis's fear about the reduction of the actor's choices[378] inside PEM perhaps is reminiscent of what Blair states is the essential tension between art and science:

> The fear that science will take away the part of us that has choice, that makes art, that makes democracy possible. This is possibly the point at which anxieties about the end of theatre — and maybe humanity, for want of better way of putting it — arise. Interestingly, I am convinced the reverse is true.[379]

Like Blair, I am also convinced the reverse is true. For an actor or artist, increasing one's understanding of the human condition, and all the insight that science, psychology and other fields of research can offer us about the intricacies of that condition, only increases the detail and artistry one can apply to the rendering of a role, or creation of a story. The actor's job, after all, is the physical rendering of the

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[378] See Chapter 4.6.

[379] Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action,* 12.

human condition in all its varying states of extremis, light and shade, and acute and mundane moments in a character's life. As we learn more about how biology drives behaviour as much as psychology does, and how neuroscience offers more insights than ever into the nature of emotion, consciousness and the decision making of individuals, acting techniques can only benefit from understanding and leveraging such knowledge into deeper, more authentic embodiment of characters. As Roach explores, the best acting theorists throughout history have always leveraged science in this way, from Diderot to Stanislavski, from Strasberg to Bloch.[380] Acting is craft, not an act of divine inspiration — knowledge deepens that craft, not dulls it.

5.12 PEM and Wellness

The question of whether PEM can contribute to greater wellness for the actor is core to this entire debate. In light of international studies that illustrate the relative unwellness of actors,[381] this is a question that extends beyond the simple efficacy of PEM as an acting technique: if PEM indeed supports greater degrees of wellness for actors, there is an ethical imperative for drama schools to investigate its implementation, and a compelling reason for trained actors to investigate it. This question is difficult to answer conclusively, due to the subjective interpretation of how "wellness" is defined, and to the shortness of this study and its inability to track PEM participant data over many years. Yet there is significant evidence to suggest that there are several ways that PEM can, and does, offer several potential benefits to the actor's wellbeing.

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[380] Stephen M. Archer and Joseph R. Roach, "The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting," *Theatre Journal* 38, no. 3 (1986): 377.

[381] Prior et al, "Responsible care in actor training: effective support for occupational health training in drama schools,"*Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 6 no. 1 (2015): 59-71, and Szlawieniec-Haw, "Telling Tales Within School."

The first is, simply, that it provides auxiliary benefit through being a viable alternative to the practice of Emotion Memory which, as outlined throughout this thesis, can be harmful to the actor.[382] As stated in the introduction, Emotion Memory arguably only works when it mines the actor's "unresolved" feelings — feelings that are particularly acute, cause on-going disruption or distress and, potentially, have become psychologically problematic.[383] Working in this way may keep actors in an unhealthy and unnecessary attachment to these unresolved feelings and traumas, in the belief these are required to do their job effectively. The reliance on Emotion Memory, then, can lock the actor into believing they must suffer in order to create character, as not only do they need to literally feel the suffering of the character, but their own personal suffering must be kept intact to produce their best work. As Toi Whakaari Senior Tutor Bert van Dijk states, this is a vicious cycle that can have "devastating effects on the wellness of the actor."[384] PEM, by comparison, removes personal experience as an emotional trigger point, and its training pedagogy is based on clearing the physiological effects of trapped emotion and feelings, as opposed to leveraging them.

While a key PEM advantage is that it affords the actor the ability to convincingly play emotions that are outside their own experience, it also allows them to more safely play emotions that are very *close* to their own experiences. This is especially important if those relatable experiences include immense personal trauma or distress, for instance, when playing a scene involving physical or sexual assault. Toi Whakaari Senior Tutor, Chris Jannides, identified PEM's ability to support an actor convincingly acting a character's trauma, without accessing or aggravating one's

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[382] As discussed in Chapter 1, 2.3, 2.5.

[383] Cited through personal communication with Toi Whakaari Senior Tutor, Bert van Dijk.

[384] Bert van Dijk, email correspondence with author, April 17, 2019.

similar personal trauma, as clearly supporting greater wellbeing.[385]

Just as PEM's pedagogy is designed to educate actors to separate pure, biological *emotion* from personal, culturally-conditioned *feelings*, it educates actors to make clear distinctions between *acting* and *living*, character and self. *Acting* involves engaging the will in the activation of emotions, and is a craft serving the embodied rendering of character. *Living* is the actor's personal life, feelings and psyche, outside of their work. If there is a key difference between PEM and other systems, it is perhaps its dedicated discipline and devotion to maintaining this delineation at all levels of its method and pedagogy. This robust delineation between character and self, work and life, likely provides benefit to the actor's mental and emotional wellbeing, and may also grant the actor more objectivity over their own practice, which in turn may help actors take critique less personally. Many actors find this difficult, as "the actor *is* the work."[386]

Furthermore, the degree of emotional control PEM provides the actor is significant. As Jack Parker states, "Working with PEM is like having your body on fire, but your head in the freezer."[387] This is an apt description that recalls my own experience. Whilst the body holistically experiences the purity and intensity of the emotion state, the mind remains calm, somewhat detached from that experience, perhaps safe in the understanding that the actor has made the decision to act, and any external or internal threat is *imagined* rather than providing literal, immediate danger. Additionally, interviewees cited this level of control, and psychological separation from the physiological emotion state, as a means to providing more essential safety between actors. As Jessica Quilter states, "the ability to be both

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[385] Chris Jannides, conversation with author, April 28, 2019.

[386] Moss, *The Intent To Live*, 13.

[387] Jack Parker, interview with author, March 10, 2017.

deeply, physically, inside the emotions and also be able to kind of monitor them, is that you never worry about losing control or harming the other actor. As a woman, I found this very reassuring and empowering, both for myself and for the other actor."[388] Quilter's point is significant, as it highlights dangers of losing the control of emotions through techniques that blur boundaries between acting and reality. Certainly, there is evidence suggesting this to be a potential danger of Strasberg's approach, where the actor uses their own experiences and personality as core ingredients.[389] Anecdotes of actors losing control through the Method abound. Daniel Day-Lewis, in method-acting *Hamlet* as part of the RSC, famously believed he saw the ghost of his own father, and was so emotionally disturbed he never returned to the stage: "I don't think I had a breakdown, but I daresay I wasn't that far from it… I depleted myself to the point where I had nothing left."[390] More recently, as Michelle Williams and Ryan Gosling filmed *Blue Valentine*, they became entangled in their own personal, volatile relationship as a result of going too deeply into character immersion.[391]

PEM's "reliability" was also cited a key factor in providing increased wellness.[392] Many interviewed, such as Jon Hunter and Jack Parker, pointed to PEM's ability to reduce their own performance anxiety as it removes the "guess work" of achieving emotion. As Parker attests,

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[388] Jessica Quilter, interview with author, August 23, 2017.

[389] Richard Brody, "Is Method Acting Destroying Actors?" New Yorker, accessed March 1, 2019. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/is-method-acting-destroying-actors

[390]Simon Hattenstone, "In The Name Of The Father," The Guardian, 2003. https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/feb/28/artsfeatures.danieldaylewis

[391] Katy Hall, "Blue Valentine: How Derek Cianfrance Destroyed Michelle Williams and Ryan Gosling's Marriage," Huffington Post, 2011. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/blue-valentine-how-derek_b_819497

[392] Jon Hunter, interview with author, March 5, 2019.

> I used to stay up all night, working myself into a frenzy before any emotional scene…. And then crucify myself when, inevitably, the scene never met my expectations or I just couldn't get there… this work was my first step to worry about it less. So, immediately, there was less suffering involved in my approach.[393]

Similarly, PEM offers tangible strategies to deal with other aspects of performance anxiety and professional pressures, such as preparation for auditions, pre-performance nerves, and the disappointment of failing to book a role. As actor Cohen Holloway states, these pressures are often underestimated, as "the worst part of acting no one talks about is auditions… the gut churning fear of not getting the role, of not being able to pay the rent, is right there in the room with you, sitting on your shoulder. Once you get the role you have less nerves… auditioning is the difference between eating or not."[394] In my own experience, I use many of the emotion techniques consistently on a day-to-day basis, in teaching and in meetings, not to achieve overt emotional expression towards an acting situation, but to regulate my own emotions more effectively in response to situations of pressure. For example, activating the *heart open in all directions* combined with diaphragmatic breathing is effectively calming in any situation of nervousness; *low level force liver forwards,* is particularly useful in bringing one's voice forward and focusing in a busy meeting. The somatic education provided through PEM, in both becoming more aware of my emotions and feelings, and having clear techniques to alter those states when required, has provided measurable improvement in my own wellbeing. Many PEM participants reported similar experiences, and benefits, through gaining deeper understanding of their own emotional processes. As Jon Hunter explains:

> Understanding the emotions in a new way was deeply impactful upon me as a teacher, as an actor, and as a person. PEM teaches you to reframe the emotions and gives you tangible tools to manage them. This gave me a new permission to explore the emotions in a way I've resisted in the past, both as an actor *and* as

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[393] Jack Parker, email correspondence with author, May 21, 2019.

[394] Cohen Holloway, conversation with author, May 6, 2019.

> a person, because of my own negative associations with them. In this way PEM has changed my orientation to acting pedagogy… but also to many aspects of my emotional life… it has distinctly improved my own emotional wellbeing.[395]

Another benefit is found through PEM's focus on techniques to *de-role* or *step out* of performance. This is an important aspect of the actor's craft many neglect. Returning to the Sydney University survey, over 40% of Australian actors find it challenging to let go of an emotionally demanding role; only a small percentage of those reported a dedicated warm down routine. Whilst professional athletes pay equal attention to warm down and recovery as they do to preparation and warming up, many New Zealand actors interviewed, echoing their Australian counterparts, have no dedicated ritual to finishing a performance, and substitute with strategies such as alcohol consumption. As actor Jade Daniels observes,

> In theatre… the warm down really is beers and conversations at the bar. It's a celebration or commiseration mentality. Either, shit, I was awful, let's drink, or wow, I was amazing, let's celebrate with a drink. The cynical view, of course, is that our industry actually depends on this... the livelihood of theatres is dependent on actors injecting what they earn back into the bar afterwards.[396]

PEM practitioners are particularly attuned to exercises that support this 'coming down,' from its diaphragmatic wobbling techniques to the specific essential emotion-training exercises. These exercises are remarkably efficient, as a few minutes of diaphragmatic wobbling in addition to three to four minutes of an emotion clearing exercise are sufficient to clear most energetic residue generated through performance. Furthermore, if the actor is adept at PEM they will arguably create less pent up residue through performance in the first place.

Finally, many participants spoke to the cathartic effect of the emotion clearing

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[395] Jon Hunter, interview with author, March 5, 2019.

[396] Jade Daniels, personal communication with author, March 14, 2018.

exercises. The exercises allow actors to both become more aware of what already exists, and then to clear those energies. This was explicitly identified in the Court Youth Company workshop where participants were almost euphoric after the Fear clearing exercises, and discussed how the effect of the ongoing Christchurch earthquakes had meant the emotion of fear was a constant, buried energy in them.[397] Exposure to the fear clearing exercises, such as the fear run, produced strong release amongst the group, and many commented on an experience of catharsis. Although an overt example, many other participants identified the relaxation generated after a PEM session: they would be physically tired, yet emotionally released and relaxed, "not unlike an intense hot yoga session."[398] To me, the process of learning about one's own emotions through PEM echoes Mindfulness meditation practice, as it builds an awareness of what is already existing emotionally, and reframes those feelings as neither negative nor positive, but rather, simply present.[399] Mindfulness practice affords a practitioner strategies to untether themselves from the mercy of such feelings, just as PEM does: I've observed similar wellbeing benefits from the practice of both.

In weighing the observations, interviews and personal experiences of this study, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that PEM provides a safer approach to emotion compared to those techniques that use personal experience in the production of emotion. There are also potential benefits to the actor's overall wellbeing, through the somatic and physiological education practitioners receive through PEM instruction. Additionally, the clear distinctions PEM maintains between character and self, acting and reality, may safeguard instances of psychological

[397] Discussed in Chapter 3.3.

[398] Acacia O'Conner, interview with author, March 14, 2017.

[399] Mindfulness is a form of meditation practice, which recent studies illustrate can produce distinct wellness benefits. See: Yi-Yuan Tang, *The Neuroscience of Mindfulness Meditation: How the Body and Mind Work Together to Change Our Behaviour (*Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

transference that can occur between actors working together through other approaches where such distinctions are less clear or, as in the case of some aspects of method acting, *purposefully* blurred.[400] The ability to work with extreme forces of emotion, whilst maintaining control, minimises risk of actors hurting each other in scenes of violence, conflict, or intimacy. Whilst PEM is not the only technique that can offer such potential benefits, few can provide its specialist instruction and care in both the activation of emotion, and the safeguarding of the effects of that emotion, in such a complete system. These wellness benefits of PEM's emotion training are now being successfully applied in a therapeutic capacity, in its work with autism.[401] From observing its accelerating growth in this capacity, it is possible PEM's therapeutic applications may eventually outweigh its popularity and uptake as an acting system.

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[400] The danger of psychological transference for actors is discussed by Raymond Hamden, "Clinical and Forensic Psychology," Dubai Today. Arabian Radio Network. Dubai. April, 2010.

[401] As discussed in the introduction.

Fig. 10. Jack Parker. *Revulsion Mask*, 2017. Toi Whakaari. Photographer Jon Hunter.

CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION

In 2019, a book will be released in Germany that is the first documented account of learning and working with PEM. The account is written by Aaron Wahl, an autistic man who has found significant improvement in his ability to process and manage emotion through its practice. In one section, Wahl asks Perdekamp if he can write a book about PEM, to share what he feels is an important discovery with the world. Perdekamp responds: "The question is not if it will work for them… but if they want to hear our message."[402] At the conclusion of this study, this quote is salient. In theory and practice, there is evidence to support Perdekamp's claim that PEM 'works.' Yet there is further evidence to show, as Perdekamp portends, it may continue to struggle to achieve wider uptake.

Overall, this project provides corroboration of PEM's claim as an acting technique that facilitates repeatable and efficient access to the emotions. Sufficient research supports its emotional theory, from the studies accredited in Vienna that confirm the technique's ability to produce measurable change in the autonomous nervous system, to the arguments by notable neuroscientists and behavioural psychologists, such as Damasio and Ekman, who align with PEM's definition of the emotions as universal biological mechanisms defined by their physiological affect. While further scientific studies are required to verify how the organ-emotion relationship functions, the research of this thesis offers insight into how this process could occur.[403] As more scientific studies are undertaken in the field of neurobiology, it is highly possible that further connections between the viscera and emotions are

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[402] Wahl, *A Gateway To Your World,* 78.

[403] As discussed in Chapter 5.3.

established and accepted.

There is also a clear space for PEM in the acting field. Reviewing the history of acting methodologies shows that the problem of embodying convincing emotion has been a longstanding area of struggle, as well as key to mastering the craft. PEM therefore is a tool that should be of interest to all actors.[404] Furthermore, as neuroscientists such as Damasio and LeDoux point us further towards the influence of the body's essential biology and requirement to maintain homeostasis as an elementary key in determining behaviour, even more impactful and more deeply affecting than psychological motivations, the use of an acting technique able to tap into those essential biological impulses makes cogent sense.[405] Like Damasio, PEM identifies emotion as the ultimate source of all motivated behaviour and has developed its technique accordingly; this foundational principle is what ultimately sets PEM apart from most other approaches.[406] Because of this position, PEM will not appeal to everyone, and this premise will undoubtedly alienate those who are aligned with acting canons that identify psychology as the primary key to character.

However, pedagogically, PEM may be comfortably integrated with a variety of psychophysical techniques. This ability is important in considering PEM's potential inclusion in drama school curricula. Furthermore, it increases its ability to be included in screen training programmes where PEM presents particularly strong potential application. This potential is twofold. Firstly, from a practical perspective, the provision of on-demand, repeatable and scaled emotion is incredibly valuable when dealing with the complex technical requirements and time-sensitive pressures of screen work. Secondly, preparation for screen performance is typically an isolated

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[404] As discussed in Chapter 2.

[405] As discussed in Chapter 2.

[406] Damasio, *The Strange Order of Things*, 1-51.

process in comparison to theatre.[407] In lieu of working with a company through an extended rehearsal process, the actor approaches a role alone with limited directorial and collegial support, and yet is expected to arrive ready to meet the performative emotional requirements on the day of filming. Pressure is compounded due to the time-sensitive nature of working across television and film and its significant associated costs. When adding the potential psychological risks of an approach that ties personal experience to character, such as Emotion Memory, we perhaps are given insight into a particularly combustible working practice. PEM provides a dependable alternative that can help mitigate anxiety and emotional harm both through preparation and performance of such projects, as well as providing clear techniques to de-role when required. This ability is an aspect of its claim of supporting greater wellness in actors.[408]

The conclusion of this study supports Bloch's argument that training the emotions warrants inclusion alongside the training of the voice, body, and intellect in drama school curricula.[409] In the same way that practicing scales gains greater dexterity for a pianist through repeated neuronal patterning, practicing the controllable physiological features of specific emotions can increase the actor's ability to express emotion in response to fictional circumstances, either through their own conscious choice, or through an involuntary response to an imaginative stimulus. This second point is important: even if PEM and Alba are not used as primary methodologies for an actor, using them to train greater access to a broader palette of emotions will benefit the actor who subsequently uses *any* character methodology. PEM trains emotional athleticism; once these muscles are stretched and activated, they can be employed in multiple acting situations.

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[407] Merlin, *Acting: The Basics*, 146.

[408] As discussed in Chapter 5.13.

[409] Bloch et al, "Effector Patterns of Basic Emotions," 222.

In specifically considering PEM's inclusion into a conservatoire drama school curriculum, it is important to consider the student feedback gathered through this study while simultaneously being wary of making decisions at the mercy of it. Deep learning generally arrives with challenge, and repetition. Piano scales are boring and repetitive to the neophyte pianist; they form the basis of advanced technique and artistic expression. Learning, therefore, is not always pleasant; yet there nonetheless is an understandable tendency for students to avoid methods that initially seem complex and detailed to learn, in favour of working in more familiar or more entertaining ways, mistaking, perhaps, the idea of being 'free' and 'playful' in their work as the sole requirement in developing mastery.[410] While student feedback was generally positive towards PEM, the fact that many said they would not continue to explore the technique perhaps illustrates the difficulty of including a technique as structured and as disciplined as PEM alongside other, arguably less technical or 'repetitive' training approaches, such as Meisner or Gaulier, where there is a focus on freedom, play, and improvisation. Drama school administrators and curriculum directors will need to weigh popularity against necessity; while a physiological-based emotion-training technique such as PEM may not ever achieve the approval ranking of other approaches, it provides a tool that will provide a worthwhile inclusion into an actor's toolkit.

It is important to note, however, that the practice of activating physiological triggers is not the only way to train the emotions. Both Rick Kemp and Rhonda Blair, drama theorists working at the cutting edge of the meeting of neuroscience and performance, illustrate how the intersection of physical action and imagination can stimulate equally powerful performance results.[411] Training the use of the imagination, when separated from direct autobiographical experience, should

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[410] As discussed in Chapter 4.2.

[411] Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action,* and Kemp, *Embodied Acting.*

remain elemental to any acting institution: the issue is that some teachers confuse imagination as purely a mental exercise, rather than an embodied one. Psychophysical techniques which acknowledge the unified complex of the bodymind, such as Chekhov, and late-Stanislavski, remain as vital as ever to the actor. Yet, as proven through this study, PEM offers a formidable adjunct to those systems, and can work symbiotically in harmony with them.

At present, this is the role PEM is perhaps best suited to inside drama school curricula: a complementary inclusion rather than core methodology. This is not a reflection on the legitimacy of PEM, but rather a reflection on what is best taught in a conservatoire environment that must cater to a broad and diverse student base. Through comparing the success of the Wellington Workshop and the Court Youth Theatre Workshop[412] with the more varied reception at Toi Whakaari, PEM works best for students who come to it of their own volition rather than for whom it is prescribed as part of a curriculum. For those who see the value in its raison d'être, PEM offers a comprehensive training system that will likely deliver on its claims; for those who do not, PEM may be frustrating and prove divisive.[413]

Furthermore, rejection of PEM by some workshop participants occurred even when the technique proved effective. Mendoza-Davis, as explained, found fault with the technique for being "too easy," making her feel she was cheating her audience of 'deeper' authenticity. Returning to Al Pacino's quote ("the actor becomes an emotional athlete. The process is painful. My personal life suffers…")[414] is salient — it seems that the popular notion of suffering as a core requirement for great acting is one that is difficult for many actors to relinquish, and this reinforces suspicion

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[412] Highlighted in Chapter 4.3.

[413] As discussed in Chapter 4.

[414] Arnold, "Tower of Babbleonia for Pacino," 35.

about PEM. For all these reasons, PEM is perhaps best taught in its own specialised and bespoke training environment. Until drama administrations and teachers can effectively address this culture of 'suffering for the art' that permeates student bias, alternatives to producing emotion may continue to lack significant uptake inside conservatoire curricula.[415]

This study also points to further research to be done. Although a small data size, the difficulty of Māori and Pacific Island students in learning PEM warrants further investigation.[416] Additional scientific, empirical testing, when appropriate technology becomes available and is funded, would help definitively answer the organ-emotion question; such testing may quell suspicion about this aspect of PEM and widen its appeal to broader audiences. Broader testing over a larger data sample of diverse demographics to determine whether PEM-derived emotion is more or less 'effective' to an audience than Stanislavski-derived emotion may also quell the fear of actors such as Mendoza-Davis.

Finally, it is interesting to touch further upon the fear that PEM, through its very clinical approach to actor training, and its interest in the intersection between science and art, removes something of the *magic* of the art form of acting. There seems to be an underlying anxiety, as Blair states, that such approaches may turn actors into mere electrochemical automatons, incapable of capturing the deeper chaos and inner messiness that some link to our essential humanity.[417] It's a fear that is compounded, perhaps, when students find some aspects of the training challenging and confusing, such as the difference between *emotion* and *feeling,* and find the technique overwhelmingly technical. Certainly, the instruction of a

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[415] As was evidenced at Toi Whakaari.

[416] As discussed in Chapter 4.2, 4.7.

[417] As discussed in Chapter 5.11.

technique like PEM can at times feel laborious in its discipline, specificity, and repetition. Yet ultimately this study argues that, if a student follows through to master it, PEM can allow them to be a more complete actor: an athlete of emotion, and a magician of sorts, able to conjure emotions at will. It will also give them a greater education about their own inner emotional life, and new strategies to manage that life in a variety of situations.

Lifeblood of the stage, and of the screen, remains this *magic* of performance. This magic occurs when we as an audience are moved by a performance and experience the emotion of a character almost as if it were happening to us, as real, despite the awareness we are witnessing a fiction. This is the lived paradox at the heart of Diderot's provocation, and a paradox that new discoveries about the deeper nature of emotions are helping demystify, through uncovering these as biological mechanisms, at the core of what makes us human. The mastery of emotion is a key tool in provoking feeling in the audience, affecting their unconscious neural patterns of empathy, of imagination, of their own emotion. As Kemp has illustrated, when we witness 'real' emotion in another, our mirror neurons react in a way that means that, on some level, we are experiencing this emotion as if we were the person expressing it.[418] This is the ritual, perhaps, that the act of theatre and performance is founded upon: a ritual that can be understood, through the lens of neuroscience, as a series of biological mechanisms that can be controlled and manipulated with the right instruction. It is important that performance practitioners and educators continue to expand their knowledge of these mechanisms and instructions, just as figures such as Diderot, Stanislavski and Chekhov have done in their respective eras. If techniques emerge that offer even a small percentage of improvement in the wellbeing of drama students and actors, then there is ethical responsibility for drama administrations to investigate their application. Such investigation and trial will no doubt yield challenges and friction; the knowledge that this challenge and

[418] Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 84 -110.

friction is part of the investigative equation does not mitigate the doubt and fear that may emerge in the face of it. Yet in meeting such fear, Stanislavski's famous quotation provides guidance: "Moreover, and this is of primary importance, the organic bases of the laws of the nature on which our art is founded will protect you in the future from going down the wrong path."[419] The study of science and biology, if applied correctly, should free our art form, not cage it.

In this respect it is important to acknowledge the terrain that practitioners such as Perdekamp and his colleagues continue to traverse; whether one agrees with their techniques or not, one should respect their ongoing research and desire to close the gap between the artistic act of portraying life and life itself, and to give actors an ability to give their art a direct relevance, beyond entertainment. Too often PEM's 'message' has been dismissed without dialogue, and Perdekamp and his collaborators have been ignored as radicals, rather than as researchers, artists, colleagues. What is required from our current performance establishments is more discussion and debate, rather than repudiation and rejection. Only then can we move the process of acting forward, towards creating approaches that are more artful and yet at the same time more efficient and sustainable.

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[419] Stanislavski, *To The Actor,* 32.

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Appendix A: List of Interviewees

PEM Teachers
Stephan Perdekamp
Rik Stowman
Sarah Victoria

PEM Trained Actors (Australia)
Ella Hill-Cotter

2017 A3 Class
Logan Cole
Lutz Hamm
Jessica Quilter
Acacia O'Connor
Jack Parker
Olivia Parker
Sophie Wright

2017 A2 Class (Mise En Scène).
Isabella Austin
Darneen Christian
Marshayla Christie
Antony Crum
Andrew Eddy
Michael Hockey
Jessica Hong
Mate Lagae
Leo Maggs
Nathalie Morris
Shaquille Stirling
Mosese Vea'ila
Ashleigh Williams
Jane Wills

2017 A1 Class
Eden Wallace
Elizabeth Winders

2018 A1 Class
Ben Ashby
Shania Bailey-Edmonds
Ola Ratka

Toi Whakaari Graduates
Jack Barry
Emma Draper
Lydia Peckham
Justin Rogers
Valeria Mendoza-Davis
William Moffat

Christchurch Youth Workshop
Rachel Rygar
Harrison Seancke

Wellington Workshop 2016
Serena Cotton
Jon Hunter
Jonathan Martin

Others
Marcus Graham
Jade Daniels
Cohen Holloway
Chris Jannides

Appendix B: Valeria Mendoza-Davis
Video Supplement

This video contains excerpts from Screen Experiment 3, with Mendoza-Davis. It is edited for time, but illustrates an example of cycling through the basic emotions, application to text, and a range of organ combinations. A USB with the video file has been included, but the video can also be accessed at the link below.

It is important to note that, as Mendoza-Davis is still learning the technique, there are issues with the accuracy of the facial masks. Thus, in some instances, the emotions are not 'pure,' but rather contain blended secondary emotions.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/bpk8d7teyw5x7hg/Screen%20Experiments%20-%20VMD.mp4?dl=0

Password: PEM

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI
VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Phone 0-4-463 5480
Email susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz

MEMORANDUM

TO	Vaughan Slinn
Copied to	A/Prof David O'Donnell; Dr Lori Leigh
FROM	AProf Susan Corbett, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	20 September 2017
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	**Ethics Approval: 25133** Under The Lens: Perdekamp's Acting Methodology and Sustainable and Effective Emotional Practice in Screen Performance

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 1 May 2019. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Kind regards

Susan Corbett

Convener, Victoria University Human Ethics Committee

Appendix D: Toi Whakaari Approval Form

Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School

1 August 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to confirm that Vaughan Slinn has been given permission to carry out formal research at the kura. We understand this research will involve working with a small group of current students in workshops across Term 4 of 2017. Additionally, we understand that it may involve him using our contact database to find alumni to interview.

We understand it has been made clear to students that participation in these workshops is completely voluntary, and that declining to participate will have no implications in terms of their course work or assessment, or their professional relationship with Vaughan as tutor.

We trust Vaughan to carry out these workshops in a professional and ethical manner, and feel it will be a rich experience for students to be involved. Toi Whakaari supports this enquiry and feels that its findings are highly valuable both the school, and the wider acting community as a whole.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me directly.

Kind regards,

Heather Timms

Director of Actor Training

Heather Timms Director of Actor Training • Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School **T** 04 381 9225 **E** heather.Timms@toiwhakaari.ac.nz

Appendix E: Interview Information Sheet

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI
VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Under The Lens: Perdekamp's Acting Methodology and Sustainable and Effective Emotional Practice in Screen Performance

Information Sheet for Interview Participants

You are invited to participate in interviews for "Under The Lens: Perdekamp's Acting Methodology and Sustainable and Effective Emotional Practice in Screen Performance." Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. Thank you for considering this project.

Who am I?

My name is Vaughan Slinn and I am a Senior Acting Tutor at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. My main areas of teaching are across Screen Practice, Independent Practice, and Context & Practice, leading the development of increased screen presence within the curriculum.

What is the aim of this project?

This project investigates the claims of the Perdekamp Emotional Method (PEM) - an emerging psychophysiological acting methodology that is gaining attention internationally. PEM claims to allow actors 'safe, reliable and repeatable access' to emotion with no recourse to their own psychology - using neurobiological principles to achieve effortless and guidable access to authentic emotion. The project aims to investigate such claims in order to contribute critically to the depth and understanding of this system. The findings of this study will form an analytical MA thesis, and influence the potential implementation of this approach into the Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School screen training curriculum.

What types of participants are being sought?

Interviews will be sought from participants from PEM workshops held in New Zealand, as well as internationally.

What will participants be asked to do?

As a key informant, you are invited to participate in an interview exploring aspects of the research objectives identified above, particularly in relationship to your experiences with PEM. You will have a chance to freely offer your comments and opinions on issues you see as relevant to this study. The interview can be conducted at a pre-agreed time and location of your choice. It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately half an hour to

one hour of your time, and it will be recorded (audio only). You will receive a summary of this interview for review by the 1st March, 2018. Any quotations intended for use in the finished written thesis will be included in this summary and will only be used with your permission.

Can the participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time up until the 30th September 2018. To withdraw, simply email the researcher.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

You will be asked questions to express your views exploring aspects of the research. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been precisely determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. If the line of questioning develops in a way that you do not feel comfortable with you are reminded that you have the right to decline to answer any particular questions, and you may also withdraw from the interview at any stage.

Access to the data from key informant interviews will be strictly limited to the student researcher, and the supervisors of the project.

If you wish your name to remain confidential in the published results, this project will give you that option. For example you may choose to use a pseudonym or only be referred to by role or association with an organisation rather than by name. Confidentiality will be attempted to be maintained throughout the development, presentation and publishing of the research.

At the completion of the project all the raw data will be held until December 31st 2020, before being destroyed. Within that time all data will be held in password protected computer files. The results may be published/recorded and will be available within Victoria University of Wellington. The findings may also be written up for publication in academic or professional journals and/or disseminated at academic or professional conferences, and may be implemented into future teaching practice.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

If you have questions at any time about the interview or the procedures, you may contact:

Vaughan Slinn	Dr. Lori Leigh	A/Prof David O'Donnell
MA Student Researcher	*Supervisor*	*Supervisor*
vaughan.slinn@vuw.ac.nz	lori.leigh@vuw.ac.nz	david.odonnell@vuw.ac.nz
(027) 424 1733	(04) 463 6712	(04) 463 6828

Human Ethics Committee information

Appendix F: Workshop (Screen Experiment) Information Sheet

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O TE ŪPOKO O TE IKA A MĀUI
VICTORIA
UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

Under The Lens: Perdekamp's Acting Methodology and Sustainable and Effective Emotional Practice in Screen Performance

Information Sheet for Workshop Participants

You are invited to participate in workshops for "Under The Lens: Perdekamp's Acting Methodology and Sustainable and Effective Emotional Practice in Screen Performance." Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. Thank you for considering this project.

Who am I?

My name is Vaughan Slinn and I am a Senior Acting Tutor at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. My main areas of teaching are across Screen Practice, Independent Practice, and Context & Practice, leading the development of increased screen presence within the curriculum.

What is the aim of this project?

This project investigates the claims of the Perdekamp Emotional Method (PEM) - an emerging psychophysiological acting methodology that is gaining attention internationally. PEM claims to allow actors 'safe, reliable and repeatable access' to emotion with no recourse to their own psychology - using neurobiological principles to achieve effortless and guidable access to authentic emotion. The project aims to investigate such claims in order to contribute critically to the depth and understanding of this system. The findings of this study will form an analytical MA thesis, and influence the potential implementation of this approach into the Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School screen training curriculum.

What types of participants are being sought?

I am seeking drama students aged from 18 - 25 to work with. This demographic is important to the study as they will be the core group affected by the potential implementation of this approach at Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School - if PEM is to be implemented into training institutions, it needs to serve the students of those institutions primarily. Furthermore, this is a demographic still forming its ideas about acting craft, and may be more interested in deeply exploring contrasting techniques.

What will participants be asked to do?

As a workshop participant, you will be asked to learn two pieces of text, from one character from a feature film TBC. Over the course of 8 weeks (Term 4, 2017) you will be asked to

attend a series of four two hour workshops, where you will investigate this character and text deeply, using a variety of approaches. These sessions will be extracurricular and will occur at times that are most suitable for you, onsite at Toi Whakaari: NZ Drama School. The first two sessions will be using an action based methodology, analysing the text through actions and objectives, and then using Strasberg's approach to affective memory to help you realise the performance. The next two sessions will introduce you to the PEM emotional system, and to the PEM approach to character. You will explore Main Leading Centres and Subcentres to create character, and then use the six basic emotions as a framework to explore the text. We are interested not simply in the 'success' of the performance, but also the impact on you in working with these different techniques.

The benefit to you as participants will be:

- additional tutoring in camera technique
- the ability to have far more direct attention than in a typical class environment
- the ability to learn new acting skills and stretch your ability through exposure to the PEM technique
- a koha of $50 for your time.

The workshops will be filmed, but this footage will not be shown to anyone outside the primary researcher and supervisors. With your express permission, some material could be used in supplementary AV material that accompanies the thesis. Any intended supplementary material will be submitted to you for review and approval by March 1, 2019.

At the conclusion of the workshop sessions, you will be invited to participate in a brief interview exploring your immediate responses and experiences of the exercises listed above. This interview will be filmed and will take up to a maximum 30 minutes. You will have a chance to freely offer your comments and opinions on issues you see as relevant — alternatively, you may decline to partake in this interview at any point. Participants will receive a summary of their interview for their review by the 1st March, 2018. Any quotations intended for use in the finished written thesis will be included in this summary and will only be used with your permission.

Will participation in this workshop have any effect on course work or assessment? Is participation compulsory?

Participation in this workshop is completely voluntary. Declining to participate will have no implications in terms of course work/assessment or your professional relationship with the tutor.

Can the participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time up until the 30th September 2018. To withdraw, simply email the student researcher.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

Digital footage of the workshops will be recorded and reviewed at the end of each session. You will have the option to review the footage immediately, and determine if you are comfortable with that footage being included in the study. If you decide you are not comfortable, the footage will be erased immediately, with you present.

For the (optional) interview, you will be asked questions to express your views exploring aspects of the research, with particular focus on the workshop exercises you have just experienced. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been precisely determined in advance, but will depend on the results of the workshop exercises and the way in which the interview develops. If the line of questioning develops in a way that you do not feel comfortable with you are reminded that you have the right to decline to answer any particular questions, and that you may also withdraw from the interview at any stage.

Access to this data will be strictly limited to the student researcher, and the supervisors of the project. You will receive a summary of your interview for review by the 1st March, 2018. Any quotations used in either the finished written thesis will be from this summary and will only be used with your permission.

If you wish your name to remain confidential in the published results, this project will give you that option. For example you may choose to use a pseudonym or only be referred to by role or association with an organisation rather than by name. Confidentiality will be attempted to be maintained throughout the development, presentation and publishing of the research, but you will be able to be identified if you consent to your work being included in supplementary AV material.

At the completion of the project all the raw data will be held until December 31st, 2020, before being destroyed. Within that time all data will be held in password protected computer files. The results may be published/recorded and will be available within Victoria University of Wellington. The findings may also be written up for publication in academic or professional journals and/or disseminated at academic or professional conferences, and may be implemented into future teaching practice.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish. Please note you may request digital AV data being destroyed at any point during this period.

If you have questions at any time about the interview or the procedures, you may contact:

Vaughan Slinn
MA Student Researcher
vaughan.slinn@vuw.ac.nz
(027) 424 1733

Dr. Lori Leigh
Supervisor
lori.leigh@vuw.ac.nz
(04) 463 6712

A/Prof David O'Donnell
Supervisor
david.odonnell@vuw.ac.nz
(04) 463 6828

Human Ethics Committee information