

## Holly Cate

### Teaching Philosophy

BODY, BODY, BODY, BODY, BODY. My approach to actor training is rooted in the belief that the body is the primary storytelling device of the actor. It is the body that breathes, that makes sound, that engages in behavior, that is moving constantly toward needs and desires, that contains passion and is the clearest expression of our souls. My interest in training the body to become a facile, expressive instrument draws me to the teachings of Stanislavski, Laban, Grotowski, Adler, Keith Johnstone, and Ruth Zaporah, among others. I'm drawn to the body because I believe we can control our bodies, and through making conscious choices about what we are actually *DOING* we can gain access to deep recesses of character that are outside of our conscious control – as Stanislavski says, “unconscious creativity through conscious technique”.

We live in a world that promotes a Cartesian duality between body and mind, despite a mountain of evidence from neuroscience that suggests otherwise. Especially in working with undergraduate actors, I find it important to begin to reconnect those two halves of the human experience, to encourage the actors to see their bodies as tools of thought and to begin to trust that wisdom to carry them to truthful performances. My classes are always physical. We move, we sweat, sometimes we dance, sometimes we need kneepads. We run, we move in super slow motion, we explore the rhythm in stillness. We spend time on the breath, and we work on giving and receiving with the body. We explore the impulse and what it actually feels like to act on impulse. We identify and examine behavior, and the way our stories are carried in our bodies through behavior. We pay attention to the bodies around us (shocking!) and explore how one small change – a turn of the head, a switch of the cross of the legs – can completely change the story that's being told. And most of all, we PLAY - at all levels and across genres, from a foundational acting technique class to an advanced on-camera course.

If I had to label myself, I would say that I am a Stanislavski technique teacher, although in reality my own process as an actor and, by extension, what I offer my students is an eclectic blend of tools, all connected by an emphasis on the somatic. I am particularly drawn to Stanislavski's work in the latter part of his life when he shifted his focus to action as the centerpiece of the actor's process. Like Stanislavski, I'm interested in helping actors discover and build truthful specific *behavior*, rooted in a deep investment in the given circumstances of the character.

While you will hear the language of Stanislavski in my classroom – given circumstances, objective/task, action – you will also hear status from Keith Johnstone, motion factors and shapes from Laban, run/walk/stand from Ruth Zaporah, et. al. I'm not dogmatic as a teacher. Acting is too personal to have a one-size fits all approach. I see my job as more of a guide on the journey than a top-down authoritarian “this is what works” figure. I offer my students a set of tools, knowing full well that there will be some tools in the set that folks just don't jive with. I celebrate that fact, even though it can make students uncomfortable at times. Part of training as an actor is learning to give ourselves permission to hold onto the tools that work and to leave behind the ones that don't without guilt. As Stanislavski says, “There's no way

of walking away from yourself on stage". I seek to create a rigorous training environment in which students move toward mastery of the actor's tools while also feeling free to chart their own individual path.

I believe trained actors are problem-solvers and that acting technique is a set of problem-solving tools. My motto is "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". If you're playing well and things are cooking, great – keep going; you don't need to break down those beats. Technique is there to help us through the trouble spots, the moments when our instincts or intuition are not getting the job done. As a technique teacher, I find it especially important to underline this point. I believe deeply in the problem-solving power of technique, but that power pales in comparison to what can be ignited by our instinct and imagination.

Of course, the imagination is itself a tool, and I often find that undergraduate actors are surprised by how much they are "allowed" – I would say *required* – to use their imaginations. I'm a big believer in going deep with given circumstances work, a passion that has been fueled by my own journey of working in television where the backstory and context for a character is left largely up to the actor creating it. To borrow yet more language from Stanislavski, I would say that my super-super task as a teacher is to instill in my students a sense of themselves as artists. I want actors to know that they bring just as much to the creative process of making a show as the director, the DP or the designers.

I place a strong emphasis on giving and receiving feedback in my courses. One of the great gifts we can give each other as artists – and perhaps as people - is the ability to give specific feedback. I use a variety of structures to support student growth in this area from collaboratively created Community Engagement Agreements to Liz Lerman's Critical Response process. It's vital to me that the students understand that they are responsible for each other's growth.

Being able to truthfully experience the story of another human being is hard, and I treasure that about this craft. It takes surrender, discipline, and, most importantly, compassion. In fact, I would say that acting is really the fine art of compassion. I want to leverage the compassion that is generated through the craft and combine it with an intentional way of talking to each other in order to create a more equitable and inclusive training environment.

I'm committed to continuing to develop an anti-racist pedagogy for actor training. I actively seek to de-center whiteness in my classroom. I want students from all backgrounds and perspectives to know through the work we do together that they are valued for themselves and their contributions. Most of the material we work on in my classes is focused on telling difficult stories, stories of suffering and struggle, of passion and resilience, and my goal is to use these stories to have a larger conversation about the world we live in and how we might want to change it. Perhaps my super-super-super task, then, is to contribute to my students becoming generous and compassionate citizens of the world.