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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

CHASE THE CHICKEN.

I want you to imagine that you are in the middle of the desert; no food, no water, for almost a week. You know that if something doesn't change, and change soon, this will be the end for you. One day, when the stakes couldn't be any higher, a chicken crosses your path. This is it, your moment; without a second thought you begin chasing after it. Have you ever seen someone chase a chicken? If you haven't please take the time to YouTube it. If you laugh, give me a call and we can chuckle about it together. Now, imagine you're chasing that chicken - the rapid clucking, feathers flying everywhere, the crazy feeling you have chasing a small, flightless bird while fighting the sand in your eyes. It's ridiculous, isn't it? If you can't take a step back and realize how silly you are, even in these high stakes, you are missing the point. Your own preconceived notions and desires will make your objectives that much harder to achieve. You will get in the way of the little tangible moments at your fingertips. Do you have to sprint for the chicken? Can you let the chicken get closer to you before you pounce? What is a chicken even doing in the desert anyway? You gain freedom of choice when you are playing the individual moment and not what is manufactured in your mind.

It's the exact same with acting. I discovered this analogy for myself while working for The Barter Theatre (LORT) as a young actor. I had noticed that I put a ton of expectations on myself to be great. It was my first professional job and I was a leading role at the time. I felt that I had something to prove to everyone: since I was the youngest, since I was an actor of color, and since I wanted to be hired again. Thankfully the Artistic Director took me under her wing, thank you Katy Brown, and guided me to this thought. On the stage what others think of you is immaterial. The person that can make, unmake, or harm your career the most is yourself. You must release your counterproductive expectations or else you do yourself and the audience a disservice. Play the scene, play the moment, chase the chicken. Don't add anything you don't need, because you are enough.

How do I achieve this in my classroom? Simple. On day one I make my students fail. I assemble them all and I challenge each of them to do something just as ridiculous as the act of chasing the chicken. I'll ask a student to pat their head, rub their belly, and hop on one leg. I'll ask another to name each state in the United States of America without faltering, I'll ask another to touch the ceiling, etc, etc. I will do this until each student has failed. Thereafter, I remind them that they're still alive, still breathing, and now they realize they can only name 9 states under minimal pressure. I believe it is crucial to establish the room as a laboratory for their growth and we establish this through swiftly neutering a fear of failure.

I am an unorthodox Frankenstein amalgamation of every teacher, experience, and artist I have come in contact with. Thus, my interactions with students - whether they are acting, history, or introductory students, reflect as such. My expertise lies in developing processes that are as personal and unique as the individuals wielding them. I go beyond believing my students are different. I believe wholeheartedly that every student I encounter is exceptional at something that is intrinsic to them. I as an educator must help each student discover their natural gifts; this way we can set a foundation around that ability in order to build upon it.

My preferred method is contact improvisation, a step-by-step sequence of external and internal Stanislavski influenced techniques. I lead advanced students through a rigorous exploration of P.A.T. - Physicalizations, Repeatable Actions, and Transitions. By the end of a semester with me students will have their own completed list of techniques they can rely on to approach any role. These techniques I impart have passed through the minds of master teachers including Stanislavski, Jack Clay, and Seth Panitch. However, these are but tools and not short cuts to true mastery of the art form. Doctors spend their whole lives working on the human body; actors spend their lives working on the human soul. This is not something one can hope to master in a semester or even four years. However, these are the weapons students will need in order to go to battle. With each swing students will grow stronger, but we must have the courage to dare to swing with all our might. Choose to be brave, choose to be open, choose to let go, and choose to chase the chicken.

Warm regards,

Christian Tripp