

Emotion memory versus physical action: towards anti-racist pedagogies that make way for critical *praxis*

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1.1 Introduction

The resurgence of social movements such as Me Too and Black Lives Matter prompted scholars and practitioners to investigate social inequalities in actor training and develop decolonising and decentering pedagogies. Anti-racist pedagogies address how what Konstantin Stanislavsky calls ‘the art of representation’ (16) works with and against social representations that are implied in texts used for actor training, and are manifested by actors during the process of training and facilitated by actor trainers in the studio. The manifestations can be categorised as problems with underrepresentation, sometimes even absence, of the Global Majority in scripts and studios, but also problems with misrepresentation when actors, through their art, reproduce historical stereotypes and narratives.

Stanislavsky training problematises representations because it assumes that ‘human nature is universal and that the essence of acting is to uncover the human spirit, to bring out the universal in the specifics of human life’ (Thompson, 128). Debbie Thompson continues:

The way the actor’s emotions and identities are experienced, then, will (in a post-structuralist model) be very much embedded in the ideological situations of the actors, but will be presented as “impulsive,” “instinctive,” “natural,” “the truth of human nature.” Naturalism, in other words, naturalises ideology. (129)

In light of this quote, the ethics and effectiveness of post-Stanislavsky approaches for anti-racist pedagogies become a matter of how and to what extent actors (and writers and trainers) have internalised white supremacy as ‘natural’, and whether methods of representation invite them to acknowledge and address this.

Writers, actors and trainers affect representations, often unintentionally. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus* illuminates how individuals might unconsciously perpetuate dominant ideologies during their interactions, including acting. Most commonly understood as ‘the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality’ concerning how individuals embody biases (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 26), an individual’s *habitus* is ‘a system of structured, structuring dispositions’ that ‘is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions’ (Bourdieu, 52). All actions are a result of the *habitus*, which derives from an individual’s family and schooling (50), which is also true for acting and actor training. In the context of theorising the logic of human actions and practices, Bourdieu writes that biases ‘generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends’ (53). This suggests that the reproduction of stereotypical representations in training and performance results from the unconscious dispositions that writers embody and manifest in the narratives and characters of their scripts, that actors embody and manifest in their characterisation

choices, and that trainers or directors embody and manifest in their practices and interventions.

In bringing Bourdieu's concept to performance studies thinking, Harvey Young writes that 'racial assumptions' are embodied by Black people as 'acts of violence' which, among other things, shape 'social behaviour or everyday social experiences (black *habitus*)' (2010, 5). Black *habitus* 'allows the black body to be singular (black) and variable at the same time', and 'allows us to read the black body as socially constructed and continually constructing its own self' (20). In his later writing, Young more explicitly links Bourdieu's concept to racial identity as a combination of biases 'as well as the choices that a person makes concerning how he self-identifies and how he treats others' (2013, 14). Young is optimistic in stressing that 'although it can be difficult to not embrace or, more strongly, to reject the beliefs, practices, and expectations of the group [that has raised an individual], resistance is possible' (14). This suggests that actors can resist the reproduction of racial stereotypes through a process similar to what Young describes as 'critical consideration of the experiences of racial interpellation, socialisation, and habitus' (67), and ultimately create progressive representations.

To understand how such critical consideration is possible in the studio and can result in progressive racial representations, it is useful to consider bell hooks's drawing on Paulo Freire to discuss Black resistance against racial assumptions as a self-liberating learning process that is two-faceted: it is triggered at a 'historical moment when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstance', and is completed with 'verifying in praxis what we know in consciousness' (47). This suggests that anti-racist pedagogies for Stanislavsky training should facilitate a journey that invites the student-actor's critical awareness of racial assumptions within the studio, and manifest such awareness in making character choices that represent social justice.

The first part of this essay uses the *habitus* to critically analyse how two often oppositional devices—emotion memory and physical actions—problematises anti-racist pedagogies. The second part of the essay uses the *habitus* to reflect on exploring emotion memory in a training studio influenced by Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Stanislavsky's colleague at the Moscow Art Theatre and proponent of "fantastic realism". Throughout, the essay illuminates post-Stanislavsky thinking concerning how the studio can bring the unconscious dispositions of the actor to consciousness and help the actor to create progressive social representations.

I should preface the body of this chapter by stating that I am a white, middle-class, cisgender, straight, abled female. I was born and raised in Greece as a second-generation refugee, before migrating to the UK. I am grateful as a practitioner-researcher to be given space in this book. We know Global Majority authors are underrepresented in academia, and I hope the field offers increased opportunities moving forward. I also hope the representation of Global Majority authors in this book shows progress since hooks stated, almost thirty years ago, that critical pedagogies have been primarily the concern of white people (9). I recognise that my positionality as a white woman might be seen as problematic, so I invite the reader to engage with my work in critical friendship, as hooks suggests when referring to Freire (49-50), a white pedagogue committed to decolonisation. Since 2010, I have been training actors in the United Kingdom, within diverse groups with multiple and intersecting identities, dominant and dominated, protected and unprotected, and visible and invisible. Such complex

environments frame, inform and develop my allyship and complicity (Clemens) with the Global Majority.

1.2 Tackling white supremacy: emotion memory versus physical action

Because the various training processes of emotion memory and physical action involve actors, writers and trainers in different ways, the use of the *habitus* to unpick them can illuminate how the two approaches problematise race differently and help relevant interventions develop. A big debate among Stanislavsky teachers of the Western world is whether acting processes that prioritise emotion memory, such as those from earlier Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, and Lee Strasberg, are less effective and ethical compared to approaches that build on physical action, such as those from later Stanislavsky, Maria Knebel, Sonia Moore, Sharon Marie Carnicke, Bella Merlin, and Nick Moseley.

The essence of the difference between the two approaches is described in Stella Adler's quote in favour of physical action: 'To go back to a feeling or emotion of one's own experience I believe to be unhealthy. It tends to separate you from the play, from the action of the play, from the circumstances of the play, and from the author's intention' (143). Adler comments on the actor's well-being, but she also identifies that acting processes that utilise emotion memory draw on the actor's own experience, which, according to Bourdieu, results in predisposed decisions concerning character behaviours and reactions. Predisposed and individualised, the actor's social representations might be different or even conflictual with the play's world, actions and circumstances, which ultimately reflect what the author intended or how they imagined social representations on stage. According to Bourdieu, the author's intentions and suggested social representations are affected by their social dispositions. So Adler's quote implies that the author's social dispositions should be prioritised over the actor's social dispositions, which is better achieved using Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Actions. Ultimately, the merging of the dispositions of the writer and actor is expressed through the imagination, the voice and the body of the actor with the purpose of what has been described as helping '[s]pectators learn about the characters on stage' (Moore, 33). Therefore, with emotion memory processes, the audience's learning is more affected by the actor's social dispositions, rather than the writer's, whereas with physical actions it is the opposite.

The key elements of the Method of Physical Actions can be understood from Stanislavsky's rehearsal room, where '[a]ctors analysed the events and investigated the psycho-physical behavior of the characters on stage, in action' (47). By psycho-physical Moore means that '[i]nstead of forcing an emotion before going on stage, the actor fulfils a simple, concrete, purposeful physical action which stirs the psychological side of the psycho-physical act, thus achieving psycho-physical involvement' (19). To achieve this, 'before and after physical action, the student must use gestures of the body in order to project mental processes, such as thoughts, feelings, decisions, evaluations, attitudes' (22). The main difference between the two approaches is whether the actor has consciously tried in their imagination to associate their experience to the role prior to engaging in etudes, by which I mean improvisations on the given circumstances and beats of a play not for the purposes of performance but as a rehearsal process 'purely for the actors to understand something for themselves' (Stephenson in Dunne, 185). So, if we are looking at the racial representations that the audience sees, the

difference is whether they have been created through etudes initiated by the actor's personal affinity to the role and scene (inside out) or by what is suggested by the author in the script, to which the actor responds emotionally (outside in). This suggests that there is a more conscious inclusion of the actor's social experience and dispositions, or *habitus*, in emotion memory approaches, which decenters the rehearsal process from the play and the writer's dispositions.

Often scripts internalise white supremacy in complex ways, and various representation tests have been developed to tackle the reproduction of stereotypes (<https://www.wideanglemedia.org/blog/media-tests>). If the texts are the main problem, then the actors should be encouraged to scrutinise and resist 'the action' and 'the circumstances' of a text, as well as 'the author's intention', all of which might reproduce the author's racial biases. So, a first assessment using the *habitus* suggests that approaches that draw on emotion memory are less problematic for anti-racist pedagogies than approaches that draw on physical actions because the actor can resist the unconscious biases of the writer.

The *habitus* of the trainer or director is also less central in emotion memory approaches. For Stanislavsky, emotion memory invites the actor to use their experience, or *habitus*, creatively to bring 'a logical, truthful...genuine...physically embodied' (196) approach to a dramatic character. This quote implies an appreciation of acting decisions that draw on the real experience of the actor, with little room for questioning whether such decisions are truthful because they have been experienced before. When at the later stages of his work he describes the Method of Physical Actions, Stanislavsky implies a stronger intervention from the director's or trainer's *habitus*:

a new approach to the role that involves reading the play today, and tomorrow rehearsing it on stage... Everyone can act this, guided by their own life experience. So, let them act. And so, we break the whole play, episode by episode, into physical actions. When this is done exactly, correctly, that it feels true and it inspires our belief in what is happening on stage, then we can say that the line of the life of the human body has been created... (in Carnicke, 154)

The invitation to the actor to embody their 'own life experience' is scrutinised by the director's assessment concerning whether 'it feels true and it inspires our belief in what is happening on stage'. Once more, emotion memory approaches feel more ethical concerning race because the individual actor is less dominated by the writer's representations and also the director's assessment of what is 'exact' and 'correct' in acting choices.

This indicates that emotion memory-inspired pedagogies are more decentered, and therefore liberating because they are less likely to impose the writer's and director/trainer's potentially problematic dispositions. However, the *habitus*, or the unconscious dispositions, of the actors can also problematise race. So, anti-racist pedagogies need to develop ways to address the dispositions of all participants. Therefore, to decolonise actor training studios, individual actors need to process their racial assumptions during the processes of shaping characterisation decisions, alongside critically addressing the racial assumptions embedded in the texts and in the training methodologies.

The decentering of the classroom and the bringing of unconscious dispositions to consciousness were pioneered by Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which considers that

critical consciousness in adult education and active engagement with their political, social and economic frustrations can help individuals take action to improve their reality. The potential of emotion memory to bring oppressive structures to consciousness can be extracted from Sanford Meisner's criticism of Strasberg's work that 'all artists are introverted because they live on what's going on in their instincts, and to attempt to make that conscious is to confuse the actor' (59). Meisner implies that when unconscious experience and the behaviours related to it - the two of which comprise the *habitus* - are brought to consciousness the actor will lose the focus on the script and rehearsal room and turn their attention to their own experience, which might be unproductive for the aims of a director or a specific production.

As part of a holistic training process that combines critical consciousness with well-being (hooks, 17), if what is brought to consciousness relates to the student actor's frustrations concerning oppressive experiences and behaviours then such processing can be productive towards taking the kind of action that improves social representations on stage. Freire decentered the classroom by reframing the teacher as a facilitator of 'student *conscientizacao*,' which 'refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality' (1999, 3). Depending on techniques employed, actor trainers can consider how their studios invite actors to acknowledge how their *habitus* shapes acting decisions and invite them to engage in processes to develop acting decisions that mobilise biases towards decolonisation. And because the *habitus* is fluid, by which I mean it changes through life experience, actor training can develop actors to embody improved representations of marginalised communities throughout their acting careers.

To explore in the studio how emotion memory invites acknowledgement of the *habitus* and prepares the ground for manifesting such new awareness, the next section narrows the focus to one emotion memory approach and one physical actions approach and reflects on my embodied experience in specific training contexts. The following part of the essay exploits my reflections on acting practice and therefore involves a phenomenological approach. It is a preliminary investigation that will benefit from further practice research explorations to corroborate and enrich findings. My narrative and reflection invite post-Stanislavsky trainers to associate my insights with their own practices and utilise them towards anti-racist pedagogies.

1.3 Emotion memory and critical consciousness

Strasberg's Method is well-known for prioritising emotion memory in the approach that he developed at the Actors Studio in New York City. The words 'emotion' and 'memory' have been associated primarily with psychology. My use of a sociological lens to reflect on the actor's feelings as a result of previous dispositions and social interactions highlights an alternative approach to studying and developing that part of Stanislavsky's "system". My experience of training in the Method with Andreas Manolikakis from the Actors Studio and consequent application of such embodied knowledge in an etude within a different context indicates an opportunity for the actor to acknowledge inherited dispositions and develop progressive representations.

Because my experiences reflect my positionality as a white woman, this part of the essay can be seen as inherently flawed, similar to what hooks describes as ‘unclean water’ concerning Freire’s work (50). I offer my experience of gender in this instance as one way to apply the work I propose. I do not intend to conflate a gender experience with a racial experience. There are intersections but there is no equivalence, and space should be left for the lived experiences of Global Majority actors. If the reader chooses to dismiss the rest of the essay, I invite you to draw on your own resources to investigate the possibility of the Method prompting an acting process that facilitates critical consciousness and critical action against oppressive social structures. I believe studios should proactively offer protection to prevent Global Majority students from experiencing re-traumatisation in relation to racial oppression. In this context, it is, of course, dependent on the experiences and desires of the Global Majority actor to engage with or avoid memories associated with identity, family and racial injustice. Ideally, such an investigation should be enriched with processes that facilitate reflexivity that sustains the well-being of trainees, which was not a priority in the studio of Manolikakis that I discuss here.

The bringing to consciousness of embodied oppressive structures resonates with Stanislavsky’s main goal ‘to cultivate in students, abilities and qualities which help them to free their creative individuality—an individuality imprisoned by prejudices and clichés’ (Zakhava in Malaev-Babel, 23). Stanislavsky neglected the investigation of his system’s potential to develop actors in the studio in favour of facilitating characterisation during the direction of plays in rehearsal rooms and on stages. Nikolai Demidov observes: ‘If [Stanislavsky] did practice pedagogy, he only did so in the course of rehearsals, in passing: it was done to help the actor bring to life a particular moment of the role... He never taught School—there was no time...’ (in Malaev-Babel, 8). The potential of the “system” to liberate the students from their embodied dispositions has been left in the hands of post-Stanislavsky tutors.

Among other complexities of isolating and studying parts of the “system”, is that the several variations of practices have been also tacitly informed by the previous training of post-Stanislavsky tutors, and from associated historical moments. Demidov observes:

As for the teacher’s work, sometimes it brought good results sometimes bad... Why?... in the case of the teacher’s failure, no one ever asked the question: perhaps, the imperfection of the method is to blame? And in the case of success... perhaps the teacher, except for using the established methods, also used some other methods of their own, sometimes without noticing it? (8)

My use of the *habitus* retrospectively to reflect on practice investigates how the specific professional development studio of Manolikakis facilitated my critical consciousness as an actor. Throughout the training, Manolikakis repeated Stanislavsky’s quote that ‘Vakhtangov teaches the “system” better than me’ and Strasberg’s advice to his students that ‘Vakhtangov is there, in his books waiting to answer your questions’ (Manolikakis, 13). So, my training in 2008 both enacted and invited a critical engagement with Vakhtangov’s writings. For my retrospective reflection, I reviewed old notebooks and I corroborated my memories from the training with fellow actors-participants through phone and social media conversations.

The Actors Studio developed from the acting processes of Stanislavsky’s ‘best student’, Vakhtangov, and prides itself to be a studio instead of a rehearsal room or stage, where

‘actors are free to develop privately without the glare of commercial pressures’, in a ‘safe environment to stretch and grow their talents’ (<https://theactorsstudio.org/who-we-are/our-history/>). The main criticisms against the Method concern how it invites the actor to work with their imagination in ways that draw on personal experience and use those associated behaviours in characterisation. My training with Manolikakis in the summer of 2008 in Athens focused solely on how the actor can draw on emotion memory for characterisation, without any movement or voice training. The four-week workshop was addressed to professional actors. The classes were delivered in the empty auditorium of the theatre of Moraitis School and involved a weekly showing of work-in-progress on the proscenium stage. The actor was invited to graft their personal experience onto the text of a duologue that they had been assigned. The training day was broken down into two parts: emotion memory exercises and scene study during which the emotion memory exercises were enacted in etudes.

The first part of the session involved recurring concentration and relaxation exercises. The actor sat on a chair with their eyes closed and used their imagination to release any tension from their bodies until they reached a fully relaxed state. Manolikakis instructed tasks such as ‘release your left foot’ but the process gradually became individualised and independent. When the actors were fully relaxed, Manolikakis invited the visualisation of imaginary scenarios. He always narrated a miserable scenario, which the actors would gradually personalise in their imagination to move themselves to tears.

For example, a scenario invited me to remember the last big holiday in my family home in detail from smells, sounds, objects and a particular focus on ‘the person who loves me most in the world’ and then returned me to the home during a future holiday when something was eerie and the person ‘who loves me most’ was crying. Towards the end of the narration, it was revealed that I had died and they were mourning me, and I was invited to articulate the last words that I would tell the ‘person who loves me most’. After the end of the narration, we were given time to explore the sense memories in our imagination again, observe what moved us most, and try to reproduce the emotional distress.

During our independent time, we were expected to invent scenarios that would be productive for our duologue. Vakhtangov describes how such exploration of past experiences could trigger the activation of the character with a push of a button:

An actor seeks within himself the feelings that he needs to experience in order to bring to life the character. He discovers in his soul the buttons he can push to evoke these feelings. Each actor’s buttons are individual... Everyone knows for himself what combination of factors he must proceed from in order to experience certain feelings at a given moment, and what button, known to him alone, he needs to push for that. As an actor digs deeper into his role, the number of these buttons gradually diminishes, until the artist can finally control his feelings through one combined button. In one push, he can evoke the entire range of his character’s feelings and live his character’s life. (105)

During our weekly showing of an etude, we would assess in the studio whether this button had been discovered or not. In the early improvisations, we used our own words after studying the scene at home but without learning the lines. We would get feedback from Manolikakis about what was working and then gradually substitute our text with the text of

the playwright. We were encouraged to use a personal object in the scene that would provoke an emotional response. This process would help with grafting our personal experience onto the text.

During these four weeks, I visualised myself in various tragic narratives. The process of my imagination involved substituting the characters from Manolikakis's scenario with people from my own life experience to explore what might be a sense memory that triggers emotional distress. Manolikakis's scenarios were not the same every day, which helped me recognise the types of narratives that moved me more. Because of the emotional intensity required, I mainly visualised close family members and recalled relevant interactions. I gradually developed an ability to activate sense memories, such as images and sounds that concerned the interactions. I was surprised to discover that I couldn't always predict what moved me and I was relieved that these explorations were never discussed or shared in the studio.

As the days moved on, I observed a subtle pressure from such narratives to cry at the thought of a family member dying. But my relationships with my family were much more complex and what made them vivid were the conflicts, the disappointments, the manipulations and the oppressions. The grief that I manifested during the exercises seemed to derive from a combination of self-pity for the unfair behaviours that I tolerated in these relationships and, most importantly, of mourning the close relationships that I wished I had experienced instead. Towards the end of the four weeks, I noticed a pattern in my explorations: most conflicts and disappointments derived from expectations concerning my role as the daughter of the family. Aggressive and microaggressive behaviours were shaping me according to patriarchal narratives. This realisation of my positionality as a woman in the family, school and broader social network brought my *habitus* to consciousness.

Returning to hooks's suggestion that a self-liberating learning process starts with a 'historical moment when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstance' (47), the Global Majority actor's renewed awareness could be a result of browsing through their memories in search for the most appropriate experience that could be grafted onto a duologue. The focus on the actor's task can create a critical distance. Such distance would have been difficult to achieve in Strasberg's studio because of vocabularies such as 'Freudian sense' and 'therapeutic value in art' (Cohen, 28) that guided actors towards a psychoanalytical processing of past experiences rather than a sociological one. For example, during an emotion memory exercise, Strasberg observes that a female actor '...seemed to be in conflict or in contradiction with what she was trying to will herself to do', and interprets her frustration as a result of her father's wordings that women actors are 'all tramps' and that she should '...at least sit ladylike' (99-100). From a sociological perspective, this actor is frustrated because her father enacted unconscious biases against women and against actors. The 'conflict' and 'contradiction' that Strasberg observed is a result of confronting oppressive systems in the relationship and body of a 'loved one'. The personal relationship is exposed as a relationship of power, which confuses the actor but at the same time reveals their *habitus* to them.

This confusion can be understood through Bourdieu's suggestion that 'when the *habitus* encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself "as a fish in water", it does not feel the weight of water and takes the world about itself for granted' (in Wacquant, 43).

When the actor fails to cry during a Method exercise that invites them to imagine that a family member is dead, and even if they cry as a result of feelings more complex than grief, they find themselves as fish out of water. This experience can activate the historical moment of the Global Majority actor reflecting on embodied racial assumptions, and the struggle against what hooks describes as ‘the colonising process and the colonising mind-set’ (46). The acknowledgement of constructing their identities ‘in resistance’ (46) invites actors to consider how their progressive characterisation choices become what hooks describes as ‘my right as a subject in resistance to define my reality’ (53). Progressive social representations on stage can contribute to an anti-racist reality.

I recognise that the awareness of identity in resistance to white supremacy and the burden of decolonising scripts and stages can be taxing for the student-actor and should be only part of a holistic pedagogy that prioritises well-being. hooks writes:

[m]any of the issues that we continue to confront as black people—low self-esteem, intensified nihilism and despair, repressed rage and violence that destroys our physical and psychological well-being—cannot be addressed by survival strategies that have worked in the past. (67)

Such issues become even more complex if we consider intersectional identities, as extensively accounted for in hooks’s work. Because actors from the Global Majority might encounter traumatising issues during emotion memory training, anti-racist pedagogies need to be developed to facilitate the two-faceted learning process of critical consciousness and critical praxis as part of a learning trajectory that supports individualised physical, psychological and spiritual well-being.

Anti-racist pedagogies that focus on emotion memory are invited to resist Strasberg’s often patronising and exposing tactics and exploit Vakhtangov’s writings that invite a sociological assessment of the human experience. Vakhtangov aimed to ‘strip away the mask people wear in everyday life and to break through to the true, secret human’ (Malaev-Babel, 38). This implies a studio that invited social processing to liberate the actor from oppressive systems. Vakhtangov’s acknowledgement of ‘social masks’ (40) implies an understanding of social power. His observation that ‘a social moral that comes with the mask protects [people] from any doubts and inner struggles’ (40) resonates with the feeling of a ‘fish in water’ when the *habitus* is validated. In Vakhtangov’s characterisation, ‘only a character who has the courage to shed his or her protective social mask exposes their heart to the ultimate struggle between Good and Evil. By doing so they remain *morally* above the rest of the characters in the play and near the kingdom of ultimate life’ (40). This quote implies choice, which resonates with Young’s suggestion concerning the black *habitus* that ‘individuals choose whether to accept and adopt the beliefs and perspectives that surround them’ (2013, 14). To facilitate such courageous choices in the studio, Vakhtangov ‘continually designed situations that caused his characters, and subsequently the actors, to shed their skin and bare their nerves. At such moments, both characters and actors were forced to lose their masks and live their hidden, “essential” life”’ (Malaev-Babel, 38). This process invites the actor to recognise what is meaningful for them, through the exploration of ‘what button, known to him alone, he needs to push’ for the purposes of characterisation (Vakhtangov, 2011, 105), leading to a transformation ‘by the power of their inner impulse’ (211). This resonates with what hooks describes as ‘engaged pedagogy’ that facilitates meaningful learning (19). In actor training,

this can mean connecting characterisation processes with the Global Majority actor's life in meaningful ways, including their racial experience. Even though not fully realised, Vakhtangov's characterisation processes could facilitate explorations of racial assumptions and aim at bringing these to consciousness to achieve meaningful - and progressive - representations.

Even though Vakhtangov was not aware of the family's role in shaping the actor's unconscious dispositions in a Bourdieusian sense, the private exploration of family memories invites actors to draw such links. The effort to recall memories should be led by an investigation of 'the "what for" behind [each exercise]. [The tutor] cannot give an answer to this question, as everyone, in time, should discover his own answer (Vakhtangov, 88). In this manner, the actor independently develops their 'knowledge of self', which Vakhtangov considers as '[t]he important result of the "system"' (102). The actor discovers what is meaningful and inspiring to them and links such values to specific experiences and visual stimuli to a level of detail that can be exploited to provide subtext and support internal monologues.

The processing of memories as manifestations of social power within interactions can transform the perspective and attitude of the actor towards oppressive behaviours, which then leads to critical praxis concerning characterisation. Such an opportunity has been observed in Vakhtangov's studio as he 'brought an actor's point of view on his or her character into the foreground, foreshadowing the Brechtian principle of "alienation"' (Malaev-Babel, 4). The processing of dispositions - or *habitus* - inherited by the family as social masks to be shed invites actors to enact critical praxis in the studio by creating appropriate behaviours for characterisation instead of reproducing oppressive behaviours. An emotion memory studio that 'teaches to transgress' oppressive systems in hooks's sense offers room to process how dominant ideologies have shaped the actor through their family and schooling. An inspiring and highly acclaimed actor who interrogates her unconscious dispositions in characterisation and makes critical choices is Viola Davis, who invites young actors to develop the associated 'courage' required that is eventually rewarded with life fulfilment (in BUILD, 02:17-3:13). In the context of a holistic process that prioritises the actor's well-being such a studio could inspire resistance to racial assumptions and materialise anti-racist choices in Global Majority characters.

1.4 Emotion memory and progressive social representations

According to hooks, critical consciousness only initiates the self-liberatory process that is complete by individuals 'verifying in praxis what we know in consciousness' (47). In the case of the Global Majority actor, this means creating progressive social representations instead of racial stereotypes. Even though the studio of Manolikakis offered me space to explore my *habitus*, I did not find any associations between my experience and the role of Amanda from Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* that I was cast in. Vakhtangov explains that 'I can make an author's circumstances my own when they are true to me' (90) and that 'an actor must live with his own passion and 'fall in love with the character' (103). But when a week later I explored the role of Irina from Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* during an etude in a different training studio, I observed that the social knowledge of self that was triggered by the emotion memory exercises in the studio of Manolikakis transformed my approach to characterisation.

I will reflect on improvisation around the scene in which Soleni confesses his love to Irina and she rejects him. This exploration happened in the context of a weekly professional development seminar on Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Actions, run by Greek director Stathis Livathinos, a distinguished graduate of the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS). Livathinos spends a week reading the play with the cast in the rehearsal room before they move to etudes. The actors studied the play independently to save most of the time for etudes during the training.

I had studied *Three Sisters* before this particular seminar. Returning to it after the Method training, I noticed an affinity between myself and Irina as a woman who tolerated the aggressive and micro-aggressive behaviours around her during a rite of passage between family life and independent life. According to Vakhtangov, '[i]n art—comprehending is experiencing' (96), by which he meant that a character is created from the first reading when the actor connects with a role that 'pushes their buttons'. Because I recognised myself in Irina, I was 'inspired by the material offered by the author', and found the 'essence' of Irina in my own inner world, in the sense of understanding the character's tasks in the play as my own' (100). I was assigned a love confession scene between Irina and Soleni, which opens with Irina alone after the mummies have been sent away. The scene pushed another button because, like Irina, I was raised in Orthodox Christianity, which encourages rejoicing on particular calendar occasions such as name days, Sundays and the carnival, and implies that the purpose of a woman is marriage. So, I associated Irina with my personal experience in a way influenced by my training on the Method.

During my independent process, I recalled how the carnival affected my interactions with people around me and observed in my memory that the anonymity behind costumes and masks altered the behaviours of people in liberating ways. I visualised putting on a mask to liberate myself from inhibitions, which evolved into a fantasy of calling out the aggressive and microaggressive behaviours of the people around me, with a surprising focus on people, especially women, who did not stand up for me or with me. I associated the memory with Irina's circumstances, deprived of the opportunity to express herself without social inhibitions during the carnival, and navigating the disrespectful or unsupportive relationships with the people around her. During another visualisation, I recalled that in my teenage years I was expressing such thoughts and feelings in a diary. When I later realised that my parents were reading it without my consent, I used it deliberately to call them out in ways that I would not have dared face to face. The diary mediated the shedding of my social masks. By containing my anger, it liberated me. To graft the diary experience into an object from Irina's world, I crafted a domino mask which covered only my eyes and the space between them. I imagined that Irina was eager to use the mask during her interactions with the mummies and now was left with it in hand, a contradictory object associated with both joy and disappointment. The first etude was silent, without text. Alone on stage, I put the mask on and looked at the audience of my peers as if in an imaginary mirror. In my imagination, I was substituting all the characters from Irina's world with people from my life looking for associations that would allow the grafting of my personal relationships onto Irina's. I observed which associations established clear and impactful relationships with the characters in Irina's world. I constructed the broad strokes of Irina's internal monologue and fantasised about calling out each one of the people around me/her. When Soleni entered the stage, he interrupted a fantasy of triumph over Irina's oppressors. I confronted and challenged sexist

behaviours while I had the mask on, but when I took the mask off I contained my anger as a well-mannered woman. During the scene with Soleni, I followed a trajectory of avoiding, tolerating and eventually rejecting him. The etude got encouraging feedback, especially for the use of the mask before the scene.

I had two days to process my experience and prepare for the presentation of the etude with improvised words. According to Vakhtangov, the creative process itself takes place ‘in the intervals between rehearsals’ when the ‘subconscious processes the acquired material’ (111). While working with my associations with my close social environment, I noticed that I was raised to refrain from calling people out, which resulted in repressed anger and self-pity. But the reproduction of such feelings on stage, or experiences of oppression, contradicted Vakhtangov’s feeling of joy in an actor/improviser performing a character ‘with “an energetic desire” to express, or rather, to create’ (109). I realised that my attitude to avoid confrontation was an inherited bias against women that perpetuates patriarchy, which I decided to tackle in my work with Irina. I was excited to transgress the patriarchy with my acting, and experienced pleasure in hooks’s sense (7), namely as a liberatory practice. So, during the presentation of the spoken etude, I verified my critical consciousness and enacted my new *habitus*: after putting the mask on, I addressed people in the audience as the characters from Irina’s world and called them out for how they oppressed me directly or indirectly in making the best decisions for my house, my leisure time, my work and my wellbeing. When Soleni came in, I did not avoid his presence in my private space or tolerate his romantic advances, as was my first instinct. Instead of the polite attitude that is expected from a well-mannered woman, expressed with my initial sequence of avoidance, toleration and rejection, my attitude changed to a trajectory of dismissing, commanding and humiliating. My personal experience raised the scene’s stakes to life and death because the prospect of becoming Soleni’s trophy wife dehumanised Irina. The feelings evoked from this attitude combined anger and rejoicing for both the actor and the character. Irina’s anger was self-protective from oppressive behaviours and her joy was in commanding people in her house. The actor was joyful in representing women who hold their oppressive environments accountable instead of harming themselves through tolerance and self-pity.

My experience illustrates how emotion memory can support the actor in developing progressive representations independently, privately and quickly. Vakhtangov suggests that ‘an actor must be an improviser. This is what we call talent’ (119). My reflection on practice indicates that social self-knowledge through the exploration of the *habitus* could help Global Majority actors develop as improvisers in Vakhtangov’s sense. In their imagination and in their own time, actors can develop unique perspectives on a play and character and create anti-racist representations that resist racist experiences and narratives.

Vakhtangov decentered the studio by prioritising the experience of the actor over the author and director, which was clear in his saying that “[w]e don’t need characters, characterisations. Everything you have makes up your characterisation; you have individuality—this is your character” (in Mavael-Babel, 21). The liberating potential of an independent acting process is also time-saving: as if a button were pushed, a single etude was sufficient to develop clear and nuanced attitudes against all the characters of Irina’s world, which further developed into an anti-patriarchal through-action score that informed both her subtext and inner monologue during the staging of the work.

Most importantly, the grafting of the Global Majority actor's personal experience and anti-racist desire onto a text can hold the writer accountable for the social representations indicated and develops such representations in anti-racist equivalents. Vakhtangov valued the actor in the room, the real human, more than the fictional character in a play, which is implied in his words: 'as far as an actor can preserve his own individuality, he must preserve it... A character must consist of the material that you possess' (103). The personally-grafted etudes of Global Majority actors can juxtapose individualised and localised racist manifestations. The merging of layers of the world of the text and the world of the actor into one character has been described by Vakhtangov as a 'method of creative existence' and living 'truthfully in a fantastic reality' (80). This indicates that the use of emotion memory in improvisations makes way for actors to resist their contemporary realities and enact such resistance in characterisation choices.

Because experiences of social oppression are linked to emotional distress, the invitation to explore the actor's 'buttons' is an invitation to social self-analysis which can be exploited to develop progressive racial representations, within holistic anti-racist pedagogies that invite critical consciousness and praxis while prioritising well-being. If we reconsider as the core of emotion memory training the development of the actor's meaningful creativity as valuing 'the richness of an actor's soul and his ability to reveal this richness' for an audience (Vakhtangov, 88), practices can seek to leave space for actors to tackle the stereotypical representations in scripts through grafting their experiences of resistance onto texts.

1.5 Conclusion: making space for anti-racist praxis

This essay has employed Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to assess the liberatory potential of emotion memory and invites the development of anti-racist pedagogies. It has identified potential in reimagining and reframing Vakhtangov's use of emotion memory in the studio from a sociological, rather than a psychological, perspective to make way for progressive social representations through the development of actors who can independently graft their personal experience onto texts privately and quickly.

The comparative analysis of emotion memory versus physical action-based approaches through the *habitus* demonstrated that both practices problematise race because the writers, actors and trainers involved internalise white supremacy in unconscious ways, which, in turn, affect their contributions to the actor training process. In emotion memory approaches, the starting point for acting decisions is the actor's prior experience, rather than the social representations that are suggested in the script, which reflect the writer's prior experience, or the interventions of a director/trainer. Such a studio is more decentered as it invites the actor to lead in creating social representations through characterisation.

The socially inclined process implied in Vakhtangov's writing and work resonates with hooks's writings in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). Vakhtangov's studio leaves room for actors to explore how they embody racial assumptions. Such exploration can bring to critical consciousness how multiple and intersecting identities affect the actor's experience and opens the way for realising how such experience affects characterisation. Drawing on the writings of hooks and Young, this essay indicates Vakhtangov's desire that the actor 'ultimately must be a good human being... inwardly pure' (101) can be fulfilled by

supporting the Global Majority actor to acknowledge that their body, voice and imagination have been developed in relation to white supremacy, among other oppressive systems, and verify such awareness in their acting choices. The processing of memories as social experiences reveals the actor as a social agent who can instigate social progress through progressive social representations.

To create socially-inclined characterisation practices, contemporary Stanislavsky-based studios can consider how to develop the actor as a social agent who is offered the time and space to develop both self-knowledge and self-assessment mechanisms that can be used toward meaningful and progressive characterisation. Interventions should invite the actor to resist assumptions and push against the boundaries to challenge racism, sexism, classism and other forms of oppression that they have experienced. My reflection on practice has shown that an affinity with a character can maximise the possibility for a characterisation of resistance and has the potential to contribute to the decolonisation of performances of problematic scripts. More investigation is required into this, and a holistic approach that protects Global Majority actors from being re-traumatised. Having said that, the use of the *habitus* as a critical lens to reflect on practice and understand how the dispositions of actors, writers and trainers affect the Stanislavsky-based studio can generate awareness and understanding that could be used toward the development of anti-racist pedagogies.

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