

THE COMMODIFICATION OF US ACTING AS SEEN THROUGH THE LEAGUE  
OF PROFESSIONAL THEATRE TRAINING PROGRAMS, 1968-1987

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Abstract

The Commodification of US Acting As Seen Through the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs, 1965-1987

by

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Founded in 1971, the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs was a consortium of university-sponsored conservatories granting BFA and MFA degrees in acting. It marked an institutional and pedagogical shift from the private studio and academy models of developing actors, such as the Actors Studio and Neighborhood Playhouse, and can be seen in a causal relationship with the emergence of the US regional theatre movement, insofar as the latter needed classically trained actors to fill their repertoires. Thus, League programs such as Juilliard and the Yale School of Drama began implementing a psychophysical curriculum to meet the casting demands of regional theatres that ranged from the Guthrie to the Mark Taper Forum.

My dissertation addresses this shift by examining three case studies of League acting programs from 1965-1987, the years encompassing the consortium's formation and dissolution. As such, I investigate Carnegie Mellon University's Drama Department, the American Conservatory Theatre's Advanced Training Program, and Juilliard's Drama Division along the lines of administrative policy, pedagogy, and the professionalization of graduates to demonstrate how market forces influenced US acting and actor training.

Relying on the theories of several Western Marxists, especially Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, I use a cultural materialist analysis to argue that America's actors increasingly became products for consumption throughout the period of inquiry, a practice that persists today. I therefore put the practice and professionalization of stage acting in conversation with its on-camera counterparts, film and television, to show how the forces of capitalism have compromised the actor's craft and its place in American society. In my conclusion, however, I use personal interviews and an examination of the current state of the profession and actor training to strike a chord of optimism, insofar as many students now graduating from former League programs use their education to assume an entrepreneurial approach in establishing careers of service, a trend that could very well be a positive model for the future of US actor training.

## Acknowledgements

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Lynette Gibson, whose assistance was as consistent as it was helpful throughout my time at the Graduate Center. While I have many colleagues to thank for their continual support over the past seven years, I want to specifically acknowledge Dr. Naomi Stubbs for her insightful comments during our mutually supportive work. Naomi took the time to read my chapter drafts, thereby providing thoughtful feedback, much of which I put to good use.

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Lastly, I must express my sincere gratitude to J. Michael Miller and his wife, Sharon Jenson, for sharing their personal documents, which in effect was the basis for this project. Consisting of notes, letters, minutes from meetings, and other ephemera, the Miller collection provided me with a wealth of research information upon which to build the dissertation's topic and central argument. Moreover, I want to thank Michael for his

valuable input during our many meetings. It was a conversation that we had during the fall of 2009 that in fact gave me the idea to use the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs as the dissertation's point of focus. I will always remain grateful to him for his generosity and goodwill.

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## Introduction

In an address to the National Congress of Actors and Acting Teachers in 2008, the esteemed acting teacher J. Michael Miller reflected on the bond between actor training programs and the US regional theatre dating back to the 1960s: “When there were companies the actor was the center of the event. The Artistic Director hired the acting company and made the producing decisions, to be sure. But in so many ways, both obvious and subtle, the acting company was the pulsing heart of the theatre.”<sup>1</sup> Miller was referring to the formation of resident acting companies at regional theatres throughout the US begun in 1947 when Margo Jones started the regional theatre movement as an alternative to the commercial offerings of Broadway. As Jones’s vision grew into a reality during the 1950s and early 1960s, there was a consequent need for psychophysically trained stage actors who could meet the demands of the challenging repertoire of plays produced by resident professional theatres.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a handful of American universities began forming acting conservatories that offered MFA or BFA degrees designed to prepare students for the not-for-profit professional theatre.<sup>3</sup> In a

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<sup>1</sup> J. Michael Miller, “Keynote Address to the Second National Actors Congress of Actors and Acting Teachers,” 12 January 2008, <http://www.theactorscenter.org/Congress.html> (accessed 15 September 2009).

<sup>2</sup> The term psychophysical has come in vogue of late when referring to actor training, as noted by the recent scholarship of Philip Zarilli; see *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavsky* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Despite his claim to the contrary, a psychophysical approach to acting can indeed be traced back to Stanislavsky, and moreover, it was essential to the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs, as these schools used an organic method synthesizing the actor’s psychological and physical attributes in creating a role.

clear departure from the studio system of training actors, as shown by institutions specializing in some form of Stanislavsky's Method (e.g., the Actors Studio, the Neighborhood Playhouse, Stella Adler Conservatory), these university-sponsored programs balanced a Stanislavskian approach with coursework designed to develop the technical skills necessary for meeting the demands of a largely classical repertoire being performed in spacious theatres throughout the country.<sup>4</sup> Given the sheer size of these playing spaces and the poetic requirements of the texts being staged, these "new American actors"<sup>5</sup> underwent a rigorous regimen to develop the supple bodies, powerful voices, and dexterous speech skills needed to command the audience's attention as part of

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<sup>3</sup> The US regional theatre is oftentimes more formally referred to as the "resident" or "not-for-profit" professional theatre. Beginning in the middle 1960s, several universities formed conservatories that trained actors to meet the needs of the resident theatres. Among these institutions were the Carnegie Institute of Technology and the Yale School of Drama, both of which were founding members of the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs. It is important to note that there were only a handful of acting conservatories at universities during these early years. These programs were not profitable enterprises for a university, as many are today, such as NYU's Undergraduate Drama Program, which has over 1000 students. NYU's undergraduate acting curriculum, which is distinct from its MFA Acting Program, consists of outsourcing the training to private acting schools (e.g., the Atlantic Acting School). While I am not able to locate how much these schools charge NYU to train its students, one can safely assume that the Undergraduate Drama Department is making a sizable profit when considering that its students are paying over \$40,000 a year to study with untenured part-timers at a local acting school. In fact, if these same students had the wherewithal to independently enroll at these acting schools, they could receive what is ostensibly the same training for a fraction of the cost (e.g., the Atlantic Acting School costs \$8,000 annually). For more on NYU's Undergraduate Drama Program, see [http://drama.tisch.nyu.edu/object/dr\\_curriculum.html](http://drama.tisch.nyu.edu/object/dr_curriculum.html) (accessed 27 March 2011). For evidence of NYU's tuition costs, see <http://collegesearch.collegeboard.com/search/CollegeDetail.jsp?collegeId=3186&profileId=2> (accessed 27 March 2011). For evidence of the Atlantic Acting School's tuition costs, see <http://www.atlanticactingschool.org/page.aspx?id=12016822> (accessed 27 March 2011).

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the core curriculum that was performance-oriented, actors at these conservatories were also required to take a handful of academic courses, especially those enrolled in BFA programs. Nonetheless, these classes were generally related to the study of theatre and drama. For example, Juilliard required its students to complete a course entitled "The Culture of Theatre," which examined the socio-cultural conditions of a given historical moment for the purpose of providing insights to period acting styles. It was not, however, a rigorous sociological study of theatre.

<sup>5</sup> See Jennifer Dunning, "The New American Actor," *New York Times Magazine*, 6 November 1983.

a performance that was rich in vitality. Through it all, as Miller states, the actor became the “center of the event.”

In 1971 Miller and several of his colleagues founded the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs<sup>6</sup> with the intention of establishing a standard for training actors in a psychophysical manner, and therefore providing regional theatres with the skilled artists they needed to fill their resident companies.<sup>7</sup> A consortium of eleven schools was formed at universities such as Yale and Carnegie Tech, all of which had to adhere to a set of unifying principles related to the training of stage actors.<sup>8</sup> Fielding MFA and BFA programs that were highly regimented and lasting for three and four years respectively, these schools sought to present the talents of graduating actors to the artistic directors of regional theatres, thereby placing them in resident acting companies where they would join veteran performers as part of an ensemble that brought a unique brand of theatre to local communities that could be distinguished from the commercial offerings of

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<sup>6</sup> Hereafter referred to as the “League.”

<sup>7</sup> The genesis for the League was a meeting involving Miller, Earl Gister, and Arthur Wagner at the ATA conference in Chicago during the summer of 1969. In 1971 the League began holding annual meetings and in 1973 it was officially incorporated.

<sup>8</sup> The original eleven League schools were Boston University, Brandeis University, California Institute of the Arts, Carnegie Mellon University, Goodman School of Drama, NYU, Ohio University, Southern Methodist University, Temple University, University of Washington, and Yale University (Juilliard, University of California at San Diego, SUNY Purchase, North Carolina School of the Arts, and American Conservatory Theatre joined later). Every year the League dispatched members to review the daily operations of a fellow program to ensure that the consortium’s standards were being met. During the League’s annual meetings, the majority of the sessions were spent on the issue of training standards, and programs that failed to meet these criteria were placed on probation, with some ultimately having their membership revoked (e.g., Ohio University, Temple University, the University of Washington, and CalArts). The League never had more than eleven active members at any given time in its history. The minutes of the League’s annual meeting dating back to 1971 are available in the private archive of J. Michael Miller’s wife, Sharon Jenson, who was the organization’s Executive Officer throughout its seventeen-year history.

Broadway.<sup>9</sup> Echoing Margo Jones's vision some twenty years earlier, this practice was intended to provide the public with work that centered on the actor and the acting company. Audiences would establish a special bond with performers they would see in different roles throughout a season's repertory, and this would reinforce civic pride, in conjunction with a positive sense of ownership of the organization and its actors.

The placement of League actors at regional theatres did not last long, however, as throughout the 1970s the theatres began to jettison their acting companies and implement the cost-cutting process of hiring talent on a show-by-show basis. Actors therefore could not rely on a steady income from doing stage work. In 1971 young actors suffered an additional setback when Actors Equity cancelled its so-called "Journeyman Contract," which was specifically intended to provide them with union status and an entry-level salary at theatres operating under the auspices of the Theatre Communications Group (TCG).<sup>10</sup> As a result of these hiring changes, acting schools were forced to alter their focus from developing talent exclusively for the stage and instead had to consider other mediums for placing their students professionally, such as film and television. The League demonstrated this trend insofar as member programs started to burnish their reputations and enhance future enrollment by encouraging graduates to seek work in

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<sup>9</sup> As regional theatres disbanded their resident companies throughout the 1970s, League schools were forced to find alternative ways to place their students in the profession. As a result, in 1979 the League began its annual Actor Presentation for industry professionals. Today literally hundreds of college acting programs conduct such showcases, with many agents and casting directors referring to them as "the League auditions," thereby inadvertently acknowledging the League's role in the history of US actor training.

<sup>10</sup> The Theatre Communications Group (TCG) was formed in 1961 for the purpose of synthesizing the regional theatre movement. Member theatres had to adhere to standard principles for admission to the organization, which provided a central site for sharing administrative, financial, and artistic information. One of the primary functions of TCG during the 1960s was to facilitate the auditioning of new talent for resident acting companies.

commercial sectors of the business.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the League's annual Actor Presentation also evidences this change in focus. Commencing in 1979, this yearly showcase was intended to expose graduating students to agents and casting directors, middlemen who were fast becoming indispensable to an actor's livelihood.<sup>12</sup>

Reasoning that the consortium's initial goal to train exceptional stage actors had run its course, Miller and his colleagues disbanded the League in the spring of 1987. The history of the League serves as a telling narrative in the development of US actor training, insofar as it demonstrates how conservatories were formed to prepare personnel for the professional not-for-profit theatre, yet ultimately were forced to redirect their students to seek work in the entertainment industry, namely film, television, and to some extent, Broadway. My project will address crucial shifts seen within US actor training from 1965 to 1987—the years encompassing the League's formation and decline. Using three schools that operated as members of the League and continue today (Juilliard, Carnegie Mellon, and A.C.T.), I will investigate trends in actor training relative to the profession of acting by identifying the ways in which actors have increasingly become products to be consumed. With these case studies as the foundation for my analysis, I hope to address such questions as: What was the history of these schools in relation to the regional theatre, and how did this connection affect the way theatre was offered to local communities? How did these university-sponsored conservatories prepare students for

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<sup>11</sup> The program brochures of various League schools began to feature their celebrity alumni, as exemplified by Carnegie Mellon's 1984 version, replete with photographs of film and television stars such as George Peppard, Jack Klugman, and several members of the cast of the hit show *Hill Street Blues*.

<sup>12</sup> The League's Actor Presentations also attracted artistic directors of regional theatres according to J. Michael Miller (Interview with author, 7/22/10), however, a significant portion of the guests were agents and casting directors representing the film and television industry. This trend increased over time, and today hundreds of acting schools employ similar showcases for the sole purpose of connecting graduating students with agents and casting directors.

the profession, and moreover, how did this preparation trend according to the forces of capitalism? Ultimately, what impact did these developments have on US acting as an art form?

To answer these questions I will examine my case studies through a cultural materialist lens by considering actors as commodities that possess exchange value in the capitalist marketplace.<sup>13</sup> Numerous social and cultural theorists have identified “commodification” as the process by which materials are produced, distributed, and consumed. Studies on the subject can be traced as far back as Marx, who uses the term “commodity” to address the effects of a market economy on labor and social class.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, most scholarship analyzing consumer society can be therefore attributed to Western Marxists, as exemplified by the likes of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Unlike critics of consumerism who base their analysis on issues of disenfranchisement and economic privilege relative to social class and ethnic identity,<sup>15</sup> Adorno and Benjamin focus on capitalism’s transformation of the material goods being produced. Adorno, in particular, is concerned with the “thing-like” properties constituting a work of art in modern society and the ways in which socioeconomic forces condition the

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<sup>13</sup> I should note that US actors are not objects of exchange in every instance in which they practice their work. Indeed, there are a number of contexts in which an actor could conceivably perform outside the reach of capitalism, such as in educational and nonprofessional settings (e.g., community theatre). Nonetheless, the great majority of professional acting jobs, and likewise the prospect of having a successful career, is somehow conditioned by the forces of capitalism.

<sup>14</sup> For a foundational understanding of Marxist theory, see his signature treatise, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 1992). For his theorization of commodities, see vol. 1, chap. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Among the numerous scholars who locate cultural production and consumption along the lines of social class and identity politics are those hailing from the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, most notably Stuart Hall, Colin Mercer, and Tony Bennett. For more on the Birmingham School theorists, see Tony Bennett et al., *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1986).

production and reception of cultural goods.<sup>16</sup> Because a work of art's function is determined by its exchange value in the marketplace, its constituent materials and the creative labor used to produce it are objects of exchange. Just as Adorno applies this theoretical framework to music, I intend to address the commercialization of actors and acting, and argue that market forces increasingly corrupted US professional acting and actor training during the period of my study, 1965-1987. I will support this argument by analyzing how the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs, as exemplified by my three case studies, were forced to respond to economic conditions by increasingly portraying actors and their craft as cultural goods produced for mass consumption.

While much has been written about actor training, no one has addressed the commodification of the actor relative to the professional not-for-profit theatre. For example, acting theorists such as Jerzy Grotowski and Philip Zarilli examine the psychophysical demands of stage acting, and gentleman scholars like Joseph Wesley Zeigler and Robert Brustein have written about the regional theatre, yet heretofore there has been no effort to investigate the two in tandem. My case studies will consist of two League schools that had a direct relationship with a TCG theatre and one that did not, thereby enabling me to show how the not-for-profit theatre influenced training methods and the professionalization of student actors. I will examine the Juilliard School in conjunction with the Acting Company, and the American Conservatory Theatre in association with its not-for-profit namesake. Because Carnegie Mellon University (my third case study) did not share an alliance with a professional theatre, I plan to distinguish

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<sup>16</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 175.

it accordingly from Juilliard and A.C.T.<sup>17</sup> I chose these schools because collectively they best represent the League given their pedagogy, storied histories, success of alumni, geographical breadth, and sterling reputations. Moreover, the fact that these programs still exist today enables me to trace them beyond the history of the League, something that I do in the dissertation's conclusion.

In chapter 1, I lay out the theoretical foundation for my argument: the commodification of US acting and actor training as seen through the League. I will use Theodor Adorno's cultural criticism in conversation with Walter Benjamin's work on the reproduction of art in modern society and Jean Baudrillard's theory of symbolic exchange to show how the stage actor's *aura* has been negatively affected by the forces of capitalism, insofar as the actor has become a material good possessing "exchange value" at the expense of his "cult value."<sup>18</sup> Whereas the latter is associated with stage acting and will therefore be explored in connection with the US not-for-profit theatre, the former pertains to the reproduction of the actor as an object for mass consumption, as exemplified by his function in the mediums of film and television. After establishing my theoretical basis (commodification negates an artwork's aura), I will then specifically apply it to the work of actors by analyzing the training methods of Jerzy Grotowski, Phillip Zarilli, and Tadashi Suzuki in relationship to the pedagogy of League acting programs.

In chapter 2, I provide a historical context for the content and scope of my study by summarizing twentieth-century US actor training from the arrival of Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theatre in 1924 to the advent of the League schools during the late 1960s. I

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<sup>17</sup> Carnegie Mellon University was known as the Carnegie Institute of Technology until 1967, when the latter merged with the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research to arrive at the university's current name.

<sup>18</sup> I will be referring to my subjects interchangeably as both "actors" and "actresses" throughout this dissertation.

trace the legacy of Stanislavsky's system from Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya's American Laboratory Theatre to the formation of the Group Theatre and the Method's various incarnations in the teaching of former Group members, most notably Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner. Subsequently, the bulk of this chapter discusses the shift in emphasis from the acting studio model to university-sponsored conservatories. Because regional theatre was the impetus for university acting programs, I historicize the not-for-profit theatre movement in the context of the League's formation and development.

In chapters 3 and 4, I jointly explore the acting programs of Carnegie Mellon University, Juilliard, and the American Conservatory Theatre in the following areas: administrative policy, curriculum and faculty, and professionalization. These case studies will serve to represent the League's standards, and moreover, its tireless yet unsuccessful attempt to forge an alliance with TCG, thereby effecting the policies, pedagogy, and professional placement of graduating actors. The data gleaned from these areas of inquiry will support my materialist examination of actor training by showing how the increasing commodification of actors jointly influenced the not-for-profit theatre and League acting programs.

My conclusion will synthesize the outcomes of my case studies into a clear response to the questions posed at the dissertation's outset.<sup>19</sup> Thus, I will identify the ways in which US actor training changed during the history of the League, how these shifts are marked both pedagogically and professionally, and how the League may have anticipated future trends in the field. With respect to the latter, I will cite several current models of former League programs in making a case for an entrepreneurial approach to preparing

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<sup>19</sup> Please see page 5 to reference the key questions I am addressing.

actors for today's evolving professional landscape. Underscoring these findings is a theory of commodification as defined by the cultural and social criticism of Adorno and others.

## Chapter 1

### Theorizing the Commodification of US Acting and Actor Training

Since kings break faith upon commodity, gain be my lord, for I will worship thee.

–William Shakespeare, *King John*<sup>1</sup>

Theodor Adorno and his colleague Max Horkheimer coined the term “culture industry” as part of their work with the Frankfurt School of Social Research during the 1930s. The term represents Adorno’s view that cultural production underwent a regressive change during the modern era with the global reach of capitalism and the consequent mass reproduction, distribution, and consumption of material goods. According to Adorno, artworks degenerated into material objects that were standardized and commodified for the sole purpose of making money for producers. A cultural object’s use was determined by its “exchange value,” or how much capital it could fetch in the marketplace. This commodifying process had the effect of debasing artistic tastes, criticism, and most crucially, a sense of the object’s uniqueness. With respect to the latter point, Adorno feared that the standardization of culture resulted in a devaluation of individuality that went beyond works of art to include a homogenizing affect on society in general:

The sacrifice of individuality which accommodates itself to the regularity of the successful, the doing of what everybody else does, follows from the

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<sup>1</sup> *King John*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 2.1. 597-98. References are to act, scene, and line.

basic fact that in the broad areas the same thing is offered to everybody by the standardized production of consumption goods.<sup>2</sup>

Although Adorno primarily addresses the culture industry's impact on music, his theoretical argument can also apply to theatre and actor training. My aim is to use his theory to argue that the not-for-profit US American theatre has become a homogenized industry devoid of artistic uniqueness, which, moreover, has fallen short of Margo Jones's promise that it provides a service to individual communities. Acting programs have likewise become formulaically organized, as shown by their increasing acquiescence to the demands of the entertainment industry. Just as Adorno argues that the commercialization of music led to a decline in musical tastes, one could make a similar case regarding the regional theatre and America's diminishing respect for stage acting. Over the past four decades not-for-profit theatres have retreated from Margo Jones's founding vision of creating companies that were constituted by an ensemble of actors performing a range of new and classical dramas in service of local communities. Instead, these theatres have generally adhered to the formulaic approach of producing marketable works with small casts that are hired on a show-by-show basis. Rustom Barucha makes this very point in addressing the matter of "audience development" and play selection in his scathing, yet thoughtful, critique of the regional theater:

And so the standard repertoire of a regional theatre includes a selection from the "classics" (the overworked masterpieces of Shakespeare, Shaw, and Chekhov), "American drama" (the warhorses of O'Neill, Williams, and Miller), "new American plays" (*The Shadow Box*, *Vanities*, and *The Gin Game*), British imports (Stoppard, Pinter, and revivals of Coward), and, of course, "all time favorites" like *Barefoot in the Park* and *You*

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<sup>2</sup> Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Culture Industry*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1991), 40.

*Can't Take It With You*. There is something disturbing about this eclectic selection.<sup>3</sup>

As Barucha and others have argued, the US regional theatre developed as an institution at the expense of taking artistic risks and serving local communities.<sup>4</sup> What began as a democratizing movement designed to “decentralize” the US professional theatre from its New York City roots eventually became, in part, a “tryout” station for Broadway, with a “purely elitist approach to building audiences.”<sup>5</sup> Ironically it was Zelda Fichandler, a protégé of Margo Jones, who began this practice by overseeing the transfer of Arena Stage’s production of Howard Sackler’s drama *The Great White Hope* to Broadway in 1968. Thereafter, many regional theatres throughout the country looked to the Arena example as a model for gaining both economic and cultural capital; today this practice continues, as exemplified by *Jersey Boys* (La Jolla Playhouse) and *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (Mark Taper Forum), among others. Since the 1970s, regional theatres have also applied an oppositional strategy in forging a relationship with the New York theatre by taking their cues from Broadway in selecting their seasons, as noted by TCG’s documentation of the most widely produced works for 2011-12, in which nine of the top ten plays were recent successes on “The Great White Way.”<sup>6</sup> While some

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<sup>3</sup> Rustom Barucha, “Anatomy of the Regional Theater,” *Theater* (Summer 1979): 10-20. Also, see Paul DiMaggio and Kristen Stenberg, “Why Do Some Theaters Innovate More Than Others? An Empirical Analysis,” *Poetics: International Review for the Theory of Literature* 14 (April 1985): 107-22.

<sup>4</sup>For additional critiques of the US regional theatre, see Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 170-209; Martin Gottfried, *A Theatre Divided: The Postwar American Stage* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), 90-128; Robert Brustein, *Reimagining American Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), 225-27, 240-48; and Herbert Blau, *The Impossible Theatre* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 183-227.

<sup>5</sup> Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 178.

regional houses do in fact form a close connection with their local audience by producing work that could be described as separate from the commercial underpinnings of Broadway, the greater majority of them are significantly influenced by what has been successful in New York, a conceit that has homogenized America's not-for-profit theatres and contradicts the notion of a decentralized aesthetic.

As regional theatres became increasingly institutionalized during the 1960s and 70s under the influence of Broadway and the auspices of TCG and the Ford Foundation, the movement's initial intention to provide a "service" to "every part" of the varied communities comprising America's cities and towns proved to be an aesthetically conservative enterprise for select audiences.<sup>7</sup> Economic forces were crucial in determining how these organizations operated and made artistic choices, such as the programming of plays, and most crucially, the elimination of resident acting ensembles. I will explore the latter more fully in the dissertation's penultimate chapter.

In contextualizing the commodification of music, Adorno claims that cultural consumers are trained to become "slaves" that blindly succumb to the subtle, yet palpable effects of the culture industry.<sup>8</sup> Although his choice of words seems elitist, his argument is convincing insofar as it applies to capitalism's impact on cultural production and consumption. Audiences often fail to recognize the nuance and attributes of an artwork and the ways in which it gets produced, but are drawn instead to the public perception, or

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<sup>6</sup> With the exception of Christopher Sergel's adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, nine of the top ten plays produced at TCG theatres during the 2011-12 season were Broadway hits within the past five years, with the Tony Award winning *Red* and *God of Carnage* sharing the top spot with twenty-three productions a piece. See <http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/ATtopten.cfm> (accessed 9 June 2012).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>8</sup> Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," 39.

“belief” surrounding its production: the reputation of a conductor or musician; the cultural capital of a composer or his composition; the culinary or popular appeal of a hit song, etc.<sup>9</sup> A similar fetishizing move can be identified in the not-for-profit theatre and its actors, as audiences are drawn to shows and performances to garner symbolic capital, yet they oftentimes fail to distinguish the merits or shortcomings of what they see. In addressing the US regional theatre, the playwright Richard Nelson makes this very point:

I see the theatre reflecting a society in which we are not articulating moral concerns and in which the only goal appreciated by our peers is success. There was a time when we agreed that theatre had to be about something, when we had to find out what it should be about.<sup>10</sup>

The cultural producers, which in this instance would be artistic directors and their Boards, reinforce this degenerative process by presenting work that is averse to taking aesthetic, intellectual, or political risks. The artwork therefore functions as a commodity yielding symbolic capital that can be translated into economic capital, thereby causing material goods and services to be traded for financial gain. Thus, a successful repertory company is not defined by its connection to local communities or by making innovative or politically challenging artistic choices, but by its ability to prosper.

A successful acting career is likewise measured by the acquisition of symbolic and economic capital, and often has little to do with one’s skills, technique, or artistic craft.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pierre Bourdieu theorizes that culture is assigned value according to a socially constructed “belief” that is demonstrated by the public’s perception of a given artwork, artist, or art form. This process of valuation is symbolic and most often determined by critics, who serve as arbiters of taste. Although Bourdieu’s view of cultural production could be positioned against Adorno’s, I see a methodological connection between the two, insofar as both demonstrate that the valuation of culture is driven by economic forces and the concurrent attempt of producers to contrive a perception of legitimation for their artwork. The point is that such legitimation or cultural worth is determined symbolically. For more on Bourdieu’s cultural theory, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Nelson, quoted in David Savran, *In Their Own Words: Contemporary American Playwrights* (New York: TCG, 1988), 172.

For example, a common practice on Broadway— and to some extent regional theatre—is casting celebrities in leading parts to boost ticket sales, regardless of whether or not the actor is capable of meeting the role’s requirements. This explains why respected film stars such as Julia Roberts (*Three Days of Rain*, 2006) and Nicole Kidman (*The Blue Room*, 1998 and *Sweet Bird of Youth*, 2011), among numerous others, are awarded plum roles despite their unproven work onstage. Throughout their illustrious screen careers, which include the *crème de la crème* of symbolic acquisitions, the Academy Award, they have amassed enough symbolic capital to warrant being cast in leads on Broadway, although neither actress has any formal stage training. Moreover, Roberts’s and Kidman’s celebrity dominated their respective productions and in effect eclipsed the play, thereby making it “all about” them:

Ms. Roberts is the sole reason this limited-run revival has become the most coveted ticket in town. Mr. Greenberg’s slender, elegant play from 1997 about familial disconnectedness and the loneliness of intimacy has certainly never known—and will probably never know again—such fame and fortune.<sup>12</sup>

That one of the performers is Ms. Kidman, the wife of Tom Cruise and the star of the films *Practical Magic* and (most memorably) *To Die For*, has much to do, of course, with what has made “The Blue Room” a must-see event.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, referring to an artwork or an artist’s career as a “success” is complicated and needs to be defined. I am therefore measuring a “successful” theatre company or acting career by the amount of cultural, symbolic, and most importantly, economic capital a given subject earns. For a comprehensive explanation of the various forms of capital and how they can be theorized according to cultural production, see Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 112-41. For more on the valuation of culture in society, and the determining role of economic forces therein, see David Throsby, *Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19-43.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Brantley, “Enough Said About ‘Three Days of Rain.’ Let’s Talk About Julia Roberts!” *New York Times*, 20 April 2006, <http://theater.nytimes.com/2006/04/20/theater/reviews/20rain.html> (accessed 28 March 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Ben Brantley, “Fool’s Gold in the Kingdom of Desire,” *New York Times*, 14 December 1998.

Adorno refers to this process in music as “fetishization,” insofar as musical products (e.g., singers or instrumentalists) are valued not for their individual abilities to express the form and content of a given composition, but for the ways in which they are marketed publicly: “For all contemporary musical life is dominated by the commodity form; the last pre-capitalist residues have been eliminated.”<sup>14</sup> Adorno goes on to describe the “fetish character” of music as a schism between the musician and the listener, as identified by the artist’s detachment from the materials of his labor. For example, he uses NBC’s broadcasts of Toscanini’s concerts to illustrate how radio and television detach the artist from the production and reception of his work.<sup>15</sup> Of course this hardly matters to the artist and listener, as the measure of success within this commodified context is the cultural product’s “exchange value,” which is determined by its symbolic worth to the listener. At no point is there a “pure” and tangible connection between the artist, his work, and the listener. Instead the dynamic of cultural production, distribution, and consumption is defined by the fetishization of the artistic object; the process has precious little to do with the work of art itself.

Citing another musical example, Adorno demonstrates how the production and distribution of the so-called “pop song” negates aesthetic individuality and uniqueness. He dialectically identifies the creation and marketing of artistic goods by arguing that the composer of a hit song produces a “standard” that feigns originality yet adheres “to the regularity of the successful, the doing of what everybody does.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, Adorno coins

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<sup>14</sup> Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” 37-38. Also, see Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chap. 1, sec. 4, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof.”

<sup>15</sup> Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

the term “pseudo-activity” in pejoratively identifying twentieth-century popular music.<sup>17</sup> A basic and proven form is established (e.g., the syncopated rhythms of jazz), yet contrarily, a composer will also attempt to contrive suggestions of originality and inventiveness—Adorno refers to the improvisatory character of jazz in this manner. Although many have questioned Adorno’s understanding of jazz, his contention that much modern music lacks uniqueness is compelling and can be applied to other art forms, especially theatre and acting.<sup>18</sup> The demise of the stage actor’s craft can be likened to the declining virtuosity of vocalists. Similar to his criticism of Toscanini’s NBC broadcasts, Adorno describes how the fetishization of singers occurs at the expense of their artistry: “Musical fetishism takes possession of the public valuation of singing voices.”<sup>19</sup> The singer’s technical virtuosity and craft is eclipsed once he is mediated as a marketable commodity whose image and music fit the formula for success, which is ultimately defined by the singer’s exchange value. This process can be identified in many pop artists of the period of my study (e.g., Madonna), in which the artist’s image operates as a material good for mass consumption at the expense of any vestige of musicianship or vocal technique.

In locating musical production as a fetishized process, Adorno suggests that marketing plays a significant role: “Regressive listening is tied to production by the machinery of distribution, and particularly by advertising.”<sup>20</sup> Similar to the current case of Lady Gaga,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>18</sup> For a thoughtful and balanced response to critiques of Adorno’s treatment of jazz, see James M. Harding, “Adorno, Ellison, and the Critique of Jazz,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (Autumn 1995): 129-58.

<sup>19</sup> Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” 36.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 47.

for example, celebrity actors have become culturally constructed icons by having their images mass distributed to a target audience that desires the image and what it symbolizes. From screen stars such as Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise to the stage-trained Meryl Streep, an actor's fame translates into exchange value, which is the measure of professional worth and success. By using media tools like the recording industry, iPods, popular periodicals, the Internet, and of course film and television, these celebrities are marketed as products for consumption before a dotting public that is drawn to his/her image and would-be artistic praxis. The actual artwork, however, tends to get lost in this process. The consumer wants to have an experience of someone and something with which they are familiar and can relate to, yet conversely, they want to "produce the belief" that this very experience is altogether unique.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Lady Gaga's formulaic music is accompanied by her outlandish costumes and highly contrived iconoclasm.<sup>22</sup> Her symbolically constructed idolatry serves as a commercial complement to her ersatz musicianship. A similar analysis could be made of her predecessor, Madonna, whose "success," as John Fiske asserts, "[was] due at least as much to her videos and her personality as her music."<sup>23</sup> In tracing Madonna's fame to her socially constructed image (as opposed to her music), Fiske reminds us that her first album, *Madonna* (1983), was initially a commercial failure, and that it wasn't until she made the video "Lucky Star"

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<sup>21</sup> See Bourdieu's theorization of the "production of belief" in *The Field of Cultural Production*, 74-111.

<sup>22</sup> According to Famecount.com, a site that uses Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube to measure a celebrity's popularity, Lady Gaga has over 20 million fans. This site identifies her as the most popular individual in the US. <http://www.famecount.com/all-platforms/Worldwide/Musician> (accessed 2 August 2010).

<sup>23</sup> John Fiske, "Madonna," in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, ed. James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein (New York: Routledge, 2001), 246.

that her career began to take off.<sup>24</sup> The basis for this breakthrough, he argues, was to deploy mythical signifiers through the mass media that evoked Madonna as a sexually empowered figure that became a pop icon for adolescent girls and gay men, who largely comprised her fan base during much of the 1980s. Like the contemporary case of Lady Gaga, this “fine example of the capitalist pop industry at work” built a singing career that had little to with “what she sounded like.”<sup>25</sup> As such, both icons exemplify what Adorno refers to as the “totalitarian” result of “the star principle.”<sup>26</sup>

The social theorist Jean Baudrillard also uses the term “totalitarian” to show how the mass media displaces artistic craft by using images that are divorced from the artist and his work.<sup>27</sup> Unlike Adorno, who bases his criticism on the forces of cultural *production*, Baudrillard locates *consumption* as the foundation for his theory. In doing so, he employs a structuralist methodology to argue that products are marketed through a system of signs that persuade consumers to purchase goods for their *symbolic value* because they yield some form of social distinction. Be it a car or an article of clothing, the object is advertised to the consumer by evoking a mythical message that has little to do with the object itself, insofar as it is distributed as a symbolic image. As Baudrillard points out, the specific needs and personal character of the consumer are of little interest to the product’s marketers, as in essence they are selling signs that bear socially-coded

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 246-47.

<sup>26</sup> Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening,” 35.

<sup>27</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: SAGE, 1998), 123. *Consumer Society* is representative of Baudrillard’s earlier work (1970s), in which he developed poststructuralist theories that examined socially constructed systems of signs relative to consumerism. From the late 1980s onward he shifted his attention to historiography, globalization, and politics as noted by works such as *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1991) and *The Illusion of the End* (1992).

messages: “Advertising as a whole has no meaning. It merely conveys significations. Its significations (and the behaviors they call forth) are never personal; they are differential.”<sup>28</sup> The concept of difference is itself a commodity that possesses exchange value determined along socioeconomic lines: a Mercedes Benz connotes elitism precisely because only the wealthy can afford it; it creates the perception of distinguishing its owner from the rest of society.<sup>29</sup> Society is trained to respond to these codes and what they signify through the branding and marketing of products for consumption. The paradox rests in the fact that conformity is being sold to a consumer who thinks he is buying something that separates him from everyone else. He fails to recognize that he is responding to a socially constructed code that is constituted by a myth: “The differences are not differences and, instead of marking a person out as someone singular, they mark rather the conformity with a code, his integration into a sliding scale of values.”<sup>30</sup>

Baudrillard’s theory of symbolic exchange can be applied to art, and more specifically, theatre and the work of actors. Just as the Mercedes Benz offers symbolic value to a prospective buyer, a Shakespearean play at a prestigious regional theatre can offer a spectator cultural capital, or the social credit obtained by attending a canonical presentation at a legitimized artistic institution.<sup>31</sup> The consumer is in effect purchasing a myth that bears the socially encoded credit of erudition and cultural refinement, which

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<sup>28</sup> Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 88.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>30</sup> Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, 89. Also, for a useful analysis of how culturally constructed myths are formed through marketing techniques, see Holt, *How Brands Become Icons*, 39-61.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Levine’s seminal work on the bifurcation of culture in nineteenth century America offers an insightful look at how Shakespeare has been hierarchically constructed in the US. See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 13-81.

explains, in part, why the overwhelming majority of audiences for the not-for-profit theatre since its inception have been educated, upper-middle class whites.<sup>32</sup> This perception of the so-called legitimate stage reinforces a hierarchical social order in the US, thereby privileging those who can afford the time and money to attend LORT's consecrated offerings.<sup>33</sup> As I will argue in chapter 5, these theatres have traditionally catered to their limited audience base by making conservative artistic choices with respect to programming, marketing, and production.<sup>34</sup> In lieu of taking artistic risks or challenging the sociopolitical status quo, these institutions instead—by and large—produce formulaic work in appealing to a calcified demographic of spectators who engage in what Baudrillard refers to as a symbolic exchange of cultural and economic capital.<sup>35</sup>

Baudrillard's theory is perhaps even more applicable to actors. As film and television have come to dominate their profession, actors have been forced to turn to on-camera mediums for employment.<sup>36</sup> As such, their craft has been subjected to what Baudrillard calls *simulation*, a term he uses to describe how an object bearing the

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<sup>32</sup> William Baumol and William Bowen, *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1966), 71-97; also James Heilbrun and Charles M. Gray, *The Economics of Art and Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 46-51.

<sup>33</sup> The League of Resident Theatres (LORT) consists of seventy-six of TCG's more reputable members. Theatres such as the Guthrie and Arena Stage represent this auspicious group, and can be located in nearly every major US market. For a remarkable study of how the US theatre has historically functioned as a source of social stratification, see David Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theater, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 170-80.

<sup>35</sup> Also, see Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 29-45, 74-111.

<sup>36</sup> Several NEA reports conducted between 1976 and 2005 indicate that professional actors have been trending to film and television to make a living. For a detailed account of this development, see the National Endowment for the Arts Research Division, "Understanding the Employment of Actors," September 1977; also "Employment and Unemployment of Artists: 1970-1975" and "Artists in the Workforce: 1990-2005," <http://www.nea.gov/research/index.html> (accessed 1 December 2009).

moniker of “art” is reduced to the machinations of the process of symbolic exchange, which again, is not contingent on the beholder/consumer’s “acculturation,” but rather his attempt to gain upward social mobility.<sup>37</sup> Baudrillard explains his theory by referencing what he terms the “recycling” of art, in which an object’s uniqueness falls prey to “an aesthetics of simulation,” whereby it is “aped” and “imitated” in mass.<sup>38</sup> Be it the reconfiguration of a piece of music as an advertising jingle or the recycling of a painting as a souvenir print, the original artwork is reproduced and mass distributed under the guise of something artistic, but in fact it is only an echo, a “simulation,” of the real thing. A reproduced image of the “Mona Lisa,” for example, is nothing more than a simulation of the actual painting. The brush strokes, juxtaposition of light and shadows, mixture of colors, indeed all the qualities that constitute the painting’s craftsmanship, are negated when it is remade into a poster or a key chain, thereby resulting in a loss of the painting’s *aura*. The same is true for the actor whose performance is mediated through the camera. Whereas the stage actor’s corporeal presence—as identified by his physical, emotional, and vocal vitality—defines his aura, his cinematic counterpart’s expression of his body and voice is inconsequential. The film and television spectator therefore experiences the actor’s displaced image, but not his *psychophysical* presence. The film actor’s performance can be thus compared to the variegated simulations aping DaVinci’s famous painting, which according to Baudrillard, are formulated through a system of social codes that determine how such goods are produced, distributed, and most crucially, consumed.

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<sup>37</sup> Baudrillard, *Consumer Society*, 100-101.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

## The Actor's Aura and its Theatrical Function

Conceptualizing art and its value is complicated. Indeed, Adorno admits as much: “The idea of beauty draws attention to something essential to art without, however, articulating it directly. The beautiful is no more to be defined than its concept can be dispersed with a strict antinomy.”<sup>39</sup> In his aesthetic theory, however, Adorno uses several attributes to identify an artwork, including its originality or uniqueness, its distinction from “empirical reality,” and—uncharacteristic as it may seem for Adorno—its “spiritual essence.”<sup>40</sup> It is the latter criterion that best describes how actors and their craft have become compromised by the commodifying effects of capitalism and will therefore be my point of focus in attempting to explain his theory of aesthetic spiritualization.

Comparing aesthetic beauty to a fireworks display, Adorno describes art as a transcendent experience that can be identified as an “apparition.”<sup>41</sup> The apparition implies a spirituality that causes a phenomenological effect that is evanescent—evanescence reconceived as “liveness” is of course a distinguishing characteristic of theatre. Ultimately, Adorno does not use the term “spirit” in an ethereal manner, but addresses it relative to an artwork’s form. In arguing that “the spirit of artworks is bound up with their form,” he defines the former as a sensual affect that is the product of a given piece’s constituent elements.<sup>42</sup> Contrary to supernatural associations with the term, Adorno describes spirit as an artwork’s “vital” and “substantial” essence, and not “a thin abstract

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<sup>39</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 51.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-94.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

layer hovering above” the selfsame work.<sup>43</sup> It is affective, if phenomenal, and the result of a process that can be objectively identified .

Adorno contends an artwork bears exceptionality as a uniquely created phenomenon that is distinct from empirical reality, otherwise identified as the ordinariness of everyday life. In recognizing art as jointly spiritual and tangible, Adorno uses a dialectic to analyze the dynamic between a work’s phenomenal affect and its material form, which he terms its “thing-like” dimensions.<sup>44</sup> The work’s spirit is thereby generated by the artwork’s material form for the purpose of transcending that very form. While the artwork’s spirit is its defining attribute, it is created through a process that is contingent on the work’s constitutive elements, such as the dialectical connection between the sounds of a sonata relative to its musical composition, or actors mediating a scripted drama into live performance. The performed sonata and drama potentially yield a transcendent experience for the performers and spectators alike, and in doing so are distinct from empirical reality. Yet this affect depends on the artwork’s material properties (the notes and words on the page), without which the spirit of the aesthetic would cease to exist. In a certain sense, the spirit of the artwork breaks forth from the very materials that constitute it to express a state of sublimity that goes beyond the empirical and enters a phenomenal realm that can be measured objectively: “Its objectivity has its measure in the power with which it infiltrates its appearance.”<sup>45</sup> The constitutive elements are thus

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 88-90.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 87.

transformed through a creative process that renders a tangibly transcendent and altogether ephemeral affect on its beholder: this process is what Adorno terms “spiritualization.”<sup>46</sup>

Adorno’s theory of aesthetic spiritualization can be likened to how his colleague Walter Benjamin depicts the stage actor’s *aura*. In his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin equates an artwork’s aura with uniqueness, and he demonstrates how the forces of commodification, as seen through technological progress, eradicate it. The mass reproduction of an artwork negates its “spiritual beauty,” which Benjamin identifies as “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”<sup>47</sup> He describes his paradigm through a binary that positions a work’s “cult value” against its “exhibition value.” In the former case, the work is imbued with a ritualistic essence that is defined by what he terms its aura. Such a work possesses an affective if evanescent presence and must be experienced live. Theatre, for example, fits this rationale. On the other hand, exhibition value refers to the technological mediation of art into objects that are reproduced in mass. This system of standardization cancels the cult value that makes an artwork unique and ephemeral: “When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult the semblance of its autonomy disappeared.”<sup>48</sup> Benjamin’s overarching argument is not to lament the disappearance of the aura, however, but to show how the reproduction of art can be a powerful political tool, as he locates this process relative to the emergence of fascism during the 1930s.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 90-95.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 245, 220.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 226.

Despite the essay's political implications, for the purpose of my study, I would like to focus on Benjamin's methodology, in which he demonstrates the effect technologically reproduced art has on a work's aura. Benjamin identifies photography and film as the most prominent examples of cultural reproduction. He explains how, in the latter instance, the actor becomes mediated through a camera, thereby resulting in his disconnection from the spectator: "The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera."<sup>49</sup> In contrast to theatre, after completing his work before the camera, the film actor's performance is shaped and contrived through the director's editing; he thereby forfeits his artistic agency. Whereas the stage actor's work is measured by his *presence*, as expressed through his corporeal being, including its manifestation in voice and speech work, the film actor is mediated through the camera's lens that constitutes his performance as a commodity to be reproduced and distributed in mass. Moreover, the process of arriving at a performance further distinguishes film and stage acting. In the latter instance the actor goes through numerous weeks of rehearsals before sharing his work with a live audience, in which he must sustain his concentration and energy to hold their attention.<sup>50</sup> If he becomes detached from his work he sacrifices his aura, and by extension, his connection with the spectator. Contrarily, the film actor generally does not partake in a rehearsal process, and given that his performance is

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>50</sup> Marx's theory of use-value readily applies to the labor-intensive process of the stage actor. The time spent rehearsing a play, for example, which includes everything from memorizing text to arriving at a character, is a lengthy and oftentimes arduous experience that the audience, much less the critics, fails to recognize because, as Marx puts it, the actor's labor becomes "abstracted from its use." See Marx, "The Two Factors of a Commodity: Use-Value and Value (The Substance of Value and the Magnitude of Value)," in *Das Kapital*, chap. 1, sec. 1.

intended for the camera (as opposed to a live audience), he does not have to employ the same corporeal vitality as his theatrical counterpart.

Training theatre actors through a rigorous regimen of psychophysical coursework was the basis for the acting schools that constituted the League. Though many (Juilliard's Kevin Kline or Yale's Meryl Streep) went on to have film and TV careers, in theory, they were being prepared for the stage.<sup>51</sup> The pedagogy of League schools bore a resemblance to Benjamin's description of the actor's aura, insofar as the curricula therein integrated a psychological approach to the actor's work with technique courses designed to produce virtuosic performers who possessed the vocal and physical expressivity, "the cult value," necessary to meeting the casting demands of the US regional theatre. Whether one was playing Cleopatra on an outdoor stage at one of the nation's ubiquitous Shakespearean festivals or working on a new work at a venue such as the Mark Taper Forum, this "new breed of American actors" graduating from League programs achieved what I am calling an *auracular* performance style, a feat made possible through years of training and the development of highly refined technical skills.<sup>52</sup> Classes in fencing, acrobatics, and yoga complemented newly developed approaches to train an actor's voice and speech, such as those respectively founded by Kristin Linklater and Edith Skinner.<sup>53</sup> At Carnegie

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<sup>51</sup> Although Kline and Streep are best known for their film work, they have numerous theatre accomplishments in their respective careers, most notably their joint endeavor in George Wolfe's production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* at the Delacorte Theater during the summer of 2006. While an excellent case can be made for their casting having commodified the production, one should not underestimate the fact that their training enabled them to deliver an impressive, if imperfect, pair of performances. See <http://theater.nytimes.com/2006/08/22/theater/reviews/22moth.html>

<sup>52</sup> Jennifer Dunning, "The New American Actor," *New York Times Magazine*, 2 October 1983.

students learned corporeal mime, at A.C.T. they were taught acrobatics and circus skills, whereas schools like CalArts and Juilliard employed a host of eastern performance techniques such as tai chi chuan and the Noh-influenced system of Tadashi Suzuki, all of which was intended to train actors to ground their work in a state of psychophysical centeredness, a necessary skill for rendering an auratic, or to borrow from Adorno, a “spiritualized” performance.

The premise for this curriculum can be traced to a 1966 conference in Minnesota that sought to unite the US professional and academic theatre in a mutually beneficial working relationship. Jointly sponsored by the Guthrie and the University of Minnesota, luminaries from both of these branches of the profession left the week-long session concluding that actor training had to be “reshaped” to overcome its “woefully inadequate” state and therein “meet the existing standards of the US theatre.”<sup>54</sup> At the heart of this new pedagogy was a psychophysical regimen that integrated multiple learning methods for the purpose of producing performers schooled in traditions such as the “elements of Meyerhold’s biomechanics” and “Chinese training to develop relaxation and flexibility,” every bit as much as they were studied in Stanislavsky’s work.<sup>55</sup> Film and TV acting were eschewed as “unchallenging” in favor of the virtuosity and versatility of the repertory actor, who at that time could enjoy permanent employment as a member

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<sup>53</sup> Kristen Linklater founded the vocal pedagogy that bears her name and Edith Skinner developed a system for training actors to speak with greater articulation and distinction. Both women were employed at League schools during the 1960s and 70s, with Linklater working at NYU and Skinner splitting her time between Carnegie Mellon and Juilliard. For a thorough explanation of their respective training methods, see Kristin Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (New York: Drama Publishers, 1976); and Edith Skinner, *Speak with Distinction* (New York: Applause, 1990).

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth L. Graham, et al., “Relationships Between Educational Theatre and Professional Theatre: Actor Training in the United States: A Report on the University of Minnesota Conference, February 3-6 and May 26-31, 1966,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 18, no. 3 (November 1966): 328.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

of a regional theatre's resident company.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the principles gleaned from this conference gave rise to the formation of the League, an organization that would oversee the training standards of a psychophysical curriculum intended to develop stage actors who were in service of America's regional theatres and the communities they represented.

The pedagogy at League schools can be seen as part of a larger movement in actor training marked by the work of several postmodern acting theorists, most notably the system of Jerzy Grotowski. Like the attendees of the Minnesota conference in 1966, Grotowski distinguishes stage from on-camera acting to identify the auricular as a core component of his training approach. Arguing on behalf of what he terms a "Poor Theatre," Grotowski locates the actor/spectator connection at the core of the theatrical experience. The stage actor forges "holy" contact with his audience by integrating his psychic and physical energy to create a transformative "encounter" that jointly affects the spectator and himself.<sup>57</sup> This encounter is decidedly ephemeral and must be experienced without the accoutrements of the so-called Rich Theatre, which is marked by a confluence of superfluities that negate the actor/audience connection:

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perpetual, direct, "live" communion.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>57</sup> Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (New York: Routledge, 2002), 55-59.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 19.

Grotowski faults the Rich Theatre for attempting to compete with the technological prowess of film and television, mediums that use the actor not as the center of a live event, but as a tool to serve a “mechanical function.”<sup>59</sup>

Like his predecessor and occasional muse, Antonin Artaud, Grotowski seeks to make theatre that is ritualistic and transcends the everyday world or what Adorno terms “empirical reality.”<sup>60</sup> Artaud’s call for a Theatre of Cruelty greatly influenced Grotowski’s actor-driven aesthetic:

When Artaud speaks of release and cruelty we feel he’s touching a truth we can verify another way. We feel that an actor reaches the essence of his vocation whenever he commits an act of sincerity, when he unveils himself, opens and gives himself in an extreme, solemn gesture.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, Artaud argues on behalf of theatre in which the actor and spectator undergo something akin to a spiritual transformation. Likening it to the medieval practice of alchemy, he describes a process that is fraught with “chaos” and “heat” resulting in an altered state of being for both the performer and his audience.<sup>62</sup> He uses eastern performance traditions, most particularly Balinese theatre, to depict a “metaphysical” aesthetic that can be compared to a religious ceremony.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to the text-oriented theatre of the west, which during Modernism became increasingly psychological,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 83.

<sup>61</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 124. Also, see Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 84-100.

<sup>62</sup> Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*, 48-52.

<sup>63</sup> Despite Artaud’s endorsement of eastern performance traditions, his analysis should be met with a degree of skepticism given its exoticism of these traditions. His citation of Balinese theatre is particularly questionable in that he spent a mere afternoon in 1931 viewing a performance at a Parisian exposition. For more on Artaud’s appropriation of Balinese theatre/dance, see Nicola Savarese and Richard Fowler, “Antonin Artaud Sees Balinese Theatre at the Paris Colonial Exposition, *TDR* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 51-77.

Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty is based on a visceral exchange between the actor and spectator, in which the former serves as a kind of shaman creating a mystical and mesmerizing encounter with the latter. A similar phenomenon could be likened to the League-trained actor and his ability to command the attention of theatre audiences nationwide throughout the 1960s and 70s, as indicated by Jennifer Dunning's description of Mandy Patinkin's work:

This new actor may create his own reality on stage, as Mandy Patinkin (Juilliard '74)...regularly does. It is a reality that depends not merely on projecting the actor's own psyche or star quality, but one that comes out of the practiced ease with which he fits into a character as a result of his training, as well as his innate gifts.<sup>64</sup>

While the League regimen was somewhat different from Artaud insofar as its schools used dramatic texts as a cornerstone to the curriculum, their employment of a psychophysical pedagogy for the purpose of developing an actor's stage presence, his aura, towards transforming into a character before a gripped audience bore striking similarity to Artaud's metaphorical use of "alchemy" in support of a "cruel" aesthetic.

In discussing the work of actors, Artaud acknowledges the rigorous and highly codified training regimen of Balinese theatre and its ultimate effect of "overwhelming the mind" of the spectator through a visceral experience.<sup>65</sup> Unlike most western actors at the time, who during the 1950s were being taught a strictly psychological approach to their craft (e.g., The Actors Studio), Artaud's aesthetic is based on the training principles of what he conceived to be eastern performance. As Grotowski notes, however, his project is entirely theoretical and lacks a practical system to ensure its implementation:

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<sup>64</sup>Dunning, "The New American Actor."

<sup>65</sup> Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*, 64.

Artaud presents an indisputable stimulus where research is relative to the possibilities of the actor, but what he proposes are in the end only visions, a sort of poem about the actor, and no practical conclusions can be drawn from his explanations.<sup>66</sup>

Despite his influence on occidental actor training, Artaud never devised a methodology to enact his ideas. A large part of Grotowski's genius was the creation of such a system.

Like the curriculum of the League schools, Grotowski's system is an amalgam of eastern and western performance techniques designed to incorporate the actor's entire being into a performance.<sup>67</sup> From Kathakali facial exercises and Japanese Noh to Meyerhold's biomechanics and Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Actions, he continuously explores ways to engage and express the actor's psychophysical essence. This essence is defined by a reciprocal connection between the actor's mind and body as facilitated by his gestures, movements, speaking, and the relationship they each have with his thoughts, imagination, and emotional expression. The result is a self-induced "trance" that transcends empirical reality in favor of what Adorno calls "spiritualization," what Benjamin terms "cult value," or what the more recent acting theorist Philip Zarilli refers to as an "enactive" state of being.<sup>68</sup>

Like Grotowski's, Zarilli's training regimen borrows from numerous eastern performance traditions towards developing the actor's entire body as an expressive instrument. Many of the League programs during the 1970s and 80s would apply a similar psychophysical approach. Although Zarilli is writing a full twenty years after the League disbanded, his eloquent articulation and exemplification of a psychophysical

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<sup>66</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 205-206.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-173.

<sup>68</sup> Phillip Zarilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavsky* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 41-60.

process offers insight into understanding the training mission at League schools. I am therefore introducing a summarization of his methodology to sharpen my description of a psychophysical approach to actor training. Like programs such as Juilliard and NYU, both of which were steeped in rigorous psychophysical training techniques, Zarilli has devised a system to develop the actor's "body-mind" for the purpose of making fully available his voice, speech, movement, and emotions.<sup>69</sup> With the breath functioning as the primary source of psychophysical vitality, an approach that can be compared to the work of Kristin Linklater at NYU during the 1960s or Elizabeth Smith's vocal training at Juilliard throughout the 1970s, Zarilli's actor achieves a state of centeredness allowing him to command the spectator's attention by directing his energy and focus in concert with the stage action he crafts.<sup>70</sup> To illustrate this pedagogy, Zarilli details numerous exercises that test the actor's threshold for physical discomfort and mental acuity. One such example involves extreme stretches and holding poses for lengthy periods of time to cause the actor to "undergo in-depth psychophysical training to control and shape his breath and thereby his energy," which gives him the theatrical presence and power to construct a transformative performance.<sup>71</sup> As such, Zarilli's process can be likened to how Adorno describes the dialectic of an artwork's physical properties and its phenomenology, insofar as its "spirit transcends" its "status as a thing" and thus achieves

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<sup>69</sup> The League schools employed a wide range of classes and techniques to develop the actor's skills for stage performance. The goal of this pedagogy was similar to what Zarilli is attempting to achieve by developing the actor's "enactive state," which can be likened to how Walter Benjamin describes the stage actor's "aura." While each League school had its own curriculum, according to the consortium's standards, they all had to adhere to a psychophysical training regimen. Please note that the dissertation's fourth chapter will explore the pedagogy of League programs in greater detail.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth Smith was among the original faculty at Juilliard's Drama Division in 1968 and taught voice there until 1999. Her pedagogy is explained by her former student, Ralph Zito, in *Standard Speech: Essays in Voice and Speech*, ed. Rocco Dal Vera (New York: Applause, 2000), 79-80.

<sup>71</sup> Zarilli, *Psychophysical Acting*, 79.

a state of “beauty” towards rendering a desired affect on its beholder.<sup>72</sup> The concrete materials of an artwork (the actor’s mind and body) are thus implemented into a creative process (the exercises comprising the training system) to arrive at a transcendent state of being (the phenomenology of the stage actor’s performance).

One of the most important influences in the psychophysical reshaping of US actor training during the late twentieth-century was the Japanese director, Tadashi Suzuki, who also devised a regimen to develop the actor’s aura. Having taught at three League programs in the early 1980s, Suzuki has left an indelible mark on American stage acting.<sup>73</sup> Like the curriculum of the League schools, his system consists of physically demanding exercises that maximize the actor’s expressivity.<sup>74</sup> Claiming that his goal is for students “to learn to make [their] whole body *speak*,” Suzuki draws his techniques from the Noh tradition, which requires extraordinary agility and physical strength.<sup>75</sup> His so-called “Grammar of the Feet” training, for example, is based on the Noh performer’s practice of connecting fully and firmly to the earth to enable his instrument to “achieve a transformation from the personal to the universal.”<sup>76</sup> Donning bifurcated slippers (*tabi*)

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<sup>72</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Suzuki was first invited to the US in 1980 to teach and direct at the Professional Theatre Training Program at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (a program that, according to the Minutes of the League’s Annual meeting, would have been admitted to the League if not for the technicality that it graduated a class only once every three years). From 1981-1984 he taught at League schools such as Juilliard, Southern Methodist University, and the University of California at San Diego. His work continues to be taught at acting schools throughout the US today, most notably with Anne Bogart’s Saratoga International Theatre Institute in Saratoga Springs, NY. For a listing of the trajectory of Suzuki’s career, see <http://www.scot-suzukicompany.com/en/profile.php> (accessed 21 April 2011).

<sup>74</sup> For a detailed explanation of the psychophysical pedagogy that became the standard for League schools, see Kenneth L. Graham, et al., “Relationships Between Educational Theatre and Professional Theatre,” 328-39.

<sup>75</sup> Tadashi Suzuki, “Culture Is The Body,” in *Acting (Re)Considered*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Phillip Zarilli (New York: Routledge, 2002), 163. Italics used in the original text.

<sup>76</sup> Tadashi Suzuki, *The Way of Acting* (New York: TCG, 1986), 12.

that provide flush contact with the ground, Suzuki's actors stomp in a circle for twenty minutes as classical Japanese music underscores their movements. While the upper body remains still and their eyes fixed straight ahead, the legs repeatedly stomp into the ground until the music ceases, at which point the actor collapses before slowly and artfully rising to the music's resumption. The purpose is to subject the actor to a rigorous exercise that discourages cerebral activity in favor of engaging his physical apparatus. Two other techniques constituting Suzuki's Grammar of the Feet pedagogy are "walking" and "statues," and like "stomping," they train the actor to have Promethean control of his instrument. In the former instance, the Noh tradition is particularly evident as shuffling is used in a repertoire of walks that ranges from the pigeon-toed and bowlegged variety to squatting and walking in slow motion. The statue portion of Suzuki's training entails holding uncomfortable poses for several minutes while speaking text. Suzuki's methodology echoes Zeami's writings on *yūgen*, otherwise defined as the profound and mysterious grace imbuing the Noh actor's aesthetic.<sup>77</sup> Like Zeami (as well as Grotowski, Zarilli, and the League conservatories), he has devised a concrete training system designed to access something indescribably ethereal, with the actor functioning at the fulcrum of a ritualistic encounter.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Zeami Motokiyo, "Teachings on Style and the Flower," in *On the Art of the Noh Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*, trans. J. Thomas Rimer and Yamazaki Masakazu (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 3-63.

<sup>78</sup> In fact, Grotowski founded a theatrical laboratory in Wrocław, Poland that functioned as an actor training retreat of sorts where he implemented his psychophysical training methods. As such, his Wrocław project—which continues today—can be likened to Suzuki's theatre in Japan, though in Grotowski's case it is currently organized according to his paratheatrical aesthetic and therefore not intended for a public audience. For more on Grotowski's work in Wrocław, see Robert Findlay's firsthand account, "Grotowski's Cultural Explorations Bordering on Art, Especially Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 32, no. 3 (October 1984): 349-56.

## The Stage Actor's Social Role

Claiming that “theatrical activity is not to benefit performers” but designed to “satisfy others,” Suzuki sees the actor as a public servant who is the basis for theatre’s communal function.<sup>79</sup> Similar to the ways in which Margo Jones envisioned the US regional theatre movement, Suzuki argues that theatres should provide their respective communities with a cultural identity arrived at through a collective and most “human experience.”<sup>80</sup> With this ethos in mind, Suzuki founded the Toga Festival in the rural village of Toga-mura, Japan in 1976.<sup>81</sup> As Jones did with Theatre 47 in relationship to New York City, Suzuki sought to decentralize the Japanese professional theatre from its Tokyo roots. A sleepy town with a population of 1,000, Toga-mura became the home to his company and was emblematic of Suzuki’s belief that theatre’s primary function is to serve its community: “Theatre functions as a model for the whole cultural mechanism, and how we must deal with our communal experiences.”<sup>82</sup> Today people from all over the world continue to travel to Toga-mura to share in what Suzuki calls “sacred time,” depicted as tangible human interaction in a public and “open” space that can be defined both literally and figuratively.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, the company’s impact goes beyond the site of the reconstructed farmhouse where the performances take place to include the surrounding environment and its countless opportunities for audience members to relate and reflect on what they

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<sup>79</sup> Suzuki, *The Way of Acting*, 88-89.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-68. Also see Margo Jones, *Theatre-in-the-Round* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970); and June Bennett Larsen, “Margo Jones: A Life in the Theatre” (PhD dissertation, CUNY Graduate Center, 1982).

<sup>81</sup> For an overview of Suzuki’s company and its relationship to the town of Toga-mura, see <http://www.scot-suzukicompany.com/en/toga.php> (accessed 22 April 2011).

<sup>82</sup> Suzuki, *The Way of Acting*, 68.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-93.

jointly experience.<sup>84</sup> A strikingly similar experience can be identified at a handful of US not-for-profit theatres today, most notably Ashland's Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where the company enjoys a rich and active relationship with the local community and visitors alike, as indicated by its current artistic director, Bill Rauch, who "believes very strongly that all art is community-based."<sup>85</sup> Rauch has the resume to back this claim, given his earlier involvement with the Cornerstone Theater Company, an organization he founded in 1986 with the mission of using a company of actors to bring theatre to local communities in ways that strengthened their identity, values, and collective sensibility.<sup>86</sup>

At the heart of Rauch's reasoning is a permanent ensemble of actors, much in the spirit of how US regional theatres functioned throughout the 1960s and early-1970s.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, Suzuki's actors have been essential to the Toga Festival since its inception. Like Artaud and Grotowski, Suzuki sees theatre as a ritualistic experience that is facilitated by the actor's transformational abilities, and therefore, his company is schooled in his training system for the purpose of meeting this aesthetic demand. As William Ball did at the American Conservatory Theatre throughout the 1970s, and as Rauch's actors do today, Suzuki's company trains as it performs for the public.<sup>88</sup> In other

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>85</sup> Bill Rauch, "Keynote Address" (Mid-America Theatre Conference, Minneapolis, MN, 5 March 2011).

<sup>86</sup> For more on the mission of the Cornerstone Theater Company, see [http://www.cornerstonetheater.org/content/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=15&Itemid=46](http://www.cornerstonetheater.org/content/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15&Itemid=46) (accessed 22 April 2011).

<sup>87</sup> Rauch's current organization, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF), is one of the only US regional theatres that still has a resident company of actors and is far and away the largest of its kind with more than 110 members. For a complete listing of the OSF acting company, see <http://www.osfashland.org/about/people/company.aspx> (accessed 22 April 2011).

<sup>88</sup> During his address before the Mid-America Theatre Conference in Minneapolis during March of 2011, Rauch emphasized that the acting company at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival continued to train by taking workshops and classes.

words, the actors remain students of their craft despite the fact that they have become professionals. As such, Suzuki's actors could be compared to Olympic athletes dedicated to developing their instruments to their maximum expressivity—as League actors were trained to do throughout the 1970s and early-1980s. It is a decidedly different practice than film acting, which hardly approaches the kind of psychophysical presence and disciplined training needed for the stage: “People often do not distinguish between stage and film performers, simply calling both categories ‘actors,’ but I believe there to be a great difference between them.”<sup>89</sup>

Comparing how the actor functions in these two mediums helps to distinguish theatre and film's differing social roles. Whereas theatre causes a community to come together to share in a live performance that is inherently ephemeral, film is a mechanized medium that can be reproduced, distributed, and consumed throughout the world. If the actor functions in Suzuki's theatre as a conduit to the “eternal,” his use in film is at best a photographic image providing entertainment to a non-participatory spectatorship. As Walter Benjamin argues, the film (and TV) actor constitutes an “image” that is reproduced and distributed in mass, thereby distinguishing his social role from the stage actor.<sup>90</sup> The on-camera performer thus contributes to what Guy Debord refers to as “an immense accumulation of spectacles” that has the effect of “separating” people from their communities in favor of the “commodity relations” that determine modern society.<sup>91</sup> According to Debord, technologically generated images are the grist forming the

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<sup>89</sup> Suzuki, *The Way of Acting*, 78.

<sup>90</sup> Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 227-28.

<sup>91</sup> Guy DeBord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black and Red, 1983), sec. 1.

spectacles that shape the capitalist social order. Similar to Baudrillard's structuralist methodology, he posits these spectacles—and the images making them up—as “signs of the ruling production” that signify how people should live their lives.<sup>92</sup> Adorno makes a similar case in discussing the harmful effects of film and television, insofar as both mediums uphold potentially damaging and “nefarious” social stereotypes by evoking a “pseudo-reality” at the expense of a dialectical analysis of society, or put more simply, film and television privilege conformity and discourage critical analysis.<sup>93</sup> The on-camera actor therefore feeds into a system of signs that simultaneously shapes and reinforces the “banal” status quo by offering “pseudo-enjoyment” to cultural consumers.<sup>94</sup> Celebrity performers are particularly influential in this process, as Debord notes:

The celebrity, the spectacular representation of a living human being, embodies this banality by embodying the image of a possible role. Being a star means specializing in the seemingly lived; the star is the object of identification with the shallow seeming life that has come to compensate for the fragmented productive specializations which are actually lived.<sup>95</sup>

Celebrity actors are therefore dominated by and contribute to society's commodification of cultural goods, in which artistry loses its uniqueness and “everything” becomes “mediated by images” that separate people from themselves and each other in favor of conforming to the capitalist social order.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., sec. 7.

<sup>93</sup> Theodor Adorno, “How to Look at Television,” in *The Culture Industry*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1991), 158, 171.

<sup>94</sup> Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, sec. 59.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., sec. 60.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., secs. 1, 4.

Debord's discussion of spectacle can be seen as part of a movement in cultural studies during the 1960s and 1970s attempting to recoup the auricular in artworks. Like Adorno, whose *Aesthetic Theory* was posthumously published in 1970 (three years after *Society of the Spectacle*), Debord identifies the regressive effects of fetishizing artistic goods for mass consumption, thereby resulting in commodities that displace tangible human interaction.<sup>97</sup> As people respond to technologically generated images instead of a live and shared experience with others, they become increasingly divorced from one another, and "the commodity attains the total occupation of social life."<sup>98</sup> The possession of such commodities, be it a material object (a print of a painting) or the desire to emulate or fawn over a celebrity, relies on a process of "spectacular representation" marked by the peddling of sameness under the guise of autonomy, or the hocking of reproductions that masquerade as "the real thing."<sup>99</sup> The phenomenal essence of a given artwork loses its "sensual appeal" for a beholder by regressing into a mere material good whose value is defined by the concept of ownership and the social signification therein, a piece of property serving the turn towards upward social mobility, as identified by what Baudrillard refers to as *symbolic exchange*. The so-called culture industry is at the center of this process, which in the case of acting can be best seen in the trappings of Hollywood, thereby causing what Adorno calls the "deaestheticization of art."<sup>100</sup>

While it would be remiss to argue that stage acting and the theatre are devoid of spectacle, they can collectively transcend the cultural industry's machinations. Given its

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., sec. 36.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., sec. 42.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., sec. 60.

<sup>100</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 16.

liveness and potential for “cult value,” theatre can provide a unique communal service. With the actor at its center, it can bring a community of people together to *actively* partake in the creation of a distinctly social event, as demonstrated by Grotowski’s formulation of a “holy encounter” between the actor and her audience, or Suzuki’s use of Toga-mura as a “sacred” site to facilitate a shared experience that could be likened to a religious ceremony. Indeed, in many respects an actor-centered theatrical aesthetic has more in common with religious services, or even sports and public amusements, than it does film and television. As the historian Michael Kammen argues in his book *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, film and television represent mass culture’s reductive influence on US society, insofar as they encourage passivity and privatization in the consumption of cultural goods. Kammen deftly differentiates popular culture from mass culture claiming that the former involves the public integration of a community to democratically share in some sort of social activity. Structuring his argument chronologically, he demonstrates how theatricals such as Buffalo Bill’s *Wild West Show* and vaudeville provided opportunities for the public to “go out” and actively participate in entertainments that were both “ephemeral” and “evanescent.”<sup>101</sup> Similar to Suzuki’s Toga Festival or the US regional theatre during the 1960s and early 1970s, these experiences were live events that served the dual function of contributing to a community’s identity while bringing people together as participants. Just as fans function at the ballgame or crowds before a parade, these audiences were not passive bystanders, but rather, necessary collaborators in the event’s creation. And of course it is a resident company of psychophysically trained actors that—in the cases of

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<sup>101</sup> Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 3-26.

Suzuki and Grotowski's work, or in the halcyon days of the US regional theatre— facilitates such an experience.

I began this chapter by explaining the process of cultural commodification and how it pertains to US acting along both professional and pedagogical planes. In doing so, I borrowed from the cultural materialism of Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, and most especially, Theodor Adorno to show how the mass reproduction, distribution, and consumption of artworks displace its aura with a fabricated likeness thereby rendering it a spectacle devoid of uniqueness, evanescence, and “cult value.” I then drew on the psychophysical training techniques of several postmodern acting theorists to explain and demonstrate the auricular in stage performance, and therein liken their approaches to those practiced at League schools throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>102</sup> My final move in this chapter was to examine the social role of stage acting in relationship to the US not-for-profit theatre by connecting the latter to the emergence of university-sponsored acting conservatories as identified by the League and its psychophysical training regimen.

It was the placement of League actors in the resident companies of these theatres—a key criterion for Margo Jones's conception of the movement—that enabled them to have a stage career without partaking in the trappings of the culture industry as specifically exemplified by film and television. As such, they joined resident ensembles from institutions ranging from Seattle Rep to Arena Stage, where they were crucial in contributing to a given community's identity by providing opportunities for its citizens—as well as visitors—to share in a cultural event. However, economic forces caused these

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<sup>102</sup> As stated in the introduction, the curriculum of League acting programs will be examined in greater detail in chapter 4.

organizations to ultimately eliminate their resident companies, thereby shifting the professional and pedagogical spheres of American acting towards increasing commodification. The next chapter will explore this narrative in greater detail. After briefly summarizing middle-twentieth-century US actor training and the events leading up to Jones's founding of Theatre 47, I will historicize the not-for-profit theatre in conjunction with the League's formation.

## Chapter 2

### Contextualizing Twentieth-Century US Acting and Actor Training: From Stanislavsky to the League

*Jean: Motion picture acting is just as much of an art as stage acting only it's cut up more.*

*Terry: Yes, and then they put it in a tin can like Campbell's soup. And if you die the next day it doesn't matter a bit. You don't even have to be alive to act in pictures.*

—Edna Ferber and George S. Kaufman<sup>1</sup>

Borrowed from Ferber and Kaufman's 1936 tragicomedy *Stage Door*, the above epigraph exemplifies the professional tension between film and stage acting that emerged during the 1920s and 30s. Whereas Jean takes advantage of her marketable appearance to become a motion picture star, her counterpart, Terry, turns down a Hollywood offer and remains in New York City to pursue a “noble” career on the stage.<sup>2</sup> While one can hardly blame Jean's choice of a lucrative life of “sunshine, fun, and ermine jackets,” Ferber and Kaufman use her as a foil to demonstrate Terry's commitment to the art of acting as identified by her dedication to the stage.<sup>3</sup> Terry forgoes the opportunity to follow Jean to Hollywood by rejecting a multiyear contract that would bring her financial security, but not peace of mind. She continues to reside at the Footlights Club for stage actresses, where her daily struggles of auditioning and working menial jobs are among

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<sup>1</sup> George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, *Stage Door* (London: English Theater Guild, 1946), 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> The original production of *Stage Door* opened at the Music Box Theatre in October of 1936 with Phyllis Brooks playing Jean and Margaret Sullavan in the role of Terry (ibid., 819).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

the major plot points. In the make-believe world of *Stage Door*, however, the play ends on a triumphant note as Terry replaces Jean in a Broadway production on the grounds that the latter “can’t act,” whereas Terry is a first-rate talent that simply has yet to be discovered. Ferber and Kaufman thus propagandize their anti-Hollywood sentiment by honoring the noble artist over the commercial opportunist.<sup>4</sup>

Terry’s decision is hard to reconcile since most actresses would understandably follow Jean’s path to fame and financial security. Nonetheless, *Stage Door* emblemizes a time when American acting and actor training were undergoing significant changes, as identified by the emergence of “Method” acting in conjunction with the invention of sound film and the concurrent tensions between Hollywood and the professional theatre. After the US tour of Stanislavsky’s Moscow Art Theatre in 1923-24, American acting changed from a presentational performance style to one dedicated to the naturalistic principles of the so-called Method, an approach to acting that lends itself to the verisimilitude of on-camera performance, especially the so-called “talkies,” a medium that began with Warner Brothers’ release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927.<sup>5</sup> Because Stanislavsky’s system requires actors to mimetically “create the life of the human spirit,”<sup>6</sup> it effectively transfers to cinema, which during the 1920s and 30s had become America’s most popular source of entertainment and an increasing source of employment for actors,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 819-68.

<sup>5</sup> For a study of US actor training prior to 1925, see James H. McTeague, *Before Stanislavsky: American Professional Acting Schools and Acting Theory, 1875-1925* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994). For more on the emergence and popularity of sound film and its impact on the careers of US actors, see Anne E. Lincoln and Michael Patrick Allen, “Double Jeopardy in Hollywood: Age and Gender in the Careers of Film Actors, 1926-1999,” *Sociological Forum* 19, no. 4 (2004): 611-31.

<sup>6</sup> Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theater Books, 1936), 15. I have chosen to cite the Hapgood translation because it was current at the time. For a more recent and comparatively effective translation, see Konstantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor’s Work*, trans. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008).

as demonstrated by the comparatively high salaries offered them by Hollywood studios.<sup>7</sup> As a result, stage actors began leaving the theatre to seek multiyear film contracts similar to the one tendered Jean precisely because of the “weekly salary whether [one] works or not.”<sup>8</sup>

Numerous members of the Group Theatre perhaps best exemplify this development. What began as a remarkable theatre collective, dedicated to bringing socially relevant drama to American audiences, ignominiously ended with many of the Group’s actors, directors, and playwrights seeking work in the more lucrative medium of moving pictures. Stalwarts of the stage such as Stella Adler and Morris Carnovsky joined the Group’s directors (Elia Kazan and Harold Clurman) and resident dramatists (John Howard Lawson and Clifford Odets) to secure what they hoped would be a better life marked by financial stability. Although many Group actors failed to achieve the monetary success they perhaps had hoped to obtain, as Wendy Smith notes, their Hollywood employment—modest as it was in certain instances—far surpassed the “meager wages” they made while working for the Group.<sup>9</sup> Economic challenges and artistic differences, especially those caused by members who chose to pursue film careers, led to the company’s demise in 1941. The “capitalist realities” of their situation made it impossible for the Group to operate according to the collective ethos under which

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<sup>7</sup> Edwin Duerr, *The Length and Dept of Acting* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), 450-2. Also, see Lincoln and Allen, “Double Jeopardy in Hollywood,” 614-15.

<sup>8</sup> Kaufman and Ferber, *Stage Door*, 854.

<sup>9</sup> Wendy Smith, *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America, 1931-1940* (New York: Grove, 1990), 300; for documentation of the salaries of select Group members see Duerr, *The Length and Depth of Acting*, 480.

the organization was founded.<sup>10</sup> In effect it succumbed to the forces of a market economy.

The Group's legacy, however, had a direct and lasting impact on US actor training. Lee Strasberg and some of his colleagues, most notably Sanford Meisner and Stella Adler, formed acting schools of their own to teach their interpretations of Stanislavsky's system. This private acting school model, as demonstrated by the Actors Studio, became the primary source for actor training in the US until the formation of a handful of university-sponsored programs during the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Whereas places such as the Actors Studio and Neighborhood Playhouse taught students techniques that transferred best to on-camera performance, these emerging university programs trained people exclusively for the stage; at least this was their initial aim. Awarding both MFA and BFA degrees upon completion of a three or four year training regimen, institutions like Yale and Carnegie Tech formed conservatories that were designed to prepare graduates for professional theatre careers.<sup>12</sup> The very formation of these conservatories was prompted

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 408-11.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that Strasberg did not found The Actors Studio. That distinction rests with his Group colleagues Cheryl Crawford, Elia Kazan, and Robert Lewis, who collectively formed the organization in 1947. However, Strasberg took over as the Studio's Artistic Director in 1951 and is best known for developing his version of Stanislavsky's Method there. For more on Strasberg and his work at The Actors Studio, see Robert H. Hethmon ed., *Strasberg At The Actors Studio* (New York: TCG, 1965).

<sup>12</sup> Carnegie Tech's Drama Department is the nation's oldest, having been founded in 1914. Yale's illustrious program can be traced back to George Pierce Baker's "47 Workshop" in 1905. An outgrowth of his English 47 course, Baker wanted to develop playwrights by producing their work as theatrical ventures. This chain of events led to the formation of a drama department in 1925 and ultimately the Yale School of Drama, a separate entity from the university, in 1955. It was in 1955 when Yale began conferring MFA degrees in the area of actor training. The very first MFAs offered through Yale's Drama Department occurred in 1931, though they did not specifically recognize the *métier* of acting. The YSD's vaunted reputation as a theatre conservatory did not develop until the commencement of Robert Brustein as its Dean in 1965, the same year the Yale Repertory Theatre was formed. For more on the history of the Yale School of Drama, see "History and Objectives," *Yale School of Drama Bulletin*, June 1973, Series 69, Number 12, Manuscript and Archives Yale University Library; also see Yale/Cole Souvenir Booklet, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, NYPL.

by the need of repertory companies to cast psychophysically-trained actors who possessed the skill-set to meet the demands of their productions. Replete with acting ensembles echoing the collectivist ethos of the Group, not-for-profit theatres such as the Guthrie and A.C.T. emerged during the 1960s to provide local communities with a troupe of skilled actors capable of meeting the textual demands of a largely classical repertoire. These actors possessed the voice, speech, textual, and movement skills that the great majority of students coming from private studios sorely lacked. The predominantly psychological approach of schools like the Actors Studio did not adequately prepare students for the versatile requirements of the typical regional theatre season, which generally consisted of a mix of modern and European classics such as the oeuvre of Shaw and Shakespeare. The not-for-profit theatre movement therefore bore a reciprocal relationship to the emergence of university-sponsored acting schools—as represented by the League—with the latter incorporating Stanislavsky’s pedagogy in conjunction with a physical regimen that stressed the actress’s development of her body and voice to achieve virtuosic levels of psychophysical expression onstage.<sup>13</sup> The joint emergence of university conservatories and the not-for-profit theatre marks one of the most significant developments in the history of US theatre, acting, and actor training.

In this chapter I will contextualize the scope of my study, 1965-1986, by historicizing twentieth-century American actor training in tracing Stanislavsky’s system through the Group Theatre and the ways in which it became manifested in the pedagogy of Group

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<sup>13</sup> Stanislavsky’s US legacy is largely drawn from his internal approach to acting, as explained in *An Actor Prepares*, the first installment of the trilogy of texts documenting his system. However, his second work, *Building a Character*, clearly depicts the importance of physical technique to his system as noted by individual chapters on voice and speech, the actor’s use of his body, and “externally” approaching a role. The fact that the second text was not translated into English until 1949, thirteen years after *An Actor Prepares*, most likely contributed to America’s limited understanding of his pedagogy. See Constantin Stanislavsky, *Building a Character*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Routledge, 1977).

alumni. I will then historicize the US regional theatre in conjunction with the League's formation, noting the shift in emphasis from the studio model to university-sponsored conservatories and the concurrent transition from a naturalistic methodology—most applicable to on-camera acting—to a psychophysical one. In doing so, I will address the professional, pedagogical, and aesthetic tensions between stage acting and its cinematic counterpart by continually examining these tensions from a materialist perspective.

### **Bringing Stanislavsky to the US: The Seminal Role of the Group Theatre**

Following his graduate work in France, Harold Clurman returned home to the US in June of 1924 eager to create theatre that addressed pertinent sociopolitical issues and their affect on humankind: “In the books I read, in the painting I see, in the music I hear, in all conversations, I am aware of the presence of the world itself, I detect a feeling for the large issues of human concern.”<sup>14</sup> Later that October he landed a job with the Provincetown Players, where he was introduced to Richard Boleslavsky, one of the founding members of the Moscow Art Theatre and a former pupil of Stanislavsky's. The next spring Clurman began working for the Theatre Guild and subsequently met Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford, with whom he would form the seminal organization in modern American acting: the Group Theatre.

Founded in 1931, the Group Theatre could be seen as an extension of the Little Theatre Movement insofar as its founders sought to serve the public by presenting innovative work that was sociopolitical and therefore an alternative to the commercial offerings of Broadway. Despite the fact that many of the Group's productions were in effect done in Broadway houses, their aesthetic was distinct from the conventional

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<sup>14</sup> Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957), 5.

trappings of the commercial theatre for two salient reasons: they produced American dramas that possessed sociopolitical relevance, and they employed a collectivist approach to the very process of making theatre, most especially as it pertained to the work of actors. Like the US regional theatre of the 1960s, the Group located the acting ensemble at the center of the theatrical experience, with the cast uniformly committed to the production's vision. Whether it was an anti-capitalist drama such as John Howard Lawson's *Success Story* or an anti-war musical like Paul Green and Kurt Weill's *Johnny Johnson*, the acting company was dedicated to working with a "singleness of meaning and direction" to create theatre that caused audiences to think and feel in ways that could alter their perspective of current events.<sup>15</sup> In short, the actress was the conduit for narratives that could potentially prompt social change. Hers was a theatre that mattered.

The Moscow Art Theatre's (MAT) collectivist approach to producing theatre coupled with Stanislavsky's system for actor training guided the Group's working process. Lee Strasberg in particular was inspired by the MAT's US tour in 1924, claiming that the acting ensemble's ability to jointly tap into a "real and emotionally true" connection with their characters was unprecedented for American actors. He was especially impressed with the human truthfulness Maria Ouspenskaya brought to her comparatively small role of the governess in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, thereby giving credence to Stanislavsky's fabled maxim.<sup>16</sup> The following year Strasberg and Clurman began studying with Ouspenskaya and Richard Boleslavsky at the American Laboratory

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Smith, *Real Life Drama*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> "There are no small parts only small actors," quoted in Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus: An Acting Master for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 43.

Theatre, which, fittingly enough, was located next door to the iconic referent of the so-called Little Theatre Movement: the Provincetown Playhouse.<sup>17</sup>

The basis for Strasberg's understanding and development of Stanislavsky's system derives from the teachings of Boleslavsky and his MAT colleague, Ouspenskaya. Although his time enrolled at the Lab was brief,<sup>18</sup> it provided Strasberg a "beginning" with which to "find the answers" to Stanislavsky's system.<sup>19</sup> Much has been written about Strasberg's adaptation of the "Method," with scholars and practitioners alike criticizing his interpretation as shortsighted and inaccurate.<sup>20</sup> It is not my intention to enter into this debate, but rather, to identify the pedagogical and institutional shift that occurred with the onset of university conservatories. I will therefore analyze Strasberg's psychological approach to the actor's craft before comparing it to the pedagogies of his two most prominent colleagues: Sanford Meisner and Stella Adler. This will enable me to provide a context for the emergence of the regional theatre movement and the League, both of which are germane to my project. I will explore the history of the League and

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<sup>17</sup> After fleeing his native Russia in 1922, Boleslavsky founded the Lab a year later with the intention of bringing Stanislavsky's pedagogy to America. Ouspenskaya arrived in the US with the MAT's 1924 tour and chose to remain behind to work alongside Boleslavsky at the Lab. For more on Boleslavsky, Ouspenskaya, and the American Laboratory Theatre, see Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, *Actors on Acting* (New York: Crown, 1970), 509-517; Edwin Duerr, *The Length and Depth of Acting* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1962), 462-463; and Richard Boleslavsky, *Acting the First Six Lessons* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1933).

<sup>18</sup> While the precise amount of time Strasberg spent training at the Lab is undocumented, Wendy Smith reports, "He didn't stay long." See Smith, *Real Life Drama*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Lee Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (New York: Plume, 1987), 50.

<sup>20</sup> See Richard Hornby, *The End of Acting: A Radical View* (New York: Applause, 1992); Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *Meisner on Acting* (New York: Vintage, 1987); Stella Adler, *The Art of Acting*, ed. Howard Kissel (New York: Applause, 2000); Robert Lewis, *Method—or Madness?* (New York: Samuel French, 1958); and Jonathan Pitches, *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

pedagogy of its programs in greater depth in chapters three and four, as noted in the introduction.

While there are numerous US acting teachers credited with developing some version of Stanislavsky's system,<sup>21</sup> the triumvirate of Group alumni (Strasberg, Meisner, and Adler) are widely recognized as the most salient. As David Krasner argues, they are the American teachers of the Method who are "recognized as having set the standard of its success."<sup>22</sup> Although they taught nearly until the end of their respective lives, which went until Meisner's death in 1997, their work was most significant during the twenty years following the Group's dissolution: 1940s and 1950s.<sup>23</sup> In each case, they relied on Stanislavsky to form the basis for their own pedagogy.

Strasberg abstracted two important—yet incomplete—elements of Stanislavsky's system as taught to him by Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya. Citing their use of *concentration* and *affective memory* as means for creating "emotional truth" onstage, Strasberg combined these skills with his reading of Stanislavsky's writings on an actor's *relaxation* to form the foundation of what he coined "the Method."<sup>24</sup> Relaxation refers to the actor's ability to enter a state of mental and physical neutrality for the purpose of freely and openly accessing his emotions. Quoting from Stanislavsky, Strasberg claims

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<sup>21</sup> Sonia Moore, Uta Hagen, Michael Chekhov, and Group alumnus Robert Lewis also introduced elements of Stanislavsky's system to American actors.

<sup>22</sup> David Krasner, "Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner: Method Acting," in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (New York: Routledge, 2000), 129-50.

<sup>23</sup> Meisner began teaching at the Neighborhood Playhouse in the same year as the Group's demise (1940), whereas Strasberg and Adler respectively started at the the Actors Studio and Stella Adler School of Acting in 1948 and 1949.

<sup>24</sup> Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion*, 5-6.

that a relaxed actor can tap into “the whole soul of creativeness onstage,”<sup>25</sup> thereby availing him the ability to express the character’s feelings in a manner that is consistent with human behavior and not the sort of “amateur” fakery Stanislavsky associated with nineteenth-century stage performance throughout Europe and the US.<sup>26</sup>

Strasberg’s understanding of relaxation works in tandem with the actor’s ability to concentrate onstage. Concentration can be described as the actor’s point of focus, insofar as it pertains to where he channels his energy and attention at any given moment. Borrowing again from Stanislavsky, Strasberg wanted to equip his actors with the ability to avoid external distractions—such as the presence of a live audience—in favor of focusing on a particular sensory object that would evoke the desired emotional expression towards creating a character. Indeed, sensory exercises comprise the foundation of Strasberg’s pedagogy and are designed to “foster” the actor’s concentration and ultimately “arouse and focus” his ability to impulsively and credibly respond to imagined objects, be they tangible or intangible.<sup>27</sup> It is a decidedly internal, or psychological, approach that provides an actor with the emotional blueprint for his character’s trajectory of dramatic action.

The third and most controversial element of Strasberg’s appropriation of Stanislavsky’s system—by way of Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya—is affective memory.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>26</sup> In his translation of *An Actor Prepares*, Jean Benedetti captures the overarching impetus for Stanislavsky’s system in a pair of opening chapters entitled “Amateurism” and “The Stage as Art and Stock-In-Trade.” In these two opening sections, Stanislavsky identifies his goal for actors to truthfully and repeatedly depict human behavior onstage. His system can be seen as a reaction to the “amateur ham” and “clichéd” acting that largely defined the performance style of the nineteenth-century European stage. See Konstantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor’s Work*, trans. and ed. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008), 5-36.

<sup>27</sup> Hethmon, *Strasberg at The Actors Studio*, 99.

Describing affective memory as the “fusion” of the actor’s emotional past with the character’s given circumstances, Strasberg builds on his foundational exercises by having actors deploy their newfound *sense memory* skills to recall feelings from their past that enable a “personal” connection with the character they are portraying. By concentrating on a specific sensory object associated with a past experience, the actor arouses the necessary emotion for a given moment in the drama. For example, an actor playing Stanley in *A Streetcar Named Desire* might train his senses to recall an object from a past event and “substitute” his feelings therein to connect to the character’s despair when beckoning for “Stell–lahhhhh!” during the culminating moments of the famed “Poker Night” scene.<sup>28</sup> The ultimate goal is to seamlessly craft each onstage moment with these remembered connections to arrive at an emotional score that can be played “unconsciously.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the actor works internally to render an artful expression of human behavior that is steeped in emotional “truth” and can be repeated for each successive performance.

As has been documented by Strasberg’s numerous critics, most especially his Group colleagues, using an actor’s emotional history as the template for creating a role yields mixed results. Stella Adler, who has arguably been the most outspoken against Strasberg’s appropriation of Stanislavsky, claims affective memory is “unhealthy.”<sup>30</sup> Sanford Meisner refuses to teach the technique contending that an actor’s emotional past

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<sup>28</sup> Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (New York: Signet Classic, 1947), 59-60.

<sup>29</sup> Strasberg cites both Stanislavsky and Boleslavsky in acknowledging the actor’s ultimate goal is to use his “conscious” selection of emotional material from his past to “unconsciously” deploy them into his performance. See Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion*, 79-81.

<sup>30</sup> Helen Krich Chinoy, *Reunion: A Self-Portrait of the Group Theatre* (reprinted from *Educational Theatre Journal*, December 1976): 508.

is an unreliable source for building a performance.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, he employs some techniques that are similar to Strasberg's, insofar as he wants students to personalize their emotional experience to align with that of the character they are creating.<sup>32</sup> Meisner begins by training his actors to ground their work in spontaneous human behavior through exercises designed to develop the ability to impulsively respond to a partner. The so-called "repetition exercise" involves a pair of actors instinctively and repetitively verbalizing an observation about each other until the exchange becomes fluid to the point of organic communication. For example, an actor might observe his partner and notice that she is smiling at him, to which he states, "You're smiling at me." Her response would then be, "I'm smiling at you," thereby prompting him to repeat the phrase ("You're smiling at me"). This exchange would be executed roughly a dozen times until the duo reached a level of spontaneous playing that prompted one of them to slightly alter the wording of the dialogue. Meisner demonstrates this technique while working with one of his students, as documented by Dennis Longwell:

After a moment he [Meisner] peers at Anna, comically leering at her from behind his thick lenses. "Will you come to my house tonight?"

"Will I come to your house tonight?"

"Will you come to my house tonight?"

"Will I come to your house tonight?"

"Will you come to my house tonight?"

"No, I will not come to your house tonight."

"You won't come to my house tonight?"<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell, *Meisner on Acting* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 79.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

The purpose of this exercise is to train actresses to viscerally respond to stimuli, most especially as they pertain to what one's partner says and does. Indeed, "doing" is essential to Meisner's pedagogy and can be defined as the spontaneous completion of concrete actions in response to what someone else does. Thus, the adage "acting is reacting" squarely applies to Meisner's work, as he requires that one sensitize one's instrument to impulsively respond to stimuli, such as another actress's line or action.<sup>34</sup> In this respect Meisner distinguishes his work from Strasberg's constant use of emotional memory by claiming that Strasberg "makes you go inside, and you get stuck in there."<sup>35</sup> However, like Strasberg, Meisner's pedagogy is also centered on an actor's use of his internal life, as the crux of his instruction is to develop the skill of intuitively responding to stimuli for the purpose of giving a performance steeped in human behavior. It is important to recognize that Meisner does not address the physiological side of the actor's work, choosing to privilege a verisimilitudinous product rather than—to borrow from Walter Benjamin—an auracular one. Benjamin draws a direct comparison between stage and film acting to argue that the latter "exhibits" a pedestrian reality through the lens of the camera, thereby facilitating a relationship between the spectator and the actor's image to achieve verisimilitude, whereas theatre requires a performer to use his entire being towards rendering a "ritualistic" experience for his audience.<sup>36</sup> Benjamin's description of film acting applies to Meisner's training approach. According to Meisner, an actress is

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<sup>34</sup> Robert L. Benedetti, *The Actor at Work*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Meisner and Longwell, *Meisner on Acting*, 59.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 217-52.

doing her job so long as she responds spontaneously and realistically to stimuli.<sup>37</sup> There is no mention whatsoever of voice and body training in his book, or an actress's use of her physical technique for creating a performance that meets the demands of the stage. His work is therefore limited insofar as it stresses intuitive acting at the expense of crafting a theatrical performance that is contingent on an actress's ability to use her psychophysically-honed instrument to powerfully speak poetic language, move about the stage with supple grace, and to render an auricular presence while—and this is crucial—simultaneously creating the *illusion* of emotional truth before a live audience every night.

Meisner's training is best suited for on-camera acting. Unquestionably, an actress's ability to behave naturally by intuitively responding to stimuli is a great asset, most especially for film and television, neither of which requires the physical expressivity that onstage performance does. It comes as little surprise that former students who established careers in Hollywood, such as Academy Award-winners Diane Keaton, Robert Duvall, and Sydney Pollack, constitute the majority of Meisner's accomplished alumni.<sup>38</sup> A similar claim can be made about Strasberg's students, most of who left the Actors Studio to achieve monetary and artistic success in the movies.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, despite Meisner's claim to the contrary,<sup>40</sup> his pedagogy bears much similarity to Strasberg's. This point is readily apparent in Meisner's approach to developing a character. After

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<sup>37</sup> Meisner and Longwell, *Meisner on Acting*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Neighborhood Playhouse website, <http://www.neighborhoodplayhouse.org/alumni.html> (accessed 12 December 2010).

<sup>39</sup> The Actors Studio has a long list of graduates who became cinematic stars after studying with Lee Strasberg, including Jack Nicholson, Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino, and Marilyn Monroe, among numerous others. For a sample list of the school's graduates see [http://www.ask.com/wiki/Category:Actors\\_Studio\\_alumni](http://www.ask.com/wiki/Category:Actors_Studio_alumni) (accessed 17 January 2011).

<sup>40</sup> Meisner and Longwell, *Meisner on Acting*, 9, 79, 182-84.

completing the repetition exercise, which goes on for weeks, he continues his internal approach by instructing his actors to create the character's emotional life. This is evident in his "preparation" exercise in which actors are taught to ready themselves for an entrance by identifying with the character's "inner life" before coming onstage.<sup>41</sup> Meisner models this work with an actress in his class whom he directs to "start off with a preparation, an inner emotional state" that will enable her to assume the character's psychology prior to entering, and to then use that behavior as the basis for the scene. He coaches her to act "as if [she] were coming from [her] father's sickbed," thereby adopting a similar approach to the Strasberg actor's personalization of a character's feelings by drawing from his own emotional history.<sup>42</sup>

Meisner emphasizes the actor's use of emotion to internally create a character, and like Strasberg, does so at the expense of developing the necessary physical apparatus to approach a role.<sup>43</sup> It is little wonder that he is critical of physically dexterous stage actors like Laurence Olivier who display vocal and corporeal presence in their work: "Don't be empty or you'll turn into Laurence Olivier."<sup>44</sup> Unlike Olivier's technically-proficient approach, Meisner wants his students to avoid becoming exaggerated in their work, which includes teaching them to eschew the elocutionary demands of verse drama. In his chapter entitled, "Making the Part Your Own," Meisner's actors begin working with text, but are instructed not to learn their lines or concern themselves with the nuance of its

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>43</sup> Stanislavsky refers to the actor's work on his physical technique as the development of his "bodily apparatus." See Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 352.

<sup>44</sup> Meisner and Longwell, *Meisner on Acting*, 122.

language. Using the poetic drama *The Spoon River Anthology* to facilitate this juncture of his training, Meisner tells his students that the “text is your greatest enemy” and that they should not begin by learning their lines, but rather, by crossing out the stage directions and building a personal connection to their character’s given circumstances. After this initial step, his students improvise these circumstances to gain a “secure emotional grasp of the material” before addressing the spoken dialogue.<sup>45</sup> Despite Meisner’s claim to the contrary, this privileging of the actor’s personal feelings and internal mechanism is comparable to Strasberg’s pedagogy, and most significantly, both of their methods result in verisimilitudinous performances that are most effective for realistic drama and on-camera acting.

Meisner’s approach can be directly traced to film acting, as exemplified by the pedagogy of the “acting-for-the-camera-teacher,” Richard Brestoff, who likewise instructs his students to eliminate “all stage directions,” and “personalize” their connection to a role by “exploring [their] own unique response to the material.”<sup>46</sup> Whereas stage acting demands a well-trained physical and vocal instrument, especially when performing poetic drama in which the text requires no less skill than does an aria of an opera diva, on-camera actors need not concern themselves with such technical matters.<sup>47</sup> After all, a film director is unlikely to ask an actor to enunciate clearly or move gracefully when executing a close-up. The film scholar, James Naremore, makes

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 136, 151.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Brestoff, *The Camera Smart Actor* (Lyme, NH: Smith and Kraus, 1994), 29.

<sup>47</sup> For a concise but informative explanation of the film actor’s use of his body and voice and how this practice differs from stage acting, see Michael Caine, *Acting in Film: An Actor’s Take on Movie Making* (New York: Applause, 1990), 73-76.

this very point by distinguishing a stage actor's voice and speech work from the verisimilitudinous line-delivery pertaining to on-camera performance:

The microphone is capable of bringing us the "grain" of the actor's voice, but in usual practice it tames and naturalizes the vocal instrument, detheatricalizing language in much the same way as close-ups detheatricalize gesture.<sup>48</sup>

Robert Benedetti likewise differentiates stage and film acting by arguing that the former "functions mainly through *activity*," and contrarily, film actors use their "real life" to experience "*thought and feeling*."<sup>49</sup> There is nothing theatrical about the film actor's rendition of character. Indeed, Benedetti argues that the process is one of "greatly reducing the size of a performance" by connecting to the "the inner life of the character."<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in echoing Benjamin's understanding of film and stage acting, he claims that the "goal of a film actor is not to create a performance, but to be recorded and shaped by the camera."<sup>51</sup> So long as the actor is "making the role his own" by "naturally" depicting the character and his given circumstances he is executing his craft. Although a sense of behavioral truth is also expected of stage actors, particularly if they are working on realistic dramas, their work requires more than merely revealing a character's psychological state. This necessity was not lost on Stanislavsky, who dedicated the second installment of his three-part treatise to the physical embodiment of a role, with particular attention paid to developing an actor's vocal, corporeal, and verbal skills. *Building a Character* identifies the actor's physical training as crucial to

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<sup>48</sup> James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 46.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Benedetti, *Action! Acting for Film and Television* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

Stanislavsky's system, a fact that has been overlooked by most American interpreters of his work, especially Strasberg and Meisner.

Of the Group alumni who became prominent teachers, Stella Adler was most successful in devising pedagogy for theatrical performance, insofar as she focused on Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Actions to enable her actors to create a performance that was stage-worthy and not minimized by a slavish adherence to verisimilitude.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps her appetite for the stage can be traced to her theatrical family, most especially her father Jacob, an illustrious figure in the Yiddish theatre of the early-twentieth century. Whatever the case, Adler possessed grandeur in both her acting and teaching that distinguishes her from Meisner and Strasberg. Whereas her Group colleagues attempted to replicate everyday life in their work, Adler demanded that her students "raise themselves to the level of the character" they are playing to create a performance that has "EPIC SIZE."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, she eschewed the "lack of theatricality" in most of the Group's actors and was constantly at odds with Strasberg's use of affective memory in rehearsals.<sup>54</sup>

Adler claims that "ninety-nine percent" of the actor's work relies on using his imagination to find and fulfill a character's "given circumstances."<sup>55</sup> Although she wants her actors to internally connect to their roles, she warns against "debasement" the work by having an actor use his personal history to construct the emotional life of the character.

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<sup>52</sup> Adler, *The Art of Acting*, 148-59.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, 164.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Chinoy, *Reunion*, 507.

<sup>55</sup> *Stella Adler: Awake and Dream!*, VHS, directed by Merrill Brockway (New York: WNET/PBS American Masters series, 1989).

“Hamlet was not a guy like you,” and “The world of the stage is not your world,” she states in contending that actors must study the historical period and social class of their character to begin to meet the play on its own terms and not reduce it to a level of pedestrian familiarity.<sup>56</sup> The actor’s use of his imagination to psychophysically commit to “actions” that are determined by the play’s given circumstances is the foundation of Adler’s approach.<sup>57</sup> Stanislavsky’s Method of Physical Actions is therefore essential to her pedagogy. Adler famously met Stanislavsky during a visit to Paris in 1934 and returned to America weeks later to claim to her Group cohorts that Strasberg had been misrepresenting Stanislavsky’s system by privileging emotional recall, or affective memory, at the expense of using one’s imagination to work on a role. Her notes from working with Stanislavsky are succinctly captured on a flow chart that lists “Action” as the second most prominent part of the actor’s work and “Feeling (Emotion)” as tenth.<sup>58</sup> While Adler’s claim to be the “only American to actually work with Stanislavsky” is both self-aggrandizing and somewhat misleading, she is correct in stating that his Method was constantly evolving, as by the 1930s he stopped using affective memory in favor of focusing on physical actions arrived at by an actor’s use of his imagination.<sup>59</sup>

Unlike Strasberg’s emotional scoring of a role, Adler draws from Stanislavsky to instruct her actors to build “a vocabulary of actions” and to assign them to each moment

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<sup>56</sup> Adler, *The Art of Acting*, 19, 29.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-102.

<sup>58</sup> See Adler’s chart as documented by her colleague Robert Lewis in his work *Method or Madness?* (New York: Samuel French Inc., 1958), 34-5.

<sup>59</sup> Adler, *The Art of Acting*, 13; also Carnicke, *Stanislavsky In Focus*, 148-49; and Chinoy, *Reunion*, 508.

they are responsible for filling.<sup>60</sup> These actions are defined by “doable” verbs that must be internally justified by the character’s will, or desire to achieve an objective that most often involves someone else.<sup>61</sup> For example, in the famous “Balcony Scene” between Romeo and Juliet, the former might use any number of actions such as charming, wooing, or challenging Juliet into reciprocating his ardor. Actions are variable from performer to performer, thereby making each rendition of Romeo, in theory, distinct from those that preceded it as well as those still to come. Although actions should be motivated by a character’s thought process and internal life—and in this sense the process can be likened to modern psychology—Adler demands that they possess superhuman “size” to meet the needs of a theatrical performance.<sup>62</sup> As such, her approach to the actor’s craft echoes Benjamin’s distinction of the stage performer’s auracular presence as well as Adorno’s discussion of aesthetic *spiritualization*. Like Benjamin, she clearly differentiates stage and on-camera performance, lamenting that the latter deprived the actor of “grandeur” as the “mass mediums of film and TV took over.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, her condemnation of technology and commerce’s impact on the theatre compares in attitude, if not complexity, to Adorno’s criticism of the culture industry.<sup>64</sup>

Yet another distinguishing feature of Adler’s teaching is the importance she places on the actor’s social role. Whereas Meisner dismisses any suggestion of critical thinking or

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<sup>60</sup> Adler, *The Art of Acting*, 114.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-06.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-09.

intellectual engagement of the actor's work,<sup>65</sup> Adler champions students who understand the theatre's place in society and the actor's place in the theatre: "She made us feel that the theatre was important to society and we, as actors, were its priests."<sup>66</sup> This logic can be seen in Adler's appreciation of her father's influence on the Jewish American community during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Jacob Adler, and the Yiddish Theatre he represented, provided a cultural identity for thousands of European Jews immigrating to the US in search of better lives as defined by the mythical American dream. In fact, Stella Adler's future husband and professional confidante (Harold Clurman) was a great admirer of her father's work, and particularly "enthralled" by the Yiddish theatre's function as a "gathering place for the community," a premise that would become foundational to the Group.<sup>67</sup> As her father had done years earlier with the Yiddish theatre, Adler brought a sense of social responsibility to her work with the Group by participating in an ensemble that was committed to using art as a way to enrich, improve, and enlighten American society. Although the Group may have fallen short of Adler's goals in this area, she does indeed see stage actors as "priests" who must "understand the social conflicts the playwright is trying to illuminate."<sup>68</sup> They are more than entertainers, but trained artists whose work has social value insofar as it is the conduit for stories that bear an instructive relationship to the audience. She thus locates actors and the theatre in the context of a ritualistic tradition that can be traced as far back as ancient Greece.

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<sup>65</sup> Meisner and Longwell, *Meisner on Acting*, 36-37.

<sup>66</sup> Former Adler student, William Metzko, interview with author, 17 December 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, *Real Life*, 10, 19.

<sup>68</sup> Adler, *The Art of Acting*, 240.

Despite Adler's commitment to develop actors for the theatre, like Meisner and Strasberg, her regimen lacked the physical training necessary to do so. Although her studio offered complementary courses in voice and movement, for example, they were not synthesized within a program designed to train an actor's physical apparatus in conjunction with the internal elements of his instrument. Moreover, these classes were taken on an ad hoc basis and not as the primary reason for attending the school. Indeed, whether it was the Actors Studio, Neighborhood Playhouse, or Stella Adler Conservatory, students enrolled to study with the institute's marquee teacher rather than engage themselves fulltime in a training regimen that required a minimum of forty contact hours a week in classes that ranged from fencing and vocal production to text analysis and acting technique, which was roughly the layout for any number of League programs. Thus, the acting studio model fell short of preparing talent for the stage.

As is true of Strasberg and Meisner, the majority of Adler's successful students can be traced to the film and television industry. The long list of accomplished alumni who studied with her includes notables such as Warren Beatty, Robert De Niro, Cybil Shepherd, Diana Ross, Melanie Griffith, Kevin Costner, Martin Sheen, and of course, Marlon Brando.<sup>69</sup> With the exception of the latter, none of the aforementioned could be considered a legitimate theatre performer, and in the case of Brando, he left the stage almost immediately after achieving stardom in Hollywood.<sup>70</sup> While some who studied

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<sup>69</sup> Stella Adler Studio of Acting website, <http://www.stellaadler.com/about/alumni/> (accessed 29 December 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Marlon Brando and Robert Lindsey, *Brando: Songs my Mother Taught Me* (New York: Random House, 1994).

with Adler did indeed have stage careers,<sup>71</sup> like the graduates of the Neighborhood Playhouse and the Actors Studio, the great majority of them either made their careers acting on-camera or were forced to quit altogether. A major reason for this reality was that the training of the aforementioned institutions did not cater to theatrical performance, especially as it pertained to executing poetic drama. This point is evident in the 2010-2011 Broadway production of *The Merchant of Venice* starring Strasberg's protégé, Al Pacino, in the role of Shylock. Because his instrument is not trained for the stage, much less speaking Shakespeare, Pacino relies on the tricks that he learned from Strasberg and successfully built a career upon. For example, he does not encompass the size and nuance of Shakespeare's language, choosing instead to reduce the poetry to the realm of his own persona and its corresponding emotional repertoire, physical deportment, and speech patterns. Just as fellow Actors Studio alumnus Dustin Hoffman made Shylock "his own" during a 1980s revival,<sup>72</sup> Pacino brings his personal "New York" style to the role, thereby limiting its inherent eloquence, as noted by the *New Yorker's* Hilton Als:

The seventy-year-old Pacino is a great star, one whom only New York City could have produced—like the best of us he is amped up and perpetually paranoid. And he brings to Shylock that appealing New York City diction, a combination of black, Jewish, and Puerto Rican rhythms. But Pacino's Shylock, it turns out, is interesting not in relation to the rest of the play, but because he is Pacino's Shylock.... We can't appreciate Shakespeare's words because we're too busy listening to Pacino's distinctive speech patterns, that Molly Picon-like whining at the end of a

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<sup>71</sup> Prolific stage performers such as Leslie Uggams, Tovah Feldshuh, and lesser-known names like William Metzo, also trained under Adler. Stella Adler Studio of Acting website, <http://www.stellaadler.com/about/alumni/> (accessed 29 December 2010).

<sup>72</sup> Craig R. Whitney, "Hoffman as Shylock: London Critics Cool," *New York Times*, 3 June 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/06/03/theater/hoffman-as-shylock-london-critics-cool.html> (accessed 29 December 2010).

line that's supposed to soar, the way he angrily crams his words together, his breathlessness, and his shouting.<sup>73</sup>

Als contrasts Pacino's performance with those of the rest of the cast, which he claims maintains a "fidelity to the text" despite the fact that the show's star "refuses to engage them."<sup>74</sup> The latter trait, again, can be traced to Pacino's training under Strasberg and his experience as a film actor.<sup>75</sup> In addition to the "Method" being guilty of "making you go inside" as Meisner says, working before a camera does not require the listening and communal playing that stage acting does. Stanislavsky stressed "communion" as an essential component of his system, yet this skill is hardly necessary when your scene partner is the camera, as is often the case in film performance. Thus, Pacino is gainfully using what skills he has to make up for those he never developed.

In 1967 Stella Adler joined the Yale School of Drama (YSD) as an adjunct professor.<sup>76</sup> While she maintained a primary commitment to her own school, it is telling that Adler agreed to teach for Yale, a charter member of the League. Years later her beloved colleague and Group alumnus, Robert Lewis, would chair YSD's acting

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<sup>73</sup> Hilton Als, "Underdogs: Victims of Prejudice in *The Merchant of Venice* and *On the Levee*," *New Yorker*, 12 July 2010, [http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/theatre/2010/07/12/100712crth\\_theatre\\_als](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/theatre/2010/07/12/100712crth_theatre_als) (accessed 29 December 2010).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Using theatre as a vehicle for reinforcing the "stardom" of a celebrity actor is of course nothing new. One can trace this practice back to ancient Roman, when Roscius's popularity earned him over a million dollars. Identifying stage actors as stars, however, emerged during the nineteenth century in Europe and the US when professional rivalries and vehicle plays became commonplace, as noted by the careers of Sarah Bernhardt, Eleanora Duse, Edwin Forrest, William Charles Macready, Henry Irving, Constant Benoît Coquelin, and Edwin Booth, among numerous others. Film and television has expanded the practice of using "name actors" in leading stage roles regardless of one's ability to deliver the part, as demonstrated by Pacino's Shylock. For a history of actors and acting theory, see Cole and Krich Chinoy, *Actors on Acting*. For a prescient examination of mass culture's effect on acting, see Duerr, *The Length and Depth of Acting*, 491-98.

<sup>76</sup> Chinoy, *Reunion*, 506.

program.<sup>77</sup> These developments underscore the shift in emphasis from private acting studios to university-sponsored conservatories as the new center of US theatre training. Throughout the 1960s schools such as Columbia, Stanford, NYU, and Juilliard joined Yale in beginning a pedagogical and institutional transformation in the training of America's actors.<sup>78</sup> This movement was the result of another major development in US culture during the 1960s: the formation of the so-called regional theatre.

### **The Emergence of the US Regional Theatre and the Formation of the League**

The former Artistic Director of the Yale Repertory Theatre and Dean of the Yale School of Drama, Robert Brustein, claims the most salient part of the Group Theatre's legacy rests not in the "plays it produced" or its "great acting ensemble," but the very "idea" of the company's collectivist existence and corresponding commitment to produce theatre that made a difference in society.<sup>79</sup> Brustein argues, "The Group defined the terms on which a serious American theatre would henceforth be approached, as well as identifying the conditions that would prevent such a theatre from enjoying a healthy life."<sup>80</sup> The salutary existence Brustein references is of course the economic reality that forced the Group to disband in 1941, as numerous members left the company to seek more lucrative endeavors in Hollywood. Nonetheless, the vision on which Clurman, Crawford, and Strasberg founded the organization can be seen in the artistic missions of

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Lewis assumed the head of the acting program at Yale during the early-1970s and relinquished the position by 1976.

<sup>78</sup> According to J. Michael Miller, Columbia and Stanford's acting conservatories disbanded by the end of the 1960s because of funding issues. Interview with author, 17 September 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Brustein, *Reimagining the American Theatre* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1991), 220.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

the upstarts constituting the US regional theatre movement that emerged in the years after World War Two.

Aptly named for the year of its creation, “Theatre 47” was the brainchild of Margo Jones and marks the beginning of the American regional theatre. This development can be traced back to the Little Theatre Movement of the early-twentieth century insofar as it was a nationwide theatre movement that likewise functioned as an alternative to the commercialism of Broadway. The distinguishing feature of Jones’s mission, however, was her commitment to establishing “professional” theatres that consisted of “permanent” ensembles, thereby causing scholars to credit her with starting the US not-for-profit theatre.<sup>81</sup> Claiming, “Every town in America wants a theatre,” Jones describes this enterprise in her seminal text *Theatre-In-The-Round*,<sup>82</sup> which functions as what Joseph Wesley Zeigler calls the regional theatre “Bible.”<sup>83</sup> In addition to addressing how burgeoning theatres should select seasons and manage a not-for-profit budget, Jones provides numerous criteria for creating a repertory company including the implementation of arena staging, a commitment to “complete professionalization,” a minimum rehearsal period of three weeks, and most importantly, a permanent ensemble of actors.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> As Brustein notes, many scholars prefer to use the term “resident” instead of “regional” in referencing the US not-for-profit theatre. For the sake of variety and personal choice, I will use both terms interchangeably. See Brustein, *Reimagining the American Theatre*, 209. For commentary crediting Jones with the beginning of this movement, see Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage* (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 17-23.

<sup>82</sup> Margo Jones, *Theatre-In-The-Round* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 6.

<sup>83</sup> Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 17.

<sup>84</sup> Jones, *Theatre-In-The-Round*, 64-135.

It is the latter criterion that best distinguishes resident theatres from Broadway. Throughout its history the US commercial theatre has been bound by the need to earn a profit and has therefore usually had to hire celebrity actors to increase ticket sales. However, its not-for-profit counterpart was—in theory—free to deploy an ensemble of actors in the exploration of unconventional creative choices towards producing innovative and potentially provocative work for an audience that could be identified, not as mere consumers, but as a community of supporters who were personally invested in their town or city’s theatre. Indeed, the regional theatre movement was initially intended to “bring high quality theatre to people who do not usually see it” by forming companies that permanently “resided” in various cities and towns throughout the US.<sup>85</sup> From major metropolises like Seattle and San Francisco to rural communities like Ashland, Oregon and Monmouth, Maine, Jones’s idea was to decentralize the professional theatre from its New York City roots and provide a rich source of culture and entertainment to a wide cross section of Americans. Admittedly, one could argue, as Zeigler does in describing the movement during the 1970s, that these resident companies have not adhered to a democratic model that includes “every part” of a given community, but have instead catered to a select constituency largely identified as white, educated, and upper-middle class.<sup>86</sup> Baumol and Bowen’s 1966 report on the not-for-profit performing arts supports this claim insofar as their analysis of the “characteristics” of theatre “participants,” otherwise defined as someone who goes to the theatre once a year, indicates that the average audience member is a “white collar professional” with a “graduate degree.” This

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<sup>85</sup> Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 247-48.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-80.

is a dilemma that has challenged the US resident theatre throughout its sixty-year history and will be explored in conjunction with the development of the League in the forthcoming chapters.

Jones, who also uses the term “participants” to identify an audience, stresses that a company of actors is necessary to “nourishing” the theatrical tastes and edification of its followers.<sup>87</sup> This distinction is crucial to understanding her model. As spectators became familiar with the ensemble of players performing in rotating repertory, they therein developed an appreciation for the virtuosity of these actors and the ways in which different dramas were presented. The critic Martin Gottfried made this very point after visiting over fifty resident theatres during the late-1960s. Gottfried acknowledged the importance of forming acting ensembles that can “develop in the resident theatres” and through a “solitary effort” eschew the star system in favor of working collectively on behalf of the overall production, just as the Group did some thirty years earlier.<sup>88</sup>

Echoing Jones and to a certain extent Stanislavsky, he asserts that this practice will serve and foster audiences by enabling them to “become more accustomed to a company and a play,” instead of encouraging an “interest in stars.”<sup>89</sup> Though his argument lacks circumspection, Gottfried exposes the standardization of America’s regional theatres as he promotes the importance of resident acting ensembles that work in repertory:

Repertory is helpful for ensemble performance because it keeps an unchanging group of actors at work together for constant periods during which different plays in different styles are juggled. With such assorted changes and a constant dependence upon teamwork, the actor learns to

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<sup>87</sup> Jones, *Theatre-In-The-Round*, 131-35.

<sup>88</sup> Martin Gottfried, *A Theater Divided: The Postwar American Stage* (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Co., 1967), 120-22.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

function as a member of an artistic *corps*, rather than as a lone craftsman.<sup>90</sup>

Brustein, as well as Zeigler and numerous others, makes a similar claim in support of the company model.<sup>91</sup> Brustein cites his professional experience at Yale to criticize the breakup of acting ensembles that occurred in the US regional theatre during the 1970s and 80s by rhetorically asking, “How could an ensemble remain together when so many of its members have largely decamped for Hollywood or New York?”<sup>92</sup> In reminding the reader that the movement’s original mission was to “decentralize” from the commercial hub of New York City and its commodified practices, Brustein laments theatre’s diminishing presence in the US, as identified by the ways in which not-for-profit institutions have increasingly attempted to align themselves with Broadway and its formulaic production criteria, instead of initiating innovative and politically daring work.<sup>93</sup> Zeigler likewise contends that the regional theatre’s defining attribute was a resident troupe performing in repertory for the sake of providing individual communities with “serious and socially committed drama.”<sup>94</sup> Once these theatres started to disband their companies in the early-1970s it marked an unequivocal retreat from Jones’s original vision and set a disturbing trend in the profession of US acting.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>91</sup> Numerous theatre professionals and scholars have criticized the disbanding of resident acting companies at America’s not-for-profit theatres. To name a few, Rustom Barucha, Herbert Blau, and Lloyd Richards, who stated at TCG’s 1987 conference, “What we have done is develop the institutions without the artists.” Quoted in Martha LoMonoco, “Regional/Resident Theatre,” in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre: Post World War II to the 1990s*, ed. Don B. Wilmet and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); also see Rustom Barucha, “Anatomy of the Regional Theatre,” *Theater* 10, no. 3 (1979): 10-20; and Herbert Blau, *The Impossible Theatre* (New York: McMillan Co., 1964), 82.

<sup>92</sup> Brustein, *Reimagining the American Theatre*, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 209-16.

<sup>94</sup> Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 9.

During the formative years of the not-for-profit theatre, a pair of Jones's protégés, Nina Vance and Zelda Fichandler, followed her lead and respectively founded Houston's Alley Theatre (1947) and the Arena Stage (1950) in our nation's capital. As Zeigler notes, these two organizations used their resident acting companies to forge an alliance with their local municipality.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, the distinguishing feature of these regional upstarts was the fact that they were very much a part of their communities. Vance's theatre began in conjunction with Houston's Jewish Community Center, where she formed a "semiprofessional" operation that brought the likes of Hellman and Odets to local audiences.<sup>96</sup> Fichandler's Arena Stage turned an abandoned movie house into a fully professionalized theatre featuring actors such as Pernell Roberts and George Grizzard, as well as hiring Alan Schneider as the company's resident director.<sup>97</sup> Both theatres would have to weather financial uncertainty abetted by the fact that their pioneering enterprises did not have a precedent—excepting of course Jones's Theatre 47, which folded shortly after its founder's death in 1955.<sup>98</sup> Thus, Vance and Fichandler relied on their visionary leadership and sheer will to successfully create two of the flagship institutions in America's not-for-profit theatre movement.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 24-32.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 32. Schneider also happened to be on faculty at Washington's Catholic University of America at the time.

<sup>98</sup> Zeigler reports that Jones died from breathing toxic fumes from a carpet cleaner while she was lounging about at home reading plays. Such a narrative certainly adds to her legendary status as the "high priestess" of the US regional theatre movement. Under new management Theatre 47 shut down in 1959. See Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 17, 23.

Both the Alley and Arena Stage ultimately survived and still exist as two of America's most successful resident theatres.<sup>99</sup> In addition to Vance and Fichandler's stewardship, a significant reason for their survival can be attributed to the economic funding they received from the Ford Foundation during their formative years. Between 1957 and 1959 W. McNeil Lowry, the Ford Foundation's head of funding for the humanities, began holding national conferences and meetings with artistic directors of resident theatres for the purpose of underwriting select institutions.<sup>100</sup> Buttressed by America's burgeoning interest in the arts and culture,<sup>101</sup> Lowry and the Foundation sought to bring professional theatre to every sector of the country by bankrolling the movement. The Alley and Arena were two of four beneficiaries in 1959, with six other institutions being added to this auspicious list in 1962.<sup>102</sup> Over the next ten years the Foundation would provide over \$16 million to seventeen regional theatres.<sup>103</sup> By the early-1970s its average annual donation to America's not-for-profit stages peaked at approximately \$9.5 million, and

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<sup>99</sup> Identifying the "success" or "value" of an artwork must be understood as a socially-constructed phenomenon that is inherently unstable. Therefore, claiming the worth of a given theatre company is likewise a slippery consideration. Let it suffice to say that I am using the term "successful" to indicate the relative financial stability of both the Alley and Arena and not referring to their artistic achievements, which are considerable if beside the point that I am attempting to make. For an informative study on the social valuation of culture, see David Throsby, *Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19-43.

<sup>100</sup> In addition to the Alley and Arena Stage, the two other initial recipients of Ford's funding were The Actors Workshop and the Phoenix Theatre Company. For a listing of the Foundation's beneficiaries during the formative years of the movement, see Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 180-83.

<sup>101</sup> For an analysis of America's cultural consumption during the 1950s and 60s, see Alvin Toffler, *The Culture Consumers: A Study of Art and Affluence in America* (New York: Random House, 1973).

<sup>102</sup> The six additional beneficiaries receiving funding in 1962 were the Guthrie, American Shakespeare Festival, Actors Studio Theatre, Fred Miller Theater (later renamed Milwaukee Repertory Theatre), UCLA Theatre Group (later the Mark Taper Forum), and the Mummer's Theatre of Oklahoma City. See Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 212.

<sup>103</sup> Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 183.

moreover, its largesse was extended to smaller companies such as Ellen Stewart's La Mama Experimental Theatre and the Negro Ensemble Company.<sup>104</sup> It would not be a stretch to suggest that Lowry and the Foundation he represented were largely responsible for expanding and institutionalizing the US resident theatre movement.

In 1961 the Foundation underwrote a service organization for America's repertory theatres that would provide members with a network through which they could exchange administrative and artistic information. Known as the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the organization was Lowry's brainchild born from his multiple discussions with artistic directors during his travels to conferences in the late-1950s. As a result of TCG, theatres began sharing personnel, business models, and play selections as part of a system that increasingly shifted the movement towards its highly codified

“institutionalization.”<sup>105</sup> While it has had a lasting—and in some respects—positive impact on America's not-for-profit theatres, as Zeigler and others argue, TCG has conventionalized the very companies it is trying to help. As early as the organization's inception, artistic directors and their respective theatres began aping one another, as opposed to locating an individual voice for their company and the community it represented. In short, TCG's standardization of the regional theatre has come at the expense of the aesthetic creativity and uniqueness of its membership.

One of TCG's functions was to “ferret out New York actors” by “selecting college graduates” and distributing them to member theatres for the purpose of joining their

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<sup>104</sup> Gerald M. Berkowitz, *New Broadway Theater Across America: Approaching a New Millennium* (New York: Applause Books, 1997), 104.

<sup>105</sup> For more on TCG's role in the institutionalization of America's resident theatres, see Zeigler, *Regional Theatre*, 184-87.

respective companies.<sup>106</sup> This was a crucial development in US acting and the regional theatre. As organizations such as the Guthrie and Hartford Stage began to emerge, it became necessary for them to hire highly skilled actors for their resident ensembles. While the start of the regional theatre movement was generally met with enthusiasm, there was an obvious void in the talent pool of the nation's actors. Because the training at America's acting schools was based on a psychological methodology at the expense of the skills necessary to fill a large space with distinct speaking,<sup>107</sup> a sonorous voice, and palpable presence, many scholars and practitioners alike reasoned that something had to be done to fill this void. Julius Novick acknowledged this fact after accepting a Ford Foundation grant to visit and study fifty resident theatres nationwide in 1966:

The basic problem with actors is that there are just not enough of them around who can meet the demands imposed by variegated repertoires of the resident companies. I saw very little patently phony emotional acting—the Stanislavskyite influence may be thanked for that at least—but a good deal else is wrong. American actors speak abominably, for one thing; it has sometimes seemed to me that the one absolutely indispensable qualification for employment in the resident theatre is a speech defect. A related fault is that “American actors” to quote Jacques Cartier of the Hartford Stage Company, ‘have in the main not been taught to characterize. American actors tend to want to be themselves in the author’s situation. They don’t change the way they walk, they don’t change the way they speak.’ This does not matter so much on Broadway or in Hollywood....In a resident company, on the other hand, versatility is important.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>107</sup> The esteemed speech teacher, Edith Skinner, coined the phrase “speaking with distinction” in determining the basis for her system to train actors to speak verse drama. Her work was essential to the League programs and remains a mainstay in US actor training today. For more on her pedagogy, see Edith Skinner, *Speak With Distinction*, ed. Lilene Mansell (New York: Applause, 1990).

<sup>108</sup> Julius Novick, *Beyond Broadway: The Quest for Permanent Theatres* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 15-16.

Novick's criticism is echoed by Gottfried, whose own tour of America's regional stages led him to conclude that its actors had training deficiencies, thereby causing the movement's "major problem" that could only be remedied by the "development of broadly qualified actors" capable of performing the "too long-ignored theater classics."<sup>109</sup>

In 1965 universities answered the call for classically-trained actors, beginning with the formation of MFA programs at New York University and Yale, as well as BFA conservatories at places like Carnegie Tech: "We had to train people to fulfill the needs of the regional theatre."<sup>110</sup> The defining characteristics of these programs included a faculty constituted by professional artists, one of whom had to be recognized as a "Master Teacher,"<sup>111</sup> students who were admitted solely on the basis of their talent and projected success as stage actors, and a psychophysical curriculum that combined a Stanislavskian approach with courses designed to develop an actor's stagecraft.<sup>112</sup> Finally, these programs did not sponsor student productions for "commercial" purposes, but used them as an integral component of the overall training process. Whereas academic theatre in the past had been associated with speech departments, this development marked a significant shift not only in American actor training, but also in US higher education in general.

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<sup>109</sup> Gottfried, *A Theater Divided*, 125.

<sup>110</sup> League founder and President J. Michael Miller during interview with author, 12 October 2009.

<sup>111</sup> Miller defines a master teacher as "an individual who a generation of actors looked to as their primary guide in their creative life." CMU and Yale's Earle Gister could be recognized as such a person.

<sup>112</sup> A psychophysical curriculum includes work on the actor's body and voice—his instrument—in addition to addressing his internal (psychological) approach to the craft. Courses such as voice, speech, speaking verse, fencing, corporeal mime, tai chi chuan, dance, and movement were all part of the League pedagogy.

At the 1969 American Theatre Association conference in Chicago, J. Michael Miller, the head of NYU's MFA acting program, joined several colleagues from other universities to discuss their mutual development. It was during this meeting that Carnegie Tech's department chair at the time, Earle Gister, announced a new funding opportunity for theatre conservatories that was being considered by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Just as Ford had underwritten the US not-for-profit theatre, the NEA would play an integral role in funding what would ultimately become The League of Professional Theatre Training Programs. Miller recalls begrudgingly attending this meeting on the grounds that his program at NYU was "doing just fine" and he was reluctant to get involved with other schools, some of which were struggling for their economic survival.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the head of Columbia University's fledgling actor training program, Bernard Beckerman, organized the meeting with the hope of "getting everybody together to mutually support one another."<sup>114</sup> While Beckerman's program would ultimately fold, others took advantage of the NEA's plan to financially assist professional theatre training at select US universities, a plan that did not come into practice until 1973. The impetus for this funding decision was directly related to the NEA's commitment to complement the Ford Foundation's support of not-for-profit theatres. Under the leadership of Ruth Mayleas, the NEA's Theatre Program facilitated this initiative by directing funds to the newly formed League for the purpose of

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<sup>113</sup> J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 22 July 2010.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

“improving cooperation and create exchange between professional training institutions and professional theatres.”<sup>115</sup>

The League was unofficially formed in 1971 with its inaugural meeting occurring in New York City on 9 December.<sup>116</sup> Eleven charter members represented the organization and Miller served as its first president.<sup>117</sup> That following spring Mayleas contacted Miller about the prospect of the NEA funding the League. According to Miller, Mayleas told him that the NEA was starting a pilot program designed to support professional theatre training, “but didn’t want to administer it,” thereby allowing the League to “set up the structure” for how the NEA money was to be distributed.<sup>118</sup> As was suggested at the fateful meeting in Chicago during ATA’s 1969 conference, the NEA was making a move to fund a select group of MFA and BFA training programs for the purpose of supporting the artistic needs of the US regional theatre. Beginning in 1973 Mayleas’s organization directed \$76,000 to League schools, with the figure increasing to \$240,000 in 1975 and peaking at \$320,000 in 1977.<sup>119</sup> The NEA money was essential to the League’s

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<sup>115</sup> Quoted in the NEA’s 1977 Annual Report, 116, <http://www.nea.gov/about/AnnualReports/NEA-Annual-Report-1977.pdf> (accessed 2 January 2011).

<sup>116</sup> The League was officially incorporated in 1973 as documented by its Certificate of Incorporation, 3 August 1973, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>117</sup> The eleven charter members of the League consisted of the MFA programs at Brandeis University, NYU, Ohio University, Southern Methodist University, Temple University, University of Washington, and Yale, as well as the BFA programs at Boston University, Carnegie Tech, and the Goodman School of Drama. The California Institute of the Arts, also an initial member, offered both a BFA and MFA in acting. The Juilliard School and American Conservatory of Theatre, both of which along with Carnegie represent my case studies, respectively joined the League in 1975 and 1977. Minutes from the League’s Annual Meeting, 1971, 75, 77, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>118</sup> The NEA money was unevenly distributed to League schools with funding specifically intended for student scholarships, “master teachers,” and bringing in guest directors. J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 22 July 2010; also Minutes from the League’s Annual Meeting, 1973-1985, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

operation, as funding was divided between its members—albeit unevenly—throughout the organization’s seventeen years. In addition to covering the League’s administrative costs, this money was allocated “at the discretion of the president” and generally applied to the hiring of guest directors and master teachers.<sup>120</sup> Mayleas left her post at the NEA in 1978,<sup>121</sup> the Reagan administration cut the NEA’s budget by 10% in 1981, and thereafter the endowment’s funding of the League decreased annually to the paltry sum of \$10,000 by 1985.<sup>122</sup> Although Miller contends the depletion of federal support was not the sole reason for the League disbanding in 1986, he admits that it played a role in the organization’s termination.<sup>123</sup>

Despite the League’s relatively short seventeen-year history, it would ultimately leave an indelible mark on US actor training. In addition to bringing professional theatre conservatories to America’s universities, it provided a pedagogical template for developing America’s most skilled stage actors. Seasoned professionals and “master teachers” used the largesse of the NEA in conjunction with their host institutions to train

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<sup>119</sup> Mayleas and the NEA closely evaluated what the League was doing, what its goals were, and after careful consideration, they agreed to fund the League on a provisional basis. Annual reports were turned into Mayleas’s department documenting how the funds were used, a process that was necessary to renewing the NEA’s support. J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 14 February 2011.

<sup>120</sup> President Miller’s summation of the League’s 1973 annual meeting, 16 October 1973, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>121</sup> League of Professional Theatre Women Website, “Lee Reynolds Award–Ruth Mayleas,” <http://www.theatrewomen.org/lee-reynolds-award-ruth-mayleas> (accessed 4 January 2011).

<sup>122</sup> National Endowment for the Arts Website, Annual Reports for 1973, 74, 75, 77, and 1985, 86, 87, <http://www.nea.gov/about/08Annual/index.php> (accessed 2 January 2011); and Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Arts in Crisis: The National Endowment for the Arts Versus America* (Chicago, IL: A Capella Books, 1994), 46–66.

<sup>123</sup> While admitting that the NEA’s decreased funding impacted the League’s demise, Miller claims that another important factor was the increasing disparity in the training standards of its membership. He claims that the League’s most reputable programs at the time (Juilliard, Yale, and NYU) were becoming increasingly disenchanted by their perception that the others—to one degree or another—were lagging behind. J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 17 July 2010.

exceptionally talented students who would constitute the next generation of theatre artists.<sup>124</sup> Famous actors such as Meryl Streep (Yale) and Kevin Kline (Juilliard) joined lesser-known graduates of League schools in forming an emerging crop of gifted performers possessing the skills to meet the needs of the US regional theatre. In addition to being taught some form of Stanislavsky's system, these "New American Actors" were schooled in a host of physical disciplines that ranged from corporeal mime and fencing to dialect work and speaking verse drama.<sup>125</sup>

While the pedagogy of these schools varied from program to program, each was intended to train "the entire physical system" of the actor's instrument, much in the spirit of Jacques Copeau's *Vieux Colombier* of the early-twentieth-century.<sup>126</sup> Copeau's commitment to a psychophysical training regimen is evident in the curriculum practiced at his makeshift conservatory—he conducted classes in an outdoor garden at a villa in the French countryside—created for the purpose of fostering an ensemble for his theatre company, the *Théâtre Vieux Colombier*.<sup>127</sup> Classes in gymnastics, voice and speech training, and mask characterization were combined with athletic activities such as swimming and "ball games" for the purpose of developing actors with finely-tuned instruments capable of maximum levels of physical, vocal, and emotional expressivity—traits that are synonymous to how Suzuki describes the actor's "transformation" or how

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<sup>124</sup> League of Professional Theatre Training Programs Information Bulletin 1978-1979, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>125</sup> Jennifer Dunning, "The New American Actor," *New York Times Magazine*, 6 November 1983.

<sup>126</sup> Copeau founded the *Vieux Colombier* School in 1921. For a compact but useful history of Copeau's acting theory and the *Vieux Colombier*, see John Rudlin, "Jacques Copeau: the Quest for Sincerity," in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, 55-78.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Benjamin depicts the actor's "aura."<sup>128</sup> This regimen was complemented by Copeau's desire for psychologically and emotionally "sincere" performances that remained faithful to the dramatic text.<sup>129</sup> Like his contemporary Stanislavsky, Copeau wanted to depart from the artificiality—or *cabotinage*—of nineteenth century acting by constructing a curriculum that integrated the psychological and physical elements of the actor's work.<sup>130</sup> His ultimate goal was to "form a company of actors to fulfill the requirements of [his theatre's] repertoire,"<sup>131</sup> an objective that would be echoed by America's not-for-profit theatres during the 1960s and early-1970s. It should come as little surprise that Copeau's nephew and Vieux Colombier member, Michel Saint-Denis, was the founder of Juilliard's acting program, which proved to be an exemplary model of the League's commitment to producing some of our nation's finest stage actors.

The League stood for a standard of excellence that distinguished its members from the overwhelming number of training programs that began to form at US colleges during the 1970s and 80s.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, these enterprises developed at such a rate that US actor training became an industry onto itself. Today over 160 universities offer either a BFA or MFA in acting, a figure that does not account for the myriad BA-granting theatre

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<sup>128</sup> See Tadashi Suzuki, *The Way of Acting*, trans. J. Thomas Rimer (New York: TCG, 1986), 12; and Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978).

<sup>129</sup> Rudlin, "Jacques Copeau," 56.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 59.

<sup>132</sup> The League's Information Bulletin for 1978-79 states that the organization's goal was to "seek out the best talent the country has to offer" and develop these "young men and women for careers in the professional theater." Cited from the personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jensen.

departments throughout academia.<sup>133</sup> Unlike average college theatre programs, League schools were widely recognized by theatre professionals for the organization's high standards.<sup>134</sup> Every year colleagues from other League schools visited each program to review and evaluate its daily operations to ensure that the consortium's goals were being met. In fact, the majority of time during the League's annual meetings was dedicated to discussing training standards, with certain schools placed on probation and having to ultimately withdraw for failing to meet the necessary criteria for membership.<sup>135</sup>

According to Miller, the central reason for the League disbanding was that his colleagues and he felt that their consortium was not "standing for a standard anymore but merely existing as a Good Housekeeping stamp of approval."<sup>136</sup> His remarks reinforce the League's commitment to excellence.<sup>137</sup>

Throughout the League's history, Miller and his associates tirelessly attempted to forge an alliance with the US not-for-profit theatre. Given that programs such as NYU and Juilliard were founded in conjunction with the emergence of the regional theatre, it would seem that such a partnership should make perfect sense. Unfortunately, this was

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<sup>133</sup> P. J. Tumielewicz and Peg Lyons eds., *The Directory of Theatre Training Programs 2007-2009*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Dorset, VT: Theatre Directories Inc., 2007).

<sup>134</sup> For proof of the League's standing among US theatre professionals during the 1970s and 80s, see Dunning, "The New American Actor," 6 November 1983.

<sup>135</sup> Programs such as Brandeis University, the University of Washington, Ohio University, Temple University, and CalArts had their membership revoked during the League's seventeen-year history. Minutes from the League's Annual Meeting, 1971-1986, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jensen.

<sup>136</sup> J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 22 July 2010.

<sup>137</sup> Drafted in 1971, the League's original charter explicitly states the organization's commitment to excellence in theatre training: "The purpose of this association is to improve the American theater through dedication to the highest standards of training for theater artists." Cited from the personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jensen.

not the case. Politics and jockeying for control over funding left the League and TCG constantly at odds with each other, a subject that will be explored in detail in chapter four on the professionalization of League actors. The greatest blow to the permanent placement of young actors at US theatres, however, came with the disbanding of resident companies. As institutions such as A.C.T. and the Long Wharf were forced to cut expenditures, they increasingly dismantled their acting ensembles and began “jobbing in” talent on a show-by-show basis. As a result, highly skilled actors coming out of programs like Carnegie Mellon and Yale were in turn forced to seek employment in other sectors of the entertainment industry, namely film and television. The acting teacher Thomas W. Babson uses the League Showcase to make this very point in his 1988 article, “Theatre’s Illegitimate Child: The Screen Actor,” in which he shows how graduates “must face the reality that actors have to make a living, and today” the field is “dominated by film and television.”<sup>138</sup> Babson interviewed students who had recently completed their “showcase” auditions for industry professionals and combined his findings with employment statistics from SAG and Equity to conclude, “four out of five working actors are employed in film and television.”<sup>139</sup> This development is likewise documented by numerous NEA reports, most especially one entitled, “Understanding the Employment of Actors,” which unequivocally states that “data from SAG and AFTRA reveal shifts of theatrical personnel from live theatre to movies and television.”<sup>140</sup> This disturbing trend was not lost on Miller and his colleagues, as acknowledged during a

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<sup>138</sup> Thomas W. Babson, “Theatre’s Illegitimate Child: The Screen Actor,” *TDR* 33, no. 3 (1988): 17.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in NEA Research Report, “Understanding the Employment of Actors,” September 1977, [http://www.nea.gov/research/ResearchReports\\_chrono.html](http://www.nea.gov/research/ResearchReports_chrono.html) (accessed 4 January 2011).

meeting of a task force that the League created for the purpose of professionally aligning with America's regional theatres:

Most of the training programs we started between 1965 and 1968 were responding to the needs of a developing regional theatre. Prior to that time, speaking as an actor, we studied with Stella or Lee or Uta, found occasional work Off-Broadway and in live television and looked forward to summer stock. But as companies began to form across the country, the need for actors with training in the classic sense became apparent. In the late sixties and very early seventies, the relationship between the theatres and the training programs was close. But with the demise of the [Equity] journeyman contract and the subsequent disappearance of companies, the original connection between theatres and the schools has been lost. As a result...most of our talented young actors see television as their primary source of employment.<sup>141</sup>

Thus, US actors began hawking their craft to whoever was willing to pay them, which in most instances was the film and television industry. A corollary development was the emergence of commercial and “theatrical” agents—and casting directors—as middlemen in the increasing commercialization of American acting.<sup>142</sup> Prior to examining this process in detail, however, I will trace the League's development by historicizing the relationship between US professional and educational theatre during the 1960s. Thereafter, I will examine three League programs by addressing how they were organized, how they functioned, what pedagogical initiatives they used, and most crucially, how they represented the consortium and its place in the trajectory of US actor training.

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<sup>141</sup> Quoted in Minutes from the League Task Force Meeting, 19 and 20 July 1986, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>142</sup> The term “theatrical agent” is something of a misnomer in that it refers to an agent who submits clients for film and television jobs, as well as positions in the professional theatre. In fact, the significant majority of these submissions today are in film and TV, thereby reinforcing the professional trend that I have historicized in this chapter. This fact is made obvious by simply viewing the so-called “Breakdowns” on any given day, which lists the professional jobs currently being cast in both New York City and Los Angeles.

## Chapter 3

### The Emergence of the League of Professional Theatre Programs in the Context of Institutional Politics, Funding, and Administrative Policy

I see little of more importance to the future of our country than full recognition of the place of the artist. If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow [her] vision wherever it takes [her].

—John F. Kennedy<sup>1</sup>

The 1960s were a heady time for the arts in America. President Kennedy's pledge to foster the work of artists was buttressed by the financial and participatory support of organizations and individuals nationwide. From institutional benefactors such as the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations to the sponsorship of businesses and private donors, both the fine and performing arts enjoyed "an historic shift" in US society.<sup>2</sup> An emerging class of consumers of culture represented what some social historians refer to as a "cultural explosion" in which the arts were supported and practiced at unprecedented levels in US history.<sup>3</sup> Although these consumers did not in fact constitute a plurality of American society (they were predominantly upper middle-class and well-educated whites), they began a movement of artistic patronage and spectatorship that was exemplified by the formation of arts organizations throughout the decade. From urban centers to rural towns, symphonies and dance companies operated alongside museums

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Kennedy quoted her father in her opening remarks to the 2008 Kennedy Center Honors. See <http://www.susangabriel.com/blog/writers-and-writing/a-quote-from-john-f-kennedy-about-artists/> (accessed 24 June 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Toffler, *The Cultural Consumers: A Study of Art and Affluence in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

and theatre troupes underwritten by support from both the private and public sector.

With respect to the latter, the formation of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965—modest as its coffers were and continue to be—aptly signified how the US had begun to appreciate the social role of the fine and performing arts.

One of the places where the arts flourished during the 1960s was on the campuses of America’s colleges and universities. As Alvin Toffler notes in his contemporaneous text, *The Culture Consumers*, US higher education was spending “more time, money, and energy” on the arts than at any point in history.<sup>4</sup> Claiming that “the arts [had] moved in on higher education,” Toffler portrayed the growth of cultural opportunities at America’s universities as a positive development in linking art and society.<sup>5</sup> That connection was demonstrated in a variety of ways, such as a touring art exhibit or a live performance that a college sponsored on behalf of its campus and local community, an alliance between a professional arts organization and a university’s corresponding department (e.g., Princeton University’s Theatre Department and the McCarter Theatre), or perhaps the inclusion of professional artists as resident and adjunct faculty. In short, college campuses contributed to this cultural expansion by jointly representing and mediating America’s growing arts movement.

Perhaps the presence of culture at US universities during the 1960s is best exemplified by the proliferation of undergraduate and graduate degrees as the culmination of a course of study in the fine and performing arts. Theatre particularly fit this trend as noted by Burnet M. Hobgood’s report entitled, “Theatre In US Higher Education: Emerging Patterns and Problems,” in which he claims that “while attention to certain fields in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

higher education is diminishing, interest in theatre is enlarging.”<sup>6</sup> Between 1945 and 1955 the number of theatre programs at American universities increased by 28% to bring the total to more than 300 and 176 at the undergraduate and graduate levels.<sup>7</sup> In the latter instance, twenty-five doctoral programs combined with 151 granting masters degrees.<sup>8</sup> This development marked a significant shift in the dispensation of theatre curriculum in higher education, insofar as prior to 1950 the overwhelming majority of theatre courses were offered through a given college’s English or Speech Department. During the 1950s and 60s, however, theatre programs would enjoy unprecedented growth in academia, as Theatre and Drama departments were formed at colleges and universities of various sizes, designations, and geographic locations.

Although the emergence of these departments signified an appreciation for theatre that was consistent with its expansion socially as part of the so-called “culture boom,” its newfound position in higher education came at a price. Theatre was being offered to communities nationwide through the regional theatre movement, and therein it often prospered through its reciprocal relationship with US universities, yet this seemingly auspicious alliance posed certain problems. Merging theatre’s professional and pedagogical spheres proved to be a tangled combination of competing interests and continual misunderstandings between artists and academic administrators. Moreover, the conventional logic, traditions, and functionality of higher education did not necessarily lend itself to aesthetic practice and processes, thereby adding to the competition among

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<sup>6</sup> Burnet M. Hobgood, “Theatre in US Higher Education: Emerging Patterns and Problems,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 16, no. 2 (May 1964): 147.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-44.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

departments and programs for an institution's limited resources. Not surprisingly, these conflicts most often centered on the allocation of funds.

According to contemporaneous literature on finance and policymaking in US higher education during the 1970s, the institutional term for expenditures was “input,” which could best be defined as the capital invested in a given area, such as constructing a new building, hiring tenured faculty, underwriting a specific academic program, or purchasing resources for students (e.g., computers or library books). Naturally, it was expected that these investments would yield specific benefits for the university, or “outputs,” that could be measured in various yet precise ways: student success academically and professionally; the attraction of more applicants towards increasing enrollment; and an enhanced reputation for a given program, which by extension benefited the overall university.<sup>9</sup> This paradigm guided the policymaking and distribution of funds in higher education throughout the period of my study—and one could argue it persists today.<sup>10</sup> Essentially, administrators were responsible for conducting a rigorous cost/benefit analysis to justify the dispensation of resources. Oftentimes this process was informed by “political considerations,” as contended by Frederick E. Balderston—a leading scholar on

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<sup>9</sup> For contemporaneous scholarship analyzing US higher education as a commercial industry during the 1970s, see Frederick E. Balderston, *Managing Today's University* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974); and John Vaizey, *The Political Economy of Education* (New York: Halsted Press, 1972). For specific information on the function of input/output ratios relative to US Higher Education, see Jane Louise Johnson, “The Role of the Student in the Higher Education Production Function,” *Research in Higher Education* 9, no. 2 (1978): 169-79; and Frederick E. Balderston and George B. Weathersby, “PPBS in Higher Education Planning and Management: Part III, Perspectives and Applications of Policy Analysis,” *Higher Education* 2, no. 1 (February 1973): 33-67.

<sup>10</sup> For an informative overview of the present day function of input/output ratios in US higher education today, see Dan Berrett, “Program Reviews Can Produce ‘Death Spirals’ or Happy Endings,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 9 September 2011.

the topic of policymaking at US universities during the 1970s—who referred to politics as a “reality [in] planning and management in higher education.”<sup>11</sup>

As a result of these developments, throughout the 1960s and 70s, US universities began to resemble major corporations insofar as they operated according to the triangular relationship of funding, politics, and input/output ratios. In his 1972 text, *The Political Economy of Education*, John Vaizey depicted higher education as an “industry” dominated by a “production function,” thereby lending credence to the reality that America’s colleges and universities were becoming increasingly interested in their bottom line to justify how they allocated resources.<sup>12</sup> If policymaking and investments provided a desirable output, whether it were in the form of economic or symbolic capital, then such decisions were deemed worthwhile; on the other hand, if administrators saw them as wasteful or unwise, these resources would be cut. Such was the academic environment that League schools and other theatre programs entered during the 1960s and 70s. While it was understandably an exciting and progressive time for the creative arts on campuses nationwide, it was also fraught with conflicting interests that pertained to the very cost/benefit paradigm explained earlier and the ways in which politics and policymaking determined how these newfound departments functioned, and in certain instances, managed to survive.

In many respects newly minted BFA and MFA theatre programs offering professional degrees in playwriting, directing, design, and of course acting, were incongruous with the traditions and functionality of higher education. First, the very concept and practice of higher learning has historically been heterogeneous, with a multiplicity of disciplines

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<sup>11</sup> Balderston and Weathersby, “PPBS in Higher Education Planning and Management,” 35.

<sup>12</sup> Vaizey, *The Political Economy of Education*, 212-13.

bearing complementary relationships to each other under the auspices of a given university, an arrangement that opposes professional theatre training's specialized approach to teaching and learning. A conservatory-styled acting program, for example, is not going to concern its young actors with the study of foreign languages or mathematics. Professional training is by definition—and understandably so—a narrow endeavor intended to instruct students to achieve a singular goal: making a living in their chosen *métier*. Therefore, the pedagogy and curriculum of League schools were homogenously centered on establishing the highest possible professional and artistic standards, which necessitated that students were uniformly focused on their specific discipline. Second, the faculties charged with developing these students were hardly products of academia furnished with PhDs, but professional artists whose accomplishments were not measured by publications but by their proven practice (e.g., acting resume or productions directed). Among other things, this reality oftentimes led to disputes over granting tenure as committees had to consider unconventional criteria regarding credits and accomplishments when considering an applicant's bid for promotion.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, universities historically located themselves within the context of a civic community, whereas private acting academies did not. While it might seem logical that a theatre program would reach out to a surrounding city or town to promote its operation, conservatories have traditionally been insular ventures. Indeed, in the case of the League programs, students were not permitted to publicly present their work until the final year

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<sup>13</sup> The acting teacher Jack Clay chaired Southern Methodist University's (an active member of the League throughout its history) training program from 1966-1986 before leaving after being forced by university administrators to tenure his faculty. Clay argued that doing so was "not conducive to the training because teachers became complacent." He contended the optimum situation for training actors was to have a central visionary with a like-minded faculty whose job security was contingent on producing quality graduates that could compete professionally. See Jack Clay, interview with author, 27 August 2011.

of their training—if at all. One of the League’s mantras was that all student productions had to be justified pedagogically and not geared for public “entertainment.” This could make it challenging at times to defend a program’s budgetary needs to unsympathetic deans or provosts whose backgrounds were most likely not in the creative arts, and who would be understandably concerned with their university’s reputation in the local community. Such were the unfortunate fates of the MFA Acting Programs at Ohio University and Brandeis University, two League schools that were forced to withdraw from the consortium because of a lack of funding from their host institution. Finally, and most significantly, income generated by student enrollment was yet another issue for theatre conservatories. Whereas most disciplines could cater to a large number of students, specialized training in the creative arts—most especially acting—is hands-on and requires a comparatively low student/faculty ratio. Attending a mathematics lecture in an auditorium is appreciably different than a voice class where an instructor is responsible for addressing each student’s vocal needs on a case-by-case basis. In keeping with the aforementioned example, the mathematics student would also be likelier to contribute money to the university as an alumnus than would someone graduating from the theatre program, given that on average a math student’s career would be more prosperous than a student actor’s. Thus, a larger proportion of graduates from disciplines such as mathematics and business would be expected to donate to their alma mater than their artistic counterparts. These increased opportunities for funding would have the corollary effect of justifying internal support from the university; a department’s output, or its “use” to an institution, was commensurate with the amount of economic and symbolic capital it generated, which therein determined how much internal support it

received. This was the case with the University of California at San Diego's Theatre School, which was made possible in large part because members of the science community agreed that it was a good idea that UCSD begin supporting the arts for the purpose of acquiring symbolic capital. Having a theatre program would "credit" the university's emerging reputation for excellence in multiple disciplines, not just the sciences upon which it had built its reputation. While the formation of the Theatre School marked a shift in the university's investment in the arts, according to the program's founder, Arthur Wagner, it would not have happened if not for the widespread support from UCSD's science departments.<sup>14</sup>

The inherent tension between newfound theatre conservatories and academia represented an institutional paradox in which the latter wanted to embrace the so-called cultural explosion throughout US society during the 1960s and 70s, yet was uneasy to do so because it did not want to surrender its traditions and adjust its conventional functionality. This was likewise the case with performing arts institutions such as Juilliard where certain disciplines were privileged over others. As I will demonstrate during my examination of Juilliard, its President (Peter Mennin) was a musician by trade who consistently denied the Drama Division much needed resources and instead directed them to the Departments of Music and Opera. Before addressing the dissertation's case studies, however, I will provide a context for the troubled alliance between actor training and US higher education by citing the prescient warnings of W. McNeill Lowry, who cautioned that the professionalization of artists at the university level invited a host of administrative and economic challenges. I will then likewise put the formation of the League in this context by relating it to academic structures and the emergence of the

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur Wagner, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

regional theatre movement. Finally, I will examine my three case studies as representatives of the League by specifically considering how institutional policy and politics shaped the allocation of financial resources. It is my hope that this line of inquiry will demonstrate how the corporate practices of higher education directly—and oftentimes negatively—shaped professional actor training.

### **“An Uneasy Alliance”: W. McNeil Lowry’s Prescient Warning Regarding Professional Theatre Training at US Universities**

W. McNeil Lowry addressed the tension between artistry and academia in a speech given to an auditorium of graduate school deans in October of 1961. The Director of the Ford Foundation’s Program in the Humanities and the Arts, and arguably the country’s most influential supporter of the arts at the time, Lowry expressed concern regarding the growing trend in training theatre professionals at US colleges and universities:

The university has largely taken over the functions of professional training in [theatre] but in the main has sacrificed professional standards in doing so.<sup>15</sup>

Claiming that this course of action was “irreversible,” Lowry used theatre to exemplify how the creative arts had begun to founder in academia despite the newly minted BFA and MFA programs in métiers such as directing, playwriting, and most especially, acting.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the latter has historically attracted more students than any other concentration offered by theatre programs. Lowry implored his audience to make a “radical shift” in the training of professional theatre artists by looking beyond the conventional academic practice of hiring scholars as teachers, and instead to bring in

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<sup>15</sup> W. McNeil Lowry, “The University and the Creative Arts,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 14, no. 2 (May 1962): 106.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

“non-academic” practitioners to create and administer programs that were exclusively designed to prepare students for professional careers.<sup>17</sup> This meant that liberal arts courses and electives would at best be a peripheral part of the curriculum, as students would be selected solely on the basis of their professional potential, thereby earning the privilege of working alongside proven artists in their field of study. Burgeoning playwrights would learn from established dramatists, beginning directors and scenic designers would be the protégés of seasoned professionals, and young actors would develop under the tutelage of so-called master teachers. Lowry proposed that the culmination of such a regimen should result in the student artist’s placement at a professional institution that would serve as an “apprenticeship removed from [the] academic environment.”<sup>18</sup>

Lowry was calling for a corps of young professionals—most notably actors—to meet the artistic needs of the US regional theatre, a movement that was bankrolled by the Ford Foundation during its formative years. As Director of Ford’s Department of the Humanities, Lowry was largely responsible for underwriting the entire movement. In 1958, a year after being appointed to his post, Lowry attended the first of what would become known as “theater-communications-conferences,” at which professional directors and producers from around the US convened to discuss ways to strengthen and expand their shared practice of decentralizing America’s professional theatre from its New York City moorings. Using Margo Jones’s Theatre 47 as a seminal model, these artists and producers concluded that a resident company of actors performing in repertory would be

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the movement's signature component. In an interview some years later, Lowry fondly recalled the formative days of the US regional theatre and his role in establishing it:

So I thought maybe someday, you know, we'll have permanent institutions in the theatre which would be a counterweight to the hit-or-flop economics on Broadway and at least encourage the serious actor, director, playwright, designer, with the collaboration of the artist and the poet.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after the 1958 conference Lowry oversaw the dispensation of Ford money to several emerging companies including the Alley Theater (Houston), Arena Stage (Washington D.C.), and the Actor's Workshop (San Francisco), thereby commencing the foundation's investment of more than \$17 million in not-for-profit theatres over the next twenty years.<sup>20</sup>

To understand the emergence of professional actor training at the university level, one must consider it within the context of the US regional theatre, and by extension, the cultural expansion happening nationwide during the 1960s. Theatres and conservatories bore a complementary relationship insofar as the former needed psychophysically trained actors who had the versatility to meet the casting needs of a variegated repertory, and the training programs in turn wanted places to send their graduates. They also faced similar economic challenges that reflected the ways in which arts funding was handled during the 1960s. Because both resident theatres and university programs operated as not-for-profit entities, they had to be funded by external sources. Whereas Lowry and the Ford Foundation underwrote the regional theatre movement, the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations, and to a lesser extent the Shubert Organization, all dedicated funds to

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Joan Simpson Burns, *The Awkward Embrace: the Creative Artist and the Institution in America* (New York: Knopf Inc., 1975), 278.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Magat, *The Ford Foundation at Work: Philanthropic Methods, Choices, and Styles* (New York: Plenum Press, 1979), 129.

professional theatre training to offset costs that a given university might not be capable or willing to meet. For example, in 1966 NYU and Yale received \$750,000 and \$390,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation for the purpose of supporting their respective training programs.<sup>21</sup> However, it could hardly be expected that external donors alone would support these ventures, and considerable investment was of course necessary from a program's university. This was a fact not lost on Lowry during his aforementioned address. While acknowledging that professional theatre training programs were expensive, he contended that US universities and the administrators that ran them had access to funding that went above and beyond the resources of their private drama school counterparts:

Academic deans coping with deficit financing in their annual budgets may not make the best audience to which to say it, but the fact is that so far as artistic training is concerned the universities have the money.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, he challenged his audience either to adopt some version of the conservatory model that he was promoting, a system that would be solely dedicated to developing theatre professionals, or simply to “throw the artist out,” which according to Lowry's logic, would better serve him than an ersatz training regimen.<sup>23</sup>

Lowry's challenge was opposed by many representatives of the professoriate at the time, most notably esteemed faculty from theatre departments nationwide. Frank M.

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<sup>21</sup> Milton Esterow, “N.Y.U. Gets Grant for Stage School,” *New York Times*, 29 April, 1966; *New York Times*, “Drama School at Yale Gets \$390,000 Rockefeller Grant,” located in Juilliard School Archives (Drama Division Papers, box 34, folder 1); Sam Zolotow, “Repertory Unit Planned by Yale: Brustein to Hire Prominent Actors to Guide Students,” *New York Times*, 24 February 1967; and Milton Esterow, “\$175,000 Is Given by Shubert Fund: Universities and Theatrical Groups Will be Aided,” *New York Times*, 24 May, 1965.

<sup>22</sup> Lowry, “The University and the Creative Arts,” 107.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Whiting's published response, "W. McNeill Lowry's 'The University and the Creative Arts': A Reply," criticized Lowry's assessment and argued that a liberal arts education and conservatory-styled theatre training were compatible—"the two go hand in hand" towards "combining professional and liberal values."<sup>24</sup> Theodore Hoffman likewise suggested that professional actor training and the academy was a match by "equating quality in the arts with intellectuality."<sup>25</sup> Both men had a vested interest in their contentions, as they were seminal members of the shift in actor training from independent schools to US universities and stood to benefit from this change. Whiting was a professor with the University of Minnesota's Theatre Department during the 1960s at which time Hoffman chaired the drama program at Carnegie Tech, thereby justifying their joint interest in defending the newfound arrangement between professional theatre training and the academy. J. Michael Miller admits that he too was initially skeptical of Lowry's argument. Given Miller's role in co-founding NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and by extension its Theatre Program, he confesses that he shared Whiting and Hoffman's disagreement with Lowry, but has since come to recognize his "prescience" in depicting the "uneasy alliance" between professional theatre training and higher education. Miller was Tisch's Associate Dean from 1968 to 1998 and speaks fervently of the institutional politics that he dealt with regarding the Theatre Program and its relationship with the university at large:

For twenty-two years I battled the professoriate because they didn't want the school of the arts to get all the attention from the press and prospective

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<sup>24</sup> Frank M. Whiting, "W. McNeill Lowry's 'The University and the Creative Arts': A Reply," *Educational Theatre Journal* 15, no. 2 (May 1963): 159.

<sup>25</sup> Theodore Hoffman, "Talent, Admissions, Attrition: A Contribution to the Lowry Debate," *Educational Theatre Journal* 15, no. 3 (October 1963): 212.

students. It was an uneasy alliance. There were three major deans at NYU that didn't want us around.<sup>26</sup>

The institutional tensions that Miller experienced can be traced back to Lowry's 1961 speech. A PhD in his own right, Lowry was familiar with the political and economic trappings of academia and eloquently spoke to the potential pitfalls of mixing creative arts training with America's universities: "Can such training, given the objectives of a university, be offered under what are known as professional standards?"<sup>27</sup> According to Lowry, higher education and professional training in the creative arts—especially acting—were antithetical when put into practice. Preparing artists for a specialized profession like dancing or acting was oppositional to academe's traditional *modus operandi*, as students would no longer be admitted to a school on account of their academic record and standardized test scores, but on the basis of their professional prospects within a given *métier*: talent trumped intellect. The faculty responsible for developing this talent and providing these young artists with the techniques and skills to make a living at their craft were generally "non-academic" personnel drawn from the professional world. In an environment that historically prized terminal degrees and publications as benchmarks of achievement (and promotion), it was a seismic shift to suddenly recognize actors, directors, and playwrights as faculty sharing the same status as accomplished PhDs. Lowry further identified this tension by addressing the specialized curriculum of BFA and MFA degrees, both of which required that the significant majority of a student artist's coursework be centered in her chosen discipline. The curriculum of an arts conservatory in many respects had more in common with the

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<sup>26</sup> J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 18 February 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Lowry, "The University and the Creative Arts," 103.

pedagogical approach of a vocational school than a university. Thus, Lowry warned his audience that higher education and the training of professional artists were incompatible practices and therein fraught with future conflict and competing interests.

The most salient point of contention, not surprisingly, would almost always come down to the allocation of financial resources. Given Lowry's background with the Ford Foundation, he was quite adept at understanding the bureaucracy of not-for-profit funding and how it would ultimately pertain to higher education and the support of professionalization programs in the creative arts. Despite his skepticism regarding this "uneasy alliance," Lowry was resigned to the fact that the trend to train professional artists—actors and otherwise—at US universities was irreversible, and the only way for it to work was for "universities to regard the arts as important and give [their programs] financial support."<sup>28</sup> As identified earlier in this chapter, external sources of support did in fact come from foundations such as those tendered by Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller and therein defrayed some of the costs to help sustain a given program. Under the guidance of Ruth Mayleas and the NEA's Theatre Division, for example, funds were given to the League to dispense to its membership for the purpose of underwriting the salaries of guest directors and master teachers. Moreover, private donors and a handful of local businesses likewise supported a given Theatre Department to alleviate the costs of training professional actors, directors, and dramatists.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>29</sup> SMU's Jack Clay was very effective in raising external funds for his theatre program, thereby causing it to succeed as one of the League's most consistent members throughout the consortium's history: "I frequently went to the community for help. I developed a reputation in Dallas of being very effective at doing this sort of thing (raising money)." See Jack Clay, interview with author, 27 August 2011.

Despite these examples of external funding, however, a given program could only function if it received both economic and social capital from its university. While the former was an obvious necessity for survival, the latter oftentimes determined how much money would be allotted to a given department. Stanford University and Columbia University, for example, each had MFA acting programs during the 1960s that became defunct because neither of these wealthy institutions deemed them a worthy investment. The irony in this fact is that Bernard Beckerman, who headed Columbia's program, organized the first meeting of what would ultimately become the League in 1969, merely months before his department collapsed because of a lack of funding. Thus, the history of the League must be seen within the larger institutional context of the university system. Charter members of the League such as Ohio University and Brandeis University were ultimately forced to withdraw because their respective institutions denied them necessary funding. In the cases of programs that were part of a degree-granting arts school (e.g., Juilliard and CalArts), the situation was slightly different insofar as their theatre departments were not competing with science and math for institutional support, yet resources were limited and politics—sometimes personalities—informed how these funds were distributed.

Lowry presented several crucial questions regarding the shift in emphasis in actor/theatre training during the 1960s: Could US higher education effectively prepare students for careers in the creative arts? How would the specialized pedagogy and practice of an aesthetic like acting function in a learning environment that was multidisciplinary and governed by deans and provosts who valued the traditions of academia and were generally not “theatre people”? How would these potentially

competing interests become manifest in the allocation of a university's limited resources? Using my three case studies, I will examine the relationship between institutional politics, administrative policymaking, and funding to demonstrate the uneasy alliance that Lowry spoke of between academia and the professional training of creative artists, which in this instance pertains to actors. I will therein question the placement of League programs—and by extension BFA and MFA-granting acting conservatories—within the context of US higher education. Should America's universities be in the business of training theatre professionals, actors and otherwise? Is there an inherent conflict between the intellectual rigor associated with a graduate school education and the decidedly creative praxis of developing stage performers? How are these tensions negotiated within academia, and to what extent do a university's distribution of funds, its administrative policymaking, and institutional politics influence the pedagogy and curriculum of training actors? I will address these questions by analyzing three League programs as a representative model for the consortium. Before introducing these case studies, however, I will first provide an overview of the League's formation in the context of US higher education and the regional theatre movement.

### **The Genesis of the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs**

Lowry's call for "professional standards" was addressed by the formation of select BFA and MFA training programs during the mid-1960s, the genesis of which could be traced to a 1966 conference sponsored by the University of Minnesota's Theatre Department and the Guthrie. The conference took place over the course of ten days on two separate occasions, one in February and the other in June, and was documented in a

special edition of *Educational Theatre Journal*. Numerous luminaries from both educational and professional theatre were brought together to “define areas of action” that would facilitate “improvements” in the relationship between the US not-for-profit theatre and its educational counterpart.<sup>30</sup> Esteemed practitioners and theatre producers such as Morris Carnovsky and Peter Zeisler joined forces with so-called “master teachers” (e.g., Earle Gister and Kristen Linklater) and department heads (e.g., Theodore Hoffman and John Houseman) to discuss the current state of US theatre and to take decided action towards creating a mutually beneficial connection between America’s regional theatres and professional actor training programs.<sup>31</sup> Although theatre departments that merely functioned as liberal arts programs were included in this conversation, the thrust of the conference was to find a better way to prepare students for a professional theatre career, as clearly indicated by its participants who were predominantly artists and producers and not scholars or academics.<sup>32</sup> The conference’s self-described objective says as much:

Stated simply, a profession of theatre exists with no systematic, preparatory training for it. In the need to correct this state of affairs lays the indissoluble link between theatre educators and its practitioners: the areas of preparation and performance are interdependent; one relies on the other for purpose, meaning, and continuity. To strengthen one is to strengthen the other.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kenneth L. Graham et al., “Relationships Between Educational Theatre and Professional Theatre: Actor Training in the United States: A Report on the University of Minnesota Conference, February 3-6 and May 26-31, 1966,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 18, no. 3 (November, 1966): 312.

<sup>31</sup> The term “master teacher” came out of the movement to establish conservatories at US universities and was a criterion for membership to the League: every program had to employ a minimum of one master teacher in the field of acting. A master teacher’s pedagogy was expected to have shaped a generation of actors, such as Earle Gister, Kristen Linklater (voice), and Robert Benedetti did during the 1960s and 70s. The League’s official definition of a master teacher is “a person with a comprehensive approach to talent development and a record of preparing working artists.” Quoted from Earle Gister’s Foreword in *Master Teachers of Theatre*, ed. Burnett M. Hobgood (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), vii.

<sup>32</sup> Graham, “Relationships Between Educational Theatre and Professional Theatre,” 314-15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

The conference conveners and participants clearly wanted to take advantage of theatre's emerging place in US society and its concurrent growth at the university level. Citing a "ferment of activity and interest" as identified by "communities developing more interest and allocating more funds for cultural planning," the conference's overarching aim was to create a mutually beneficial alliance between the not-for-profit professional theatre and American universities.<sup>34</sup> As Lowry acknowledged some years earlier, the conference participants contended that higher training standards were needed at theatre programs, and could only be achieved by enlisting proven practitioners to teach select students who were admitted on the basis of their talent and potential for landing a position in the resident company of a regional theatre.<sup>35</sup> Although a variety of *métiers* was discussed as part of this process, the training of actors was the conference's focus. For example, the professionalization and training of actors was the subject of six of the conference's thirteen sessions; no other practice had a single workshop, but instead fell into the generalized rubric of such sessions as "Interrelationship Between Educational and Professional Theatre," which predictably focused on the professionalization of actors.<sup>36</sup> The conference concluded that systematic training models specifically preparing actors for regional theatre careers were few in number and lacked distinction from the growing morass of programs that were otherwise devoid of the "standards of excellence" necessary for achieving this goal.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 316-18.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

Despite the conference's earnest intention to link universities to the theatrical profession, it exemplified the very concerns that Lowry presented five years earlier during his seminal speech before a group of college deans. The conference failed to account for and explore the inherent tensions between theatre education—most notably as it applies to actor training—and the conventional functionality of US universities. As Lowry argued, academia functions as a bureaucratic entity that is counterintuitive to the training and professionalization of aspiring artists. For all its useful work in the area of theatre pedagogy, the participants ignored the fact that they were proposing sweeping changes to how universities traditionally functioned, and without the support of administrators who were products of the academic system and its traditions, their plight was bound for unforeseen difficulties. The *Educational Theatre Journal* piece documenting the conference suggests the naiveté of its conveners: “Those attending did not think of themselves as representatives of particular institutions, organizations, or geographical areas.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the participants consisted almost entirely of either theatre professionals or educators who would be better identified as practitioners than scholars. Of the fifty-one participants only eight had PhDs, half of whom could be identified legitimately as scholars; the other four had established careers as professional artists or practitioners.<sup>39</sup> There were merely two academic administrators involved in the proceedings, including O. Meredith Wilson, who was the President of the University of Minnesota at the time and delivered the conference's keynote address. Yet here too one can see the oversight of the conveners—which was representative of the entire movement in BFA/MFA theatre training—as Wilson outright acknowledged the growing

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 314-15.

relationship between academia and the creative arts, directly addressed and contended with Lowry's argument, and remarked on the "rift that existed between theatre people and university people," only to then give way to a conference that neglected to substantially explore any of these points.<sup>40</sup> As noted earlier, the bulk of the working sessions were dedicated to actor training, and the one workshop that even remotely attempted to address the relationship between professional theatre and academia (entitled "Economics and the Non-Commercial Theatre") conveniently surmised that universities would be willing to support professional theatre companies because such an enterprise "would fulfill part of the university's cultural responsibility to the community."<sup>41</sup> As inviting as this suggestion may sound, the fact remains that it was nothing more than a hollow presumption made by a group of professional artists and educational practitioners failing to account for how resources were allocated within the academic system. The absence of representatives from the administrative branch of US higher education and the omission of a single working session investigating the relationship between artists and institutional bureaucracy demonstrates a blind spot in the development of professional actor training at the university level.

The Minnesota conference must be seen in the context of the League's formation. Founded in 1971 and incorporated two years later, the League initially consisted of eleven schools that shared the common objective of "advancing the standards of professional training for the American theatre [by] forging links between the training

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 365-71.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 352-56.

centers and the profession itself.”<sup>42</sup> The membership consisted of a balance of MFA and BFA programs that could be further divided into two groups according to the number of students enrolled as actors. For example, half the programs “involved up to 100 students” and the others catered to approximately twenty to fifty aspiring actors.<sup>43</sup> Most operated under the auspices of a university’s school of the arts/drama (e.g., Carnegie and Yale); some functioned as autonomous programs within a larger drama department (e.g., SMU and Temple); others were performing arts institutions with a degree component (e.g., the Goodman School of Drama, and later Juilliard and A.C.T.). Seven of the schools were private institutions with high tuition, whereas the University of Washington joined Temple and Ohio Universities as the League’s publicly supported schools. All three state schools would eventually leave the consortium, but several other publically funded institutions would ultimately join, namely the North Carolina School of the Arts (1978), University of California at San Diego (1981), and SUNY Purchase (1983). A few of the schools accepted transfer applicants under very strict provisions, however, the majority required students to be enrolled three to four years to earn the MFA or BFA degree.<sup>44</sup> Depending upon whether it was an undergraduate or graduate program, the

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<sup>42</sup> J. Michael Miller, “Alliance for the Development of Theatre Artists” (working paper, presented 10 October 1978), personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>43</sup> Theodore Hoffman et al., “Report on Professional Theatre Training” (working paper, presented spring 1972), personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson. The original ten schools consisted of Boston University, Carnegie Mellon University, and the Goodman School of Drama, all of which offered BFA degrees, as well as Brandeis University, NYU, Ohio University, Southern Methodist University, Temple University, Yale, and the University of Washington all operating on the graduate level. CalArts was one of the original members in 1971, separated from the League prior to it becoming incorporated in 1973, rejoined in 1977 and was asked to withdraw for good in 1981. The other League programs and the years they entered the consortium were as follows: Juilliard (1975), A.C.T. (1977), North Carolina School of the Arts (1978), UCSD (1981), and SUNY Purchase (1983). This data is reported in the minutes of the League’s annual meeting, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>44</sup> CalArts and Ohio University both had two-year MFA programs in acting.

average student was in his late-teens to early-twenties, and in the case of a BFA curriculum, a bare minimum of academic courses was required. Every program had to have at least one fulltime “master teacher,” a “low” student-faculty ratio with a “high proportion of contact hours,” a flexible schedule that oftentimes differed from the regular academic calendar, and a baseline of financial support from its university.<sup>45</sup>

The thrust of each program was to breed an “exceptional” group of stage actors who would significantly contribute to shaping the future of the American theatre.<sup>46</sup> The professional standards of the League were distinguishable from other college acting programs, most notably those operating as part of the University/Resident Theatre Association (URTA). Established in 1969 “to work towards the highest standards in theatre production and performance and to help bring professional theatre to the university campus and its community,” URTA continues to function, if not flourish, today.<sup>47</sup> While it can be credited with largely fulfilling the latter part of its founding objective (to bring professional theatre to university campuses), its goal of reaching “the highest standards” of training, most especially as it pertains to acting, has always been in question. Whereas the League was self-selecting in its membership and squarely focused on actor training, URTA was and continues to be a much broader consortium of programs that has a very loose set of pedagogical and administrative standards. Each school functions autonomously without any organizational oversight; by contrast the League

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<sup>45</sup> Theodore Hoffman et al., “Report on Professional Theatre Training,” 2; and quoted from an interview with Arthur Wagner, who along with J. Michael Miller and Earle Gister co-founded the League. Arthur Wagner, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>46</sup> J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 18 February 2011.

<sup>47</sup> For an overview of URTA and its membership, see the organization’s website, [http://www.urta.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=44&Itemid=183](http://www.urta.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=44&Itemid=183) (accessed 2 July 2011).

constantly monitored the pedagogical results and graduate placement of its membership. Admission to the League required a unanimous vote of the current membership, and moreover, each program had to undergo an internal review every three years with certain schools being demoted to a “provisionary” status or even “withdrawn” as deemed necessary.<sup>48</sup> Every year a sizable part of the League’s annual meeting was dedicated to a “standards review,” during which time a school’s representative would be subjected to questioning based on the presentation of his acting program’s status. Topics ranging from class sizes and faculty hires to pedagogical initiatives and course scheduling were typically discussed. No such process has ever existed for URTA affiliates. Furthermore, the League had master teachers, attracted demonstrably more applicants and set an identifiable criterion of training standards; URTA did not.<sup>49</sup> Its annual recruitment conference, which includes a cattle call audition, identifies the most substantive connection between URTA’s forty-plus members.<sup>50</sup> As such, URTA can be seen as a symbol of how actor training in US higher education developed into a corporate industry in which students are lured into spending considerable time and money to prepare for a

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<sup>48</sup> The following programs were either forcefully or voluntarily withdrawn from the League: Goodman School of Drama (1975), Ohio University (1976), CalArts (1981), Brandeis University (1984), University of Washington (1985), and Temple University (1986).

<sup>49</sup> According to Arthur Wagner, one of the founders of the League and head of three of its programs throughout its history (Ohio, Temple, and UCSD), League schools attracted exponentially more applicants than other universities. By the middle-1970s, for example, Yale and Juilliard were both seeing over 1000 prospective students and the other League schools were auditioning anywhere between 400-500 each. Recruitment was helped by the League’s national audition tour in four US cities where all the member schools would be represented (Arthur Wagner, interview with author, 10 June 2011); and minutes to the League’s annual meeting, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>50</sup> For information regarding URTA’s annual auditions, see “auditions and interviews” at <http://www.urta.com> (accessed 3 July 2011).

profession that cannot possibly accommodate the overwhelming number of aspirants.<sup>51</sup> Since the great majority of these schools have failed to meet the professional standards of their League counterparts, they have corroborated Lowry's 1961 prediction that the proliferation of actor training at American universities would become an enterprise fraught with mediocrity.<sup>52</sup>

I am citing URTA at length to draw attention to the League's extraordinary accomplishment with respect to actor training. One of the League's founding members, Arthur Wagner, mentioned in a recent interview that "we were the premiere training programs and URTA had all different kinds of schools doing different things."<sup>53</sup> While Wagner could be understandably accused of bias, the facts support his case. URTA represented an array of professional and pedagogical initiatives, whereas the League was focused on one thing: training professional theatre artists (especially actors).<sup>54</sup> Although the consortium no longer exists, many of the schools that constituted it continue to be recognized by theatre professionals as the premiere actor training programs in the country, which is a testament to the League's distinction relative to URTA and the other 100-plus universities offering an acting major at the BFA or MFA level.

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<sup>51</sup> According to the 2009 edition of *The Directory of Theatre Training Programs*, there are more than 160 US universities offering either a BFA or an MFA in acting. Clearly, this number is daunting given the limited professional opportunities available to the students of these programs after they graduate. See *The Directory of Theatre Training Programs 2007-2009*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., PJ Tumielewecz and Peg Lyons eds. (Dorset, VT: Theatre Directories Inc., 2007).

<sup>52</sup> Lowry, "The University and the Creative Arts," 106.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Wagner, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>54</sup> The League introduced a "design committee" to be headed by Yale's Ming Cho Lee in 1975. This project was relatively small by comparison to the League's overarching attention to actor training. Nonetheless, portfolios of graduates in scenic and costume design were part of the League's annual presentation for industry professionals and remain an important part of the organization's legacy. See minutes from the League's annual meeting, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

Over the course of its history (1971-1987) the League had sixteen members. Issues stemming from its rigorous standards for continued participation as well as funding cuts from a given school's academic administration caused the withdrawal of many members over the years. As a result, there were never more than twelve active participants at any given time, and only ten when the consortium disbanded in 1987. In an effort to exhibit its place in the trajectory of US actor training, I have chosen three schools as case studies (Carnegie Mellon, Juilliard, and A.C.T.) to offer a representative model of what the League stood for. The criteria for selecting these schools were based on several factors. First, I wanted my coverage to include schools that offered either a BFA or an MFA. With Carnegie and Juilliard functioning as undergraduate programs and A.C.T. offering graduate degrees, I am able to do just that. Second, I wanted each of the case studies to have been affiliated with the organization when it disbanded in 1987, yet I also wanted some variance as to when they joined. As an original member, Carnegie enables me to trace its program relative to the League's entire history, whereas Juilliard and A.C.T. both entered the League at separate points during the 1970s, yet both were with the organization long enough to justify their selection as case studies. Third, I wanted programs that had varying degrees of success according to the League's "training standards." Juilliard was always a darling of the League, insofar as its actors were universally hailed as exemplars of the League model. While Carnegie and A.C.T. were also well respected, their training came under question during the League's internal reviews, with the former being placed on "provisionary" status at one point. The mixed reception by the membership towards these three schools offers a richer analysis than if I had chosen to examine those that were always considered a "member in good standing,"

or conversely, if I had only focused on programs that were constantly on probation. Fourth, I wanted a balance regarding the enrollment of the program and the institutional framework in which it operated. With respect to the former, A.C.T. never had a graduating class of more than ten students, but Carnegie and Juilliard had a relatively large number of acting majors numbering somewhere near 100. Also, A.C.T. and Juilliard fit the formerly-mentioned “performing arts school” model, whereas Carnegie has always been part of a research university—this distinction makes for an interesting comparison, especially when it comes to administrative policy and funding matters. Fifth, I wanted to combine schools that had a direct relationship with a professional theatre (e.g., Yale School of Drama and Yale Rep) with at least one that did not. A.C.T. of course applies to the former and Carnegie the latter. Juilliard presents the intriguing case of the Acting Company doubling as both a professional touring company and an extension of the school’s training regimen. Finally, I wanted my three case studies to demonstrate geographic breadth, which they obviously do.

Michael J. Miller claims that these three schools “are a fine representation” of the League.<sup>55</sup> In fact, they are just that, a representation. I do not intend for my analysis of them to substantially reflect another program’s performance. The League, after all, consisted of sixteen independent institutions that operated according to their own administrative, artistic, pedagogical, and economic policies to varying degrees of success and failure. Nonetheless, each school shared many philosophical and structural approaches and therein represented the League’s commitment to “advancing the standards of professional actor training for the American theatre” as acknowledged by its criteria for membership (e.g., having a master teacher on staff; accepting students solely

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<sup>55</sup> J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 18 February 2011.

on the basis of professional potential; etc.). I will present each case study in relationship to the League and its other members whenever possible. It is my hope that by closely studying the three that I have selected I can offer a substantial and coherent explanation of the organization at large and its place in the history of US actor training.

I have organized my case studies thematically by first looking at the administrative and economic forces that determined the way they operated, before examining them along the lines of pedagogy and professionalization in chapter 4. Whereas chapter 4 will put the case studies in direct conversation with one other, in order to analyze the unique history of each program and the role its administrative leadership had in determining that history, this current chapter will investigate each school on a case-by-case basis. I will begin by tracing the history and development of Juilliard's acting program, before moving on to Carnegie's and then end with A.C.T. The rationale for my order is to start with the program that in many ways exemplified the League ideal and then to examine the one that had the lengthiest tenure with the consortium before finishing with the school that demonstrated the most complete connection between actor training and the regional theatre. Moreover, because William Ball was a graduate of Carnegie's Drama Department and founded A.C.T., from the standpoint of creating somewhat of a logical narrative it makes sense to have Carnegie directly precede A.C.T. in my ordering.

### **The Juilliard School's Drama Division**

In the spring of 1978 while acting as League President, J. Michael Miller sent a letter to his counterpart at Juilliard, Peter Mennin, praising the school's recent graduates of the Drama Division: "We have just completed review of the graduating classes of League

schools. I thought you should know that the response to the Juilliard class this year is quite remarkable.”<sup>56</sup> Miller continued by acknowledging the work of the Drama Division’s head, Alan Schneider, before declaring Juilliard one of “the handful of schools that serve” the US theatre “in a significant way.” Indeed, Juilliard’s Drama Division played an important role in fostering talent for the US theatre throughout the 1970s and 80s, a fact that is supported by its unblemished status in the League as a “member in good standing” from the moment it joined the consortium in 1975. According to an external study, by the late-1970s Drama Division graduates had an 80% rate of employment in professional theatre, a figure that dwarfed the national average of about 30 %, according to Actors Equity.<sup>57</sup> From the hiring of topnotch teachers and the creation of a renowned touring company to the professional success of its graduates, Juilliard was fast becoming the most celebrated actor-training program in the US and an exemplar of what the League claimed to represent.

The founding of Juilliard’s Drama Division was not without its difficulties, however, especially when it came to matters of financing and administrative control. To understand how the Drama Division was created, one must put it into the context of Juilliard moving to Lincoln Center. Having been originated as the Institute of Musical Art in 1905, Juilliard relocated from its site at Claremont Avenue in Morningside Heights to the grounds of Lincoln Center in 1969. Becoming a constituent of Lincoln Center, and

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<sup>56</sup> J. Michael Miller to Peter Mennin, 11 July 1978, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 32, folder 5.

<sup>57</sup> An NEA study conducted in 1977 used data from Actors Equity to estimate the mean employment for stage actors to be approximately one-third of the union’s overall membership. See NEA Research Report, “Understanding the Employment of Actors,” September 1977, 17; also Barton-Gillet Company’s external review of the Drama Division, 1977, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 32, folder 3.

therein joining the ranks of the NY Philharmonic and Metropolitan Opera, came with two notable requirements: the term “music” had to be dropped from the institute’s name, so that it no longer went by the name the Juilliard Music School, but simply the Juilliard School; and a Drama Division needed to be formed. It is of course the latter criterion that is germane to my study.

In 1958 Juilliard’s president, William Schuman, conducted a meeting with select luminaries from the professional theatre to discuss planning for the Drama Division. Among those in attendance were Jo Mielziner, Sanford Meisner, and most significantly, Michel Saint-Denis.<sup>58</sup> Saint-Denis would be crucial to the formation of the Drama Division, especially in devising its approach to actor training. He was the nephew of Jacques Copeau and a member of Copeau’s famed Vieux-Colombier, home to the continental training model upon which numerous League acting programs were based. He was accomplished in both the European professional theatre as well as in theatre education, with a long list of credits ranging from the Royal Shakespeare Company to the Old Vic Theatre School. Schuman hired him in 1959 as “chief consultant” to the projected Drama Division, a role that would eventually evolve into his being the department’s founder and co-director, the latter position being shared with John Houseman from 1968 to Saint-Denis’s death in 1971.<sup>59</sup>

Funding the Drama Division was a thorny issue during the program’s formative years. One of Saint-Denis’s recommendations was for the Drama Division to have the facilities

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<sup>58</sup> Memo, 9 May 1958, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 115, folder 17.

<sup>59</sup> Saint-Denis was repeatedly offered the directorship of the Drama Division, but turned it down every time because he had other professional commitments that he did not want to give up. He was also in poor health throughout the 1960s, which contributed to his reluctance to accept Schuman’s multiple offers. In fact, Saint-Denis’s wife Suria was instrumental in supporting his work at Juilliard and continued as a consultant to the Drama Division after his death. See Gertrude Samuels, “New Views on New School: M. Saint-Denis, French Arts Experts, Talks on Aims of Drama Center,” *New York Times*, 5 April 1959.

to enable the department to do its work. Among other things, his proposal called for a “demonstration theatre” capable of seating 200 spectators, as well as rehearsal rooms of varying sizes, administrative offices, design studios, dressing rooms, and storage space, all of which would prove to be quite expensive. He also stipulated the need for a faculty of more than twenty-five people, thereby adding to what was becoming a costly venture for Lincoln Center, which in 1961 had agreed to underwrite the Drama Division in the amount of \$2.5 million. Financing the Drama Division became contentious at times, as noted by the correspondence between William Schuman—who, ironically, left Juilliard to become president of Lincoln Center in 1962—and his successor, Peter Mennin.<sup>60</sup> At issue was Schuman’s attempt to use a Carnegie Foundation grant of \$1 million stipulated for Juilliard’s “young artists” to reduce Lincoln Center’s initial pledge of \$2.5 million.<sup>61</sup> Mennin contended that the Carnegie money should be added to the original sum and not used to augment Lincoln Center’s prior commitment:

Juilliard agreed to develop the drama training program after it had been assured of ten years of support by Lincoln Center. . . . Since the Juilliard Drama Division (and the space provided for it in the new building) was developed by the instigation of Lincoln Center, it is clear that Lincoln Center has a responsibility in keeping this commitment as one of top-priority.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> In fact, it was Schuman who urged Juilliard’s board of directors to approve the move to Lincoln Center in February of 1957. For more on the leadership of Schuman and Mennin as Juilliard’s presidents, see Andrea Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

<sup>61</sup> Minutes from Lincoln Center Board Meeting, 8 November 1965, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 32, folder 9.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Mennin to Lincoln Center Executive Committee, 31 July 1968, Juilliard Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 31, folder 2.

In a separate letter to Schuman, Mennin claimed that Juilliard's "rocky path" to financial security was dependent upon Lincoln Center's promised support, and he went so far as to threaten the "liquidation of the Drama Division" if it did not meet its original obligation.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to the matter involving the Carnegie grant, Mennin and Schuman disagreed when it came to Lincoln Center's long-term support of the Drama Division, which was originally stated to last ten years. In the end, their respective lawyers agreed that Lincoln Center would contribute \$3,138,500 to underwrite the Drama Division, an amount that included a portion of the Carnegie donation, with the final installment arriving in February of 1973. This payment, however, did not enable Mennin to meet the Drama Division's budget deficit for that year, estimated to be in excess of \$333,000. Therefore, he sought external support from John D. Rockefeller III as well as from the Noble Foundation, both of which pledged a combined \$300,000 to the Drama Division with the stipulation that Juilliard would raise an additional \$600,000 for the department over the ensuing two years.<sup>64</sup> According to the department's Chief Administrative Officer at the time, Margot Harley, "the general coffers of Juilliard successfully raised money for the Drama Division," thereby averting a financial crisis.<sup>65</sup> Despite Mennin's fund raising abilities, he ultimately proved to be a perennial obstacle to the Drama Division's interests, as demonstrated by his continual policy disagreements with its first two

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<sup>63</sup> Peter Mennin to Robert Schuman, 24 December 1962, Juilliard School Archives, President's Records: Drama Division, box 32, folder 9.

<sup>64</sup> Frank Y. Larkin to Peter Mennin, 14 November 1965, Juilliard School Archives, President's Records: Drama Division, box 32, folder 8; also John D. Rockefeller III to Peter Mennin, 13 November 1975, Juilliard School Archives, President's Records: Drama Division, box 32, folder 8.

<sup>65</sup> Margot Harley, interview with author, 14 June 2011.

directors (John Houseman and Alan Schneider), and most especially regarding funding matters.<sup>66</sup> Harley and J. Michael Miller went so far as to question Mennin's desire for the Drama Division to outright survive. Whatever the case, it remains clear that his leadership oftentimes challenged the Drama Division's operations. To the extent that he argued on its behalf in his dealings with Schumann and Lincoln Center, given his position as president, he had no choice in the matter. After all, Juilliard's move to Lincoln Center was contingent on the formation of a theatre program, a reality that Mennin was forced to accept in attempting to negotiate its financial relationship with Lincoln Center's President (Schumann) and Board of Directors.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the financial disagreements between Lincoln Center and Juilliard, during the early-1960s tensions erupted between the prospective relationship between the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center (RTL) and the proposed Drama Division. Part of Saint-Denis's master plan for the Drama Division was to place graduates in a repertory company where they could jointly demonstrate and develop the skills they acquired from their training.<sup>68</sup> An alliance between the RTL and Juilliard's acting program seemed to be a perfect match; both were being funded by Lincoln Center, in the nascent stages of their development, and shared the same location. Indeed, they were created with each other in mind, as Schuman noted in a letter he sent to Mennin in 1966: "The relationship

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<sup>66</sup> Juilliard's archive collection contains numerous examples of correspondence between Mennin and the Drama Division's administrative personnel addressing the matter of funding cuts. One such example was a letter to Houseman in which Mennin refers to the allocation of Drama scholarships as a "problem" and that the number "simply had to be reduced." See Peter Mennin to John Houseman, 17 July 1970, Juilliard School Archives, Dean's Records: Drama Division, box 9, folder 3.

<sup>67</sup> Harley, interview with author, 14 April 2011; and J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 18 February 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Gertrude Samuels, "New Views on New School," *New York Times*, 5 April 1959; also Mark Schubart to Michel Saint-Denis, 27 February 1962, Juilliard School Archives, President's Records: Drama Division, box 33, folder 5.

between Juilliard and the Repertory Theatre not only represents significant artistic potential, but is also basic to the Lincoln Center concept.”<sup>69</sup> Schuman’s letter was prompted by Mennin’s concern that RTALC was forging a partnership with NYU’s theatre program, a move that would eclipse “Juilliard as the educational arm of Lincoln Center.”<sup>70</sup> Schuman attempted to allay Mennin’s concern by promising that he would speak to RTALC’s new artistic directors, Jules Irving and Herbert Blau, whose joint leadership marked an even worse connection with Juilliard than their predecessors (Elia Kazan and Robert Whitehead).

Kazan and Whitehead’s four-year tenure at RTALC was marked by mutual distrust of Saint-Denis and his plans for starting the Drama Division. First, Saint-Denis had reservations about Kazan’s “Method” approach to acting, which squarely “opposed” his own Continental training model. After visiting numerous theatres and drama programs throughout the US in 1959 as a consultant for Juilliard, Saint-Denis saw how Lee Strasberg’s limited interpretation of Stanislavsky had influenced US actor training, and he was not about to do the same.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, he wanted to maintain the Drama Division’s autonomy and did not appear to trust Kazan as a potential colleague, as indicated by two separate letters, one from Dean Mark Schubart to Saint-Denis and the other from Saint-Denis to Schubart:

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<sup>69</sup> William Schuman to Peter Mennin, 26 February 1965, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 34, folder 2; also William Schuman to Peter Mennin, 9 June 1966, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 34, folder 2.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Mennin to William Schuman, 23 February 1965, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 34, folder 2.

<sup>71</sup> A sampling of the programs Saint-Denis saw during his US tour included Carnegie Tech, the Goodman School of Drama, Northwestern University, and the Pasadena Playhouse’s theatre school. Michel Saint-Denis to William Schuman, 25 August 1961, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 34, folder 3.

I know that you have always favored the independence of the School from the Repertory Theatre on artistic as well as administrative grounds, and Bill [Schuman] and I subscribe fully to this view.<sup>72</sup>

Kazan has said that he would send me his own idea of a curriculum for his school by the beginning of January. I have received nothing and I do not believe I [will] receive anything.<sup>73</sup>

To make matters worse, Whitehead submitted a six point proposal to Schuman arguing for “full control” of Juilliard’s drama program, most especially as it pertained to finances, artistic decisions, and overseeing the facilities. Whitehead’s hubris went so far as to rename Juilliard’s so-called Drama Division the “The Lincoln Center School of Drama.”<sup>74</sup> Schuman responded with a politic if categorical refusal of Whitehead’s points, and shortly thereafter, due to a host of unrelated issues, he oversaw Whitehead’s dismissal as well as Kazan’s.

Things did not get much better for the proposed alliance after Irving and Blau arrived in 1964. By this time Saint-Denis had turned down Schuman’s repeated attempts to hire him fulltime as the director of the Drama Division, thereby opening the door for John Houseman, who was hired in 1966. Saint-Denis approved of the Houseman selection and agreed to “remain in close association with the development of the school” under the title of co-director.<sup>75</sup> However, the Drama Division was Houseman’s to operate, as Saint-

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<sup>72</sup> Mark Schubart to Michel Saint-Denis, 9 March 1961, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 1, folder 11.

<sup>73</sup> Michel Saint-Denis to Mark Schubart, 13 April 1961, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 34, folder 5; also Saint-Denis to Schuman, 25 August 1961, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 34, folder 3.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Whitehead to William Schuman, undated proposal, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 1, folder 11.

<sup>75</sup> Michel Saint-Denis to Peter Mennin, 24 May 1965, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Records: Drama Division, box 34, folder 6.

Denis was splitting his time between Europe and the US and in poor health.<sup>76</sup> One of Houseman's first responsibilities was to continue exploring a relationship with RTLC, but like Saint-Denis, he encountered a lack of trust in his counterparts and an abiding desire to protect the Drama Division's autonomy.<sup>77</sup> In the end, the Drama Division and RTLC would never share an active and mutually beneficial relationship.

The tension between Lincoln Center and Juilliard is a common narrative with respect to arts funding in the US and can be seen in the joint cases of the League schools and the regional theatre movement. As Baumol and Bowen argued at the time, the formation of not-for-profit arts complexes such as Lincoln Center—as well as repertory theatres and arts organizations—was contingent on receiving external funding from a combination of foundation support, corporate sponsors, private donors, and the government.<sup>78</sup> Their paradigm of “cost disease” likewise pertained to US actor training at the conservatory level. Nearly every League school, for example, was forced to negotiate with its institutional administration on matters related to funding and departmental policy. I have already shown that the NEA's general funding of the League played a significant if contradictory role in the consortium's creation and dissolution. Funding likewise impacted the organization's members on an individual basis. These programs simply could not survive without support from their university and external contributors. Thus, Juilliard's administrative policy was greatly influenced by financial challenges such as its

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<sup>76</sup> Saint-Denis had been in poor health throughout his tenure working for Juilliard. He died of complications from a stroke in July of 1971.

<sup>77</sup> John Houseman to Peter Mennin, undated letter, Juilliard School Archives, President's Records: Drama Division, box 33, folder 6.

<sup>78</sup> William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music, and Dance* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1966).

dealings with the larger entity of Lincoln Center, and this dynamic applied to the management of the Drama Division throughout the 1960s and 70s.

Margot Harley, who began as the department's Chief Administrative Officer in 1968 and served throughout the tenures of Houseman and his successor Alan Schneider, credits the former as being a "brilliant leader who excelled at managing diverse personalities and egos" towards establishing one of the most effective actor training programs in US history.<sup>79</sup> Although Houseman had limited experience as a teacher, thereby distinguishing him from many of his League counterparts, he was no stranger to the role of a producer. In addition to founding the Mercury Theater with Orson Welles, his numerous credits included a leadership position in the Federal Theater Project, the artistic directorships of the UCLA Theater Group and American Shakespeare Festival, and the producer and director of numerous stage plays and films. As early as 1965 he worked alongside Saint-Denis in shaping the structure and curriculum of the Drama Division, which, contrary to Saint-Denis's original conception for the school, only offered acting as a program of study.<sup>80</sup> They were jointly committed to a psychophysical regimen that provided students "the technical and emotional capacity" to fill the needs of any given text whether it is a "work from the past or the present" for the purpose of meeting the casting needs of America's regional repertory companies:

By maintaining a close relationship with regional groups and repertory companies the country over, we expect to furnish them, over the years,

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<sup>79</sup> Margot Harley, interview with author, 14 June 2011.

<sup>80</sup> Saint-Denis's original plan called for programs in playwriting and directing as well as acting, but only the latter was implemented at the time because of funding limitations. A major for playwrights and directors was subsequently established in 1993 and 1995.

with that flow of trained personnel without which such organizations cannot survive.<sup>81</sup>

Thirty-five students were selected from a national audition tour that accommodated over 600 applicants, thereby forming “Group I” of the Juilliard Drama Division upon the commencement of classes in the fall of 1968.<sup>82</sup> These students would be joined by several “Advanced Students” in 1971, a policy of admitting applicants who demonstrated the professional experience worthy of allowing them to bypass the first two years of training; this practice no longer exists at Juilliard. Group I graduated seventeen students in the spring of 1972, including such notables as Kevin Kline, Patti LuPone, Mary Lou Rosatto, Gerald Guitierrez, and David Ogden Stiers, among others. Nearly all of them successfully sought out careers in the US theatre.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to being credited with starting the Drama Division, the most enduring part of Houseman’s legacy at Juilliard is the formation of the Acting Company. In keeping with Saint-Denis’s master plan of a repertory company as the culminating activity of a class’ training, Houseman found the external funding to employ Group I for a little over a year, during which time they were touring dramas drawn from the classical and contemporary repertoire.<sup>84</sup> What ensued remains unmatched in the history of US actor training. The entire graduating class of 1972 was hired under Equity contracts and

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<sup>81</sup> John Houseman, “In Search of an American Acting Tradition,” *Education Theatre Journal* 20, no.1 (March 1968): 96.

<sup>82</sup> The Drama Division has always identified each of its classes as “Groups” in successive Roman numerals beginning with Group I (class of 1972); also see John Houseman, *Final Dress* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 337.

<sup>83</sup> Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 228.

<sup>84</sup> The Mellon and Rockefeller Foundations were key sponsors of The Acting Company during its formative years. Additional support came from the NEA and NY State Arts Council as well as from private donors. See Houseman, *Final Dress*, 505.

played a summer season at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center followed by a run at the Good Shepherd Church in New York City, before embarking on a national tour later that fall. During its first few seasons The Acting Company brought to college campuses and small towns throughout the country a repertoire of over twenty productions that ranged from English classics (*The School for Scandal*) and Russian masterpieces (*The Three Sisters*) to musical plays (*The Robber Bridegroom*) and original works (*U.S.A.*). Most of these audiences had never seen theatre before, much less a repertory of works performed by an exceptionally gifted and uniformly trained group of actors—as the company’s cofounder Margot Harley exclaimed, “The training Group I got in school was reflected in the choice of plays and the way they were performed.”<sup>85</sup> The likes of David Ogden Stiers, Patti Lupone, and Kevin Kline shared the stage to deliver texts such as *Women Beware Women* and *The Lower Depths* to appreciative audiences gathered in high school auditoriums, college playhouses, civic centers, and booking houses nationwide. Reviewers and theatrical luminaries hailed these productions by singling out the acting ensemble. In reference to *Women Beware Women* the venerable Brooks Atkinson reported that “the actors were in complete charge,” Zelda Fichandler claimed to be “deeply impressed” by their “unrivalled” work, and Norris Houghton specifically acknowledged Group I’s training: “The Juilliard Acting Company proves the rightness of the conclusion that an intensive program of training students can indeed result in a superior end-product.”<sup>86</sup> It was truly a remarkable accomplishment, marked by the conjoining of actor training and the not-for-profit theatre.

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<sup>85</sup> Harley co-founded The Acting Company with Houseman and has remained its Executive Producer ever since.

<sup>86</sup> Press packet, Juilliard School Archive, the Acting Company File, box 31, folder 8.

A significant part of Group I's unusual artistic success can be attributed to their formation of an ensemble in the richest sense of the word. Similarly to Copeau's Vieux Colombier and Stanislavsky's Moscow Art Theater, Houseman's creation of a repertory company that both trained and performed together demonstrates the reciprocal bonds among pedagogy, practice, and professionalization. Although nearly all of Group I eventually expanded their careers by striking a balance of employment in theatre and on-camera mediums, their craft was undeniably enhanced from their experience of touring the country for multiple years, performing an eclectic range of dramatic styles.<sup>87</sup> At least during its first few years, the Acting Company lived up to Houseman's triumvirate of goals, including a structure to facilitate the continuation of his students' training and therein enable them a smoother transition into the professional theatre, for them to travel the country bringing a mix of classical and modern dramas to audiences that would not otherwise see such work, and most significantly, to create an ensemble of artists that share a pedagogical background performing in *repertory*. With respect to the latter criterion, Houseman, who was no stranger to the virtues of a theatrical repertoire, given the six such theatres that he formed during his career, summed up his feelings on the matter in an eloquent paper entitled "In Defense of Repertory":

Theatrical repertory exists in various forms, but in its basic operation it is the exact opposite of the standard patterns of American show-business, where practice is to assemble the best personnel available for the production of one specific property which is then rehearsed feverishly for a few weeks before being presented to audiences in a gamble that may result in anything from a one-night fiasco to a three-year run. True repertory, by contrast, presupposes a certain continuity: it calls for a more or less permanent organization performing regularly in a program of plays

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<sup>87</sup> The likes of Kevin Kline and Patti LuPone spent multiple years touring with the Acting Company and credit this experience with fostering their craft as stage actors. See Linda Winer, "Houseman Knew How to Pick'em," *NY Daily News*, 16 February 1981.

that remain available to its audience during a certain length of time for one season at the least, and preferably, for repeated exposure over a period of years.<sup>88</sup>

And the acting ensemble is, of course, foundational to making repertory theatre work. As exemplified by Juilliard's students, it requires actors who possess the technical skills—voice, speech, and movement—and a keen sense of ensemble to execute a wide range of dramatic styles. This clearly was the aim of the Drama Division, and to varying degrees of success it was the goal of the League's other constituents.

Despite Houseman's endorsement of repertory and the accomplishments of his young actors, he can be seen as something of a professional and artistic contradiction. Perhaps this tension is best exemplified by his emergence as a film and television celebrity in his own right during his tenure at Juilliard. As he was training classical actors for careers in the repertory companies of America's regional theatres, Houseman professionally reinvented himself as a "late-blooming actor," with his most famous work being attributed to his Academy Award-winning performance in *The Paper Chase* (1973) as well as the stodgy caricature of himself that he famously portrayed on numerous commercial advertisements for the brokerage house, Smith Barney, where he credited the organization for "making money the old fashioned way....earning it."<sup>89</sup> His other notable credits included films such as *Three Days of the Condor*, *Rollerball*, and a portrayal of Winston Churchill in a made-for-TV-movie entitled *Truman at Potsdam*. He later resurrected his Academy Award role of Professor Kingsfield for a television version of

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<sup>88</sup> John Houseman, "In Defense of Repertory" (working paper, ca. 1973), Juilliard School Archives, President's Papers: Drama Division, box 33, folder 8.

<sup>89</sup> Dan Lewis, "Houseman Debuted at 70: Late-Blooming Actor," *The Sunday Record*, 31 August 1975; also see YouTube Database (Smith Barney commercial), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFpPovznSG8> (accessed 145 July 2011).

*The Paper Chase*. In 1979 he joined ranks with Century-Fox Television's executive Lynn Roth to produce a host of "theatrical features, miniseries, and movies-for-TV."<sup>90</sup> One cannot help but ironically note that the founder and director of what was arguably the finest actor-training program in the country at the time, a program that oversaw a rigorous regimen of techniques and courses towards preparing people exclusively for the professional theatre, had chosen to become a film and TV star without *any* previous actor training, formal or otherwise.<sup>91</sup> Houseman's emergence as a celebrity actor exemplifies the commodifying trend that had overtaken the profession at the time. Essentially, he was playing himself and not relying on a trained psychophysical instrument to execute his roles. Although his limited skills would have left him ill-prepared for a stage performance, playing characters that were more or less a replica of himself winningly translated to his film and TV assignments. Thus, his newfound career brought him wealth, stardom and—ironically—marked the end of his commitment to training stage actors.

Houseman's success as an actor led to what Olmstead depicts as his "firing" from Juilliard. Peter Mennin took issue with Houseman's other professional activities and replaced him with Alan Schneider in February of 1976.<sup>92</sup> Although he makes no mention of the circumstances surrounding his departure from Juilliard in his autobiography, multiple reports indicate that Houseman's newfound career as a film and television star

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<sup>90</sup> "Houseman and Roth Form Production Company," *Variety*, 5 September 1979.

<sup>91</sup> Houseman, *Final Dress*, 494-95.

<sup>92</sup> Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 232; Alan Schneider to Peter Mennin, 12 March 1975, Juilliard School Archives, President's Papers: Drama Division, box 34, folder 7; and Louis Calta, "Schneider Gets Post at Juilliard," *New York Times*, 17 February 1976.

indeed “robbed him of the time it requires to run Juilliard.”<sup>93</sup> Arriving at Juilliard the year Houseman won the Oscar, Group VI graduate Henry Stram corroborated such reports by referring to Houseman as “a figurehead” and crediting Margot Harley with operating the Drama Division:

The school from what I can tell was very much run by Margot Harley. She was the person everything went through. And John was starting his acting career and he won his Oscar that year so he was sort of there and not there. He would talk to us once a year. We’d go to his office and he’d read our reports to us.<sup>94</sup>

Nonetheless, Stram clearly had great affection for Houseman, “he was avuncular and very sweet and I really came to love him,” and therein he shared the sentiments of those that worked under Houseman throughout his nine years operating the Drama Division.<sup>95</sup> In fact, Stram claimed that his most rewarding experience during his time at Juilliard was the pleasure of being directed by Houseman in *The Cradle Will Rock*, a project that traveled to England and solidified his class as an ensemble. Despite Mennin’s desire to rid the Drama Division of its founder, the institute attempted to capitalize on his fame, as demonstrated by a letter Houseman received from Juilliard’s Director of Public Relations, Wriston Locklair, regarding an appearance Houseman made on the Dick Cavett Show in 1980: “It would be appreciated if you would specify that you directed the Drama

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<sup>93</sup> “Houseman to Quit Juilliard Post,” *Albany News-Union Star*, 16 January 1976; also Houseman chose a very telling cartoon from the *Los Angeles Times* to adorn the last page of his autobiography: President Reagan’s press secretary telling him, “Do you realize that, lately, you have been on TV almost as much as John Houseman,” see *Final Dress*, 533.

<sup>94</sup> Henry Stram, interview with author, 8 July 2011.

<sup>95</sup> Houseman was evidently beloved by many, if not all, his students as indicated by Margot Harley during our interview (14 June 2011). Also, Patti Lupone and Kevin Kline speak affectionately of him in a *Daily News* article conducted nearly ten years after they graduated. See Linda Winer, “Houseman Knew How to Pick’em,” *NY Daily News*, 16 February 1981.

Department.”<sup>96</sup> Juilliard’s desire to bolster its reputation by associating the Drama Division with Houseman’s celebrity is yet another example of how the commodifying forces of film and television were increasingly dominating the acting profession.

Despite the contradictoriness surrounding the twilight of Houseman’s career and his controversial departure from Juilliard, the success of the program under his leadership cannot be overstated. In conjunction with Michel Saint-Denis, he developed the premise for the program, organized its structure and curriculum, handpicked a superb faculty, selected extraordinarily talented students, founded a unique touring company, and graduated a high percentage of students who made a living at their craft. It is little wonder that the League unanimously and solely accepted Juilliard for membership in 1975, a motion made all the more notable given three other applicants were denied that same year.<sup>97</sup>

If Houseman oversaw the Drama Division with self-described “paternalistic authority” and possessed an uncanny ability, as Margot Harley asserts, “for managing egos,” Alan Schneider’s leadership style was one of “brash” and “forceful” straightforwardness, and therein demonstrated the ways in which university politics can impact funding decisions and pedagogical practice.<sup>98</sup> Having come to Juilliard in February of 1976 from a renowned career as a stage director and associate producer of one of America’s foremost

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<sup>96</sup> Wriston Locklair to John Houseman, 11 January 1980, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Papers: Drama Division, box 33, folder 8.

<sup>97</sup> Webster College, A.C.T., and CalArts were denied membership to the League in 1975. However, A.C.T. and CalArts would eventually gain acceptance in 1976 and 77. See Minutes from the League’s Annual Meeting, 15 November 1975, 14 July 1976, 10 October 1977, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>98</sup> Houseman, *Final Dress*, 397; Margot Harley, interview with author, 14 June 2011; and Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 233.

regional theatres, Arena Stage, Schneider seems to have imposed his will on Juilliard's administration rather early into his brief tenure. In October of 1976, he sent Mennin a letter that categorically made six demands of the president in a tone that could hardly be described as collegial. He begins by flatly stating, "Since we haven't seen each other for so long, I thought I'd draw up sort of an agenda for our next conversation," and then proceeds to dismiss Mennin's earlier suggestion that the Drama Division work jointly with the Opera Department in a variety of capacities. He then follows with a tersely worded repudiation of a colleague's budget proposal:

It [the budget] is meaningless.... Nothing is broken down. Nothing is justified. Nothing is explained. As far as I'm concerned, the figures are just pulled out of a hat.<sup>99</sup>

He had the hubris to sign off on the letter by listing bullet point number seven in a single sentence: "I'll think of something!"

This letter represents Schneider's tumultuous, if productive, three years heading the Juilliard "Theater Center." The title of the department had been changed to create more of a connection with the general public, a matter of significant concern to Mennin and Wriston Locklair (Director of Public Relations).<sup>100</sup> Locklair impressed it upon Mennin that the Drama Division had to do a better job of self-promotion, much in the spirit of Juilliard's musical departments:

The "incubator" syndrome has placed the Juilliard Drama Division out of the mainstream of interest to the school's general public and publicity

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<sup>99</sup> Alan Schneider to Peter Mennin, 18 October 1976, January 1980, Juilliard School Archives, President's Papers: Drama Division, box 34, folder 7.

<sup>100</sup> Despite the official change of the Drama Division to the Juilliard Theater Center in 1976, for the sake of consistency I will continue to refer to the department by its original name.

media. The change of the name to Theater Center is a step in the right direction, but more is needed.<sup>101</sup>

Schneider was a product of the theatrical avant-garde and not-for-profit theatre and considered himself to be first and foremost an artist. Consequently, he had little interest in exposing his students to the whims of newspaper reviewers: “We’re not a commercial enterprise, we’re a school.”<sup>102</sup> He argued that the training came first, a contention that was consistent with Houseman’s position on the matter of publicizing the program, and he would make all decisions regarding departmental productions according to the pedagogical needs of his students.<sup>103</sup> He was not adverse, however, to sharing the work of the drama students with the public, as demonstrated by his support of the Lincoln Center Touring Program as well as his uncompromising respect for the Acting Company, which continued to fill roughly 75 percent of its ensemble with Juilliard graduates.<sup>104</sup> The Acting Company, however, was an independent organization, and although associated with Juilliard during much of the 1970s, it was financially and structurally separate, a distinction that is readily apparent in Locklair’s note to Mennin referencing a comment that Schneider made in praise of the troupe in a newspaper article.<sup>105</sup> After sending Mennin a copy in which he underlined Schneider’s laudatory remarks, Locklair

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<sup>101</sup> Wriston Locklair to Peter Mennin, 9 December 1976, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Papers: Drama Division, box 34, folder 7.

<sup>102</sup> Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts 1978 Brochure, Juilliard School Archives, Dean’s Papers: Drama Division, box 26, folder 19.

<sup>103</sup> One of the League’s criteria for its members was to treat departmental productions as a fundamental part of the training, an approach that was antithetical to considering the greater public’s desire for entertainment.

<sup>104</sup> Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts 1978 Brochure, Juilliard School Archives, Dean’s Papers: Drama Division, box 26, folder 19; also Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 276.

<sup>105</sup> Houseman, *Final Curtain*, 483.

states: “Peter, here is another example of the Acting Company and Juilliard in an uneasy alliance, not to mention the Acting Company being promoted on Juilliard time.”<sup>106</sup> With respect to the second clause in Locklair’s note, he was referring to the article’s claim that the interview with Schneider was happening on his “phone from the Juilliard Theater Center Office.”<sup>107</sup>

Not surprisingly, the most significant source of tension between Schneider and the Juilliard administration was related to the Drama Division’s budget. With his usual hubris and brash manner of communication, Schneider sent a letter to Mennin regarding the remounting of the Drama Division’s *Spring Awakening* while the latter was recovering in the hospital from an undisclosed illness: “Don’t feel comfortable about bothering you while you’re in the hospital, but since it may serve to while away the time.”<sup>108</sup> Schneider proposed a reportedly “unrealistic” budget that included his recommendations for publicity, and most significantly, a plan to pay the student actors. Mennin’s response could not be clearer:

After reviewing the expenses and projected costs of bringing back *Spring Awakening*, unhappily the inevitable conclusion seems obvious. I am sure you can see that it is not possible to encourage more deficit-incurring performances of the Wedekind play.... As you know, the drama department is already 50 percent over budget, with one production still to go. Since you were given full authority to control the production budget, it follows that it is also your responsibility to observe it.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Wriston Locklair note to Peter Mennin, 8 May 1979, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Papers: Drama Division, box 32, folder, 4.

<sup>107</sup> Glen Lovell, “Brash Director Lashes Out at Dull Theater,” *Ft. Lauderdale News*, 14 April 1979.

<sup>108</sup> Alan Schneider to Peter Mennin, 20 March 1978, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Papers: Drama Division, box 35, folder 1.

<sup>109</sup> Peter Mennin to Alan Schneider, 5 April 1978, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Papers: Drama Division, box 35, folder 1; also Calvin Morgan to Peter Mennin, 21 March 1978, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Papers: Drama Division, box 35, folder 1.

In addition to the budgetary disputes, the two men “constantly fought” about matters ranging from publicizing the Drama Division to Schneider missing the annual department head meeting in June of 1978, which was met with Mennin’s admonishment: “There was no representation from the Drama Department and no advance information that there would not be anyone from Drama.”<sup>110</sup> It comes as little surprise that this acrimonious relationship ended with Schneider’s resignation in March of 1979. The *New York Times* quoted Mennin stating that the parting was “by mutual consent,” yet Schneider, in keeping with his straightforwardness, bluntly said in the very same piece, “It’s a free choice on my part, but it’s related to differences with the administration.”<sup>111</sup>

Schneider began that following fall with another League school, the University of California at San Diego’s Theatre Program, where he worked alongside one of the League’s founders, Arthur Wagner. When asked about Schneider’s differences with Mennin, Wagner responded, “I do not doubt the Mennin story,” and then added, “Alan could be difficult, but he could also be the most charming man you want to meet.”<sup>112</sup> However, he failed to use whatever “charm” he might have had to ingratiate himself with Juilliard’s president. His tumultuous relationship with Mennin demonstrates how institutional politics can compromise the quality of education being offered to students. In addition to costing the Drama Division much needed resources, the inability of

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<sup>110</sup> Peter Mennin to Alan Schneider, 7 June 1978, Juilliard School Archives, President’s Papers: Drama Division, box 35, folder, 1; also see Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 224.

<sup>111</sup> Mel Gussow, “Alan Schneider Resigns as Head of the Juilliard Theater Center,” *New York Times*, 3 March 1979.

<sup>112</sup> Arthur Wagner, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

Schneider and Mennin to work together led to the former being fired, a move that would ultimately be a setback for its actor training program.<sup>113</sup>

Whatever shortcomings Schneider may have had in negotiating the politics of Juilliard's power structure, the Drama Division continued to develop under his leadership. Unlike Houseman, he was very much involved in the day-to-day activities of the students. Moreover, he actively involved Juilliard with the League's activities, as exemplified by Juilliard's hosting of the consortium's annual Actor Presentations as well as his attendance at League meetings, something Houseman never did. During Schneider's tenure Juilliard's reputation as America's preeminent acting program steadily progressed: over 700 applicants auditioned in 1978; master teachers such as Michael Howard and Eve Shapiro were added to the ranks of the faculty; the professional placement of graduates rose to a rate of 80 percent employment; and its commitment to a psychophysical regimen for the purpose of training versatile stage actors remained consistent with the vision of its founders.<sup>114</sup> The latter criterion is exemplified by a letter Peter Zeisler sent to Schneider after seeing Group VIII's collective performances at the League's Actor Presentation in 1979, in which he congratulated Schneider and his staff for "establishing a benchmark of excellence."<sup>115</sup>

Although Schneider brought many of his troubles at Juilliard on himself, President Mennin presented him with what must have seemed an impossible situation. Mennin was

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<sup>113</sup> External Review of Drama Department (1977), Juilliard School Archives, President's Papers: Drama Division, box 32, folder 3.

<sup>114</sup> Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts 1978 Brochure, Juilliard School Archives, Dean's Papers: Drama Division, box 26, folder 19.

<sup>115</sup> Peter Zeisler to Alan Schneider, 28 March 1979, Juilliard School Archives, President's Papers: Drama Division, box 35, folder 1.

a micromanager who was introverted to the point of locking himself in his office and made little effort to accommodate the concerns of his faculty, students, and staff. His need to control all aspects of institutional policy was even extended to the bulletin boards in the hallways, which were under lock and key of his administration.<sup>116</sup> Houseman went so far as to accuse him of being “temperamentally and neurotically opposed to any activity which he himself did not personally and absolutely control.”<sup>117</sup> Olmstead labels Mennin an “elitist” who could “be difficult to deal with,”<sup>118</sup> whereas W. McNeil Lowry suggests that dominating others was his signature motive for making decisions.<sup>119</sup> The fact that he was a composer by trade and operating an institution that made its reputation as an elite school of music that was run by a board of directors that was sympathetic to its tradition as such seems to have added to Mennin’s disconnection with the Drama Division.<sup>120</sup> Whatever the case, it is clear that he clashed with Schneider to the point of forcing his resignation.

Margot Harley credits Schneider with keeping the school very much in the spirit of Houseman and Saint-Denis’s vision, yet she is strikingly critical of his successor, Michael Langham, whom she describes as making significant pedagogical changes to the program:

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<sup>116</sup> Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 246-47.

<sup>117</sup> Houseman, *Final Dress*, 480.

<sup>118</sup> Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 243.

<sup>119</sup> Lowry depicts Mennin as territorial and threatened by those who didn’t outright obey his directives. Mennin’s ordering of Alan Schneider to “fire Margot Harley” for being “too acerbic, too big for her britches [and]...Houseman’s appointee” justified Lowry’s reasoning. Quoted in Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 234.

<sup>120</sup> Margot Harley, interview with author, 14 June 2011; Houseman, *Final Dress*, 443-45; and Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 240.

He got rid of much of the European-styled training, which was really what was so good about it. He got rid of classes in acting style, he paid less attention to poetry and language. He kept the major faculty members, but he paid less attention to language. The big thing about Juilliard was its concern for technical things to train American classical actors. To be perfectly honest he didn't really believe that you could train actors. When he came to Juilliard he didn't even know it was a four-year school and he actually told me, "that he didn't really believe that you could teach acting."<sup>121</sup>

Although Harley was only at Juilliard for Langham's first year, her comments are significant, given that she was central to its operation at the time—and had been so since 1969—and even after leaving she remained the Producing Artistic Director of The Acting Company, which until Langham's arrival had shared a close relationship with the Drama Division. Whereas The Acting Company hired more Juilliard graduates during the 1970s than it did from any other school, the 1980s and 90s were marked by the Drama Division's retreat from the troupe that was founded by Houseman for the purpose of their development as stage actors. While this shift can be partially attributed to Langham's pedagogical changes, it must also be put in the context of the profession's trending towards film and television.<sup>122</sup> The market for young actors in sitcoms, soaps, and movies had reached unprecedented levels by the middle-1980s, as exemplified by shows such as "Saved by the Bell" and "Fame" as well as the arrival of the so-called "Brat Pack" on the Hollywood scene. The League Actor Presentations exemplified this professional shift, as casting directors and talent agents outnumbered "theatre representatives" by a count of more than 8 to 1.<sup>123</sup> Young actors coming out of Juilliard

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<sup>121</sup> Margot Harley, interview with author, 14 June 2011.

<sup>122</sup> Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 236; also NEA Research Report, "Understanding the Employment of Actors," September 1977.

<sup>123</sup> Guest list for 1987 League Actor Presentations, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

had little incentive to spend their first year after school touring the country with a repertory company, given their immediate marketability as commodities for the entertainment industry, a fact that was not lost on their agents.

With respect to Juilliard's administration, Langham's tenure as head of the Drama Division was smoother than both his predecessors. Mennin died of pancreatic cancer in 1983 and his replacement, Joseph Polisi, struck a tone of openness towards encouraging a multidisciplinary approach to the performing arts, a clear departure from Mennin's micromanagement and privileging of the school's multiple programs in music. This point was articulated by the Drama Division's current head, Kathy Hood, who credited Polisi with "changing the culture of the school" by embracing "interdisciplinarity and a commitment to service." This practice continues today, as exemplified by the collaborative efforts of Juilliard's students to use their training to serve local communities.<sup>124</sup>

Under Langham, the Drama Division continued to develop stage actors, but it also began to thrive as a place to become a movie star, as demonstrated by graduates like Val Kilmer (1981) and Kelly McGillis (1983), as well as notables that attended but failed to complete the program (e.g., Kevin Spacey and Elizabeth McGovern). The professional success of students such as these no doubt contributed to the ever-increasing number of applicants for the school, which reached a thousand by the end of the 1980s—approximately 2 percent of whom would be accepted.<sup>125</sup> However, if the Drama Division

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<sup>124</sup> Kathy Hood, interview with author, 19 July 2011. According to Hood, Polisi's leadership encouraged student-generated projects created among the seventeen programs that constitute Juilliard's Divisions of Dance, Drama, and Music. One such initiative is called Artists Striving to End Poverty, an organization founded by Dance and Drama students designed to use their performance skills to raise funds on behalf of the poor.

<sup>125</sup> Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History*, 283.

once represented a Continental training model that was intent on producing the nation's finest stage actors and professionally placing them in the US regional theatre, that goal had changed by Langham's retirement in 1992. Instead of developing the technical skills and versatility needed to perform as part of a repertory company's ensemble, students were being prepared for a commercial marketplace as exemplified by graduates like William Hurt and Christopher Reeve, both of whom made their marks in Hollywood and personified what a 1981 edition of *Newsweek* magazine described as the "New Breed Of Actor," otherwise defined as "The actor [who] plays in Chekhov and Neil Simon, in Broadway musicals and blockbuster films, in TV sitcoms and specials, in commercials where he gives a potato chip the same contemplative intensity that Hamlet gave Yorick's skull."<sup>126</sup> Being a classically trained actor who would be exclusively dedicated to a stage career was no longer practiced. Thus, the 1980s marked a shift in Juilliard's training that was consistent with the profession's irreversible trend towards commodification.<sup>127</sup>

### **The Carnegie-Mellon University Drama Department**

The formation and development of Juilliard's Drama Division in many ways justified McNeill Lowry's warning against mixing professional training in the creative arts with higher education. From the bureaucratic conflict between Lincoln Center and Juilliard over funding and control of the Drama Division to the numerous policy grumblings Mennin had with Houseman and Schneider, Lowry's concern that higher education

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<sup>126</sup> Jack Kroll et. al., "A New Breed of Actor," *Newsweek*, 7 December 1981, 91.

<sup>127</sup> Both Reeve and Hurt graduated from the Drama Division during the 1970s and were not trained under Michael Langham. However, their success and fame in film and television provided a template for how Juilliard and other League schools began to prepare students for an increasingly commercialized profession.

would form an “uneasy dichotomy” with theatre training stands to reason.<sup>128</sup> Universities and performing arts institutions (such as Julliard) functioned as corporate entities, measuring success by the economic and symbolic capital (or “output”) they generated by “producing” graduates whose careers were recognized as “successful” according to a professional sphere largely defined by Hollywood. Though all League acting programs demonstrated this commodified dynamic on some level, none was more apparent than Carnegie Mellon University’s.

Carnegie Mellon University<sup>129</sup> has the distinction of forming the first drama department in the history of US higher education.<sup>130</sup> Founded in 1914 under the leadership of Thomas Wood Stevens, its students partook in a general course of study “by doing the entire work of the theatre” towards earning a BA in Drama.<sup>131</sup> Over the next seventy-five years the department would undergo numerous changes, most especially during the 1960s, when Theodore Hoffman, Robert Corrigan, and Earle Gister assumed consecutive control of the department and systematically ushered in a period of professionalization that represented the greater trend occurring in US theatre training at the time. With the shift in emphasis from private acting studios to universities, it seemed

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<sup>128</sup> Quoted in Lowry, “The University and the Creative Arts,” 105.

<sup>129</sup> Hereafter referred to as “Carnegie.”

<sup>130</sup> Carnegie Mellon University was named as such in 1967 after being called the Carnegie Institute of Technology since 1912.

<sup>131</sup> During the period of my study the Carnegie Drama Department had five different heads, a comparatively high number that speaks to the perennial changes and instability the theatre program underwent from 1965-1987. For an overview of the Drama Department’s history, see Elizabeth Schrader-Kimberly, “A History of the Drama Department of Carnegie-Mellon University, Formerly Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1914-1981.” This report is catalogued in the Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

logical that the country's oldest drama department would be instrumental in this pedagogical movement and therein become one of the League's founding members.<sup>132</sup>

Because Carnegie is a university, it is inherently different in its organizational structure from my two other case studies. Whereas Juilliard and A.C.T. are private performing arts schools that happen to be "accredited" (and they therein differ from acting academies such as the Stella Adler Conservatory), Carnegie's theatre program must be seen in the context of a private university with a wide range of bureaucratic and financial considerations. For example, despite the drama department's distinction as the first of its kind in the US, Carnegie built its reputation by educating engineers, scientists, and technicians, a fact that indirectly influenced the resignation of arguably the most effective leader in the Drama Department's history, Earle Gister. Desiring a new theatre to replace the original that was built in 1914, Gister had successfully garnered support from private donors throughout his nine-year tenure as head (1964-1975), only to have his efforts overruled by the recently appointed Dean of the College of Fine Arts, Akram Midani. Midani cited the need to achieve "fiscal solvency" and being "bound to strenuous university circumstances" to justify his denial of Gister's plan for the new theatre.<sup>133</sup> This is just one of numerous examples of disagreement between Gister and Midani, the sum of which resulted in Gister's resignation in June of 1975.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Carnegie's head at the time of the League's formation, Earle Gister, joined J. Michael Miller and Arthur Wagner in founding the organization.

<sup>133</sup> Akram Midani to Leo Treitler, 24 August 1976, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 3.

<sup>134</sup> Jewel Walker, interview with author, 14 May 2011. Walker taught movement and acting at Carnegie from 1964-1976. He also claims to have been a neighbor and close friend of Midani's, thereby lending credence to his criticism of Midani's handling of Gister and the Drama Department.

Gister joined the faculty at Carnegie in 1962 when his mentor from Tulane University, Robert Corrigan, brought him there to be his assistant. Two years later he would replace Corrigan, who left to head NYU's drama program. Gister's leadership was marked by a commitment to classical training intended to place graduates in the acting companies of regional theatres.<sup>135</sup> Renowned teachers in movement (Jewel Walker), speech (Edith Skinner), voice (Robert Parks), and acting (Robert Benedetti) were among the department's auspicious faculty that trained some of the finest stage actors in the country during his time, including the likes of Cherry Jones. Gister was a respected professional who was much "beloved" by his students and colleagues as he oversaw the Drama Department during a particularly effective period, a claim supported by its acceptance into the League, as well as by the fact that the NEA recognized its excellence in awarding the program a training grant in 1971.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, its actors were having great success finding work in the ensembles of America's repertory theatres, as noted by 1972 graduate Sanford Robbins: "Every single actor that graduated in the class before me had a year contract at a regional theatre."<sup>137</sup> Before programs such as Juilliard and A.C.T. began graduating students, the profession consistently looked to Carnegie's so-called "Dramats"

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<sup>135</sup> Jewel Walker, interview with author, 14 May 2011; and Sanford Robbins, interview with author, 13 May 2011. Robbins graduated from Carnegie's acting program in 1972.

<sup>136</sup> Schrader-Kimberly, "A History of the Drama Department of Carnegie Mellon University," 25; and Donald Marinelli, interview with author, 17 July 2011. Marinelli was the Assistant Head of the Drama Department from 1981-1996 and claims that his colleagues who worked under Gister uniformly found him to be a "beloved" person who was "devoted to making sure each department within Drama got what it needed."

<sup>137</sup> Sanford Robbins, interview with author, 13 May 2011.

as the next generation of US theatre artists, which included not only well-trained actors, but directors and theatre technicians as well.<sup>138</sup>

Ironically, among Gister's faculty during the 1960s was Akram Midani, who taught theatre history and dramatic literature before his appointment as Dean of the College of Fine Arts (CFA) in 1972. Jewel Walker, who was a member of the Drama Department faculty from 1964 to 1976, describes Midani as a "very bright guy and an expert politician," who happened to be "totally ignorant" when it came to matters of running a theatre training program.<sup>139</sup> Formerly a Syrian appointee to the United Nations, Midani worked his way into the deanship of the CFA and wielded a period of control over the Drama Department that defined it throughout the 1970s and much of the 1980s. "It was a hierarchical arrangement under Akram," Walker states, "prior to him there was a longstanding tradition that the Dean of the college would represent our interests to the university, and Akram came in and did not represent us for anything."<sup>140</sup>

Midani's leadership can be likened to Peter Mennin's at Juilliard in that both combined deft political skills with an iron will to control their respective institutions. Mennin and he fulfilled Lowry's premonition that university bureaucracies would impede professional theatre training programs through funding decisions and by implementing academic policies that opposed the curriculum goals and pedagogy of these programs. They operated their institutions according to a strict input/output paradigm—much like a CEO would a corporation—thereby compromising the pedagogical needs of their drama

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<sup>138</sup> A "Dramat" is the in-house reference to a student who is part of the Carnegie Drama Department.

<sup>139</sup> Jewel Walker, interview with author, 14 May 2011.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

department leaders, and by extension, the student artists. In terminating the plan to build a new theatre, for example, Midani claimed in the school newspaper that Gister and he felt the project was “unnecessary.” Gister refuted this claim by posting a public letter to his students and faculty, denying Midani’s assertion that the two of them were in agreement on the matter. Instead of building the theatre, a plan that Gister had been fostering for years, Midani took the money and redirected it to “a general fund.”<sup>141</sup> Despite the Drama Department’s renowned reputation and the prestige it brought to the university, its teachers and students had to work in outdated facilities, such as a tiny basement instead of an acting studio, as well as the rundown Kresge Theatre. While other departments were in new buildings and operating with state of the art equipment, the Drama Department was not. Perhaps this oversight was due in part to the fact that Andrew Carnegie originally founded the institution as a “technical school” and it has since developed its reputation as one of the world’s leading universities in the areas of engineering and computer science, among other disciplines.<sup>142</sup> Whatever the case, it is very telling that Gister sought funding from the private sector for his department, only to have his efforts undermined by Midani, who claimed he was responding to administrative pressures.<sup>143</sup>

The fall after the debacle regarding the new theatre, Gister went on sabbatical before submitting his resignation in December of 1974. Two weeks earlier Midani preempted

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<sup>141</sup> Jewel Walker, interview with author, 14 May 2011; and Donald Marinelli, interview with author, 17 July 2011.

<sup>142</sup> See Carnegie Mellon University website at <http://www.cmu.edu/about/index.shtml> (accessed 17 July 2011).

<sup>143</sup> Akram Midani to Leo Treitler, 24 August 1976, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 3.

Gister's announcement by ordering a meeting between the Drama faculty and the university's President to address his imminent departure.<sup>144</sup> Functioning yet again like a corporate executive more than an educator, Midani orchestrated a special arrangement to forgo Carnegie's policy of requiring faculty to "return for at least one year" after a sabbatical, and thus, Gister was officially gone in June of 1975.<sup>145</sup>

The news of Gister's departure was met with a combination of disappointment and outrage. It was like "walking out of Eden" Walker states; students petitioned Midani, claiming a "state of chaos" in the wake of Gister's resignation and the concurrent ineptitude of the Acting Head, Baker Salsbury, who was generally reviled by students and faculty alike.<sup>146</sup> Midani was also unimpressed with him, as indicated by his response to Salsbury's inquiries about permanently replacing Gister. In responding to Salsbury's claim that other schools were interested in interviewing him for positions, Midani unequivocally stated:

In order to avoid ambiguity, I would like to reiterate my oral response to you: As a matter of principle, I would like to encourage you to take full advantage of all these interviews and to examine all alternatives.<sup>147</sup>

Prompted by Midani, Salsbury resigned in April of 1975 and therein ended his nine years with the Drama Department.<sup>148</sup> Lawrence Carra, a well-liked veteran of the department

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<sup>144</sup> Akram Midani inter-office correspondence to Department of Drama Faculty, 3 December 1974, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>145</sup> Akram Midani to Earle Gister, 2 January 1975, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 4.

<sup>146</sup> Jewel Walker, interview with author, 14 May 2011; and Akram Midani to Lawrence Carra, 23 April 1975, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>147</sup> Akram Midani to Baker Salsbury, 29 October 1974, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 6.

since 1946, would serve as a figurehead for the program until Midani named the Belgian theatre director and scholar, Walter Eysselinck, as his replacement in 1977. In the meantime Walker and the venerable Edith Skinner also left, shortly thereafter to be joined by Carra, who went into retirement after fulfilling his duties as interim head. Although the program survived and continued to graduate competent actors, directors, and theatre technicians, it would never return to its halcyon days under Gister's leadership. For his part, Gister continued as an integral part of the League and would eventually chair the Yale School of Drama's acting program, leading it through one of its most successful periods.

Eysselinck came to Carnegie as the Artistic Director of Belgian's Royal Flemish Theatre and also held a doctorate from the Yale School of Drama. It was expected that he would balance scholarship and practice in ways that his predecessors did not. According to Midani's directives, it was also expected that he would categorically execute eleven "conditions" regarding the future direction of the department. This daunting list included instructions such as "under your administration the department should continue its role as a leader in the initiation of major theatrical productions for the nation."<sup>149</sup> To exemplify his expectation, Midani cited the commercial successes of *Godspell* and *Pippin*, both of which originated at Carnegie. Midani's other requirements for the department spanned three single-spaced pages of typescript and consisted of lofty goals like achieving "the very highest aesthetic standards" by bringing "university theatre

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<sup>148</sup> Salsbury joined the Drama Department in 1966 as an acting teacher and voice instructor. For more on his tenure at CMU, see Schrader-Kimberly, "A History of the Drama Department of Carnegie Mellon University," 27.

<sup>149</sup> Akram Midani to Walter Eysselinck, 31 March 1976, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 11.

closer to a theatre of the world,” with the aim of “[playing] an even greater role in the theatrical and artistic life of the nation.”<sup>150</sup> While it would be difficult to determine how those goals might have been reached, it is clear that Midani was continuing his controlling practice over the Drama Department, just as he had done with Gister years earlier. This reality becomes even more troubling when one considers the fact that Midani was not a theatre professional, but an academic administrator. It is also clear that Eysselinck’s tenure as Department Head was marked by disorganization and a retreat from the reputation the program had enjoyed under Gister, especially insofar as the acting program was concerned.

According to Donald Marinelli, who joined the Drama Department as “Assistant to the Head” in 1981, Eysselinck was “in his glory discussing philosophy,” yet “had little interest in managing the financial aspect of managing a department.”<sup>151</sup> The latter contributed to Midani’s decision not to reinstate him when his contract was up for renewal in 1980:

The central issues are discrepancies between Mr. Eysselinck’s qualifications (on paper) and actual performance. It was a painful surprise to everyone to realize that Mr. Eysselinck, who was invited to take this position by a unanimous vote of the then search committee, revealed in his actions serious artistic and managerial shortcomings. Not only was his administration maladroit and frivolous, but his artistic decisions lacked élan, vision, and imagination.<sup>152</sup>

Eysselinck’s apparent inability to manage the department caused Midani to relieve him of various responsibilities as part of an evolving process that culminated with his contract

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Donald Marinelli, interview with author, 17 July 2011.

<sup>152</sup> Akram Midani to Bud Yorkin, 25 February 1980, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 2, folder 22.

not being renewed. In February of 1979, he replaced Eysselinck as the artistic director of the department's summer theatre, a semiprofessional organization established in 1976 and originally intended to be operated by the Drama Head in accordance with the program's overall curriculum.<sup>153</sup> Several months later Midani formed a steering committee to redirect a wide range of duties that normally would be part of the Head's job description, including faculty appointments and reappointments, creating course schedules and departmental curriculum, and the development of new academic programs. Midani's inter-office correspondence to the entire department regarding the steering committee suggests his lack of confidence in Eysselinck:

In order to achieve a constructive and cooperative climate for the management of the Department of Drama and to assist Professor Walter Eysselinck in his capacity as the Department Head, a Steering Committee of departmental faculty will undertake the task of providing input to the departmental decision-making process.<sup>154</sup>

To make matters worse, in May of 1980 the League's Standards and Membership Committee unanimously voted to strip Carnegie's acting program of being a "fully active member" and placed it under "provisionary status," a motion that reflected the training under Eysselinck's leadership.<sup>155</sup> He would officially resign a month later and begin work at the University of Michigan that fall.

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<sup>153</sup> Akram Midani to George Anderson, 22 February 1979, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 19. Anderson was the chief drama critic with the Pittsburgh Gazette at the time and Midani wrote him to announce Eysselinck's replacement as artistic director of the CMU Theatre Company on the grounds that it "will give him [Eysselinck] time to concentrate on the activities of the Department of Drama."

<sup>154</sup> Akram Midani to Faculty and Students of the Department of Drama, 30 August 1979, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 2, folder 22.

<sup>155</sup> Minutes from the League's Annual Meeting, 22 May 1980, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

In addition to his dissatisfaction with Eysselinck's management skills, Midani had a very different vision for the Drama Department, especially as pertained to its acting program. Eysselinck was a European theatre director, an erstwhile academic, and hardly the sort of commercial force that Midani sought for his departmental leader. He would seemingly find his man in the appointment of the Broadway and television director Mel Shapiro. An alumnus of the Drama Department, Shapiro ushered in a period of commercialization at Carnegie that strikingly reflected the professional trends of the times. Broadway musicals and the lure of film and television had begun to dominate the so-called entertainment business, thereby influencing how theatre artists were trained. The notion of a director, dramatist, or an actor making their living in the US regional theatre had become passé, and Midani knew it:

On the occasion of the appointment of Mel Shapiro, an active director of national stature, the Department has had to reiterate its goals and objectives, which are: The education of drama must signify its function as a fundamental discipline out of which learned skills can be applied to a variety of related endeavors (i.e., Music Theatre and Television).<sup>156</sup>

A trained stage director, Shapiro made his reputation by directing a Tony Award-winning musical version of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* as well as a number of television programs, such as "Phyllis," "Doc," and "Search for Tomorrow."<sup>157</sup> Although he had directed in the regional theatre during the earlier part of his career, by the time he returned to Carnegie in 1980, Shapiro was primarily interested in the commercial component of his career and that of his students. Shapiro's assistant at the time (Donald

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<sup>156</sup> Akram Midani, "Summary of the Annual Reports of the College of Fine Arts Academic Year 1979-80," 8 August 1980, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 2, folder 27.

<sup>157</sup> Schrader-Kimberly, "A History of the Drama Department of Carnegie Mellon University," 36.

Marinelli) readily supports this claim, as does one of his Carnegie acting students,

Thomas J. Ryan:

I always thought Mel saw his tenure in the Drama Department as a chance for him to revive his own career. It gave him a double opportunity: he was able to introduce new shows in a pre-Broadway try-out dynamic (albeit Pittsburgh instead of New Haven), and it provided him an opportunity to direct new productions with the hope of moving them to Broadway.<sup>158</sup>

He [Shapiro] came to Carnegie basically to make it a more commercial place...more connections to the business, more connections to New York and Hollywood.<sup>159</sup>

Shapiro admitted as much in explaining why he agreed to move to Pittsburgh and accept the position of Drama Department Head:

Being a Broadway director, one must wait, wait, wait. Wait for the script to be developed, wait for the producer to come along, wait for the backing, the stars, the theatre. Years of one's life spent in waiting like some play by Samuel Beckett. So I could very well be in Pittsburgh waiting for my next show to go on.<sup>160</sup>

Shapiro indeed saw Carnegie as a “try-out” site for Broadway musicals and new plays, as shown by his selection of departmental productions, most notably works like *Rachinoff* and *Samba*, both of which originated at Carnegie and involved an illustrious group of guest artists including John Guare, Galt MacDermot, and Billy Wilson.<sup>161</sup> If the Drama Department was a leader in preparing actors, directors, and designers for the not-for-profit theatre during the early-1970s, by the end of Shapiro's tenure a decade later it had become a veritable feeding ground for Hollywood and Broadway.

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<sup>158</sup> Donald Marinelli, interview with author, 17 July 2011.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas J. Ryan, interview with author, 1 July 2011.

<sup>160</sup> Quoted from Schrader-Kimberly, “A History of the Drama Department of Carnegie Mellon University,” 36.

<sup>161</sup> Schrader-Kimberly, “A History of the Drama Department of Carnegie Mellon University,” 38.

In keeping with trends during the 1980s, the Shapiro era at Carnegie marked a concerted effort to prepare students for multiple aspects of the acting profession, especially film and television. He sought to establish a “Media Center” and develop a “film and television option” to meet the changing landscape of the profession, a fact that was echoed by the way Carnegie marketed its drama department to prospective students during the middle-1980s.<sup>162</sup> Alumni such as Barbara Feldon, Jack Klugman, George Peppard, Ted Danson, and numerous members of the cast and creative team of the Emmy Award-winning show “Hill Street Blues” were featured in the program’s information bulletin.<sup>163</sup> At the auditions for admittance young aspirants for the acting program were privy to a propagandizing TV magazine piece that celebrated the commercial success of the school’s graduates. Unlike a number of other League schools that despite the professional trend towards film and television continued to present themselves as theatre training programs, Carnegie had moved from the days of preparing people for regional theatres to embracing “all aspects of the profession.”<sup>164</sup> The Drama Department’s so-called “West Coast Clan,” an alumni organization that consisted almost entirely of people working in film and television, became increasingly influential in the school’s “educational activities.”<sup>165</sup> Seminars and classes in establishing a television career

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 36-38; and Akram Midani to Alvin P. Brannick regarding “The Idea of a Media Center,” 17 April 1981, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 2, folder 29.

<sup>163</sup> Carnegie Mellon University Department of Drama Bulletin, 1984, Carnegie Mellon University Archives.

<sup>164</sup> Donald Marinelli, interview with author, 17 July 2011; and Akram Midani, “Summary of the Annual Reports of the College of Fine Arts Academic Year 1979-80,” 8 August 1980, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 2, folder 27.

<sup>165</sup> Akram Midani to John P. Crecine, 23 October 1984, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 3, folder 47; Schedule for the West Coast Clan’s “Television Seminar,” 7-11 May 1979, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 18; and Schrader-Kimberly, “A History of the Drama Department of Carnegie Mellon University, 24, 35.

complemented campus visits by famous guests and alumni to collectively demonstrate the department's adaptation to the commodifying trends of the profession.<sup>166</sup>

Furthermore, an internship program was arranged with CBS and alliances were forged with a local filmmaking company and TV studio to augment the program's attempt to place its actors in on-camera mediums.<sup>167</sup>

Shapiro's desire for a more commercially viable program also affected the structure, or lack thereof, in the approach to an acting pedagogy. Instead of addressing the craft systemically with a handful of instructors dedicated to a single pedagogical vision, he invited numerous guests to teach on an ad hoc basis. Many of these individuals were professional actors, but had little teaching experience. Moreover, they would often leave in the middle of a semester, and another person would come in and use an entirely different methodology.

We'd have an actor teacher for five weeks and then that person would leave and another person would come and say, "What have you been taught? This is all nonsense." It was very frustrating, especially at seventeen years old, to not be given a way to work.<sup>168</sup>

Nonetheless, this "potpourri of techniques" forced the students to adapt to different ways of working, a skill that would serve some of them in the increasingly freelance nature of the profession. Both Thomas J. Ryan and his Carnegie classmate Risa Brainin made

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<sup>166</sup> Akram Midani to Steven Bochco, 28 July 1983, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 3, folder 43; Akram Midani to Dennis Cunningham, 18 July 1980, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 2, folder 27; and Akram Midani to Graduating BFA and MFA Drama Students regarding "CBS Training Program," 31 March 1980, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 3, folder 55.

<sup>167</sup> Akram Midani to the Drama Department, 24 April 1984, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 3, folder 44; and Donald Marinelli, interview with author, 17 July 2011.

<sup>168</sup> Thomas J. Ryan, interview with author, 1 July 2011.

these very points during recent interviews. Brainin insists that she “liked the variety of view points,” and despite some misgivings regarding this haphazard approach, Ryan credits it for developing his ability to work with a wide range of professional directors.<sup>169</sup> It is clear, however, that such a variegated pedagogy is inconsistent with a training regimen designed to produce actors who would work within an ensemble, such as Copeau’s Vieux Colombier or Stanislavsky’s Moscow Art Theatre, where the company members were uniformly trained in conjunction with the theatre’s artistic vision. Given that the professional landscape in the US had shifted from a place where psychophysically trained actors could work as part of a repertory company to one in which they were hired on a production-by-production basis across a variety of mediums, Shapiro’s ad hoc pedagogy fit the professional demands of the time and therein fulfilled Akram Midani’s desire for the Drama Department to “become more responsive to the changes taking place in the profession.”<sup>170</sup>

Shapiro’s tenure at Carnegie lasted until the 1985-86 academic year, when Elisabeth Orion replaced him, as his contract was not renewed. His five years at the helm of the Drama Department can be seen in a mixed light. For one thing, Carnegie was reinstated to the League as a full-member in 1982, thereby suggesting an improvement in the program’s actor training under his leadership. While Shapiro “shook things up” by attempting to move the department in a direction that addressed the commercial trends of the profession, which most likely included his own desire to “get back to Broadway,” he

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<sup>169</sup> Risa Brainin, interview with author, 13 July 2011.

<sup>170</sup> Akram Midani, “College of Fine Arts Annual Report,” 17 September 1981, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 2, folder 31.

did not altogether abandon Carnegie's theatrical training tradition.<sup>171</sup> Although fewer graduates were being groomed for the US regional theatre than was the case under Gister, he did maintain an overarching premise to train students for the stage, yet also prepare them for other aspects of the profession. This "shift of direction" was very much a result of his leadership as well as Dean Midani's corporate vision for a theatre program that both responded to and anticipated professional developments at large.<sup>172</sup>

### **The Advanced Training Program of the American Conservatory Theatre**

The late stage director William Ball is one of the Carnegie Drama Department's most accomplished alumni. After graduating with a BA in acting in 1953, Ball spent a year in London on a Fulbright scholarship to study the English repertory system and actor training methods before returning to the Carnegie's directing program to earn his MFA in 1956.<sup>173</sup> His experience abroad coupled with his formal education inspired him to create what during the early-1970s was one of the most extraordinary experiments in the history of US repertory theatre and actor training.

Founded in 1965 as part of an alliance with Carnegie and the Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Ball's American Conservatory Theatre (A.C.T.) was dedicated to a pair of goals that ostensibly defined the company throughout his tenure as its General Director (1965-1986):

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<sup>171</sup> Donald Marinelli, interview with author, 17 July 2011; and Thomas J. Ryan, interview with author, 1 July 2011.

<sup>172</sup> Akram Midani, "Major Contributions to the New York Theatre by Graduates from the Department of Drama, Carnegie-Mellon University," September 1980, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 2, folder 27.

<sup>173</sup> "Fulbright Award to William Ball," *New York Times*, 23 May 1956.

1. To elevate the quality of theatre production to a level that would serve as a source of satisfaction and stimulation to Pittsburgh and that would give evidence that the community was one with a strong concern for the cultural growth of the performing arts....
2. To create for young and aspiring theatre artists of more than average promise an educational program in an atmosphere of quality production so that their abilities could be developed and guided to professional maturation.<sup>174</sup>

Having been trained as both an actor and a director, and having actively worked in both capacities in the regional and New York theatre, Ball became altogether familiar with and disenchanted by the quality of work being produced on America's professional stages at the time.<sup>175</sup> He lamented that US actors lacked the technical skills to deliver language-oriented dramas, most especially those of the classical repertoire, and he therefore wanted to start a company where "production and [actor] training were indigenous" to the formation of an ensemble that would be committed to providing a rotating repertory of plays for its audience.<sup>176</sup> It was "community" theatre in the richest sense of the word, insofar as a troupe of resident actors would be the foundation for reaching out to the public through a mix of classical and modern dramas, with the intention of entertaining and educating its spectatorship while serving as a cultural icon for the city.

Unlike the cases of Carnegie and Juilliard, as well as every other League program, Ball was the sole decision-maker at A.C.T. and did not have to answer to administrative superiors such as Akram Midani and Peter Mennin. This autonomy was implemented through A.C.T.'s bylaws and was crucial to Ball's ability to enact his artistic and

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<sup>174</sup> Theodore Kazanoff, "Feasibility Study on Combining Community Theatre with a College Drama Department" (unpublished report, 31 December 1965), Billy Rose Theatre Division, NY Public Library.

<sup>175</sup> John R. Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble: The First Years of the American Conservatory Theatre* (Cabondale, IL: South Illinois University Press, 1986), 72-73.

<sup>176</sup> American Conservatory Theatre Foundation Statement of Purpose, 1965, William Ball Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 7, folder 203.

pedagogical vision: “To structure the Conservatory-Theater to insure the maximum freedom from proprietary interference, and to vest in the artistic director the authority to determine continuity of policies of the Foundation.”<sup>177</sup> Whereas the drama programs of Juilliard and Carnegie had to contend with financial and academic policymaking from above, A.C.T. was not under the auspices of an institutional structure and was therefore free to make educational and artistic choices without the direct or indirect influence of deans and other administrators. As long as Ball could raise the necessary money to support his not-for-profit venture, something he accomplished throughout much of the 1970s, he was able to create the program that he wanted.

Being A.C.T.’s single authority was fundamental to Ball’s vision, a fact that became immediately apparent during the company’s brief residency in Pittsburgh. Six months into its existence, A.C.T.’s alliance with Carnegie and the Pittsburgh Public Theatre dissolved, as according to scholar John Wilk, the Public Theatre’s board of directors wanted “control over some of A.C.T. policies.”<sup>178</sup> Maintaining sole authority of A.C.T. was a leitmotif of Ball’s twenty-one-year stewardship of the organization. He refused to subject his company to a “group of businessmen” who “played games” with the “creative lives of artists.”<sup>179</sup> Ball saw firsthand how a board could take control of the aesthetic wing of a theatre when he was a visiting director at Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center during the spring of 1965. The institution’s two artistic producers, Elia Kazan and Robert Whitehead, were at constant loggerheads with their board, which resulted in their joint firing; a narrative that had become common in the US not-for-profit theatre at the time,

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 44.

<sup>179</sup> Quoted in Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 98.

and a fact that was not lost on Ball. The attempt by a group of so-called “businessmen” to become directly involved with A.C.T.’s artistic and educational decisions caused Ball to end the alliance and A.C.T.’s residency in Pittsburgh.

After Pittsburgh, A.C.T. used a Rockefeller grant of \$160,000 to fund ten weeks of training for the company’s actors in New York before embarking on a tour to several US cities including Ravinia, IL and Palo Alto, CA, both of which led to the competing interests of Chicago and San Francisco to become the organization’s permanent home. In fact, a double-season was scheduled for 1967, with the first six months to be performed at San Francisco’s Geary and Marines’ Memorial Theatres and the second half of the season slated for Chicago. However, Ball cancelled the move to Chicago, thinking that San Francisco’s financial supporters and civic network would be more willing partners over the long term. This reasoning proved to be accurate, as Bay Area contributions in excess of \$400,000 eclipsed a Ford Foundation matching grant of \$300,000. A generous hotel tax fund added an additional \$30,000 to A.C.T.’s coffers and further exemplified San Francisco’s commitment to the company. Moreover, the recently formed National Endowment for the Arts pledged \$350,000 to the burgeoning company, thereby ensuring A.C.T. of meeting its \$1.5 million budget for its first full season (1967-1968).<sup>180</sup> From that point onward San Francisco would be the company’s permanent home.

After a period of financial uncertainty during the next two seasons, by the spring of 1972 A.C.T. was poised to enjoy its finest years. With a company that consisted of over 200 employees (forty-seven of them constituted the acting ensemble), Ball assumed complete control of the organization after jettisoning colleagues and administrators with

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<sup>180</sup> Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 57, 108.

whom he had differences, thereby emblazoning himself as A.C.T.'s solitary leader.<sup>181</sup>

For the next sixteen years, all decisions of relative consequence, such as discretionary spending and choosing the season, were his and his only.

The cornerstone of Ball's enterprise was to foster the work of A.C.T.'s resident company. "Our theatre is impoverished," he quipped, "there are too many theatres being built throughout the country and now we need the actors to fill them." Indeed, despite the enormous expansion of the US regional theatre during the 1960s and early-1970s, the skill level of America's actors, generally speaking, was not up to the task of performing a challenging and varied repertoire. In A.C.T.'s first full-season, for example, the company produced twenty-three plays in rotating repertory, an arrangement that had its actors literally running from the Geary Theatre located downtown to make an entrance at the Marines' Memorial Theatre located in San Francisco's Presidio District several miles away.<sup>182</sup> Classical dramas like *Tartuffe* and *Twelfth Night* were playing alongside modern and contemporary works such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Tiny Alice*, all of which required casts that had the technical skills to effectively speak verse, move with expressivity, and embody a play's particular period. To simultaneously portray leading characters in *Tartuffe*, *Endgame*, *Man and Superman*, and *Beyond the Fringe*, as was René Auberjonois's casting in 1967, takes extraordinary skill and stamina, and the

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<sup>181</sup> Ball forced the resignations of two important members of his staff during A.C.T.'s formative years: Robert Goldsby and William Bushnell (Managing Director). In the case of the former, Goldsby was the first director of the conservatory and reported in his interviews with both John R. Wilk and me that Ball's incessant need to control everything came at the expense of the students' training. See Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 75-82; also Robert Goldsby, interview with author, 31 July 2010.

<sup>182</sup> Ken Ruta, interview with author, 11 June 2011.

training A.C.T. offered its students and company members was intended to accomplish these very goals.<sup>183</sup> In many respects, it was the exemplar of a psychophysical regimen.

Like Ball, Auberjonois was a graduate of Carnegie Tech and continued to develop his craft as an “associate actor” at A.C.T., a practice that was necessary to executing the demands of performing in repertory.<sup>184</sup> Ball’s mission was to train young and veteran actors alike for the purpose of “conserving” the theatre “by keeping the actor alive and developing.”<sup>185</sup> His actor-centered aesthetic was critically hailed as “brilliant,” “great,” and “genius” by theatre scholars, reviewers, and professionals across the country.<sup>186</sup> As such, the conservatory was integral to the daily operation of the acting ensemble, and by extension, the organization’s acclaim. A diverse regimen of classes—taught by company members—was offered to the ensemble and students as a means of complementing the repertory. Steeped in the tradition of Jacques Copeau’s *Vieux Colombier* and Michel Saint Denis’s work with the Young Vic Company, courses in voice production and speech were combined with less conventional curricula that included acrobatics, mask characterization, Alexander Technique, period dance, and Ball’s so-called “heroics” and “laughing” classes, all intended to develop the actor’s instrument to maximum levels of psychophysical expressivity. Company member Kitty Winn described the experience as

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<sup>183</sup> For a complete list of A.C.T.’s production history, see the company website at [http://www.act-sf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about\\_history\\_production](http://www.act-sf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_history_production) (accessed 10 August 2011).

<sup>184</sup> A.C.T. initially had three levels of membership in the acting ensemble in the following order of hierarchical significance: associate, journeyman, and fellows. See Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 179-80.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Frank Ottiwell, interview with author, 10 June 2011; Diane Pritchard, interview with author, 10 June 2011; and Ken Ruta, interview with author, 11 June 2011. For a sense of the critical accolades A.C.T. enjoyed during the 1960s and 70s, see Ziegler, *Regional Theatre*, 136-41; Novick, *Beyond Broadway*, 222-44; and Gottfried, *A Theater Divided*, 92, 106-10.

a “jigsaw” of scheduling in which twelve-hour days were spent going to class, rehearsing upcoming shows, and performing in the evening. “Your life was the theatre,” Winn explains, “there wasn’t a whole lot of time for anything else.”<sup>187</sup>

The entire organization functioned as a “family” of artists dedicated to executing A.C.T.’s prodigious season of plays, with veterans working and training alongside young upstarts. “We were mixed with the kids,” company actor Ken Ruta stated, to create and grow as theatre artists “all day long.” Former students such as Warner Shook and Victor Pappas, both of whom went on to have very successful careers in the US theatre, credited their training as the reason for their professional achievements: Shook, who was Artistic Director of Seattle’s Intiman Theatre from 1992-2000 and directed the Broadway production of *The Kentucky Cycle* referred to Ball as a “genius” who enabled him to have an “inspired start” to his career; Pappas ran NYU’s MFA Acting Program during the first decade of the twenty-first century and claims that A.C.T. prepared him “professionally and philosophically” for his life in the theatre.<sup>188</sup> Unlike League schools such as Carnegie that began to follow professional dictates by placing graduates in film and television, A.C.T. remained steadfast in preparing its students exclusively for the professional theatre. Both Ball and his conservatory director, Allen Fletcher, were products of the stage and wanted their graduates to constitute America’s next generation of theatre artists.<sup>189</sup> Having worked intimately with both men at A.C.T., Frank Ottiwell

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<sup>187</sup> Kitty Winn, interview with author, 1 August 2010.

<sup>188</sup> Warner Shook, interview with author, 18 January 2011; and Victor Pappas, interview with author, 11 February 2011.

<sup>189</sup> Despite the fact that Allen Fletcher was the conservatory’s director throughout most of the period of my study and was indeed an important figure therein, everyone who I interviewed claims that Ball was in charge of making all significant decisions regarding the Advanced Training Program.

confirms this claim: “Bill did not want his actors to become fodder for commercials,” and “Allen would say to students, very distinctly, you’re being trained for the theatre.”<sup>190</sup> As such, A.C.T. successfully resisted the commodifying trend overtaking the acting profession at the time.

During much of the 1970s—a time many company members fondly recall as A.C.T.’s “golden years”—Ball’s infectious optimism pervaded the organization by challenging and inspiring his employees to take on extraordinary tasks towards creating an “atmosphere in which everyone was committed to one another through the work.”<sup>191</sup> In addition to having his actors undertake assignments that ranged from performing six roles in the repertory and learning to play musical instruments, they were also responsible for both teaching and taking classes. Furthermore, as part of his vision for a company that supported one another’s work, he required his administrative staff to read and learn the dramas in the repertory: “We are trying to get a well-informed company...we must appreciate the sensitivity of the other craftsman for their hard work.”<sup>192</sup> This particular sentiment exemplifies Ball’s tireless commitment to the actor’s craft, a fact acknowledged by former A.C.T. member Deborah Sussel:

Bill envisioned his company as an actor’s company. He wanted his actors treated with respect and he felt that actors were not being respected in the commercial theatre. He wanted actors to have a permanent home and he wanted them to continue their training.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Frank Ottiwell, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.; James Haire, interview with author, 9 June 2011; and Diane Pritchard, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>192</sup> William Ball, “A.C.T. Orientation,” 22 December 1966, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, William Ball Papers, box 1, folder 51.

<sup>193</sup> Deborah Sussel, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

Initially, A.C.T. had two different training programs: the Summer Training Congress founded in 1967 and the Advanced Training Program begun in the fall of 1968.<sup>194</sup> The former was initiated to provide employment for the company's actors during the summer months when the theatre was dark, and it catered primarily to young aspirants with varying levels of talent. The Advanced Training Program (ATP), on the other hand, was the foundation for A.C.T.'s commitment to developing professional actors. It was highly competitive and regimented in comparison to the Summer Training Congress, with Fletcher undertaking the role of Conservatory Director in 1969 until Lawrence Hecht replaced him in 1984, the same year the program became accredited to confer the Master of Fine Arts degree.<sup>195</sup> Fletcher had been Ball's teacher at Carnegie and worked alongside him at A.C.T. "to train actors to be capable of acting in our repertory performances [and] of carrying the load that being part of a professional company implies."<sup>196</sup> In accordance with Ball's overarching vision to combine training and a rotating repertory, a select group of students was admitted to partake in a rigorous regimen that was based on a similar pedagogical model to other League schools. Unlike most of its League counterparts (the Yale School of Drama notwithstanding), A.C.T. provided its students with the unique opportunity to train in direct relationship to a

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<sup>194</sup> In addition to the Summer Training Congress and the Advanced Training Program, A.C.T. currently offers two part-time studies in acting as part of the Young Conservatory and Studio A.C.T. For more on A.C.T.'s educational offerings, see the company website at [http://www.act-sf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about\\_history\\_production](http://www.act-sf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_history_production) (accessed 10 August 2011).

<sup>195</sup> In 1984, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) confirmed that graduates of the ATP could be awarded the MFA. Prior to that development, beginning in the mid-1970s, the WASC allowed A.C.T.'s students to retroactively earn MFA provide they complete the foundational two years of the ATP and write a thesis on a professional role they played after graduating. See "Self-Study Report in Support of the Application for Accreditation of the American Conservatory Theatre," December 1983, A.C.T.'s Allen Fletcher Memorial Library.

<sup>196</sup> American Conservatory Theatre Annual Bulletin, 1978-79, A.C.T.'s Allen Fletcher Memorial Library.

professional theatre.<sup>197</sup> Fletcher argued that the “proximity” of A.C.T.’s professional actors to its students had a reciprocal “influence” that was “enormous” to each other’s artistic development.<sup>198</sup> The faculty consisted of members of the acting ensemble matched with a handful of fulltime teachers such as Frank Ottiwell (Alexander Technique), Deborah Sussel (speech and text), Mark Zeller (voice), as well as Ed Hastings and Fletcher, who were the primary acting instructors. In the second year of training—and later the third after the ATP became a three-year program—students worked with the professional company by playing supernumerary roles, as well as understudying and performing principal ones.

A.C.T.’s longtime company member and current instructor Frank Ottiwell claims that the conservatory was not founded as a school per se, but a way to facilitate Ball’s theatrical vision by developing the talent and skills of the acting ensemble. This fact distinguishes A.C.T. from its League counterparts in that Ball’s rationale was for his young actors to learn as apprentices to the professional ensemble. Notions of faculty tenure, departmental politics, and academic policy simply did not apply to A.C.T. as they did for acting programs operating in the context of a more traditional university setting. The curriculum was therefore less structured than at places like Juilliard and NYU, as students essentially learned from the practical experience of observing and learning from the company’s actors and directors, who functioned as mentors more than teachers.

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<sup>197</sup> Several universities and theatres, namely the University of Alabama and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, the Asolo Repertory Theatre and Florida State University, and the Denver Theatre Center and the University of Denver, followed A.C.T.’s training model of integrating a conservatory within the context of a professional company. However, in the cases of Denver and Alabama, those MFA acting programs have since been terminated.

<sup>198</sup> American Conservatory Theatre Annual Bulletin, 1978-79, A.C.T.’s Allen Fletcher Memorial Library.

There was a cost, however, to A.C.T.'s apprenticeship arrangement for developing stage actors. Although students were intimately connected to what was arguably the most celebrated acting company in the US at the time, the ATP lacked the curricular structure required to hone their skills by focusing on their individual training needs. Despite the well-deserved acclaim A.C.T. enjoyed during the early-1970s, important matters such as class cancellations, an ad hoc assortment of instructors, and being removed from class to play non-speaking roles in the repertory often disenchanted students, a situation recalled by Producing Director James Haire: "The big complaint in those days was that classes were often cancelled or rescheduled."<sup>199</sup> These developments were not lost on the League's Standards and Membership Committee, which balked at A.C.T.'s initial attempt to gain admittance to the consortium in 1975. While the committee exhibited a "general feeling of support" regarding A.C.T.'s application, it acknowledged several concerns: a lack of a third year in the program; the "overuse" of students in the professional repertory; and a "reported weakness in the acting faculty."<sup>200</sup> Thus, the ATP was denied admittance, yet encouraged to reapply after addressing the matters at issue, which Ball and Fletcher did in advance of their successful application the following year. From 1976 onward A.C.T. would remain a League member until the consortium's termination in 1987.

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<sup>199</sup> James Haire, interview with author, 10 June 2011; also Frank Ottiwell confirmed that students had become so displeased with the ongoing cancellation and rescheduling of classes that they braved addressing the issue with Ball. See Frank Ottiwell, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>200</sup> Minutes from the League's Annual Meeting, 15 November 1975, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

Like all the League schools, the ATP did not pay for itself. Although tuition covered part of its expenses,<sup>201</sup> A.C.T.'s training program has always been subsidized by the theatre, and during the 1970s it accounted for a sizable percentage of the overall budget.<sup>202</sup> Unlike its League counterparts, A.C.T. was not operating in the context of a traditional higher education model, and therefore it could not rely on institutional sources of departmental funding. While Ball and A.C.T. did not have to contend with administrative deans and presidents, they also could not count on a steady source of university support, as was the case with other theatre schools. The expense of the conservatory and providing fulltime employment for a workforce of 200, nearly fifty of whom were actors, was only possible with funding from external sources. Throughout A.C.T.'s formative years and the mid-1970s, this support came from the Ford Foundation, the NEA, and local community. The latter was officially orchestrated by an organization known as the California Association for the American Conservatory Theatre (CAACT), the fundraising arm of A.C.T. in the Bay Area.

The CAACT and A.C.T.'s Board of Trustees shared a tumultuous relationship throughout Ball's leadership that centered on the theatre's unique management structure. Unlike other regional theatres and arts organization, A.C.T.'s Board of Trustees consisted

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<sup>201</sup> Tuition for the first year of the conservatory in 1977 was \$1,400 annually, which was a comparatively low amount for the time. Moreover, second and third-year students did not pay tuition and were given a "modest stipend for their expenses." See "Report to the Future Planning Committee of the California Association for A.C.T.," 24 January 1977, A.C.T.'s Allen Fletcher Memorial Library.

<sup>202</sup> A memo regarding A.C.T.'s funding claims "approximately one-third" of the overall budget was dedicated to the conservatory. See "Notes on Funding," undated document, William Ball Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 7. According to an auditor's report of the 1978 and 79 fiscal years the percentage is lower. However, the report does not stipulate what resources marked for "Administrative," "Marketing," and "Acting Company" benefited the conservatory. Either way, the conservatory was a costly enterprise for A.C.T. See "Auditor's Report of the American Conservatory Foundation," 31 May 1979, A.C.T.'s Allen Fletcher Memorial Library.

mostly of artists, with Ball functioning as the President.<sup>203</sup> The “businessmen” that Ball feared would compromise his artistic mission were kept at bay by confining them to a separate entity whose sole responsibility was to raise money for A.C.T. at the local level. While this arrangement worked for most of the 1970s, eventually members of the CAACT became unsettled by the fact that A.C.T.’s bylaws prevented them from having any input as to how funds were appropriated.<sup>204</sup> In responding to a written statement submitted by the CAACT, in which nineteen line items concerning fund raising were raised, Ball’s Board expressed A.C.T.’s resistance to the proposed measures:

This Board reiterates its long established position that an autonomous Board upon which has been placed the obligation for the operation of A.C.T. cannot accept restrictions or limitations on its autonomy.<sup>205</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Ball had seen the ways in which artistic directors had been compromised by a theatre’s board of trustees, who, although having little artistic experience, nevertheless insisted on controlling how a given organization operated. As funding became “very scarce” towards the end of the 1970s and “resources diminished,” A.C.T. was forced to reckon with an increasing budget gap.<sup>206</sup> From 1974-78 the

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<sup>203</sup> A.C.T.’s Board of Trustees consisted of Ball appointees who were expected to rubberstamp his administrative decisions. A combination of artists (e.g., Jerome Lawrence, Jules Fisher), teachers (Edith Skinner, Ed Hastings), former students of Ball’s (Dan Kern), and patrons who were loyal to Ball (Edith Markson, Morton L. Leavy, and James McKenzie) constituted the most compliant Board of Trustees in the history of LORT. At one point A.C.T.’s Alexander Technique instructor, Frank Ottiwell, was made the Treasurer, which by his own admission was “a joke...it always seemed like Bill’s money.” Frank Ottiwell, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>204</sup> Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 44.

<sup>205</sup> Minutes of Board of Trustees Annual Meeting, 16 October 1977, William Ball Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 7.

<sup>206</sup> James Haire, interview with author, 9 June 2011.

organization's debt to surplus ratio was continuously in the red.<sup>207</sup> This inauspicious development was caused by significant decreases in external funding combined with rising operational costs. Whereas the Ford Foundation, for example, accounted for 10%-28% of A.C.T.'s overall expense budget from 1966-74, its contribution dwindled to 2% in 1975, 1% in 1976, and zero thereafter.<sup>208</sup> During this time the NEA's funding remained steady at 3%-4%, and local support from individual donors and corporations—as facilitated by the CAACT—became the theatre's primary source of external income, accounting for 10% of the overall budget from 1974-79.<sup>209</sup>

Despite the fact that funding from the Bay Area was greater than A.C.T.'s other resources, tensions between Ball, his theatre, and the local community began to emerge. Ball threatened to close his theatre unless the city and its citizens came up with \$2 million to enable A.C.T. to meet its budget gap.<sup>210</sup> Civic acrimony was represented through the press, as journalists from various newspapers began questioning Ball's perceived "chastising" and "quasi-ultimatums."<sup>211</sup> In 1981, Ball permanently damaged his relationship with the San Francisco community and his longtime supporter, Cyril Magnin, when he refused a \$1 million gift from a local donor on the grounds that he

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<sup>207</sup> The American Conservatory Theatre Financial History-Percentage Study, William Ball Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 7.

<sup>208</sup> American Conservatory Theatre Financial History-Percentage Study, William Ball Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 7.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> American Conservatory Theatre News, "Fund-Raising Crisis Throws Shadow on A.C.T.'s Future in San Francisco," news release, 11 June 1979.

<sup>211</sup> Glenn Lovell, "William Ball Takes ACT on the Road," *San Jose Mercury News*, 16 August 1982.

would not allow the money to be spent at the discretion of the donor (Helen Wattis).<sup>212</sup> Ostracizing Magnin was a fatal error in that he had been instrumental in raising money for A.C.T. since the company's arrival to San Francisco.<sup>213</sup> Even those who were closest to Ball began to question the logic of his decisions and the stability of his mental state.<sup>214</sup> With A.C.T.'s debt expanding and its local support dwindling (both in terms of finances and goodwill), it was just a matter of time before a shakeup ensued.

1985 marked a watershed moment for A.C.T. and Ball. The state Attorney General's office commenced an inquiry into the organization's risky investment in the gold market, which resulted in a loss of \$357,000.<sup>215</sup> Because the theatre was a not-for-profit organization that accepted public funds, it was required to make "conservative" investments with what was in effect, other people's money. Whereas a conventional arrangement of a theatre's board of trustees would have presumably operated with a degree of oversight to prevent such a risky venture, A.C.T.'s unique situation left Ball in charge to invest as he saw fit. Deputy Attorney General Joanne Condas was assigned to the case and concluded her investigation by "urging" A.C.T. to form a "Finance Committee" that would assume control of the company's assets.<sup>216</sup> Oversight was to be

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<sup>212</sup> Cynthia Robins, "Final Curtain: The Life and Death of a Theater Legend," *San Francisco Examiner Image*, 10 November 1991.

<sup>213</sup> Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 170.

<sup>214</sup> Ball was described as "mercurial" and a "mad genius" by a number of people who worked closely with him throughout his time at A.C.T. Tragically, he took his life on 29 July 1991. For more on Ball's suicide, see Cynthia Robins, "The Final Curtain"; Ken Ruta, interview with author, 11 June 2011; and Diane Pritchard, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>215</sup> Minutes of Board of Trustees Annual Meeting, 28 April 1985, William Ball Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 7.

<sup>216</sup> Stephen Cook, "State Launches Inquiry Into ACT Finances," *San Francisco Examiner*, 20 January 1985.

implemented, but in Ball's case, this change had come too late. A.C.T. was operating at a \$1.5 million deficit and continuing to lose public and foundational support. Its creative season and resident company had been diminished to a core group of fewer than ten actors performing in small-cast plays. What was once a towering example of the potential for a repertory theatre had become a dysfunctional outfit in desperate need of restructuring. In February of 1986, after symbolically positioning himself on the Geary stage before a scenic crucifix being used for his current production of *The Passion Cycle*, Ball announced his resignation to the company and staff. Edward Hastings would replace him and stabilize the company throughout his tenure, which ended in 1991, when A.C.T.'s current artistic director, Carey Perloff, assumed the role.

Given the reciprocal relationship of the professional theatre and the conservatory, the furor associated with the final years of Ball's leadership naturally had an impact on the latter. Nonetheless, the ATP continued to have success in training highly respected stage actors, including Robert Westenberg (1979), Robin Goodrin Nordli (1982), and Douglas Sills (1985), among many others.<sup>217</sup> This fact is a testament to teachers such as Hastings, Sussel, and Ottiwell, who were sources of stability during these trying times for A.C.T. The greater crisis surrounding Ball's imminent departure, however, did in fact take a toll on the conservatory and its students. Kenn Watt, who graduated from the ATP in 1986, compared the daily working environment to the "Nixon White House," as people were afraid to openly question Ball's leadership, despite having to work and train under draconian conditions.<sup>218</sup> Watt further recognized "a feeling of shrinkage and

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<sup>217</sup> For an overview of where A.C.T. alumni have worked in the profession, see the company website at [http://www.act-sf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=conservatory\\_alumni](http://www.act-sf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=conservatory_alumni) (accessed 11 August 2011).

<sup>218</sup> Kenn Watt, interview with author, 22 June 2011.

entrenchment” that had especially overtaken the conservatory, as “people started to realize A.C.T.’s training had been eclipsed by other League schools.”<sup>219</sup> Watt’s observation is consistent with the League’s annual report for 1984, when the Standards and Membership Committee sought reassurance from outgoing conservatory director (Allen Fletcher) that his replacement, Lawrence Hecht, would implement stability in the actor training program.<sup>220</sup> With A.C.T. having failed to achieve this goal, the following year the very same committee threatened to remove the ATP from being a League member. Among other matters of concern, the committee was particularly displeased with the ATP’s third year of training, as well as the great disparity in the size between the school’s incoming and graduating classes.<sup>221</sup> While other League programs also accepted a larger number of students than they would ultimately graduate, the difference in A.C.T.’s case was exponential; it admitted forty-five students, of which about six would actually graduate. From A.C.T.’s perspective this arrangement was deemed necessary, given its unique situation as an independent conservatory attached to a professional theatre. It had the onus of raising funds to support its training program without the means afforded their League counterparts, all of which were supported by an institution of higher learning. Whether it was the largesse of a wealthy private university (e.g., NYU and Yale), a public university that enjoyed state money (SUNY Purchase and UCSD), or so-called “performing arts schools” that were solely in the business of education and therefore more apt to receive grants and donations (Juilliard and CalArts), these other

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Minutes from the League’s Annual Meeting, 31 July 1985, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>221</sup> Minutes from the League’s Annual Meeting, 22 July 1985, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

schools were—for the most part—better positioned than A.C.T. when it came to generating income.

The Ball years at A.C.T. raise an important question for America's resident theatres and training programs: At what cost is society willing to allow artists the necessary funding to do their work? As economists like Baumol and Bowen have proven, an external source of funding is a prerequisite for creating and sustaining not-for-profit performing arts organizations. A.C.T.'s remarkable years of accomplishment during the early-1970s were made possible only by the combined support of the Ford Foundation and NEA, as well as local funding facilitated by the CAACT. A company of over fifty actors performed more than twenty plays in repertory for an increasing audience base at ticket prices that were subsidized by the aforementioned support. Moreover, the centerpiece of Ball's vision, an acting ensemble of exceptional skill and creative energy, developed their craft under the auspices of a conservatory that trained future generations of stage actors through a rigorous psychophysical regimen.

A.C.T.'s success both as a professional theatre and an actor training program indirectly supports Lowry's warning that US higher education and the creative arts would form a paradoxical alliance of competing interests.<sup>222</sup> Ball's singular vision was to prepare young actors to be part of a resident company by forming an apprenticeship-based regimen in the context of a professional theatre. It was specialized to the point of functioning as a trade school more than a department operating as part of an institution of higher learning. Teachers and students jointly practiced their artistry as collaborators dedicated to creating theatre. The mentors of A.C.T.'s young actors—such as Ken Ruta and René Auberjonois—demonstrated this ethos by continuing to train and develop their

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<sup>222</sup> Lowry, "The University and the Creative Arts," 107-10.

craft alongside their students. There were no concerns about administrative policies or managing a specialized curriculum within a multidisciplinary environment rife with competing interests in the pursuit of economic and symbolic capital. University politics and bureaucracy were nonexistent. While Ball was the undisputed authority, a reality that presented its own assortment of challenges, A.C.T. did not operate as a corporate entity, as was the case with its university-sponsored counterparts. As such, it was less inclined to adhere to the commodified practices of the profession and could train its actors as it saw fit, which was the intention to prepare them for a life in the theatre. In many respects, it was the US regional theatre and actor training at its very best, and can only leave us to wonder if we shall ever see anything like it again.

### **Conclusion: Administrative Policy and Funding as Determining Factors of Actor Training**

This chapter has traced the history of each of my case studies in the context of the League's formation and development and its relationship to the professional theatre. I began by acknowledging the so-called "culture boom" in US society during the 1960s, when arts funding reached unprecedented levels, thereby signaling an increasing interest in culture throughout the country. The regional theatre movement was part of this trend and was substantially funded by external sources that enabled institutions such as A.C.T. to afford a resident company of actors that was as identifiable to its artistic mission as it was integral to its critical acclaim. As exemplified by the University of Minnesota/Guthrie conference in 1966, a close connection was made between university-sponsored actor training programs and the casting demands of the country's growing number of repertory companies. The League was created in response to this development

and therein marked a shift in emphasis regarding the pedagogical and institutional approaches to the training of American actors.

Like the regional theatres it attempted to serve, the League and its schools were supported by external funding sources, namely its host institution. Indeed, one of the criteria for membership to the consortium was that an institution “have the ability to employ and compensate faculty on a basis [that] is equivalent to traditional criteria for academics” and to “provide full professional training” that was “discreet in structure from educational programs.”<sup>223</sup> Regardless of whether a program was under the auspices of a performing arts school (Juilliard), a private university (Carnegie), or a specialized conservatory (A.C.T.), it was a costly venture. Several League programs (Ohio University, Goodman School of Drama, and Brandeis University) and some of their forerunners (Columbia University and Stanford University) were compromised or terminated due to a lack of funding.<sup>224</sup> Because money was essential to a given program’s functionality and survival, a department’s leader had to possess financial and management skills to accompany his professional and artistic prestige. As demonstrated throughout this chapter, many of these directors lacked the former skills, a shortcoming that had a direct influence on the quality of training being offered their students as well as the reputation of the program.

The politics and bureaucratic structure of the host institutions of the League schools also shaped the administrative leadership and policymaking of each program. My three

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<sup>223</sup> Revised By-Laws of the League, 22 February 1983, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>224</sup> Minutes from the League’s Annual Meeting, 14-16 November 1975 and 9 May 1984, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson; also J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 18 February 2011.

case studies show that a department leader's temperament and ability to communicate with his staff and/or students as well as his superiors, was fundamental to fulfilling an academic vision. Whether it was John Houseman and Alan Schneider's fraught relationship with Peter Mennin or Earle Gister's struggles with Akram Midani, the administrative structure of each institution illustrated a degree of jockeying for creative and financial control of a given program that ultimately had pedagogical ramifications. Nor were these issues limited to my case studies. The University of Washington's program, for example, was particularly troubled with political turmoil that resulted in the resignation of its master teacher, Robert Hobbes, and the school's immediate and consequent withdrawal from the League in 1985.<sup>225</sup> Moreover, the artistic and professional interests of each department's leader determined the direction of his program: Mel Shapiro's commercialization of Carnegie, Houseman's formation of The Acting Company, and William Ball's consolidation of a conservatory and a repertory company, all exemplified the implementation of a leader's vision. Similar claims can be made of Lloyd Richard's leadership at Yale and Zelda Fichandler's at NYU, both of whom oversaw their schools during periods of pedagogical and professional success. Like Houseman and Ball, they demonstrated a clear direction for their schools and possessed the savvy and boldness to bring it to the point of fruition. Conversely, weak leaders who were devoid of direction—Baker Salsbury and Walter Eysselinck—had short and comparatively unproductive tenures at their given institutions, and their programs

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<sup>225</sup> The University of Washington was an original member of the League and its status was consistently "in good standing" until the retirement of its department head Paul Hostetler in 1985. His replacement, M.E. Comtois, was evidently very unpopular with students according to John Morgan— an actor in the program at the time—stemming from political differences with Robert Hobbes, the program's marquee instructor. Hobbes resigned, the students protested Comtois's appointment, and the League unanimously voted to remove Washington as a member. See Minutes from the League's Annual Meeting, 22 July 1985, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson; also John Morgan, interview with author, 31 July 2011.

suffered for it. CalArt's Robert Benedetti was such a case, as on the basis of his group's performance at the League Actor Presentations in 1980, coupled with a poor review from the League's onsite visit during his time as dean, the school was dropped from the consortium in June of 1981.<sup>226</sup> Politics and funding as well as artistic vision and leadership style all contributed to the functionality and productivity of the League programs.

Despite the enormous accomplishment of the League and its individual members, the shift in emphasis from private acting studios and academies to university-sponsored conservatories proved to be a delicate balance of funding and academic politics in conjunction with the artistic and administrative control of a given program. As such, I contend that the League must be seen paradoxically, insofar as it marked a significant advancement in the training and development of American stage actors, yet despite this accomplishment, institutional policymaking and financial pressures often compromised how the consortium's individual schools operated. Moving actor training from the simpler and more manageable confines of an "acting school" to an institution of higher learning invited a host of problems and conflicts of interests, some of which were documented in this chapter. As McNeil W. Lowry predicted in his landmark address in 1961, professional actor training and higher education would formulate "an uneasy alliance" of competing interests. In many instances academic leaders such as deans and university presidents were making decisions that directly and substantially impacted a training program, despite their having little or no experience in theatre, much less acting. This was very much the case with Peter Mennin at Juilliard and Carnegie's Akram

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<sup>226</sup> See Minutes from the League's Annual Meeting, 10 June 1981, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

Midani, to cite just two examples. This institutional dynamic also explains why William Ball was adamant about having complete artistic and administrative control of A.C.T. and went so far as to fill its board with loyal artists and colleagues. This of course would not have been possible at a college or a university, but because A.C.T. was a special case, he was successful until he wrongfully invested company funds in the gold market. As US universities increasingly developed theatre conservatories throughout the 1960s and 70s, they continued to try to “have it both ways,” to borrow from Lowry, insofar as they wanted to have reputable “professional” programs, yet they also wanted to be recognized as academic institutions dedicated to scholarly pursuits.<sup>227</sup> This tension will be explored further in the ensuing chapter on pedagogy and professionalization, in which I specifically examine the curriculum and training of each of my case studies and continue to analyze the relationship between a League actor’s education and his preparation for a profession that was becoming increasingly variegated.

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<sup>227</sup> Lowry, “The University and the Creative Arts,” 104.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Pedagogy of League Acting Programs and Professionalization of Its Graduates

*On the very first day [of rehearsal] a stage manager walks into a big empty room. They flip on the lights and they check their watch, and a moment later an enormous box of freeze-dried actors is shot in from New York City....The director flies in from another direction and he has just done twelve shows back to back to back to back...And these people who have never met each other before, these strangers, they rehearse for three and a half weeks, which conveniently is exactly how long it takes to master every play.*

—Mike Daisey, “How Theater Failed America”<sup>1</sup>

The above quote is taken from monologist Mike Daisey’s “How Theater Failed America,” a humorous and biting criticism of the US not-for-profit theatre’s abandonment of its artists—most especially actors—in favor of directing resources to its buildings. Writing at the end of the 1970s, Rustom Barucha pejoratively labeled this practice an “edifice complex,” to underscore how regional theatres prioritized their interests by eliminating resident acting ensembles while constructing state-of-the-art facilities marked by everything from fully modernized performance spaces to splashy lobbies replete with fancy bathrooms and bars.<sup>2</sup> As Daisey would do years later, Barucha argued that regional theatres gave up the company model at the expense of their artistic identity and service to their local communities. A conceit that was foundational to the movement’s inception,<sup>3</sup> having a permanent company of actors (and other theatre artists) “united” an organization to produce work that expressed a particular “style” in which

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Daisey, “How Theater Failed America,” viewed at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoXf5u6\\_Gw0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoXf5u6_Gw0) (accessed 26 December 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Rustom Barucha, “Anatomy of the Regional Theater,” *Theater* (Summer 1979): 14.

<sup>3</sup> Margo Jones, *Theatre-In-The-Round* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 75-81.

artistic innovation accompanied a shared commitment to a “synthesized” and “collaborative” vision. Barucha contended that, unfortunately, regional theatres had become “at best efficient organizations” that paled by comparison to their not-for-profit counterparts in Europe, namely the Berliner Ensemble and Moscow Art Theater, institutions that located a company of actors at the core of how they functioned.<sup>4</sup>

Barucha’s criticism is as cogent as it is convincing and continues to resonate today. Something was lost as US theatres jettisoned their artistic companies to adopt the cost-cutting measure of jobbing in talent on a show-by-show basis. As Daisey’s “freeze-dried” analogy asserts, the creative team partakes in a standard three and a half weeks of rehearsal to mount a show, and then the director and designers leave the project (presumably to move on to their next gig) as the actors and stage manager remain until its closing some four weeks later, at which point they will join the ranks of the unemployed. Such an arrangement belies the notion of a creative ensemble dedicated to a singular vision. Actors and directors exhaust crucial rehearsal time to find a working process and to form a shared language in support of the latter’s aesthetic. Furthermore, it takes additional time for the actors to become comfortable enough with each other to explore artistic risks by surrendering to a creative process that is not rushed by the production schedule. Assuming such a bond were even possible for a group of strangers, these jobbers are disadvantaged when compared to those in permanent companies, insofar as established ensembles are likelier to have a working relationship that is predisposed to exploring artistic choices. Their collectivist ethos is emboldened by the fact that the actors have a tangible stake in the production’s outcome given their status as fulltime

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<sup>4</sup> Barucha, “Anatomy of the Regional Theater,” 13.

employees of the representative theatre.<sup>5</sup> William Ball accentuates this point in describing A.C.T's approach during the organization's halcyon days:

By creating an ensemble company you can present all forms of dramatic works. Nothing is too difficult to bring off because communication among the actors is rapid. These people become used to each other; ensemble acting, therefore, has the greatest potential.<sup>6</sup>

Ball likewise explains how the company model best serves the public interest by offering a repertory of programming that includes a combination of new and traditional texts presented in accordance with the director's specified vision:

Repertory theater is based on a high hope of permanence. It cannot be at its best until, like the members of an orchestra, a group of people work together daily over a long period of time on a continuing series of plays....And what he [the audience member] would see would be something that even a singularly fine Broadway season could not give him: plays of indubitable value performed by a company completely committed, a company whose subtle interplay has been multiplied by its working together, a company housed in a place so familiar to the actors that it is like their home.<sup>7</sup>

Ball's vision was fully realized during the early 1970s as corroborated by many members of A.C.T's acting ensemble at the time: Ken Ruta declared his six seasons in residence as "the most fruitful of [his] career," Joy Carlin likewise labeled her experience the "the best part of her acting career," and Angela Paton likened it "to being in paradise."<sup>8</sup> The criteria for such an ensemble included a commitment to a singular acting

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<sup>5</sup> Daisey, "How Theater Failed America," viewed at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoXf5u6\\_Gw0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoXf5u6_Gw0) (accessed 26 December 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in James Godfrey, "William Ball: the Cornerstone of a Great Company," *San Francisco Theatre Magazine* (Summer 1978): 52.

<sup>7</sup> A.C.T Inaugural Season Program 1965-1966, William Ball Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Ken Ruta, interview with author, 15 June 2010; Joy Carlin, interview with author, 15 June 2010; and quoted in John R. Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble: The First Years of the American Conservatory Theatre* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986): 149.

style, “unified” productions guided by a directorial vision, a disavowal of the so-called “star system” of casting and performance (the opposite ethos has historically been the case in the US commercial theatre), and most significantly, providing financial security for the ensemble’s actors to provide them with the freedom to “experiment” and “grow” in their artistry towards serving their audience.<sup>9</sup>

Other pioneers of the US regional theatre movement echoed Ball’s philosophy, most notably Arena Stage’s founder and artistic director, Zelda Fichandler, who likewise located repertory and an acting ensemble as the hallmarks of the not-for-profit theatre. Nearly as ambitious as ACT’s inaugural season of some twenty-seven productions, Arena’s first year offered the Washington D.C. community seventeen plays that ranged from European classics (e.g., Shakespeare, Goldsmith, and Molière) to modern texts from the European and American repertoire (e.g., Synge, Shaw, and Steinbeck) as well as original works (e.g., Robert Anderson’s *All Summer Long*). At the center of this experiment was Arena’s permanent acting company that consisted of the likes of George Grizzard, Lester Rawlins, and Pernell Roberts.<sup>10</sup> As Fichandler notes, the development of repertory theatre and the overall success of the regional theatre movement was contingent on the idea of such an ensemble:

One must regard the American actor, now called upon by the sudden emergence of repertory theatres throughout the United States to meet new and unexpected tasks. For if we are to achieve excellence in theatre as a performing art, it will be chiefly through the art of the actor....The actor stands at the center of the development of theatre in this country.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Arena’s inaugural season, see Julius Novick, “The Theater,” in *The Performing Arts and Society*, W. McNeil Lowry ed. (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1978), 101-106.

<sup>11</sup> Zelda Fichandler, “The Development of the Repertory Actor,” 18 February 1965, George Mason University Special Collections and Archives, Zelda Fichandler Papers, box 108, folder 17. Also, see Tomoko Aono, “The Foundations of American Regional Theatre,” (PhD diss., CUNY, 2010), 78-89.

To meet the needs of this development, however, places like Arena and A.C.T had to hire a group of versatile performers whose psychophysical training enabled them to approach a role with a balance of emotional truth and physical and vocal expressivity. As articulated in chapter two of this dissertation, the so-called American “Method” of acting, as exemplified by the likes of Lee Strasberg and Sanford Meisner, was incomplete in preparing actors for the demands of repertory. While these instructors had success in providing their students with the tools to handle film and television parts, they did not give them the physical and vocal training needed to perform a varied repertoire of roles—many of which were written in poetic verse—in cavernous spaces that often “abandoned” a proscenium arrangement in favor of a thrust stage that minimized the *mise en scène* and instead foregrounded the performances.<sup>12</sup> Thus, university-sponsored conservatories began offering BFA and MFA degrees as part of a psychophysical pedagogy specifically designed to prepare actors for careers in the permanent companies of regional theatres such as those at A.C.T and Arena.

Responding to this change in US theatre and acting pedagogy, ten of these schools formed the League in 1971 with the expectation of raising the standards of US actor training by providing a select group of students the psychophysical curriculum necessary to place them in entry level positions at America’s repertory theatres, a job they would presumably use as the foundation for a stage career. Unfortunately, this was not the case. A combination of social and economic forces caused theatres to eliminate their permanent ensembles, thereby contributing to a professional landscape that was trending towards film and television. As a result, League schools such as Juilliard and A.C.T were

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

training actors for careers that were becoming impossible to achieve. Graduates of these programs therefore responded to the increasing commercialization of the profession during the late 1970s and 1980s by seeking employment in its comparatively lucrative on-camera mediums.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, I introduced a theory of commodification before applying it to the trajectory of twentieth century US actor training, the culmination of which put the League into its historical context, 1971-1987. As such, I relied on the cultural criticism of Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, and Theodor Adorno to explain how the practice of stage acting had been compromised by the forces of capitalism and its fetishizing effect on the arts in modern society. I used this theoretical paradigm to juxtapose stage acting against its on-camera counterparts, film and television performance. In chapter three, I examined the histories and administrative policies of three League schools to demonstrate the competing interests and institutional tensions between theatre professionals and the professoriate. At the center of this analysis was the matter of funding and how the dispensation and accumulation of financial resources both directly and indirectly determined administrative decision making. Thus, the forces of capitalism were located relative to the institutional policy and politics of League schools, and by extension, actor training at the level of higher education in general.

This chapter will build on the aforementioned by addressing the pedagogical and professional development of US acting and actor training during the years of the League. I will first examine the psychophysical curricula offered at League programs, and show how this pedagogy was specifically designed to train repertory actors. Using my three

case studies as the basis for my report, I will demonstrate how League programs implemented some variation of Stanislavsky's internal approach to actor training with a range of techniques and methodologies intended to create "an instrument that [was] totally, and not partially, expressive."<sup>13</sup> From mask work to corporeal mime, each program had its own way of building an actor's physical and vocal instrument and then integrating it with the more psychological context of an acting class. I will detail how this process worked by connecting the pedagogy of League schools to the casting needs of the US regional theatre, an institution that caused these programs to come into being before retreating from the permanent ensemble model that precipitated the League's very existence. As such, I will examine the League's formation of a "Task Force" intended to create a mutually beneficial alliance with the not-for-profit theatre, an endeavor that was ultimately unsuccessful for both economic and social reasons. After exploring how economics and social policy contributed to the downfall of permanent acting ensembles at US regional theatres, I will spend the balance of the chapter tracing the graduates of my three case studies relative to the overall acting profession to show that during the 1970s and 80s it became nearly impossible for US actors to make a consistent living in theatre. As a result of this inauspicious development, I will question what it meant to be an actor during this period and how this trend has evolved to the present day. Moreover, I will seek to clarify the economic situation and social role of the US not-for-profit theatre during the 1970s and 80s, and moreover, question the function of professional theatre training in US higher education. Ultimately, this chapter will provide evidence in support of my overarching theory that US acting and actor training became jointly and increasingly commodified throughout the period of my study.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## **A Psychophysical Pedagogy in US Actor Training: An Examination of the League's Training Methods**

As explained in chapter two of this dissertation, the philosophical basis for psychophysical actor training can be compared to the writings and practices of several postmodern acting theorists, most notably Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski. Although their work is not directly applicable to the pedagogy used at League schools, Artaud and Grotowski's conception of an actor's use of his body and voice to create a "spiritual" performance that engenders a "holy encounter" with his audience is foundational to a psychophysical approach to the actor's craft.<sup>14</sup> This ritualistic regard for the work can be likened to Walter Benjamin's theorization of the stage actor's "aura" or Theodor Adorno's explanation of aesthetic "spiritualization," the latter of which dialectically positions the artist's technique in relation to the phenomenological affect of his performance through a "process of development and formation."<sup>15</sup> This process entails a "breaking through of form by spirit" and can therein be identified in a psychophysical actor's training regimen.<sup>16</sup> Courses in bodywork and voice/speech, for example, provide the technical basis—or "form"—necessary to facilitate an expression of the actor's spiritualized aura that both Adorno and Benjamin reference. It is synonymous with how Grotowski describes an actor's "trancelike state" or what Artaud implies as the "alchemy" of performance, as well as Eugenio Barba's theorization of the stage actor's

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<sup>14</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 48, 52; also Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theater*, ed. Eugenio Barba (New York: Routledge, 2002), 34-35.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 245, 220; also Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 91.

<sup>16</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 90.

“extra-daily” presence or Phillip Zarilli’s understanding of his “bodymind.”<sup>17</sup> In brief, psychophysical acting is the integration of vocal and corporeal *presence* with a “truthful” connection to a character’s emotional life towards rendering a performance that is as vital and present as it is auratic and spiritual.

The abovementioned theorists of course did not privilege text in their approach to the actor’s work. Given that League programs were preparing students for careers in repertory companies, the ability to handle a wide range of dramatic literature was essential to their pedagogy. While schools like Carnegie and Juilliard were committed to developing an actor’s instrument to achieve the auracular stage presence that Grotowski and Artaud allude to, the application of this psychophysical theory can be most closely traced to Jacques Copeau’s Continental model.

Copeau’s nephew, Michel Saint-Denis, is largely responsible for introducing the Continental model to US acting schools, the pedagogy of which can be somehow identified in the curricula of every League constituent.<sup>18</sup> This fact is most applicable to the Juilliard Drama Division, a program conceived by Saint-Denis in 1960.<sup>19</sup> Basing the curriculum on his previous experience in Europe with Copeau’s Vieux Colombier as well as the Royal Shakespeare Company and Old Vic School, Saint-Denis prescribed a psychophysical training model that integrated an actress’s development of her imagination and sense of emotional truth with a “properly equipped” technical instrument

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<sup>17</sup> Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theater*, 16; Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 48-52; Ian Watson, “Training With Eugenio Barba: Acting Principles, the Pre-Expressive and ‘Personal Temperature,’” in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (New York: Routledge, 2000), 216; also Phillip B. Zarilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavsky* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3-5.

<sup>18</sup> J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 22 July 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis Funke, “Juilliard Starts School of Drama,” *New York Times*, 23 September 1968.

for the purpose of meeting the stylistic needs of any text in a given repertory. Indeed, dramatic “style” was essential to Saint-Denis’s pedagogy. He insisted “each play [stood] alone” and possessed its own stylistic needs, thereby requiring versatile performers with trained instruments and facile imaginations to bring its characters to life.<sup>20</sup> As such, classes under the headings of “Dramatic Interpretation” and “Dramatic Techniques” constituted the bulk of Juilliard’s four-year curriculum.<sup>21</sup> In the case of the former, improvisation and rehearsing plays was the basis for developing flexible performers with a keen sense of theatrical and emotional truth in their craft. Dramatic Techniques signified the training of an actress’s physical instrument: voice and speech courses to complement an amalgam of movement and body techniques, all of which were intended to produce powerful performers capable of invoking the spoken and corporeal language of dramas ranging from Aeschylus and Euripides to Shakespeare and Stoppard:

They can train their voices and their bodies, study the texts, and above all, seek the kind of improvisation that is both up to the level of Shakespeare’s poetic world and able to strengthen the physical vitality of acting.<sup>22</sup>

Though each League program had its own curriculum and academic structure, they all shared some fundamental commonalities. In accordance with Saint-Denis’s prescriptive, each school trained select students to fill the companies of US regional theatres by employing a regimen that was “heavily weighted” in “skills” classes intended to develop

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<sup>20</sup> Michel Saint-Denis, *Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style* (London: Heinemann, 1960), 113.

<sup>21</sup> “Drama Department Requirements for the Diploma,” Fall 1970, Juilliard School Archives, Saint-Denis Papers, box 34, folder 1; also “Annual Report to the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs,” May 1980, President’s Papers: Drama Division, box 32, folder 6. Until the middle-1980s the Drama Division admitted a very select group of students with a baseline of previous experience into an accelerated two-year program. These actors were generally older than the average acting student, who would have been between the ages of 17 and 22 and enrolled in Juilliard’s standard four-year program.

<sup>22</sup> Saint-Denis, *Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style*, 113.

an actor's body and vocal instrument for the purpose of performing a variety of textual styles.<sup>23</sup> Daily movement and voice/speech classes comprised the lion's share of a training day that would begin sometime around nine o'clock in the morning and extend well into the evening. The League actor's daily regimen generally consisted of twelve hours of "studio" and "rehearsal" work with the latter commencing in the evening. The rehearsals would focus on the actor's training needs by serving as a forum in which he could "integrate" his developing skills by working on a given dramatic style; these "workshop" productions were not intended to be public entertainments.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, one of the League criteria was that all productions must first and foremost satisfy the training needs of the students. Depending on the program, these dramas varied according to the pedagogical initiative of the school's "master teacher." Whereas Juilliard and A.C.T, for example, emphasized a range of modern and classical material, the post-Gister era at Carnegie was geared towards contemporary plays and musicals, a choice that reflected the department's attempt to "redefine" actor training to meet the "new economics" of the profession.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the curriculum at most League schools consistently adhered to the spirit of the Saint-Denis model as noted by Jack Clay:

We were very much under the ideals of Tyrone Guthrie and the notion of preparing actors for the resident companies of regional theatres. This had an enormous influence on our training. Training had to address both

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<sup>23</sup> Suzanne J. Seiber, "Movement Training for Actors in Selected Schools of the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs, 1971-1987" (master's thesis, University of Oregon, 1994), 252.

<sup>24</sup> J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 18 February 2011.

<sup>25</sup> In 1976 Carnegie introduced its musical theatre program thereby heeding Dean Midani's prescriptive to "redefine" US theatre training according to employment trends in the profession. See Akram Midani, "Redefinition of Theatre Training," 26 January 1976, College of Fine Arts Papers, Carnegie Mellon University Archives, box 1, folder 12; also "Production and Rehearsal Schedule," 21 April 1971, Juilliard School Archives, President's Records, Drama Division: box 32, folder 2; and "A Self-Study Report In Support of The Application for Accreditation of The American Conservatory Theatre Prepared for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges," (Allen Fletcher Memorial Library, 1983), 57-63.

classical and contemporary work. With respect to the classical, all programs had to apply a physical training regimen. We each had our own notions of what good physical training was. Despite our specific approaches the end product would be evaluated to justify the pedagogical approach.<sup>26</sup>

Although League schools were all dedicated to a psychophysical regimen, each program addressed the development of the actor's instrument in its own way, especially in the joint area of body and movement. Whereas the Alexander technique enabled Juilliard and A.C.T actors to have free and neutrally aligned bodies, CalArts and Carnegie respectively employed Tai Chi Chuan and Etienne Decroux's corporeal mime to attain the same results. A range of coursework in everything from commedia and Suzuki training to modern dance and ballet was intended to meet the overarching goal of producing performers who could control their bodies to the point of maximum expressivity in creating a role.<sup>27</sup> The physical classes that were most consistent throughout the League were dance, a "movement for actors" offering, a course intended to achieve neutral alignment, stage combat, and mask work.<sup>28</sup> In the latter case, the teachings of Jacques Lecoq were quite popular, insofar as they provided a way to externally facilitate the more psychological work being covered in a student's acting class. The thrust of the League training was integrative, which meant that the development of an actor's imagination towards a credible rendering of a character complemented the physical regimen being practiced in the voice, speech, and movement curriculum. Alexander Technique was directly related to Kristin Linklater's vocal

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<sup>26</sup> Jack Clay, interview with author, 3 October 2011.

<sup>27</sup> For more on the movement pedagogy at a sampling of League schools, see Suzanne J. Seiber, "Movement Training for Actors in Selected Schools of the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs, 1971-1987" (master's thesis, University of Oregon, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 251-52.

training, for example, which in turn was applicable to “authentically” connecting to a character’s emotional and intellectual life.<sup>29</sup> Scene study and acting technique classes therefore relied on the physical and vocal regimen that consumed the balance of the League actor’s day. Edith Skinner’s system for speech was intended to provide students with the skills for delivering classical and language-oriented dramas with clarity and nuance. Many programs likewise employed Rudolf Laban’s Effort-Shape method to unlock the actor’s body and emotional life in conjunction with a character’s action in support of creating a psychophysical performance that was in service of the text. A.C.T’s Sabin Epstein used Laban’s work as a key component of what he called an “activation” class intended to bridge the historically ill-conceived divide between an actor’s internal and external capacity for creative expression:

I changed the name of my class to “activation” so that there would be no preconception as to what to expect. Because I found that when people came into what they thought was going to be a movement class, they had a particular mindset about what they could do, what they couldn’t do, and what the material would cover.<sup>30</sup>

Epstein was one of a number of so-called “master teachers” that comprised the faculties of League programs. Defined by Earle Gister as “a person with a comprehensive approach to talent development and a record of preparing working artists,” these instructors were charged with creating, organizing, and overseeing the pedagogy and curricula of League schools across the country, such as Robert Benedetti

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<sup>29</sup> One cannot underestimate the significance of Kristin Linklater’s vocal training on League pedagogy. Trained by Iris Warren in England, Linklater’s system for “freeing the natural voice” exemplifies the very integration of an actor’s voice, speech, bodywork, and emotional truthfulness that defined the consortium’s psychophysical regimen. For more on her system, see Kristin Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice* (New York: Drama Publishers, 1976); also Kristin Linklater, *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice: The Actor’s Guide to Talking the Text* (New York: TCG, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Seiber, “Movement Training for Actors,” 112-13.

did at CalArts, Robert Hobbes at Ohio and Washington, William Ball and Allen Fletcher at A.C.T, Jack Clay at SMU, Arthur Wagner at Temple and UCSD, and Gister at Carnegie and Yale.<sup>31</sup> These program directors—all of whom were male until the 1980s, when the first women started to head League schools—hired specialists in a given training area to fulfill the program’s pedagogical vision. Thus, Kristin Linklater and Robert Parks imparted their knowledge of training the actor’s voice at NYU and Carnegie as did Anna Sokolow and John Loschmann in the area of movement at Juilliard and A.C.T. Other outstanding specialists at League schools included Jewel Walker and Elizabeth Orion (Carnegie), Fran Bennett and Lewis Palter (CalArts), Deborah Sussel and Frank Ottiwell (A.C.T), and Pierre Lefevre and Elizabeth Smith (Juilliard). The League faculty consisted of proven professionals with national reputations who ultimately defined each program. When Gister left Carnegie in 1975, for example, the Drama Department experienced significant changes in its faculty and pedagogical direction over the ensuing ten years. It wasn’t until Elizabeth Orion replaced Mel Shapiro in 1986 that Carnegie began to stabilize once again.<sup>32</sup> Similar changes occurred during the 1980s when the programs at NYU, CalArts, A.C.T, and Yale were run by Zelda Fichandler, Libby Appel, Lawrence Hecht, and Lloyd Richards. As these new chairs assumed control of a program, they altered its direction according to their own artistic and pedagogical proclivities and brought in the personnel to execute it.

The League members constantly familiarized themselves with each other’s work through the consortium’s annual meeting and actor presentation, as well as onsite

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<sup>31</sup> Earle R. Gister, foreword to *Master Teachers of Theatre: Observations on Teaching Theatre by Nine American Masters*, ed. Burnet M. Hobgood (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), vii.

<sup>32</sup> Donald Marinelli, interview with author, 17 July 2011.

visitations by a group of colleagues every three years. There was a degree of crossover among faculty over the years, most especially Edith Skinner who taught speech at Carnegie and Juilliard as well as A.C.T, and whose system was ubiquitous throughout the League programs.<sup>33</sup> Although a “master plan” for teaching acting was not employed, some offshoot of Stanislavsky’s system was the basis for developing the League actor’s imagination to arrive at psychophysical truth in creating a character.<sup>34</sup> Whereas teachers like George Morrison (SUNY Purchase) and John Stix (Juilliard) relied on their training with The Actors Studio, others adapted a variety of Stanislavskian principles to arrive at an amalgamated pedagogy. This was very much the case with Gister’s approach, which included a variety of influences that included Michael Chekhov, Sanford Meisner, and especially, Paul Mann.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps Juilliard graduate and current faculty member Rebecca Guy sums it up best when saying, “I think Stanislavsky is to acting as Freud is to psychoanalysis....No matter what you do, no matter what school you come from, it all traces back to him.”<sup>36</sup> The difference between the League’s instructors and other teachers of Stanislavsky, however, especially those that hailed from the Group Theatre tradition,

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<sup>33</sup> A great many of Skinner’s former students taught her system at League programs, such as Deborah Sussel (A.C.T), Margaret Loft (SMU), and Timothy Monich (Juilliard). Her text, *Speak With Distinction*, was the foundation for speech training at all League schools and continues to be deployed at US acting schools today. See Edith Skinner, *Speak With Distinction*, ed. Lilene Mansell and Timothy Monich (New York: Applause, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Jack Clay, interview with author, 3 October 2011; also Arthur Wagner, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph A. Alberti, “The Acting Methodology of Earle R. Gister: An Examination of the Foundational Principles” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Dallas, 2008), 37-38.

<sup>36</sup> Guy graduated from the Drama Division in 1978 and began working as a guest director there in the early-1990s. Since 2003 she has been a fulltime instructor for the program’s second year actors. Rebecca Guy, interview with author, 26 July 2011.

was the fact that they were galvanized by a psychophysical training regimen designed to prepare students for the virtuosic repertoires of the US regional theatre.

If the faculty defined the League's training, its graduates provided its identity, as a front-page article in the Arts Section of the *New York Times* noted in 1982:

More and more of our most successful young actors are emerging from places like Juilliard, The Yale School of Drama, Carnegie-Mellon, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the California Institute of the Arts (four of the five were League programs).<sup>37</sup>

Acceptance to these programs was highly competitive and depended not only on the prescribed monologue audition (the template being both a contemporary and classical selection), but also on one's potential for becoming a technically proficient stage actor. The criteria included the possibility for a powerful vocal instrument, dexterous speech skills, a facility for language, a supple body, and an expressive and accessible emotional life as identified by a prospective student's monologue presentation. There was no consideration of a person's previous academic record or intellectual ability. It was strictly a talent-based audition to gain admission in a context where 1000 people were vying for roughly twenty-five to forty positions.<sup>38</sup>

The auditions would be held nationwide every February and March to allow people to be seen by a plurality of League members. The format of each program consisted of three and four years in the respective cases of earning the MFA and BFA degree. In certain instances a student could obtain a diploma instead, yet he would still be required to finish the core curriculum. At Juilliard, for example, one had to complete thirty credits

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Gilman, "Appraising Stanislavsky's Legacy Today," *New York Times*, 5 September 1982; Jennifer Dunning also praises the League and acknowledges the accomplishments of alumni hailing from its member programs in her article "The New American Actor," *New York Times*, 2 October 1983.

<sup>38</sup> Arthur Wagner, interview with author, 10 June 2011.

of liberal arts courses to obtain a BFA. Given the Drama Division's prioritization of the performance curriculum, not surprisingly, very few people pursued this track, as explained by alumnus Richard Howard (1980):

Everyone but one in our class ended up not getting a BFA because I just found that there was so much to do in the program that if I had to read *Madame Bovary* before the week was out, I wouldn't have [been] able to do all the other stuff that I was really there for. I used to go audit the classes because I loved listening to the lectures, especially in Dramatic Lit....I used to love those classes, but I didn't do the homework! So I got a diploma.<sup>39</sup>

A similar situation existed at A.C.T, where no liberal arts component was available and most students settled for a certificate. In fact, A.C.T was not even a degree-granting institution until 1976—the year it joined the League—when the Western Association of Schools and Colleges permitted granting MFAs to students who completed the full three years of training (the final one consisting of a highly selective invitation into the professional company), or for those who finished the initial two years and then wrote a so-called thesis on a part they played.<sup>40</sup> Carnegie's BFA program was the most academically diverse of the case studies, insofar as its students had to accumulate nine units a semester in non-departmental electives as well as take courses in English, History, Psychology, and Dramatic Literature. Although the diversity of this curriculum somewhat varied throughout the 1970s and 80s, according to the university's catalog, the Drama Department consistently attempted to "broaden" their students' "knowledge

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Seiber, "Movement for Actors," 174.

<sup>40</sup> To be awarded an MFA, A.C.T students had to write a report detailing their experience working on a role at an "approved" professional theatre. Ray Dooley's "Hamlet," for example, documents his portrayal of the role at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in 1994. See the Allen Fletcher Memorial Library for a list of MFA theses.

through courses in the university's other colleges.”<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the Carnegie program functioned first and foremost as a conservatory preparing select students for careers in the professional theatre, as was the case at every other League school.

If admission to League schools was competitive, achieving graduation was commonly an arduous and abusive process. In addition to the rigorous regimen of physical coursework coupled with rehearsing plays and exploring one's emotional expressivity in acting classes, the League actor was oftentimes subjected to a draconian system of attrition. In every case of BFA granting programs and in a handful operating at the graduate level, students had to endure a cut process that was designed to maximize an institution's "input/output" ratio. Essentially, schools like Carnegie and A.C.T accepted nearly twice as many students as they intended to graduate for the joint purpose of generating tuition revenue and to offer themselves greater selectivity in winnowing down each group of graduates to the most marketable personnel to enhance the program's alumni profile. A.C.T, for example, blithely accepted an incoming class of about forty-five students knowing that the group would be cut in half after the first year and then cut again to four to eight people for year three. Those fortunate enough to complete the third and final segment of training were hired into A.C.T's professional company under what was then known as the "intern year" and operated under Equity's journeyman contract. These actors therefore could join the union, had a clear path to earning the MFA, and most significantly, they were given the opportunity to be showcased at the League's annual Actor Presentation.<sup>42</sup> This auspicious group represented less than 18 percent of

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<sup>41</sup> "Carnegie Mellon University Undergraduate Catalog, 1984-1986," Carnegie Mellon University Archives. Also, see the catalogs dating back to the 1967-68 academic year.

<sup>42</sup> Seiber, "Movement Training for Actors," 105.

the original class and was invited into the program's third year on the basis of their professional potential as well as the casting needs of the company. In fairness, the A.C.T quota system was made clear to students before they enrolled, and it did not seem to faze certain students or stop them from having successful careers. Dougald Park, for example, was not invited into the third year of the 1985 company, yet has enjoyed an active career balancing theatre and television work.<sup>43</sup> A similar case can be made for Park's classmate, Kate Levy, who also left A.C.T in 1984 and continues to be employed in the US professional theatre today. Nonetheless, Levy acknowledges the toll the cuts took on her class:

For a long time I was angry because of the cuts. I saw a lot of people get hurt. We're talking about young people. Bill Ball talked so much about failing big and taking risks but in the end it was a terrible pressure. Yale and NYU didn't have cuts. But A.C.T did. And it devastated people.<sup>44</sup>

A culture of fear and cutthroat competitiveness pervaded A.C.T's learning environment, as every Friday the first-year class would present two-person scenes to all forty-eight classmates and the faculty, with each pair being openly critiqued in front of their peers. Given everyone's knowledge that half the group would not be returning for the second year coupled with the fact that this practice was part of the faculty's evaluation process, one can only imagine how nerve-wracking and potentially counterintuitive it was for some students and their growth as artists.<sup>45</sup> Despite actually

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<sup>43</sup> Dougald Park, interview with author, 8 December 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Kate Levy, interview with author, 9 December 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Although a number of students found the cut system at League schools to be an inhibiting experience that was counterproductive to their development, many others thrived under this arrangement. Indeed, both Scott Freeman and Dougald Park spoke favorably about the competition at A.C.T, a situation that prepared them for the rigorous and unforgiving business of the profession that awaited them. See Scott Freeman, interview with author, 22 December 2011; also Dougald Park, interview with author, 8 December 2011.

making the cut and finishing the program, Judith Moreland recalls how the prevailing mindset among students was one of survival, a conceit that compromised being free and uninhibited in approaching their craft: “My only objective the first year was just trying to make it to the second year. I was so fearful about taking risks. The first year was a wash. I didn’t come into my own until the third year.”<sup>46</sup> Moreland’s view on the matter is consistent with Lawrence Hecht’s, who replaced Allen Fletcher as Conservatory Director in 1984. Having been a student and teacher at A.C.T throughout the 1970s and 80s, Hecht claims to have “detested the cut program” and “changed” the practice by ending it between the first and second years. The internship year, however, remained intact with a select minority of students being invited to join the professional company.<sup>47</sup>

The situations at Carnegie and Juilliard could be equally as harsh. Throughout the period of the League both programs accepted roughly twice as many students as they intended to graduate.<sup>48</sup> This was particularly the case with Juilliard’s class of 1975, when eight graduates remained from a group of thirty that started the program in 1971.<sup>49</sup> Ron Martell was on the faculty at the time and described the experience of “pulling the plug

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<sup>46</sup> Judith Moreland, interview with author, 21 December 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Seiber, “Movement for Actors,” 123-27.

<sup>48</sup> The draconian system of eliminating students from a professional program in the humanities was not exclusive to theatre departments during the 1960s and 70s. According to Professor Robert D. Hume, who was assistant to the Director of Graduate Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in 1968 and 69, the English program there admitted roughly forty students each year with the expectation that less than half would be “allowed to proceed” towards the Ph.D. Hume describes an even more cutthroat environment during his time as a visiting Associate Professor at the University of Virginia in 1971-72, when more than three quarters of the first year class of graduate students 180 strong were prevented from entering the Ph.D. program in English. Calling the process a “brutal factory system,” Hume recalls being privy to a meeting led by the Director of Graduate Studies, in which he learned that the state of Virginia paid “\$5000 for each graduate student each year,” thereby giving the English department motivation to accept far more students than they planned to let finish. Robert D. Hume, interview with author, 17 July 2012.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

on a student” as feeling like “the Jacobins deciding who’s going to go to the guillotine.”<sup>50</sup>

The vaunted Juilliard class of 1972 that included Kevin Kline and Patti LuPone had fourteen survivors from the original thirty-six, causing John Houseman to coldly refer to the process of attrition as “liquidations” and “executions.”<sup>51</sup> Despite her otherwise glowing tribute to the Drama Division, Andrea Olmstead exposes the draconian cut practice in her text (*Juilliard: A History*) by labeling it “sheer cruelty to students” and a policy that “rivals no other at the School.”<sup>52</sup>

“Cruelty” is also the word Lester Thomas Shane uses to depict Carnegie’s method for jettisoning students whom the faculty deemed unworthy for the profession. Having attended the program from 1970-72, Shane claims that his “work was fine,” yet he was cut because “they advised [him] he was short and smart” and “after seeing his work for two years they decided that he couldn’t do the ‘short dumb kid’” and therefore “questioned [his] professional potential.”<sup>53</sup> Things hardly changed throughout the 1970s and 80s. Carnegie commonly cut half the class after the second year, as explained by 1984 alumnus Thomas Jay Ryan:

There was a big cut system. We started with a class of forty-five and graduated maybe eighteen....It was a very fearful way to train because you were being asked to fail, but you really ought not to fail....As I’ve gotten older and talked to some people who went to these programs, very often the most idiosyncratic people, they’re the ones—including me—who were thrown out or almost thrown out of these places. Instead of idiosyncratic people that could translate well to film and select parts, they wanted to train us for a system that doesn’t exist anymore.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>51</sup> John Houseman, *Final Dress* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 247-49.

<sup>52</sup> Andrea Olmstead, *Juilliard: A History* (Carbondale, IL: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1999), 238.

<sup>53</sup> Lester Thomas Shane, interview with author, 7 July 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Jay Ryan, interview with author, 1 July 2011.

Ryan's latter sentence is referencing the League's pedagogical aim of preparing students for work in the US regional theatre. An "idiosyncratic" actress like Holly Hunter, for example, was nearly cut from Carnegie because she struggled to shed her southern dialect, which made it difficult to execute the speech needs of classical and language-oriented texts.<sup>55</sup> Under Edith Skinner's system for speech training, Hunter and her classmates were expected to master an approach to speaking that could serve as the template for an actress's versatility. Skinner's methodology was not intended to create mimeographed automatons that all sounded alike. On the contrary, her system—informally known as "speaking with distinction"—was designed to enable performers to expand their vocal apparatus to meet the needs of any given character they might play in any number of dramatic styles. It was perfectly aligned with Saint-Denis's Continental model, on which the League curriculum was based. Insofar as Carnegie was hoping to train a versatile actress with the psychophysical skills to meet the virtuosic demands of playing multiple roles in rep, Hunter paled by comparison to other graduates of the program such as René Auberjonois and Cherry Jones. However, as theatres began eliminating their resident companies and hiring talent on a show-by-show basis and as the overall profession became increasingly commercialized, an actress like Hunter was able to use her "idiosyncratic" dialect—her unique type—to navigate a casting niche in the money-making enterprises of film and television. By the time she finished Carnegie in 1980 there were hardly any repertory companies left, and therefore whatever benefit she might have gotten from the Skinner training would be of little use given her very limited, but distinctly marketable casting type as the bubbly ingénue of the American South.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Ironically, regional theatres likewise started to cast according to a director's ideal type for an individual part instead of using a performer in numerous roles for a season—the repertory model. Thus, the professional demand for an actress with a well-trained psychophysical instrument was becoming passé. Nonetheless, League programs by and large continued to accept a select group of students—many of whom would leave school without graduating—and attempted to prepare them for careers that were rapidly diminishing.

### **The Precarious Economic Situation of the US Regional Theatre and Its Consequence for Stage Actors**

When Claire Beckman graduated from Carnegie's acting program in 1984 she was planning to start a career in the US regional theatre, but was ultimately “disappointed” by the reality of the marketplace for actors at the time: “I was under the impression that I could go to the League showcase and get a job at a theatre company and have an artistic home like joining a law firm or having a residency in a hospital.”<sup>56</sup> Beckman grew up in Rhode Island admiring the productions of the Trinity Repertory Theatre, most especially the performances of their resident acting ensemble that included the likes of Richard Jenkins and Peter Gerety.<sup>57</sup> Similarly to many young actors attending League schools, Beckman reasoned that the training at places like Carnegie would ready her for a lifetime of employment at theatres such as Trinity just as a graduate of Harvard Law School or

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<sup>56</sup> Claire Beckman, interview with author, 12 July 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Both Gerety and Jenkins ultimately left Trinity to have illustrious film and television careers, with the former having a recurring role on Barry Levinson's *Homicide* and the latter gaining fame for his portrayal of the deceased father, Nathaniel Fisher, on HBO's *Six Feet Under*. For more on both men's on-camera careers, one can search for them at [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) (accessed 17 January 2012).

Cornell's medical program could expect to be hired at a leading law firm or hospital.<sup>58</sup>

The League was in a class by itself insofar as each of its programs had a vaunted reputation for developing the talents of highly selective students for the purpose of having stage careers. Despite the efforts of a faculty of master teachers who were largely products of the regional theatre movement themselves, classically trained actors like Beckman entered a profession that was becoming dominated by film and television, thereby dashing whatever hopes they might have had of landing a position in a resident company.

Beginning in the early-1970s, regional theatres began jettisoning their acting companies and stopped offering a rotating repertory of plays. Theatres from Seattle and Chicago to Sarasota and Hartford all began to produce shows individually with casts comprised of visiting artists. By 1980 only a handful of resident acting ensembles remained, and of those that did most of them had downsized the number of fulltime actors to single-digits. Institutions such as the Cleveland Playhouse, Goodman Theatre, and Arena Stage shifted their creative paradigm from a repertory of offerings facilitated by a core group of actors to a commercialized product that privileged generating income and appeasing corporate donors. They systematically started casting on a show-by-show basis and chose seasons that were commercially viable, appealed to their subscription base, and had the potential to move to Broadway. These so-called not-for-profit

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<sup>58</sup> To its credit, Trinity Repertory Company still produces a rotating selection of plays that are performed by what they claim to be “the last” permanent company of actors in the US regional theatre. While their assertion is generally accurate, several theatres—most notably the Oregon Shakespeare Festival—also have an ensemble of actors on multiyear contracts. In most cases, however, these ensembles consist of a core group of eight to ten actors and the theatres must still hire a high percentage of visiting artists to meet their casting needs. To view Trinity's acting ensemble, see [http://www.trinityrep.com/the\\_company/the\\_company/the\\_company.php](http://www.trinityrep.com/the_company/the_company/the_company.php) (accessed 5 January 2012).

organizations were in effect vying for a balance of symbolic and economic capital at the expense of artists and their craft, most especially as it applied to stage actors.

This inauspicious development has historically been viewed as a cost-cutting measure on the part of regional theatres to meet their bottom lines in an industry that has been increasingly and indirectly challenged by other entertainment mediums, beginning at first with film and television and extending thereafter to everything from video games and professional sports to Netflix subscriptions and the applications on one's smart phone. Whereas movie and television producers can distribute their work to consumers worldwide, the performing arts cannot. As Baumol and Bowen argued in 1966, art forms like theatre are victimized by a "productivity lag" defined by an inescapable imbalance between an organization's earned income and production costs. Famously referring to this dynamic as "cost disease," their comprehensive study concludes that the performing arts are beset by a structural "dilemma" in which they cannot generate products with the degree of fiscal and temporal efficiency afforded other industries. A theatre company relies on ticket buyers as its predominant income source, a model that is fiscally unsound because of its distributional limitations and unprofitable production process. To produce a play requires employing a creative team for a rehearsal period, during which time capital is being invested in the project without any income in return. This dynamic leads to a "gap" between the funds an organization raises from its product and the costs of its operating expenses. Thus, producing plays in the US regional theatre has historically been a losing venture from an economic standpoint.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, *Performing Arts the Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music, and Dance* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1966), 153-236.

Baumol and Bowen's theory of cost disease particularly applies to labor and the employment of actors. They convincingly demonstrate that advances in technology cannot ameliorate the expense of hiring creative personnel, as is the case with other industries. Whereas automobile makers, for example, have commonly used technological progress to produce cars more efficiently and cut costs by hiring fewer workers, the same is not true with a theatre company. As American salaries increased throughout the 1970s in conjunction with inflationary spending, the labor costs for the not-for-profit theatre also rose, especially when it came to funding a permanent company of actors. Technology could not replace the human talent and energy necessary to produce a play, and moreover, the play's monetary value was contingent on ticket sales, the price of which could not be exponentially hiked to the point of being commensurate with a theatre's increased production costs. The earnings gap progressively widened, and producers were therefore forced to implement a mix of cost-cutting and fund raising measures to survive.

Essentially, Baumol and Bowen's study makes a compelling case for the necessity of so-called "external funding" on behalf of the performing arts.<sup>60</sup> Given the structural model for the production and consumption of its work, the not-for-profit theatre must seek assistance from outside sources to offset its perpetual earnings gap. Like many other performing arts organizations, it has therefore relied on the financial support of private donors, corporations, individual foundations, and the government to supplement its coffers. Throughout the 1970s and 80s the US not-for-profit theatre exemplified this fiscal reality. The average percentage of a TCG member's annual budget covered by

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 305-68.

earned income decreased from 76% during the 1965-66 season to 50% in 1987.<sup>61</sup> In other words, by 1987 members of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) needed external revenue to meet roughly half of their budgetary costs.<sup>62</sup> This 33% plunge was part of a twenty-year trend in which not-for-profit theatres experienced a widening earnings gap marked by escalating production costs, limited internally generated funds, and a growing reliance on charitable donations. The confluence of these economic factors proves Baumol and Bowen's theory of cost disease.

By the middle-1970s, the US regional theatre was forced to reconsider its financial situation by cutting costs and attempting to generate growing amounts of revenue from external donors and ticket sales. In the case of the latter, from 1965-77 the box office comprised 92% of a theatre's earned income with roughly 33% coming from subscribers.<sup>63</sup> The reliance on subscriptions continued into the 1980s as ticket prices increased, and consequently, the development of new and future audiences was compromised.<sup>64</sup> This occurrence stands to reason, as higher costs for the purchasing of single tickets coupled with a continued dependence on regular patrons to fill seats were the results of the regional theatre's disinterest in actively attempting to expand its audience. The imminent crisis of an aging and ethnically limited audience was not

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<sup>61</sup> This downward trend persists in the US not-for-profit theatre today with internal income covering approximately 40 percent of the overall budget for TCG members between 2006 and 2010. See Sarah Hart, "Contending With The New Normal: Ingenuity and Flexibility Are Theatres' Aces in the Hole for Maneuvering a Distressed Economy," *American Theatre*, November 2010.

<sup>62</sup> See "Theatre Facts 87," *American Theatre*, April 1988; and "Conditions and Needs of the American Theatre" (NEA Research Report, May 1976), 66-67.

<sup>63</sup> This figure somewhat decreased during the middle-1980s to 80%. For a statistical account of this trend, see "Conditions and Needs of the American Theatre," 72; and "Theatre Facts 86," *American Theatre*, April 1987, 22.

<sup>64</sup> "Theatre Facts 86," *American Theatre*, 27; and "Theatre Facts 87," *American Theatre*, 23.

entirely lost on TCG, with Arena's managing director, William Stewart, decrying in 1985 that "we're increasingly concerned that our ticket prices are limiting the scope of our audience," and his counterpart at Princeton's McCarter Theatre Company, Alison Harris, echoing such a contention: "Overall, our drama audience is older, well-educated, affluent, and professionally oriented. . . . There is an entire generation out there which the theatre has lost to film and television."<sup>65</sup> Despite these comments from two of TCG's luminaries, throughout the 1970s and 80s regional theatres remained focused on their subscribers at the expense of reaching out to other parts of their respective communities. What began as a democratic movement intended to serve the public by offering productions at affordable prices had fast become a rather exclusive entertainment for the affluent and educated.<sup>66</sup>

Ticket sales, however, only accounted for part of a not-for-profit theatre's overall budget. Throughout the 1970s and 80s the earnings gap reached record levels as deficits increased annually. By the 1984-85 season the collective debt of TCG theatres was \$4.5 million compared to roughly \$300,000 in 1965-66 and \$1.1 million in 1976-77.<sup>67</sup> Between 1980 and 1985 TCG theatres collectively ended every fiscal year in the red, which is to suggest that even with external support from corporate sponsors and the like they were failing to make ends meet.<sup>68</sup> Comparatively, 1971 to 1973 were banner years

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in "Theatre Facts 85," *American Theatre*, April 1986, 20. Contrary to its practice during the 1970s and 80s, TCG has recently made efforts to "cultivate diverse audiences" through its New Generations Program. See [http://www.tcg.org/grants/newgen/newgen\\_index.cfm](http://www.tcg.org/grants/newgen/newgen_index.cfm) (accessed 17 January 2012).

<sup>66</sup> Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 178-79.

<sup>67</sup> "Conditions and Needs of the American Theatre," 66-67.

<sup>68</sup> "Theatre Facts 85," 19.

for the organization's members with combined surpluses reaching over \$700,000.<sup>69</sup> Thereafter, each year was marred by an overall deficit with the exception of the 1979-80 season, which incurred a modest debt of \$31,000.<sup>70</sup> Nonetheless, 1979-80 was more of an aberration than the beginning of a positive trend, as rising costs were offset by "sound financial planning," a euphemism for decreased hiring practices and producing less expensive shows, as well as continued support from foundations, most notably Ford's \$2.5 million donation that fiscal year.<sup>71</sup> Yet the foundation's support of repertory theatres had been drawing to a close. Under the leadership of W. McNeil Lowry, Ford was largely responsible for underwriting the US regional theatre's formative years, but by the early 1980s it had all but ended its support. Between 1965 and 1977 contributions coming from foundations to TCG theatres increased annually at an impressive 13.4 % with Ford providing the significant majority of funding. However, beginning in 1973 support from foundations began to precipitously decline, and by the 1980-81 season it accounted for less than 5% of an average theatre's expenses down from over 14% in 1971.<sup>72</sup> This dynamic worsened with regional theatres incurring a 60% increase in expenses from the mid-1970s to 1985, thereby forcing TCG's members to make budget cuts and turn to other sources of funding, the lion's share of which came from private donors and corporations.<sup>73</sup> Federal support also decreased during this time. The depleted

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<sup>69</sup> "Conditions and Needs of the American Theatre," 67.

<sup>70</sup> "Theatre Facts 80," (New York: TCG, Spring 1981), 18. Please note that TCG did not begin releasing its annual "Theatre Facts" report in *American Theatre* until 1985.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>72</sup> "The Conditions and Needs of the American Theatre," 75; and "Theatre Facts 81," 11.

<sup>73</sup> "Theatre Facts 85," 22.

coffers of the National Endowment for the Arts—a source that has always paled by comparison to how other industrialized nations choose to fund the arts—at best provided symbolic capital, as during the 1980s its contribution to regional theatres “plummeted” with the advent of the Reagan administration and was surpassed by state and local governments for the first time in the endowment’s history.<sup>74</sup>

Given the confluence of these economic forces, theatres reasoned that they should cut expenditures and create income. As a result, places like Hartford Stage and Seattle Repertory Theatre terminated their permanent acting ensembles during the 1970s and stopped producing a repertory season. These two measures should be seen in tandem, as it was the versatility of a company of psychophysically trained actors capable of playing multiple roles in a cross-section of dramas that was one of the founding missions of the regional theatre movement. League schools like Juilliard and ACT were then established to develop talented actresses like Claire Beckman for this very purpose. In addition to performers, many of these programs also trained directors, designers, and dramatists with the understanding they too would be joining a community of artists in residence at a particular theatre.<sup>75</sup> The very future of the American stage was thought to depend on the collaboration of trained artists who were committed to the collectivist ethos of bringing a high caliber of work to the general public. TCG’s president, Peter Zeisler, recognized

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<sup>74</sup> “Theatre Facts 84,” 1. For an informative account of the NEA during the 1980s, see Joseph Wesley Ziegler, *Arts in Crisis: The National Endowment for the Arts Versus America* (Chicago, IL: A Cappella Books, 1994), 45-66.

<sup>75</sup> While theatre programs such as ACT and Juilliard only trained actors during the 1970s and 80s, League schools like Yale, UCSD, CalArts, and Carnegie offered concentrations in directing, playwriting, the elements of design, and in some cases stage management and arts administration.

this fact in 1982 when lauding Trevor Nunn and the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Nicholas Nickelby*:

Great works of art can't be produced without a solid foundation on which to build. The astonishing accomplishment was caused by artistic director Trevor Nunn's desire to keep his entire company together during a year of fiscal crisis. [The] acting company was five times as large as the only sizable company in this country.<sup>76</sup>

Zeisler's words are instructional in that something vital is lost when a regional theatre has to hire its artistic staff from outside the organization. Besides not having a working relationship at the outset of the preproduction and rehearsal process, the creative team has little invested in the host theatre, much less its audience and local community. If an actress is able to work year round at a theatre, on the other hand, she can develop a bond with her colleagues and audience that serves both in ways that she could not if she were merely jobbed in for a single production. Moreover, the quality of shows is likelier to excel by virtue of a company taking greater artistic risks facilitated by a longstanding trust in their working process, a sentiment that is nearly impossible to create with a bunch of strangers in three and a half weeks.<sup>77</sup> Finally, the loss of an ensemble of actresses performing in rotating repertory has damaged the perception and practice of American acting. The craft has suffered at the hands of a commodified profession that is dominated by Hollywood and has come to value celebrity and type over technical skill, virtuosity, and versatility. Gone are the days when a San Franciscan could marvel at Peter Donat executing a wide range of parts that extended from *Cyrano* to *Shylock*.<sup>78</sup> Being

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in "Theatre Facts 82," (New York: TCG, Spring 1983), 1.

<sup>77</sup> The average LORT contract runs about seven weeks, with roughly three and a half weeks of rehearsal followed by a three to four week run of the production.

<sup>78</sup> Wilk, *The Creation of an Ensemble*, 153.

employed fulltime afforded Donat and his A.C.T colleagues the security of knowing they did not have to seek employment after a show closed, since they were members of a valued ensemble with each person adequately compensated to both train and perform according to William Ball's overarching vision.<sup>79</sup>

Given the fiscal reality facing regional theatres during the 1970s, one can understand the decision to cut costs by ending their repertoires and acting companies. In the case of the former, producing a rotating repertory that consisted of a goodly number of large cast dramas was indeed expensive. Yet did the US not-for-profit theatre surrender its soul as defined by the mission of its founders by adopting a commercialized agenda? As TCG theatres encountered escalating operating costs and ever-widening productivity gaps, a concerted move to offer "safe products to attract mass audiences" became the benchmark for success.<sup>80</sup> Fueled by competition from film and television as well as the reality of Baumol and Bowen's cost disease model, artistic producers were no longer driven by an aesthetic vision as much as they were by the need to satisfy their board of directors, a criterion largely determined by economics. Richard Hamburger, who guided Portland Stage Company during the 1980s, recognized this fact in a recent interview:

You'll have a discussion such as I did when I wanted to do *The Cherry Orchard* and the board said, 'what's the quid pro quo.' You'll have many such conversations with businessmen, with board members that ultimately determine your job.<sup>81</sup>

Hamburger's comments are striking insofar as Portland Stage's board of directors, a group that essentially functioned as his employer, was blithely negotiating with him from

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 144-66.

<sup>80</sup> "Theatre Facts 78," (New York: TCG, Spring 1979), 4.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Hamburger, interview with author, 7 January 2012. Hamburger also was on faculty at Juilliard during the 1980s and headed the Dallas Theatre Center from 1992-2007.

a commercial perspective. Thus, a group comprised mostly of businessmen took responsibility for making what is arguably the most important decision a theatre can make: selecting its season of plays. This situation was not limited to Hamburger's experience, as theatres across the country during the 1970s and 80s began shifting the balance of power from the visionary leadership of people like William Ball and Nina Vance to an emasculated assortment of so-called artistic directors who were expected to abide the wishes of their theatre's board, a body which, as indicated by Hamburger, was first and foremost given to matters of economic and symbolic capital:

I think the regional theatres in some ways haven't held out the promise that its originators envisioned. If you look at programming, most theatres are tending to do the same plays. It comes from the economic reality. You have to make money first or win the Tony Award. It's not so much about doing good work; it's more about clear tangible success through awards and celebrity.<sup>82</sup>

Instead of providing the public with a repertoire of dramas that reflected its socio-cultural identity and was created by a group of artists taking risks, theatres became judged by how they functioned financially, or by bolstering their reputation through the acquisition of symbolic credit, otherwise identified as their "production of belief," to borrow from Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>83</sup> Productions were deemed successful if they made money, especially if they could follow the example established by Arena's production of *The Great White Hope* in 1968 and move to Broadway; never mind the fact that doing so contradicted Margo Jones's vision for a decentralized and democratic "regional" theatre removed from the commercialism of New York City.

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<sup>82</sup> Richard Hamburger, interview with author, 7 January 2012; also see Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage* (Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 1973), 193-98.

<sup>83</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 74-111.

A contemporaneous account of the US not-for-profit theatre's trend towards artistic conservatism in conjunction with a prevailing concern for economics is documented by Paul DiMaggio and Karen Stenberg's 1985 article "Why Do Some Theatres Innovate More Than Others?" Using the dramatic repertoires of America's regional stages as its object of study, DiMaggio and Stenberg apply a theory of conformity that is measured by the infrequency with which producers mounted "new" works and those considered to have "fallen into disuse."<sup>84</sup> To the extent a subject diverted from formulaic programming and embraced the abovementioned criteria theatres were considered innovative. DiMaggio and Stenberg argue that a tangible relationship existed between artistic choice making—insofar as it applied to play selection—and a given organization's economic situation.<sup>85</sup> While one might contend with the narrow scope of their methodology (season planning) relative to the extent of their claim, DiMaggio and Stenberg prove that regional theatres with comparatively larger operating budgets—those comprising TCG and LORT—became increasingly "institutionalized" during the 1970s and 80s at the expense of creativity and innovation. A prevailing dependence on marketing and fiscal management displaced efforts to expand the audience base or to take programming and production risks. The larger a theatre's budget, the more inclined it was to conform to a model founded on conservative artistic and economic principles. The fact that TCG functioned as a "communications" hub for these organizations only added to their conformist practices with their cues coming from Broadway. In addition to following Arena's example of *The Great White Hope*, regional stages began the trend of staging

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<sup>84</sup> Paul DiMaggio and Karen Stenberg, "Why Do Some Theatres Innovate More Than Others? An Empirical Analysis," *Poetics* 14 (1985): 112.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

New York City hits and Pulitzer Prize winning dramas, in conjunction with musicals and hiring celebrity actors. Furthermore, they chose to start casting roles according to select types instead of trusting the virtuosity of an acting company, as well as the willingness and collective imagination of their audience to accept the ensemble-oriented convention of an actress capable of rendering both Cleopatra and Nina in a single season.<sup>86</sup>

In her foreword to TCG's "Theatre Facts 80," Ruth Mayleas presaged the tough economic times that lay ahead for the US regional theatre and the impact it would have on artists: "Will ways be found to retain mature artists and develop new talent?"<sup>87</sup> The concept of company through collaboration between young artists—most especially actors—with their veteran counterparts is at the heart of Mayleas's question. This sort of master/apprentice model has existed throughout theatre history. From Shakespeare's troupe to the Vieux-Colombier and the Group Theatre, the craft of stage acting in service of a given community has traditionally consisted of an ensemble of artists with varying experience and a commensurate level of skill and expertise. They each shared a vested interest in achieving something greater than one's individual performance, a goal that could only be identified by the affect of their collective effort on behalf of a given audience. During the early-1970s William Ball accomplished this feat with A.C.T, as did Tyrone Guthrie with the institution bearing his name throughout much of the 1960s. By 1980, however, the model of a permanent company performing in repertory had been reduced to a "scramble" for economic survival.<sup>88</sup> By TCG's admission, America's

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<sup>86</sup> "Theatre Facts 84," 2. Also see Richard Hamburger, interview with author, 7 January 2012; and Sanford Robbins, interview with author, 13 May 2011.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in "Theatre Facts 80," 6.

<sup>88</sup> "Theatre Facts 82," (New York: TCG, Spring 1983), 1.

regional theatres started privileging how they operated as a business at the expense of their artistic identity:

As the statistics reveal, it is that part of the budget devoted to artistic matters that is being squeezed to make room for necessary increases in other areas. What does this say about the theatre's ability to take risks with dramatic material or production concepts that require an extended developmental process?<sup>89</sup>

The final phrase of this anonymously penned quote underscores the importance of a theatre employing and developing a company of actors, the very point that I have been arguing throughout this chapter. Despite the financial challenges confronting them, during the late-1970s and 1980s regional theatres from Los Angeles to New England began investing their resources in marketing campaigns, fundraising initiatives, and administrative oversight instead of artistic pursuits. According to TCG's own reporting, artistic salaries declined from 29% of an average theatre's expense ratio in 1977 to 24% in 1981, as administrative costs increased nearly 20% over that same period, a trend that continued into the decade.<sup>90</sup> Lloyd Richards succinctly summed up this unfortunate development at TCG's annual conference in 1987, "What we have done is develop the institutions without the artists."<sup>91</sup> It would seem that Mike Daisey heard him loud and clear.

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<sup>89</sup> "Theatre Facts 81," (New York: TCG, Spring 1982), 15.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.; also "Theatre Facts 84," 11.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Martha LoMonaco, "Regional/Resident Theatre," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, eds. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby, vol. 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 246.

## **The Commodification of US Acting, the Professionalization of League Alumni, and the Consortium's Dissolution**

J. Michael Miller and his League colleagues shared Lloyd Richards's concern. In the fall of 1978, Miller drafted a proposal to form an alliance between the League and the professional not-for-profit theatre for the purpose of "developing theatre artists." This initiative in effect responded to the increasing institutionalization of the US regional theatre, a trend that occurred at the expense of its artists, as Miller noted:

While we produce as many talented actors, directors, playwrights, and designers as any other country in the world, that creative energy is being used in our theatre in only a secondary way. In its thirty year preoccupation with decentralizing itself, with finding a pattern for institutional structures, with ensuring its present and future stability, the American theatre has increasingly neglected its core: the determining role of the theatre artist.<sup>92</sup>

The League's "Alliance for the Development of Theatre Artists" specifically called for a direct "link" between graduates of its member programs and the US not-for-profit theatre. In the case of its actors, the League suggested annually showcasing the talents of its graduates to the artistic directors and producers of TCG theatres to introduce students to the people who could hire them. Furthermore, the formation of an "Actor's Center" was proposed, to provide a central source of communication between League training programs and regional theatres, with the intention of providing the latter with casting possibilities, and consequently, give graduates employment opportunities. The Actor's Center would also provide its members (students graduating from League schools) with classes and workshops offered on an "ad hoc basis" for the purpose of enhancing their

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<sup>92</sup> J. Michael Miller, "The Alliance for the Development of Theatre Artists" (working paper, 10 October 1978), personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson. In addition to acting, Miller's proposal to merge the professional and pedagogical sectors of the US theatre included métiers in directing and the elements of design.

craft between jobs and to expose them to master teachers and proven directors that they might not otherwise meet.<sup>93</sup>

The Actor's Center and the overarching proposal for an alliance between the League and the not-for-profit theatre would have been a remarkable achievement had either come to fruition.<sup>94</sup> The main reason this attempt failed was the difference of opinion between TCG and the League. According to Miller, TCG's president at the time, Peter Zeisler, refused to work with the League and instead chose to continue his organization's practice of holding national auditions for select students graduating from programs nationwide. While this practice included some students from League schools, it did not showcase every League graduate and was therefore unacceptable to Miller and his colleagues on the grounds that TCG's policy negated the consortium's commitment to provide "maximum accessibility" to all its actors.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, TCG's so-called "national audition" allowed programs outside the League to participate, which also troubled the consortium, because many of these programs lacked the League's proven standards. Though this contention may seem elitist on the part of the League, one should remember that its very premise was to establish a standard of excellence in actor training for the purpose of producing artists for the US regional theatre, and to thereby embolden and develop the profession for future generations. While other fine programs existed outside the confines of the League, the fact remains that they were few in number. The greater

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 15-18.

<sup>94</sup> Miller eventually started an organization that he named The Actors Center in 2000. Located in New York City, this organization continues to serve actors who trained at League schools by addressing many of the goals and concerns Miller lays out in "The Alliance for Development of Theatre Artists." For more on The Actors Center, visit its website at <http://www.theactorscenter.org/AboutUs.html> (accessed 14 March 2012).

<sup>95</sup> J. Michael Miller, interview with author, 18 February 2011.

majority of acting schools operating at the university level during the 1970s and 80s simply did not attract the talent or know how to train students for the exceptional demands of a stage career as effectively as the likes of Juilliard and Yale.<sup>96</sup>

In 1978 the League took matters into its own hands by forming the first of its Actor Presentations for industry personnel. By all accounts this was a successful venture in which all graduates of League programs were given the chance to showcase their talent to a combination of theatre producers, agents and casting directors, and film and television representatives.<sup>97</sup> What informally became known in the profession as “The League Auditions” attracted more industry people than TCG’s national auditions, or any such combined showcase of university acting schools ever since. This development was a triumph for the League and a testament to the superior training offered by its members. Actresses such as Carnegie’s Laura San Giacomo were able to jumpstart their careers by landing agents who immediately represented their professional interests, introducing them to casting directors and producers. San Giacomo says, “I got an agent right out of the League auditions and have been fortunate enough to be working ever since.”<sup>98</sup>

After graduating in 1984, San Giacomo moved to New York City and began balancing a career as a stage and on-camera actress. While she achieved success in regional theatre and Off-Broadway productions such as originating the role of Janice in John Patrick Shanley’s *Italian American Reconciliation*, it was not long until she realized that film and television would be her primary source of employment. In 1989 she extended her

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<sup>96</sup> For a contemporaneous appraisal of the League relative to other acting schools, see Richard Gilman, “Appraising Stanislavsky’s Legacy Today,” *New York Times*, 5 September 1982; also Jennifer Dunning “The New American Actor,” *New York Times*, 2 October 1983.

<sup>97</sup> Miller, “The Alliance for the Development of Theatre Artists,” 11-12.

<sup>98</sup> Laura San Giacomo, interview with author, 25 August 2011.

emerging on-camera career with a “breakout” role in Steven Soderbergh’s film *Sex, Lies, and Videotapes* and then moved to Los Angeles to play leading roles in cinema (e.g., *Pretty Woman*) and television, most notably the hit series *Just Shoot Me!*, for which she was nominated for a Golden Globe Award in 1998. Subsequently, San Giacomo starred on another TV series, *Saving Grace*, where she played the best friend of the title character, who happened to be rendered by fellow Carnegie alumna, Holly Hunter.<sup>99</sup> While she has enormous regard for theatre and greatly values her stage training at Carnegie, San Giacomo chose to take advantage of the film and television opportunities presented to her, given their comparatively lucrative compensation.

One can hardly blame San Giacomo for choosing a career in Hollywood. On the contrary, her accomplishments are unmistakable. She has worked hard to become a critically acclaimed film and television actress who has earned a comfortable living in an extremely competitive profession, especially for women. After all, we live in a society driven by the acquisition of capital, both along symbolic and economic planes, and for better or worse, our collective definition of success is largely determined by how much money one makes, and by extension, how much symbolic power one wields towards achieving independence and self-reliance, characteristics that go to the very heart of America’s mythos.<sup>100</sup> To be gainfully employed as an actor in this country, and to earn the symbolic power that defines success, one has little choice but to work in film and

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<sup>99</sup> *Saving Grace* ran for three years before ending in 2010. For more on San Giacomo’s on-camera credits, see her resumé by conducting a search on the Internet Movie Database Website (IMDb) located at <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 10 March 2012). Hereafter, it should be understood that all such searches for any given actress were conducted by entering her name on the IMDb site to review her film and television credits.

<sup>100</sup> The French historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, identified “individualism” as a defining attribute of the burgeoning US during his visit in 1831. See Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Perennial Classics, 1969), 506-13.

television, regardless of one's interest or aptitude for doing theatre. The stage and screen actor, Jay O. Sanders, proves this point. A graduate of SUNY Purchase's inaugural class in 1976, Sanders has built a theatre career working on projects such as the Public Theater's 2011 productions of *Sweet and Sad* and *Titus Andronicus*. Having played the title character in the latter, Sanders admits that he was only able to do so because of his employment in other mediums, namely film, television, and voiceovers:

The notion of preparing someone for just a theatre career is preposterous. Your passion may be theatre, but you must augment that with film, TV, and commercial work. If I didn't have these other sources of income, I couldn't make a living. I did the math and figured out that one day of work for me on a series was twice the amount that I earned for the entire run of these two plays [*Sweet and Sad* and *Titus Andronicus*].<sup>101</sup>

Sanders spent fourteen weeks rehearsing and performing the abovementioned dramas, which did not "include the homework [he] did on the roles."<sup>102</sup> Claiming that being a theatre actor is "totally impractical," he nevertheless has a resume rife with credits that extend from Broadway and Off-Broadway to America's most prestigious regional theatres.<sup>103</sup> However, Sanders insists that his stage accomplishments would not be possible without the supplemental income and prestige he has earned from doing literally hundreds of on-camera projects: "My goal has been to make it work so I can do the great classics and new plays on stage. I've done over 100 films, but I don't think of them as my career. I'm forced to diversify my work to support what I love and am trained to do."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Jay O. Sanders, interview with author, 31 August 2011.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

Similarly to San Giacomo, the film star Annette Bening understandably chose to have an on-camera career instead of a theatrical one. After finishing A.C.T's Advanced Training Program in 1982, Bening remained with the professional company through the 1983-84 season before relocating to the Denver Center Theater for a year. By her own admission, she "really wanted to be a classical actress," since that was "what [she] was trained to do."<sup>105</sup> Indeed, Bening reports that an agent approached her after the League showcase offering to sign her, but she instead wanted to fulfill her agreement with the Denver Center. After the yearlong contract was up, Bening moved to New York City to further pursue her stage career and landed a leading role in the original production of Tina Howe's *Coastal Disturbances*, a feat earning her a Tony Award nomination. However, it was not long before Hollywood opportunities arose, and Bening's career took a definitive turn towards film. In 1989 she starred in Milos Forman's *Valmont* and a year later had a breakout performance in Jim Thompson's *The Grifters*, for which she received the first of her four Academy Award nominations. Thereafter, Bening embarked on one of the most successful Hollywood careers of the past twenty years, highlighted by her portrayal of Bugsy Siegel's mistress Virginia Hill in the film *Bugsy*, which featured her future husband, Warren Beatty, as her director and co-star. Other noteworthy projects included *American Beauty* (1999), *Being Julia* (2004), and *The Kids Are Alright* (2010), all of which earned her Oscar nods.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> "Annette Bening: A.C.T Conservatory Hour" (San Francisco, CA: A.C.T's Allen Fletcher Memorial Library, 2002), DVD; also "Annette Bening Interview with Steven Winn" (San Francisco, CA: A.C.T's Allen Fletcher Memorial Library, 2007), DVD.

<sup>106</sup> "Annette Bening: A.C.T Conservatory Hour"; also Bening's resume located at <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 10 March 2012).

Bening's choice to leave what would have most likely been a promising stage career to focus exclusively on becoming a film star exemplifies the commodifying trend (pursuit of fame and fortune) that US acting took during the 1980s. She was trained at one of America's most prestigious acting programs and claims to have revered the mission of its progenitor (William Ball), and by her own admission, was both poised and ready to become a classical stage actress.<sup>107</sup> A smart and thoughtful woman who is much beloved and respected by those currently operating A.C.T.,<sup>108</sup> Bening acknowledged Hollywood's commodifying casting practices in a 2002 interview:

LA is all about the outside; it's all external....The camera is heartless. It sees what it sees. It pressures women to look a certain way and to be thin and to live up to some idea of being sexy. It will never go away. The pursuit of youth in culture and society and what all that means is challenging....Guys feel it too where they're supposed to have a perfect stomach, or not have two chins but have a full head of hair. Being sexy and being attractive is how you're supposed to present yourself. It's horrible. It has nothing to do with talent.<sup>109</sup>

Many contemporaneous texts dedicated to aspiring actors support Bening's comments. Brian O'Neill's *Acting As a Business*, for example, posits actors as commodities whose success is dependent on devising a "strategy" to best "market" themselves to "prospective buyers of services."<sup>110</sup> Mari Lyn Henry and Lynne Rogers use their book, *How To Be A Working Actor*, to argue that talent and training are at best equal concerns to an aspirant's

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<sup>107</sup> "Annette Bening: A.C.T Conservatory Hour."

<sup>108</sup> In January of 2012, Bening was the recipient of the Edward Hastings Career Achievement Award signifying her accomplishments in the acting profession over the past thirty years, as well as her continued support of A.C.T.'s acting program. This was part of A.C.T.'s inaugural "conservatory awards" ceremony honoring distinguished alumni of the Advanced Training Program. For more on the event, see [http://www.act-sf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=conservatory\\_awards\\_luncheon](http://www.act-sf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=conservatory_awards_luncheon) (accessed 28 April 2012).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Brian O'Neil, *Acting As A Business: Strategies for Success* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), 11.

physical appearance, and that one should be responsible for all aspects of the latter in pursuing a career. According to Henry and Rogers, “image” is crucial, and actors must account for the clothing they wear, the colors they don, the smile they present, their hair and skin care, and of course, their body.<sup>111</sup> Even someone as well respected in the US not-for-profit theatre and higher education as Robert Cohen stresses the importance of actors knowing and catering to their physical “type” in attempting to market themselves:

Most casting in the professional theatre and in film and TV today is done by physical type. Until that changes the following should be of value....You should clearly be a character actor or not. If you are ten pounds overweight, you are dead. Either lose it, or gain twenty more. If you look like an IBM executive or nineteen-year-old-groupie you are fine, but if you look half like one and half like the other, you are in trouble. If you are ugly, don't worry about hiding it. Cultivate it. Make it count. Use what you have to create a distinctive appearance. There is no “bad” appearance except a bland, characterless, type-less one.<sup>112</sup>

By the time Cohen penned the abovementioned advice during the early-1980s, the US regional theatre had ended its practice of employing a permanent ensemble of actors with the skills and versatility to perform a rotating repertory of plays. This change was caused, in part, by economics. However, the move to jettison acting companies in favor of casting on a show-by-show basis can also be traced to a shifting vision among regional theatre directors and producers who began to ape Hollywood by attempting to find exact types to fill out the *Dramatis Personae* of any given work. Just as a film or television director (or director of commercials) has traditionally sought to cast actors that meet the specific criteria of a character breakdown, theatre directors started to focus on finding the

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<sup>111</sup> Mari Lyn Henry and Lynne Rogers, *How to Be a Working Actor*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Backstage Books, 1994), 103-16.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Cohen, *Acting Professionally: Raw Facts about Careers in Acting*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 17, 19-20.

perfect type for a role instead of relying on a company of versatile actors capable of playing a variety of parts in a season.

While one could argue that individualized casting is preferable because it affords directors the flexibility to fill a role exactly as they envision it, there are notable drawbacks to such an arrangement. First, it negates the practice of having a resident company with an established working relationship that shares a collective connection with the local community. As Mike Daisey argues, bringing a group of “strangers” together for four weeks to rehearse a play is a dicey endeavor, given that they do not yet have a creative rapport, which generally takes time to develop. Moreover, the practice of having a resident company performing in repertory is an actor-centered approach that unapologetically embraces theatricality and therein relies on an audience’s imagination, attributes that can be distinguished from the verisimilitudinous concerns of film and television. This imaginative engagement of an audience by a company of exceptionally skilled and versatile performers can create an experience akin to what Benjamin terms the “auracular,” or what Adorno conceives as aesthetic “spiritualization.” In the latter instance, Adorno eschews art that merely copies “empirical reality” at the expense of presenting a “unique” experience for the beholder. Although “mimetic impulses” might be the basis for a work, according to Adorno, they should not “impose a sovereign rule” over it.<sup>113</sup> His theory effectively applies to theatre. Whereas film and television are bent on replicating reality, theatre’s aesthetic has historically used mimesis as a departure

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<sup>113</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 118. Adorno’s admiration for the plays of Samuel Beckett, for example, demonstrates his theoretical opposition to empirical reality, insofar as Beckettian drama “annihilates reality” while presenting itself as a “negative imprint” of the “everyday” world. Beckett’s work can therefore be seen as an abstracted entity exemplifying Adorno’s aesthetic trinity: a renunciation of conventional or established motifs, an embracing of artistic spiritualization, and a defiance of empirical reality. For more on Adorno’s theorization of Beckett, see *Aesthetic Theory*, 30-32, 81-82, 249-250.

point to arrive at an aesthetic that transcends the “everyday” in favor of a joint “spiritual” encounter for audiences and the players who facilitate such an experience into existence.<sup>114</sup>

If the 1970s and 80s marked a departure from regional theatres hiring versatile performers, actors nonetheless had to develop professional versatility in dealing with an ever-evolving marketplace. In December of 1981, *Newsweek* magazine’s cover story documented this development by declaring a “New Breed of Actor” had been introduced to American society: “Today’s ubiquitous actor is many things—an artist, a craftsman, a symbol, a model, a tool, a commodity.”<sup>115</sup> The article cites the emerging careers of a number of League-trained actors (e.g., William Hurt, Elizabeth McGovern, Sigourney Weaver, among others), who were attempting to balance their love for doing theatre with the necessity of working in film and television. A product of Juilliard, McGovern self-identifies as a “dedicated stage actor” who is “now being pulled in so many different directions without having the time to figure out who [she is, or how] to slowly develop [her] craft.”<sup>116</sup> Like the cases of San Giacomo and Bening, McGovern’s celebrity came at the expense of pursuing what she claims to be her “first love”: being a stage actress. Although she tried to balance a theatre career with her work in major releases like *Ragtime* and *Ordinary People*, the economic and social capital gained from doing high profile movies necessitated her commitment to the trappings of Hollywood. Whereas a

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<sup>114</sup> For an enlightening criticism of the damaging social affects that film and television generate through their use of mimesis, see Adorno’s corresponding chapters (“How To Look at Television” and “Transparencies on Film”) in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>115</sup> Jack Kroll et al., “A New Breed of Actor,” *Newsweek*, 7 December 1981.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

repertory actor such as A.C.T.'s Peter Donat could continually hone his craft during the 1970s by performing multiple roles as part of a resident company, the overwhelming majority of US actors were forced to follow McGovern's path of seeking success in the comparatively lucrative mediums of film, television, and commercials. As a result, they could only hope to find the time and summon the energy to practice what they were trained to do: perform as stage actors, which in the case of League graduates, implied a versatility that could render Hamlet and Gertrude as readily as Willy and Linda Loman.<sup>117</sup>

The trend of US actors towards on-camera careers during the 1970s is documented in several studies, most notably one conducted by Philip H. Ennis and John Bonin in 1976.<sup>118</sup> Awkwardly entitled "The Statistical Data Sets of Actors' Equity Association: A Description and Analysis With Recommendations for Research into the State of the American Theater," this report hedges on many of its findings, however, it makes a pair of striking claims to offer a telling snapshot of the profession at the time. First, its appendices provide hard data from Actors' Equity demonstrating a significant and steady decrease in the employment of stage actors from 1964-1976. Using records pertaining to

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<sup>117</sup> McGovern eventually did return to the stage in earnest during the 1990s when she left Hollywood to seek a more balanced career in England. For more on McGovern's personal struggles with the business of Hollywood—including her highly publicized marriage to the actor Sean Penn during the 1980s—see *Mail Online's* article "Why I Had to Escape Hollywood's Clutches: *Downtown Abbey* Star Elizabeth McGovern on Why She Had to Leave Fiancé Sean Penn," <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1324246/Downton-Abbey-star-Elizabeth-McGovern-leave-fiance-Sean-Penn> (accessed 16 March 2012).

<sup>118</sup> Philip H. Ennis and John Bonin, "The Statistical Data Sets of Actors' Equity Association: A Description and Analysis with Recommendations for Research into the State of the American Theater" (report prepared for the NEA, September, 1976); also "Understanding the Employment of Actors," September 1977, <http://www.nea.gov/research/reports/NEA-Research-Report-3.pdf> (accessed 17 March 2012); "Employment and Unemployment of Artists: 1970-1975," April 1976, <http://www.nea.gov/research/reports/NEA-Research-Report-1.pdf> (accessed 17 March 2012); and "Conditions and Needs of the Professional American Theatre," May 1981, <http://www.nea.gov/research/reports/NEA-Research-Report-11.pdf> (accessed 17 March 2012).

the collective “work-weeks” of the union’s membership, the study shows that employment under Broadway and Off-Broadway contracts respectively dropped about 32% and 300%.<sup>119</sup> The decline at LORT theatres was less pronounced, but still marked an unmistakable trend, as the number of cumulative workweeks went from 38,511 in 1967-68 to 26,893 in 1970-71; the ratio remained stagnant thereafter until a modest recovery to 35,657 during the 1975-76 season. In fact, of the nine types of contract categories listed in the report, only three (Children’s Theatre, Dinner Theatre, and AEA Guest Artists) had increases during the period of analysis.<sup>120</sup> As such, it should be noted that Equity’s Guest Artist contract is somewhat misleading, insofar as it historically has been used in non-professional contexts to hire a union actor or two, and its threefold increase in usage from 1967 to 1976 supports other evidence suggesting a decrease in job opportunities at recognized union houses.<sup>121</sup>

Despite the dwindling employment in theatre during the 1970s, Actors’ Equity experienced a 15% increase in paid membership throughout the report’s period of inquiry.<sup>122</sup> This development heightened competition, making it even more difficult to find work as a stage performer, thereby underscoring the study’s second salient point: US stage actors actively sought work in other performance mediums, namely film, television, and commercials. Ennis and Bonin use statistical data to show that more than half of

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<sup>119</sup> Ennis and Bonin, “The Statistical Data Sets of Actors’ Equity Association,” appendix E-1.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> TCG’s annual survey demonstrates a continual decrease in artistic salaries between 1967 and 1976, most especially as it applied to actors.

<sup>122</sup> Ennis and Bonin, “The Statistical Data Sets of Actors’ Equity Association,” 34. Although Equity’s membership increased by 15% between 1970 and 1975, Ennis and Bonin note that the Census Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a 34.6% hike in America’s “experienced” labor force during the same period, thereby demonstrating that Equity’s growth was well below the national average.

Equity's members also belonged to SAG and AFTRA, and that 73% of them admitted to have been actively seeking work in either of these two sister unions.<sup>123</sup> Adding to this assertion, the report claims "there is substantial employment of actors outside of the Equity jurisdiction, much of it probably under cards from SAG, AFTRA, and AGVA [American Guild of Variety Artists]"; the report goes on to state "the converse is not true."<sup>124</sup> This trend is consistent with a 1981 NEA report entitled, "Conditions and Needs of the Professional American Theatre," which cites data from 1977 showing 53.2% and 60.2% of Equity's membership also belonged to AFTRA and SAG, yet the opposite was the case only 32% and 39% of the time.<sup>125</sup> This same report also proves the sobering trend of unemployment confronting US stage actors. It claims that the "average member" of Actors' Equity found "less employment in 1976 than in 1961," and moreover, its findings indicate that between 1970 and 1976—the very years when regional theatres began jettisoning their permanent companies—only 40% of the union's membership "worked at all," and that the median annual salary of an Equity actor was a mere \$5000.<sup>126</sup> Needless to say, matters were becoming increasingly bleak for stage actors.

The employment history of alumni from Juilliard's Drama Division between 1972 and 1987 supports the claim that US actors have trended towards on-camera careers. The detailed records of the Juilliard Archive provide a clear indication of the professional trajectories of the school's graduates. Of the fifteen classes encompassing the years of

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 35, 38.

<sup>125</sup> "Conditions and Needs of the Professional American Theatre," May 1981, <http://www.nea.gov/research/reports/NEA-Research-Report-11.pdf> (accessed 17 March 2012).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

my study (the Drama Division's first class graduated in 1972), the available data demonstrates that each group had an average of fifteen students, 35% of whose careers could be identified predominantly as stage actors, 48% of whom have worked almost exclusively in film and television, and 18% evenly balancing between the two mediums.<sup>127</sup> This information was taken from a 2011 documentation of alumni activities, and therein differs from earlier accounts of the professional placement of Drama Division graduates, insofar as a 1980 report to the League indicates a slightly higher representation of theatre work.<sup>128</sup> Unfortunately, Carnegie and A.C.T are not as diligent in tracking the careers of former students, yet in the latter instance three alumni newsletters respectively printed in 1997, 2001, and 2003 are available at A.C.T's Allen Fletcher Memorial Library and offer some intriguing insights into the professionalization of the school's graduates. While a number of A.C.T graduates during the period of my study have attempted to follow the path of the acting program's most famous alumna, Annette Bening, a relatively high percentage of them have remained committed to lives in the theatre. Judging from the three newsletters, fifty-one individuals collectively list sixty-three theatre credits, whereas only nineteen alumni account for forty film and television jobs.<sup>129</sup> This information is consistent with commentaries by a number of students and instructors who were at A.C.T during the 1970s and 80s.<sup>130</sup> Scott Freeman, for instance,

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<sup>127</sup> List of Activities of Drama Division Alumni (as of August 2011), Juilliard School Archives.

<sup>128</sup> The Juilliard School's Annual Report to the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs, Juilliard School Archives, President's Records: Drama Division, box 32, folder 6.

<sup>129</sup> Alumni Notebook 1997, 2001, 2003, A.C.T's Allen Fletcher Memorial Library.

graduated with the class of 1985 and has been active in the US theatre as an actor and acting teacher ever since:

We were being totally and completely prepared for careers in the theatre. When I worked at A.C.T as a teacher years later I sat in on the auditions and we were looking for people who were grounded, earthy, curious about life and art, a person who would work well in a repertory company. We were not interested in how people looked or how they might become a commodified product.<sup>131</sup>

Freeman verifies another distinct feature of A.C.T alumni during the Ball years, which was the initiative to form independent theatres. Like their mentor Ball, graduates such as Richard Garner and Terrence O'Brien had the vision to start companies dedicated to classical dramas respectively at the Georgia and Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festivals. Other A.C.T alumni founded San Francisco's Encore Theatre Company, Pasadena's A Noise Within, and the Pacific Resident Theatre in Los Angeles, all of which have been receiving critical acclaim for decades and continue to make a positive difference in their given communities. Despite the profession's trending towards on-camera mediums, visionaries such as Geoff Elliot, Art Manke, and Julia Rodriguez (A Noise Within), as well as Stephanie Shroyer (Pacific Resident Theatre), all applied their training to something greater than a conventional career path defined by Hollywood, and by extension, the US marketplace.

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<sup>130</sup> Every former A.C.T teacher and student interviewed for this dissertation confirmed that the Advanced Training Program was primarily dedicated to preparing actors for the professional US theatre. See Warner Shook, interview with author, 18 January 2011; Victor Pappas, interview with author, 11 February 2011; James Haire, interview with author, 9 June 2011; Deborah Sussel, interview with author, 10 June 2011; Frank Ottiwell, interview with author, 11 June 2011; Kenn Watt, interview with author, 23 June 2011; Kate Levy, interview with author, 9 December 2011; and Judith Moreland, interview with author, 2 January 2012.

<sup>131</sup> Scott Freeman, interview with author, 22 December 2011.

Despite the visionary work of the aforementioned theatre artists, a great many A.C.T graduates during the 1970s and 80s typified *Newsweek's* so-called “new breed” of American actors. Alan Blumenfeld, for example, has over 150 credits listed on IMDb<sup>132</sup> and understandably prides himself on balancing a successful on-camera career with theatre work:

You can't make a living in the world as a professional theatre actor. A performing artist must be varied. One must be trained to be diverse. To act, write, direct. One must do film and TV as well as commercials and voice over work.<sup>133</sup>

In addition to making appearances as a character actor in multiple films and television programs, Blumenfeld has worked consistently onstage in the Los Angeles area at respected organizations like the Theatricum Botanicum and A Noise Within, the latter of which was co-founded by three fellow A.C.T graduates.<sup>134</sup> His idea of professional “diversity” extends to a business founded by his wife (A.C.T classmate Katherine James) and him that is designed to help lawyers develop their communication and performance skills.<sup>135</sup> Using his company (“Act of Communication”) as an example, Blumenfeld notes that “Actors and performers can find other things to do with their skill-set” to supplement their craft.<sup>136</sup> This has been the strategy of numerous League alumni, all of whom entered a grim marketplace upon graduation— and in many cases in debt from

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<sup>132</sup> For a complete list of Blumenfeld's on-camera credits, see <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012)

<sup>133</sup> Alan Blumenfeld, interview with author, 9 December 2011.

<sup>134</sup> Founded by A.C.T graduates Geoff Elliot, Julia Rodriguez, and Art Manke, A Noise Within is located in Pasadena, California and specializes in producing dramas from the European and US classical repertoire. Ellen Geer, who was a member of A.C.T's acting company during the 1970s, is the artistic director of Topanga Canyon's Theatricum Botanicum.

<sup>135</sup> For more on Blumenfeld and James's business, see their website at <http://actofcommunication.com> (accessed 17 March 2012).

<sup>136</sup> Alan Blumenfeld, interview with author, 9 December 2011.

student loans. Like Blumenfeld, the great majority of them first looked to film, television, and commercials to earn a living and accepted theatre work on a secondary and tertiary basis.

The careers of Blumenfeld's classmates also exemplify the commodifying trend the profession took during the 1970s and 80s. Belonging to the first class of A.C.T to have the option of earning an MFA instead of a mere certificate, Blumenfeld and six others graduated from the Advanced Training Program in 1977. This group included Katherine James (Blumenfeld's wife), J. Michael Flynn, Bartha Heiner, and Anna Deavere Smith. With the exception of Smith, whose oeuvre as a dramatist and monologist are well known, these actors have balanced stage acting with film and television careers.<sup>137</sup> James and Flynn have numerous regional theatre credits, including such prestigious institutions as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and San Jose Repertory Theatre, yet their collective resume largely consists of films as well as the multiple incarnations of television programming (episodic, miniseries, sitcom, soaps, specials, and pilots).<sup>138</sup> Heiner spent time teaching and acting with the Denver Center Theatre before moving to her current post on faculty at Brigham Young University's Acting Program.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, her IMDb page lists sixteen film and TV credits, thereby reinforcing the argument that since

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<sup>137</sup> Alan Blumenfeld, interview with author, 9 December 2011. In addition to having knowledge of the whereabouts of his own class, Blumenfeld is a dependable resource for tracing the career paths of A.C.T graduates in general, since he is also president of the school's alumni society.

<sup>138</sup> For more on the careers of Katherine James and J. Michael Flynn, see <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012); also Alan Blumenfeld, interview with author, 9 December 2011.

<sup>139</sup> See Bartha Heiner's professional biography at <http://cfacbeta.byu.edu/directory/heiner> (accessed 17 March 2012).

the eradication of resident ensembles at regional theatres, it has become nearly impossible to make a consistent living as a stage actor.<sup>140</sup>

A similar situation can be traced to the seventeen actors constituting Juilliard's class of 1977. Known at Juilliard as Group VI, this class has worked extensively in the US theatre over the past forty-five years, most notably Henry Stram, Harriet Harris, and Diane Venora. Stram and Harris have steadily performed on and off Broadway and at leading repertory theatres throughout the country, yet like their A.C.T counterparts, they have had to seek on-camera employment, as demonstrated by more than eighty such credits between them.<sup>141</sup> The same situation can be seen with Venora, whose career rose to prominence when she played the title character in Joseph Papp's production of *Hamlet* in 1983 and thereafter built an illustrious Hollywood career as a regular on episodic television (*Chicago Hope* and *Thunder Alley*), as well as starring in film roles opposite the likes of Robert DeNiro and Al Pacino.<sup>142</sup> Perhaps fellow 1977 Juilliard graduate, Frances Conroy, stated it best when putting her own stage career in perspective:

It's difficult to support yourself in the theatre a lot of the time. If you're in a show on Broadway or pick up some film or television work, or score a commercial or voice-over, it makes things easier. Theatre is an endangered species, and more often than not the economics of being in a play are definitely not to the actor's advantage.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> See <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012).

<sup>141</sup> List of Activities of Drama Division Alumni (as of August 2011), Juilliard School Archives; Henry Stram, interview with author, 9 July 2011; also see <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012).

<sup>142</sup> See <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012).

<sup>143</sup> Quoted in Holly Hill, *Actors' Lives: On and Off the American Stage* (New York: TCG, 1995), 125. Like many of her fellow Juilliard graduates during the 1970s, Conroy spent time with The Acting Company before pursuing a broader acting career that included film and television. This was a practice that changed during the late-1970s and early-1980s, as nearly all Juilliard actors turned down the opportunity to work with the Acting Company in favor of abiding by their agent's desire to market themselves as commodities in a profession that was increasingly driven by a quest for celebrity, a stature that was readily facilitated by film and television given each medium's potential for mass distribution. Also see Margot Harley, interview with author, 15 June 2011; and Henry Stram, interview with author, 9 July 2011.

Conroy's sentiments are reinforced by her contemporary and League graduate, Cherry Jones (Carnegie class of 1978), who despite her success onstage insisted that "[She] would like to do a couple of film roles" so that she would have "another ace to play when the theatre roles thin out."<sup>144</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned people, Juilliard's Group VI included a pair of superstars who failed to graduate, Robin Williams and Kelsey Grammar. As such, they are among a host of celebrities who despite not actually finishing their particular League program, went on to have successful careers (e.g., Juilliard's Kevin Spacey or A.C.T.'s Denzel Washington) and have since been acknowledged as alumni, presumably for the purpose of marketing the school.<sup>145</sup> Given the ever-increasing commodification of the profession, it stands to reason that these programs started foregrounding their more famous former students, as exemplified by Carnegie's 1985 Drama Department bulletin featuring photos and credit lines of their celebrity alumni, including George Peppard, Ted Danson, Jack Klugman, and numerous cast members of the contemporaneous television hit, *Hill Street Blues*.<sup>146</sup>

By contrast, Carnegie's training during the early-1970s was squarely focused on preparing actors for stage careers, with particular emphasis placed on getting students

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<sup>144</sup> Quoted in Holly Hill, *Actors' Lives*, 332.

<sup>145</sup> See A.C.T website featuring alumni at [http://www.actsf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=conservatory\\_alumni](http://www.actsf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=conservatory_alumni) (accessed 17 March 2012); also List of Activities of Drama Division Alumni (as of August 2011), Juilliard School Archives.

<sup>146</sup> 1985 Drama Department Bulletin, Carnegie Mellon University Archives.

jobs in regional theatre.<sup>147</sup> Under the leadership of Earle Gister, the Drama Department graduated actors such as Sheldon Epps and Barry Pearl, both of whom have had careers in the US theatre. Epps and Pearl are part of Carnegie's class of 1973, which graduated only six people, three of whom are still active professionally.<sup>148</sup> Shortly after finishing Carnegie, Epps became a director, amassing a long list of regional theatre credits, and today he is the artistic director of the Pasadena Playhouse, where he directed his former classmate, Barry Pearl, in the musical *Baby It's You* before moving it to Broadway in 2011.<sup>149</sup> Pearl's theatre career consists mostly of musicals, including the Broadway and national tours of Mel Brooks's hit *The Producers*. Claiming that he has "primarily done theatre," Pearl nonetheless admits that—like most American actors—he has had to support himself by taking film and television roles, which explains in part why he lives in Los Angeles and has a resume that includes the film version of *Grease*, a recurring role on the series *C.P.O. Sharkey*, and multiple appearances on *The New Love American Style* and *Superior Court*.<sup>150</sup> Epps likewise turned to film and television to augment his theatre career by directing episodes of *Frasier*, *Friends*, and *Everybody Loves Raymond*.<sup>151</sup> Like the majority of actors coming out of League programs, Epps and Pearl have had to balance their passion for the stage with the trappings of Hollywood.

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<sup>147</sup> Sanford Robbins, interview with author, 13 May 2011; also Jewel Walker, interview with author, 14 May 2011.

<sup>148</sup> In addition to the careers of Epps and Pearl, Carnegie's class of 1973 includes the film actress and screenwriter Nancy Hendrickson. For more on Hendrickson's career, see <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012); also James Braha (class of 1973), interview with author, 16 January 2012; Barry Pearl, interview with author, 21 January 2012; and Nancy Hendrickson, interview with author, 13 February 2012.

<sup>149</sup> James Braha, interview with author, 16 January 2012; also Barry Pearl, interview with author, 21 January 2012.

<sup>150</sup> Barry Pearl, interview with author, 21 January 2012.

<sup>151</sup> See Epps's on-camera credits at <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012).

The class graduating a year ahead of Epps and Pearl in 1972 consisted of sixteen actors: eight who achieved most of their success onstage, six who established on-camera careers, and two who left the business shortly after completing the program.<sup>152</sup> The class of 1972's most famous member is the TV star Ted Danson, whose former wife and Carnegie classmate (Randy) has gone on to “do what we were trained to do,” according to Nancy Foy, a fellow alumna of the program.<sup>153</sup> Randy Danson began her theatrical career in an Off-Broadway production of Tom Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound* before joining the acting company at Arena Stage for two years, a component of the organization that has long since been terminated. She followed up her time at Arena with forty years of steady—if not constant—employment at America's regional theatres, most notably such venerable institutions as the American Repertory Theatre, A.C.T, Actors Theatre at Louisville, and Berkeley Repertory Theatre, among many others. Danson's passion for doing theatre has caused her to reside in New York City and has often forced her to go on the road for work, thereby precluding employment opportunities in the more lucrative mediums of film and television. When asked during a recent interview how she has survived four decades of being a freelance stage actress, she responded, “One has to have a pretty modest lifestyle and be willing and able to live on unemployment between jobs.”<sup>154</sup> She has given her life to the stage, a choice that is altogether admirable if not

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<sup>152</sup> The following members of the Drama Department's class of 1973 enabled me to track the careers of its graduates from that year: Mary M. Mazziotti, interview with author, 23 January 2012; Nancy Foy, interview with author, 30 January 2012; Randy Danson, interview with author, 14 February 2012; John Roach, interview with author, 5 February 2012; and Martha Deering (class of 1971), interview with author, 19 February 2012.

<sup>153</sup> Nancy Foy, interview with author, 30 January 2012. Foy also graduated from Carnegie in 1972.

<sup>154</sup> Danson's major film credit is a supporting role in Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. See Randy Danson, interview with author, 14 February 2012.

financially rewarding.<sup>155</sup> The civic significance of being a stage performer is not lost on Danson, as she describes her work as something larger than any single casting assignment:

I believe that there is a spiritual aspect of the theatre and it is possible to change people's lives and I think that's important. I believe that we are all part of something larger than ourselves and that's one of the things that the theatre reminds us. The more we can affirm this idea the less possible it is to be hurtful or selfish or uncaring to others.<sup>156</sup>

Danson's eloquent remarks echo Tadashi Suzuki's rationale for founding the Toga Festival as they do Margo Jones's mission for spawning the US regional theatre movement. Bringing a group of individuals together to share in "something larger than themselves," an experience that is definitively communal, with performers at the ready to facilitate the speaking of and listening to texts—both literal and figurative—is an event that is nothing short of a ritualistic "encounter." To borrow yet again from Adorno, such an experience can indeed be termed "spiritual," as in many respects it is like going to church to share in something sacred with one's fellow parishioners. This noble endeavor was the impetus for many talented young men and women who entered League training programs throughout the 1970s and 80s.

The aforementioned claim is perhaps best demonstrated by Juilliard's first graduating class, most notably their participation in the Acting Company. Arguably the most prestigious class ever assembled in the history of American actor training, Juilliard's Group I (1972) included Kevin Kline, Patti LuPone, Gerald Gutierrez, and ten other

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<sup>155</sup> Randy Danson, interview with author, 14 February 2012; also Nancy Foy, interview with author, 30 January 2012. Foy has been a Hollywood casting director for more than thirty years and is currently Vice President of Feature Casting for Twentieth Century Fox. It is her business to keep track of the careers of actors, a fact that has made her an invaluable resource to this project.

<sup>156</sup> Randy Danson, interview with author, 14 February 2012.

individuals who went on to have exceptional careers.<sup>157</sup> While many of these actors ultimately established themselves in film and television, like their counterparts coming out of A.C.T and Carnegie during the early-1970s, they were first and foremost stage performers determined to put their training into practice.<sup>158</sup> Similarly to William Ball's pedagogical vision of having graduates join A.C.T's professional company, John Houseman founded the Acting Company to "extend the European ideal of a repertory company" and therein "bring theater to the American provinces."<sup>159</sup> Young actors coming out of Juilliard were therefore focused on their stage careers, and in the case of those joining the Acting Company, they subscribed to Houseman's "ideal" of a national touring troupe dedicated to serving communities throughout the US that would not normally be exposed to live theatre, much less classics of the likes of *Three Sisters* and *School for Scandal*.<sup>160</sup> Eight of thirteen members of the class of 1972 worked multiple years with the Acting Company, a feat that would be unheard of among newly minted

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<sup>157</sup> Among the other Group I graduates were Benjamin Hendrickson (a series regular on *As the World Turns*), Mary Lou Rosatto, Anne McNaughton Mathews, Jared Sakren, and Sam Tsoutsouvas (steadily employment in the New York City and/or US regional theatre), and David Schramm, Mary Joan-Negro, and Norman Snow, all who have amassed multiple film, television, and to a lesser extent, stage credits. Group I also included the TV star, David Ogden Stiers, whose claim to fame was his portrayal of Major Charles Winchester on the hit television program *M\*A\*S\*H\**. Though Stiers trained with this class, he did not officially graduate. See the Juilliard School Commencement Program 1971-1972 Season, Juilliard School Archives; also List of Activities of Drama Division Alumni (as of August 2011), Juilliard School Archives.

<sup>158</sup> Juilliard's class of 1972 made its mark in theatre before developing careers working on camera. While we know Kevin Kline, for example, because of his film roles, he spent nearly a decade working on stage before his first major Hollywood release (*Sophie's Choice*) in 1982. After Juilliard, Kline spent two years touring with the Acting Company and establishing himself as a legitimate stage actor in such works as the original production of Michael Weller's *Loose Ends*, as well as in a wide range of other Broadway and Off Broadway successes, namely Harold Prince's *On the Twentieth Century* (Tony Award), the *Pirates of Penzance* (Tony Award), and Liviu Ciulei's *Hamlet* for the Public Theater (a role Kline would reprise three additional times). For more on the careers of Group I, see List of Activities of Drama Division Alumni (as of August 2011), Juilliard School Archives.

<sup>159</sup> Linda Winer, "John Houseman Knew How to Pick'em: Kevin Kline, Patti LuPone and Other Leading Lights Recall Their Juilliard Days," *New York Daily News*, 16 February 1981.

<sup>160</sup> The Acting Company 1977-78 Brochure, Juilliard School Archives, the Acting Company Papers.

Juilliard graduates during the 1980s given the mounting pressure for young actors to land agents, get to know casting directors, and immediately embrace the commodified dictums of a fluid professional landscape. By the middle-1980s fewer and fewer Juilliard graduates were choosing to work for The Acting Company, and today the percentage is zero.<sup>161</sup> In the case of Group I, however, future stage and screen stars such as Patti LuPone and Kevin Kline initially chose to forgo Broadway and Hollywood in favor of developing their craft as they traveled the country “like the circus” on a bus that doubled as their “bedroom, bathroom, living room, [and] library.”<sup>162</sup> It seems just that this talented troupe would eventually expand their careers to include Broadway, the regional theatre, teaching, directing, and yes, Hollywood.

The 1973 graduates of A.C.T’s Advanced Training Program could also be seen as stalwarts of the American stage. Consisting of a class of roughly twelve individuals, after finishing the second and final year of the program, the likes of Victor Pappas, Warner Shook, and Barbara Dirickson<sup>163</sup> went on to achieve success in the US theatre.<sup>164</sup> Pappas and Shook established themselves as high profile directors, with the latter staging *The*

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<sup>161</sup> Margot Harley, interview with author, 15 June 2011; and Henry Stram, interview with author, 9 July 2011.

<sup>162</sup> Patti LuPone and fellow Acting Company member Mary Lou Rosato are quoted in Linda Winer, “John Houseman Knew How to Pick’em,” *New York Daily News*, 16 February 1981.

<sup>163</sup> Barbara Dirickson followed her star turn on a pair of TV series (*Lou Grant* and *Northern Exposure*) by becoming “a fixture on the Seattle stage.” Ruthe Stein, “A.C.T Veteran Barbara Dirickson Remains Onstage,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 August 1999.

<sup>164</sup> A.C.T’s Advanced Training Program was only two years until 1977 when the Western Association of Schools and Colleges allowed it to begin conferring MFAs with the provision that it became a three-year program. This criterion was also necessary for A.C.T to join the League. See Minutes from the League’s Annual Meeting 1975 and 1976, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson. Other notable graduates of A.C.T’s class of 1973 include Dan Kern and Michael Hume, both of whom have had careers working in the US regional theatre. Kern spent several decades working at major LORT theatres throughout the country and is currently head of Temple University’s Acting Program, and Hume has been a company member of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival for over twenty seasons.

*Kentucky Cycle* on Broadway to add to his long resume of regional credits, and Pappas balancing a career in the not-for-profit theatre with higher education; he was head of NYU's Graduate Acting Program for over a decade before retiring in 2011.<sup>165</sup> Similarly to A.C.T graduates who would succeed them, Pappas and Shook both credit William Ball's tireless commitment to an actor-centered aesthetic as the foundation for their training and the inspiration for their service to the American theatre.<sup>166</sup>

It is little wonder that numerous A.C.T graduates during the Ball era have taken leadership roles at theatres throughout the US. In addition to artistic directorships (e.g., Shook was head of Seattle's Intiman Theatre Company from 1992-2000), A.C.T alumni are department chairs, leading acting teachers, and regulars at regional theatres nationwide.<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless, nearly all of the school's alumni have been forced to seek work in film and television. As this chapter has repeatedly demonstrated, once permanent ensembles—such as A.C.T's company—disappeared *en masse* at US regional theatres, these exceptionally trained actors were reduced to fitting a marketable casting niche as defined by Hollywood. As Shook mentioned in a recent interview:

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<sup>165</sup> Warner Shook, interview with author, 18 January 2011; also Victor Pappas, interview with author, 11 February 2011.

<sup>166</sup> Warner Shook, interview with author, 18 January 2011; Victor Pappas, interview with author, 11 February 2011; also James Haire, interview with author, 9 June 2011; Diane Pritchard, interview with author, 9 June 2011; Deborah Sussel, interview with author, 10 June 2011; Frank Ottiwell, interview with author, 11 June 2011; Kenn Watt, interview with author, 23 June 2011; Geoff Elliot, interview with author, 12 November 2011; Kate Levy, interview with author, 9 December 2011; Alan Blumenfeld, interview with author, 9 December 2011; Scott Freeman, interview with author, 22 December 2011; and Judith Moreland, interview with author, 2 January 2012.

<sup>167</sup> Alumni Notebook 1997, 2001, 2003, A.C.T's Allen Fletcher Memorial Library; also see Warner Shook, interview with author, 18 January 2011; Victor Pappas, interview with author, 11 February 2011; also James Haire, interview with author, 9 June 2011; Diane Pritchard, interview with author, 9 June 2011; Deborah Sussel, interview with author, 10 June 2011; Frank Ottiwell, interview with author, 11 June 2011; Kenn Watt, interview with author, 23 June 2011; Geoff Elliot, interview with author, 12 November 2011; Kate Levy, interview with author, 9 December 2011; Alan Blumenfeld, interview with author, 9 December 2011; Scott Freeman, interview with author, 22 December 2011; and Judith Moreland, interview with author, 2 January 2012.

The Peter Donats and Elizabeth Huddles [two A.C.T company members during the 1970s] of the world don't exist anymore. Actors simply don't have the opportunity to pursue their craft and feed their children so they turn to Hollywood; they go off and make movies and then, maybe, do a play every two or three years.<sup>168</sup>

The remaining members of A.C.T's class of 1973 consisted of approximately nine others, seven of whom accounted for 128 on-camera credits as of the spring of 2012, thereby demonstrating that despite their stage training, they have had to adjust to the fact that by the early-1980s the professional landscape for US actors had significantly changed in favor of film and television.<sup>169</sup> Even Shook, who as a successful stage director would seemingly escape the lure of Hollywood, sought on-camera work earlier in his career.<sup>170</sup>

Balancing stage work with a career in film and television became increasingly necessary for League actors throughout the 1980s and thereafter. Juilliard's class of 1985, for example, consists of twenty graduates, nearly all who have chosen to work in film and television to some extent. Among this group are celebrities such as Wendell Pierce (HBO's *The Wire*) and Bradley Whitford (*The West Wing*), whose on-camera credits collectively total 147.<sup>171</sup> This group also includes the Hollywood-based dialect coach Howard Samuelson, who has worked on nearly 100 films;<sup>172</sup> fellow classmates

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<sup>168</sup> Warner Shook, interview with author, 18 January 2011.

<sup>169</sup> The remaining 1973 graduates of A.C.T's Advance Training Program included a pair of soap opera stars (Stephen Yates and Robert Perault), several series regulars (Deborah May, Roger Kern, and John Rue), and one other, Jerry Fitzpatrick, whose career was largely spent in Hollywood. To view the on-camera credits of these actors, see <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012). Michael Hume and Dan Kern, as mentioned in footnote number 163, each have had theatre careers since completing the Advanced Training Program in 1973.

<sup>170</sup> Misha Berson, "Stage Director Warner Shook Enjoys the Luxury of Being Choosy," *Seattle Times*, 15 July 2004.

<sup>171</sup> See the respective credits of these actors at <http://www.imdb.com> (accessed 17 March 2012).

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

Deena Burke and Ralf Zito have likewise used their voice and speech training at Juilliard to teach at the University of Delaware and Syracuse University, respectively.<sup>173</sup> As for the rest of Group XIV (class of 1985), eight people appear to have left the profession altogether and six have managed to make their living by combining theatre with a goodly amount of on-camera work, thereby exemplifying the professional trends dating back to the years of the League. Only J.C. Cutler has been able to work fulltime in theatre, having been a member of the Guthrie's core company since 1993.<sup>174</sup>

A.C.T's class of 1985, consisting of eight individuals, also demonstrates the professional trajectory League actors have been increasingly practicing since the middle-1970s. Three seemingly left the business (with two of them having enjoyed modest success working on television during the 1980s), three others became respected acting teachers, and one started a highly regarded classical theatre in Southern California; none currently make a living acting in theatre. In the latter instance, however, Geoff Elliot joined a pair of fellow A.C.T students (Julia Rodriguez and Art Manke) in founding A Noise Within during the winter of 1991 to "educate the public...[by] fostering an understanding and appreciation of history's greatest plays and playwrights."<sup>175</sup> Inspired by Ball's enterprise begun some years earlier and by their training at A.C.T, Elliot and his cohorts used their own money—a modest sum of \$3,000—to produce *Hamlet* at a Masonic temple in Glendale, a venue that more or less had been lent to them and would

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<sup>173</sup> List of Activities of Drama Division Alumni (as of August 2011), Juilliard School Archives.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Quoted in A Noise Within's mission statement listed on the company website, <http://anoisewithin.org/aboutus.html> (accessed 11 March 2012).

serve as their makeshift home for two decades.<sup>176</sup> For the past nineteen years the company has produced over 120 dramas for Glendale and its surrounding communities, and in 2011 A Noise Within moved to its current home in Pasadena, where it has been embraced by civic leaders and citizens alike. Elliot and Rodriguez consciously chose to forgo Hollywood careers in favor of committing to that which they were trained to do. Elliot noted as much in a 2010 *Los Angeles Times* article:

It didn't take me long to realize there were so few venues here for an actor trained to do what I loved to do. The TV and film work I got seemed incredibly unsatisfying. It seemed so insubstantial when you booked one of those jobs you wondered why you wanted it in the first place.<sup>177</sup>

The impetus for A Noise Within can be likened to a pursuit by another husband and wife team across the country, Claire Beckman and John Morgan, who also both graduated from League schools during the 1980s. The latter is an alumnus of the University of Washington's actor training program—and as mentioned earlier—Beckman finished Carnegie in 1984. Since 2004, Beckman and Morgan's brainchild, the Brave New World Repertory Theatre, has used Brooklyn-based theatre artists to bring plays and staged adaptations such as *The Tempest* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* to the greater Brooklyn community. Like their marital counterparts at A Noise Within, they have been focusing on their theatre company instead of attempting more conventional acting careers. Initially, however, Beckman did in fact try to establish herself in film and television. After graduating from Carnegie in 1984, like her classmate Laura San

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<sup>176</sup> Gary Ballard, "A Noise Within Founders Reaching Their Dream," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 November 2010. During the 1999-2000 season A Noise Within was in residence at California State University at Los Angeles and later returned to the Masonic temple in 2001. Also see Geoff Elliot, interview with author, 12 November 2011.

<sup>177</sup> Quoted in Gary Ballard, "A Noise Within Founders Reaching Their Dream," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 November 2010.

Giacomo, Beckman landed an agent from the League showcase, and her career immediately took off. She worked regularly in film, television, and commercials, most notably playing recurring roles on *All My Children* and *As The World Turns*. She also managed to work in theatre during this time—regionally and Off-Broadway—thereby joining numerous League colleagues who likewise typified the “new breed” of American actor.<sup>178</sup> Beckman’s class consisted of seventeen actors, yet only four continue to be active professionally.<sup>179</sup>

Despite the success of Elliot’s and Beckman’s respective organizations, neither has been able to hire a fulltime company of actors. Brave New World Repertory Theatre, for example, operates under an Equity showcase code that essentially permits its performers to work for free.<sup>180</sup> Like most not-for-profit theatres, these operations are constantly facing economic challenges. Yet both Beckman and Elliot proudly stress that they are home to a “family of artists” that therein “enables [them] to get things done in ways that [they] wouldn’t otherwise achieve.”<sup>181</sup> A company of artists with actors at its center is essential to both organizations, and thus allows them to serve their respective

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<sup>178</sup> Claire Beckman, interview with author, 12 July 2011.

<sup>179</sup> In addition to Beckman and San Giacomo, Carnegie’s class of 84 includes the New York stage actor, Thomas Jay Ryan, and the regional theatre director, Risa Brainin, both of whom have been gainfully employed for the past three decades. Brainin currently teaches fulltime in the Department of Theater and Dance at the University of California at Santa Barbara and has amassed an impressive resume consisting of over twenty-five years of directing at such regional houses as the Guthrie, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Ryan’s acting career is largely comprised of regional and Off-Broadway credits like the Shakespeare Theatre, Guthrie, and Signature Theatre Company. Ryan has also done a handful of film and television roles, namely the title character in Hal Hartley’s 1997 film *Henry Fool*. See Thomas Jay Ryan, interview with author, 1 July 2011; also Risa Brainin, interview with author, 13 July 2011.

<sup>180</sup> An Equity-approved showcase permits a producer to hire union actors for a limited run of a show without having to pay them a salary. In exchange for giving one’s talent and time to a production, the actor is provided travel money and the hope of promoting his work to industry personnel.

<sup>181</sup> These two quotes are respectively attributed to Beckman and Elliot. Claire Beckman, interview with author, 12 July 2011; and Geoff Elliot, interview with author, 12 November 2011.

communities, a mission strikingly similar to Margo Jones's vision for Theatre 47 some sixty-five years ago.<sup>182</sup> It was this concept that gave rise to the formation of the League as a training ground for America's future repertory actors. Steeped in the tradition and pedagogy of Jacques Copeau's Continental approach, programs such as Juilliard, Carnegie, and A.C.T joined forces with fourteen other schools during the League's seventeen-year history to establish exemplary standards in preparing select students to secure and develop the future of the US not-for-profit theatre. It was for this reason that the League formed a task force in the summer of 1986 that was intended to reconnect regional theatres with the consortium's programs. With Miller and the Guthrie's Garland Wright as co-chairs, the task force consisted of fifteen of the most esteemed theatre artists, producers, and teachers in the US at the time, including the likes of Michael Kahn, Isabell Monk, and Mark Lamos.<sup>183</sup> A separate advisory committee of more than forty additional luminaries was also established to support the efforts of the task force.<sup>184</sup> It would seem that the right people were in place to achieve the shared goal of strengthening American actor training and the not-for-profit theatre.

After a meeting in February of 1987, the task force reached several conclusions in the form of recommendations that were as follows: 1. to actively involve professional theatres with the League's training methods; 2. to involve these theatres in providing positions for League actors after graduating; 3. "to provide talented and intelligent young

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<sup>182</sup> Margo Jones, *Theater-In-The-Round* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 75-77.

<sup>183</sup> List of Names on the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs Task Force, 22 September 1986, private papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>184</sup> The advisory committee consisted of the likes of JoAnne Akalaitis, Arvin Brown, Gordon Davidson, Lloyd Richards, Mary Lou Rosato, Daniel Sullivan, and many other well-established professionals in the US not-for-profit theatre at the time. See "Task Force Advisory Committee," 22 September 1986, private papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

people with thorough training based on the theatre as an art form and as a social, political, and aesthetic instrument of our culture.”<sup>185</sup> The last criterion is striking, given its reference to theatre’s role in society and how the task force rightly recognized that the training of young artists—in this case actors—is vital to America’s cultural identity and must be fostered if the US theatre and its social role is to function with any degree of efficacy. Of course this requires some form of external funding, most especially from the US government—it is little wonder that the task force’s assertion was made in the context of the culture wars and the imbroglio surrounding the NEA.<sup>186</sup> Finally, this criterion underscores the League’s interest in training theatre artists who aspire to something larger than their individual careers, a defining attribute of several of the theatre companies cited earlier in this dissertation, namely the Group Theatre, Theatre 47, and Suzuki’s troupe in Toga, Japan.

A number of salient comments arose from the task force’s meetings, including Michael Kahn’s concern that student debt was predisposing graduates to seek more lucrative work in film and television, Mark Lamos’s lamentation that he had to offer the role of Prospero to forty different actors before one finally accepted it (the implication being that actors preferred to be available for pilot season), Malcolm Morrison’s telling suggestion that higher education and professional actor training were a “wrong” mix, and Jack Clay’s sobering admission that he was adapting his pedagogy to prepare students for

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<sup>185</sup> Minutes from Task Force Meeting, 2 February 1987, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>186</sup> For more on the culture wars and the involvement of the NEA, see Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Arts in Crisis: The National Endowment For The Arts Versus America* (Chicago, IL: A Cappella Books, 1994), 45-150.

the verisimilitudinous requirements of on-camera performance.<sup>187</sup> Perhaps John Dillon offered the most damning commentary when drafting an open letter to the committee dated for 11 December 1986:

If we continue to treat the young graduates of our training programs as just another indistinguishable batch of theatrical fodder, then we're going to find it harder and harder to persuade an actor to play Hamlet in Milwaukee when he knows he can earn double that being a spear-carrier on Broadway, and many times more spouting drivel on a soap opera.<sup>188</sup>

Despite these comments and the spirit of cooperation among this group of practitioners and educators, the task force was ultimately unsuccessful in its goal to inspire the professional and pedagogical spheres of US theatre into a mutually beneficial arrangement. Furthermore, the League's funding from the NEA was beginning to dry up, and a small but notable degree of infighting was becoming apparent among its members, most especially the desire of certain schools to withdraw from the organization and operate independently. In conclusion, the consortium voted to dissolve itself on 8 June 1987, a motion that became official that following August.<sup>189</sup> A number of the schools would continue to associate with each other, most notably a handful of the BFA-granting programs that in fact continues today.<sup>190</sup> This affiliation is defined more by style than

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<sup>187</sup> Minutes from Task Force Meeting, 19 October 1986, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

<sup>188</sup> John Dillon's Letter to the League's Task Force, 11 December 1986, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson. Dillon was the artistic director of the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre at the time.

<sup>189</sup> Official Announcement of the League's Cessation of Operations, 15 August 1987, personal papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson. The opening sentence of the announcement reads, "Effective August 31, 1987, the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs will dissociate its membership and cease all member activities."

<sup>190</sup> Carnegie Mellon University, Boston University, SUNY Purchase (now referred to as Purchase College), and the North Carolina School of the Arts still maintain a professional relationship, insofar as they try to synchronize their annual auditions and share the moniker of a consortium. However, they do not have the rigorous pedagogical allegiance and structure for communication that the League had.

substance, however, as these schools do not share the transparent communication and rigorous collegiality that upheld the League's standard of excellence throughout its seventeen-year history. In the words of the League's co-founder, the late Earle Gister, "A League school set and upheld a standard that was widely acknowledged and widely imitated. That achievement was substantial, far reaching, and of lasting importance."<sup>191</sup> Some twenty-five years since its dissolution, US actor training and the American theatre continue to owe a debt of gratitude to this remarkable organization and the numerous teachers, artists, and students that made it a reality.

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<sup>191</sup> Minutes from the League's Annual Meeting, 8 June 1987, private papers of J. Michael Miller and Sharon Jenson.

## CONCLUSION

### Towards an Entrepreneurial Approach to US Acting and Actor Training

*Industrial and commercial classes are to be found in all other countries as well as the United States, but only there is the whole community simultaneously engaged in productive industry and trade....They habitually put use before beauty, and they want beauty itself to be useful.*

–Alexis de Toqueville<sup>1</sup>

Today there are more than 150 universities in the US offering either a BFA or an MFA in acting. Presumably, all of them are trying to prepare students for work in any combination of mediums. In addition to these programs, there are literally hundreds of undergraduate theatre departments that offer a BA concentration in acting, as well as countless acting studios, academies, and teachers operating privately, all of which add to a growing list of people and institutions that comprise American actor training. In short, the training of US actors has become an industry onto itself, a point demonstrated by the ubiquity of advertisements lining the pages of *American Theatre* any given month.<sup>2</sup> Does this country really need several hundred acting schools? Can the profession even remotely provide employment for the thousands of young men and women that graduate from these programs each year? What is the overarching purpose to training US actors?

Perhaps the League's most significant accomplishment was that it set a professional standard for training actors that was a cut above nearly everyone else. In accordance with

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Perennial Classics, 2000), 455, 465.

<sup>2</sup> For a useful critique of the commercialization of US actor training programs, see Lissa Tyler Renaud, "Training Artists or Consumers? Commentary on American Actor Training," in *The Politics of American Actor Training*, ed. Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud (New York: Routledge, 2010), 76-93.

the League's mission to develop actors to work in the not-for-profit theatre, schools like Carnegie and A.C.T admitted select students to train under master teachers who implemented a psychophysical curriculum. As J. Michael Miller claimed during his address to the Second National Congress of Actors and Acting Teachers, actors used to be "the pulsing heart" of the US regional theatre, insofar as they were "the center of the event."<sup>3</sup> This privileging of the stage actor and his craft has faded since the 1960s and early 1970s. Beginning with the demise of repertory and the permanent companies that performed them, the US regional theatre fast became yet another component of a society driven by the consumption of commodities, which for actors has meant creating a niche for themselves in an industry dominated by celebrity, a characteristic that is best facilitated by film and television. In fairness, there is nothing inherently wrong with these on-camera mediums, however, when they displace the practice of stage performance, they minimize the actor's craft and something of value is lost.

The very root of theatre rests in its unique ability to bring a community of artists and spectators together to share in the speaking and listening of stories—be they literary or devised—that formulate a live event. To echo Miller, actors have historically been at "the center" of this experience. Theatre has always been more of a performer's medium than film and television. To the extent that actors have agency in the on-camera mediums, it is largely defined by their celebrity, otherwise identified as the ability to generate ticket sales and "buzz" on behalf of a given project simply because of one's fame and fan base. The actor himself is a commodity for consumption in such an instance. Even if a film or television performer is not a household name, as is the case

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<sup>3</sup> J. Michael Miller, "Keynote Address to the Second National Actors Congress of Actors and Acting Teachers," 12 January 2008, <http://www.theactorscenter.org/Congress.html> (accessed 15 September 2009).

with many guest stars or those appearing in smaller supporting roles, he is nonetheless hired to play a specific character type to meet a project's commercialized aims, a contrivance that will define and thus limit how he is cast thereafter.<sup>4</sup> Although on-camera performance requires a certain degree of talent and skill, the actor's work is ultimately edited according to the director's vision, which in turn is usually under the auspices of a commercial producer, thereby making the enterprise a decidedly commodified one. A film or television project's cast must also serve such an effort. On-camera performers are therefore hired "for their visual appeal as much as their acting skill," to generate "the largest possible audience to the [project] and to the messages of its advertisers."<sup>5</sup> This is of course how the entertainment industry works.

To be sure, the US theatre is not free from commercialism. The Broadway stage best exemplifies this point, insofar as it is dominated by musicals featuring spectacular sets and costumes at the expense of the work of actors (e.g., *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*). Merely a handful of dramas appear on Broadway each year, and most often they are produced with a celebrity in a major role. For example, of the eight plays running on Broadway at present (April 2012), seven of them have at least one star performer. When considering that the exception is a British transfer (*One Man, Two Guvnors*), a distinction that somewhat alleviates the commercial need for using stars, there is not a single drama

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<sup>4</sup> The Vice President of Century Fox's Feature Casting Division, Nancy Foy, confirmed in a recent interview that an actor's physical type is a dominant criterion for casting film and television roles. While theatre is not immune to typecasting, its convention of suspended belief enables directors to take a more imaginative approach to placing actors in roles. See Nancy Foy, interview with author, 24 January 2012.

<sup>5</sup> David Eulus Wiles, "Beyond Race and Gender: Reframing Diversity in Actor-Training Programs," in *The Politics of American Actor Training*, ed. Ellen Margolis and Lissa Tyler Renaud (New York: Routledge, 2010), 125.

that consists of an American cast that does not have a celebrity among its ranks.<sup>6</sup> In the words of Warner Shook, “The Broadway theatre is ridiculous, you need to have Madonna and Jesus Christ in *The Gin Game*, and even then they’ll probably only agree to a three-week contract.”<sup>7</sup>

While Shook’s remark is hyperbolic, his point is understandable. Celebrity dominates our culture, and by extension, American theatre and acting. Even US not-for-profit theatres now look to Broadway for cues in picking a season, and if they are lucky, mount productions that eventually move to the Great White Way, thereby bringing a windfall of symbolic and economic capital to its originators. From the McCarter in Princeton to San Diego’s La Jolla Playhouse, numerous regional theatres have transferred work to Broadway since Arena’s *The Great White Hope* started the trend in 1968. This practice contradicts Margo Jones’s original mission to decentralize America’s professional theatre from the commercialism of Broadway, and to therefore provide a cultural service to local communities nationwide through the work of permanent acting companies. Places such as A.C.T and the Guthrie exemplified this model during the 1960s and the early-1970s to great effect. Today the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is the only year-round organization in the US operating with a permanent ensemble performing in repertory, a feat that requires exemplary skill and stamina on the part of its actors, all of whom comprise the “center” of the theatre-going experience for the organization’s patrons. The “Festival” likewise functions as Ashland, Oregon’s identifiable point of interest, as numerous bed

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<sup>6</sup> *One Man, Two Guvnors* also had the cultural capital of hailing from London’s National Theatre with Nicholas Hytner as its director, thereby providing it the necessary cachet for a Broadway run. US theatre has historically taken its cues from England, as exemplified by America’s fascination with Shakespeare since the eighteenth century. See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 11-82.

<sup>7</sup> Warner Shook, interview with author, 18 January 2011.

and breakfasts, hotels, restaurants, and shops line the town's quaint streets. People come from all over the country to share in the Ashland experience, which of course is contingent on seeing the company's multiple offerings occurring in repertory.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the Festival bears a reciprocal relationship of service with the greater Ashland community.

Unfortunately, the Oregon Shakespeare model is a rarity, as the great majority of not-for-profit theatres ape Broadway and follow Hollywood's dictum of casting according to type and celebrity. This point is argued by scholars and professionals who have been working in the US theatre and actor training for decades. The former artistic director of the Dallas Theatre Center, Richard Hamburger, identifies America's "celebrity culture" as the culprit in compromising the repertory model and the regional theatre's founding commitment to provide a range of actor-driven dramas to communities nationwide:

American audiences like musicals and plays that are tremendously accessible and have roots in television and film. Ours is a film country, a celebrity country. I think the regional theatre model was great for a while, but now something new is needed.<sup>9</sup>

Hamburger spent over twenty years at the helm of three different theatres and also taught at Juilliard for five years. He has seen firsthand how the economic realities confronting regional theatres forced them to assume a commercialized agenda, a move that had direct implications for American actor training. The theatre scholar and acting teacher, David Krasner, supports Hamburger's claim in recalling the Alley Theatre's choice to hire Keanu Reeves to play Hamlet in 1995. Krasner describes this act as an acquiescence to

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Ashland Chamber of Commerce, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is the "cornerstone" of the town's tourism market and played to 94% capacity—a remarkable figure—for the 2010-11 season. See <http://www.ashlandchamber.com/Page.asp?NavID=441> (accessed 14 April 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Hamburger, interview with author, 7 January 2012.

celebrity culture by one of the not-for-profit theatre's pioneers: "When I heard about Keanu Reeves doing Hamlet at the Alley, my whole idea of the regional theatre scene came crashing down." A graduate of Carnegie Mellon's class of 1974, Krasner claims that the Alley's commodified casting choice not only changed his view of the US not-for-profit theatre, but also of the training programs preparing actors to work in them: "That experience [casting Reeves] by and large killed the kind of training I underwent. The market was changing and so were the training programs."<sup>10</sup> At present, Krasner teaches at Emerson College in Boston and confesses that "actor training has become more about personality than versatility," an opinion shared by his former Carnegie classmate, Sanford Robbins, who argues the "need to fill multiple roles with versatility is lost today."<sup>11</sup>

Robbins heads the Professional Theatre Training Program (PTTP) at the University of Delaware and has been an active participant in the US professional theatre for the past forty years. He studied both acting and directing at Carnegie, founded the PTTP, and interned under William Ball at A.C.T during the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Like Hamburger and Krasner, he has seen the US regional theatre and actor training develop into complementarily commercialized institutions over the years. According to Robbins, the loss of versatility in professional acting has caused actors to "find their type" in navigating careers in all sectors of the profession, most especially film, television, and commercials, given each

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<sup>10</sup> David Krasner, interview with author, 26 January 2012.

<sup>11</sup> David Krasner, interview with author, 26 January 2012; also Sanford Robbins, interview with author, 13 May 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Robbins originally founded the Professional Theatre Training Program at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee during the late 1970s, and then moved it to its current location at the University of Delaware in 1989.

medium's bent for specified casting. Marked by the jettisoning of permanent companies, regional theatres started casting on a show-by-show basis during the 1970s and stopped employing an ensemble of resident artists to work fulltime for a given theatre, and by extension, its community of spectators. To his credit, Robbins has formed a resident acting ensemble at Delaware, where a core group of eight classically trained professionals work alongside the theatre program's MFA students to bring a variety of dramatic styles to Newark's general public. Appropriately named the Resident Ensemble Players, his company has produced everything from Shakespeare and Moliere to Brecht and a commissioned Theresa Rebeck play on behalf of an audience that balances college students and members of the local community.<sup>13</sup> While his enterprise is still in its formative stage, Robbins's model could exemplify a new direction for connecting US actor training and the professional theatre.

Delaware's Resident Ensemble Players demonstrates an *entrepreneurial* venture in US theatre and actor training, insofar as the term applies to thinking innovatively and using creative resources as an act of public service, as opposed to the more conventional understanding of entrepreneurship as a blithe pursuit of economic capital. Echoing Robbins's can-do attitude, recent Carnegie graduates have started their own company to create a niche for themselves in the American theatre, including the Exit, Pursued by a Bear (EPBB) and PigPen Theatre ensembles, both of which have been producing critically acclaimed work as part of New York City's downtown theatre scene. In the case of the former, 2005 Carnegie alumnus, Ethan Hova, is a company member who describes the importance of working with a group that is dedicated to a shared vision:

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the Resident Ensemble Players, see the company's website at <http://www.rep.udel.edu/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 23 April 2012).

I don't need to be auditioning for film or Broadway right now. I am on this path of staying in the game and remaining open to my development as an actor. Whatever career path I'm building for myself is specific to the training that I received at Carnegie.<sup>14</sup>

When Hova and EPBB's founder (Ed Sylvanus-Iskandar) were at Carnegie, they annually partook in the Drama Department's three-day festival of devised theatre simply known as "Playground," in which students would generate original work as part of a multidisciplinary effort to promote independent projects. A similar situation currently exists at A.C.T's Advanced Training Program in that students are required to create a one-person show.<sup>15</sup> Juilliard's Drama Division has likewise adopted an entrepreneurial approach to actor training, as mandated by its president, Joseph W. Polisi, who insists that its students "have to be entrepreneurial" by developing writing and critical thinking skills, as well as having a basic knowledge of liberal studies, towards balancing an intellectual life with their chosen *métier*.<sup>16</sup> Although the majority of a Juilliard actor's coursework focuses on his craft, unlike the Drama Division during the 1970s and 80s, classes in the humanities round out the curriculum for students to gain "a deeper understanding of themselves and the complex world in which they live."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ethan Hova, interview with author, 5 June 2011.

<sup>15</sup> James Haire, interview with author, 16 June 2011.

<sup>16</sup> A topic ripe for further study in US actor training is the role of liberal studies in the education of theatre artists, and conversely, theatre's role in the context of a liberal arts curriculum. In the latter instance, a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article entitled "The Liberal Arts as Guideposts in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" makes a strong case for the role of the humanities (and by extension, theatre studies) in an undergraduate education in that it "hones the mind, teaching focus, critical thinking, and the ability to express oneself clearly both in writing and speaking skills." See Nannerl O. Keohane, "The Liberal Arts as Guideposts in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 3 February 2012.

<sup>17</sup> For a description of Juilliard's commitment to liberal arts as foundational to a performing artist's education, see the school's website at <http://www.juilliard.edu/degrees-programs/liberal-arts/index.php> (accessed 14 April 2012).

The Drama Division's administrative director, Kathy Hood, has been in her position since 1988 and has seen the program undergo fundamental changes, especially the practice of deploying theatre as community service. Hood claims that using one's training to serve communities is "addressed and supported" by Juilliard's administration, and moreover, "many of the drama students gravitate to service work and think of it as an important part of their training and their future life."<sup>18</sup> Under the leadership of Polisi, whose text *The Artist as Citizen* is an unofficial guide to Juilliard's three degree-granting programs, the Drama Division strongly encourages its students to use their talents and training to make a difference in the world. For example, the school provides multiple fellowships in return for student participation in outreach programs that bring the arts and arts education to "disadvantaged children" in the greater New York City area.<sup>19</sup> Drama students have taught workshops in acting and improvisation, for instance, by partnering with places such as the Hunts Point Alliance for Children and the Harlem School of the Arts. Others have teamed up with colleagues from Juilliard's Music and Dance Divisions to create multidisciplinary service initiatives that extend from teaching impoverished children in Tanzania to visiting the sick in local hospitals. One of the most remarkable service accomplishments generated by Juilliard students is the formation of the Artists Striving To End Poverty (ASTEP) initiative, an organization that provides arts education to "underserved youth" throughout the world for the purpose of promoting "creative thinking, problem solving, and collaboration."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kathy Hood, interview with author, 19 July 2011.

<sup>19</sup> For more on Juilliard's outreach programs, visit the school's website at <http://www.juilliard.edu/community/outreach/teaching.php> (accessed 15 April 2012).

One of the Drama Division's most exemplary graduates in the area of social service is Evan Todd (class of 2008), who describes a "really amazing spirit of generosity" among Juilliard's students and faculty that feeds a "concept of giving back to the community" that is "essential to the school's energy."<sup>21</sup> In addition to participating with ASTEP, Todd has been part of Juilliard's other social initiatives that had him teaching improvisation to youth in Utah one summer and theatre games in rural Tanzania the next. After these experiences, Todd decided he wanted to create an arts program for his hometown of Kissimmee, Florida. Consequently, he raised grant money to start the Osceola Arts Intensive, an initiative that continues to provide drama, music, and dance instruction to roughly 100 high school students for two weeks during the summer. His latest project brought him back to Africa (South Africa) to work with youths living with HIV, a cause for which he raised the necessary funds to underwrite the service-work and travel expenses of a team of artists that included the Tony Award winning lyricist Dick Scanlan. Todd estimates that approximately three-fourths of the Drama Division's students either participate in one of Juilliard's outreach programs, or they volunteer for student-generated service projects such as his brainchild in Florida. Needless to say, his work marks a departure from the school's operating procedure during the 1970s and 80s.

Administrative Director Hood depicts the Drama Division as a "more compassionate, supportive, and nurturing" environment today than it was during the Houseman, Schneider, and Langham eras. Though the program still remains committed to a rigorous

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<sup>20</sup> Juilliard students founded the Artists Striving to End Poverty (ASTEP) in 2003 with the purpose of using their respective art forms to "give back" to underprivileged communities. Since its inception, ASTEP has conducted fieldwork in Tanzania, South Africa, India, and New York, among other places. For more on the organization's history and mission statement, see <http://asteponline.org/2011/ourstory> (accessed 15 April 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Evan Todd, interview with author, 31 August 2011.

psychophysical curriculum, and many of its graduates continue to find employment at the highest levels of all sectors of the acting profession, the department's culture has changed from one driven by a draconian cut system and a militaristic conception of discipline to a "caring" environment that has redefined how to measure professional accomplishments:

We prepare people by providing them with the craft and skill to succeed professionally while also facilitating their curiosity and their openness and developing their intellect to the fullest possible extent. At a certain point, they have to go out and make whatever they're going to make. But if you try to figure out the business, I think it's a losing proposition. We haven't neglected the business. We're doing much more preparation for film and television and voiceovers and books on tape, and we prepare people to be responsible to the industry in that way, but we're not beholden to the industry either.<sup>22</sup>

To borrow from President Polisi, this change is perhaps best described as "entrepreneurial."<sup>23</sup> Unlike the days of the League when students were following a prescribed career path for a sector of the profession that was quickly diminishing (repertory ensembles at regional theatres), today Juilliard's actors are armed with intellectual skills and an abiding curiosity in social service to complement their preparation for stage and on-camera careers. In addition to graduates finding success in theatre or the on-camera mediums, the Polisi era has provided Juilliard's actors with the know-how and initiative to use their training to build multi-faceted careers that reward them—and others—in ways that include—yet transcend—monetary compensation.

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<sup>22</sup> Kathy Hood, interview with author, 19 July 2011.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Kimball Gallagher and Amanda von Goetz, "Dr. Joseph Polisi on Improving the Environment for the Human Spirit," *Notes on the Road: The Interview Magazine for Arts Professionals*, <http://notesontheroad.com/joseph-polisi.html> (accessed 23 April 2012); and Joseph W. Polisi, *The Artist as Citizen* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2005).

Perhaps the Juilliard model can offer possibilities for the development of US actor training in the twenty-first century. During the League years, students were accepted to a given program solely on the basis of their talent, and they trained exclusively for a life in theatre. However, today “[actors] can’t make a living on a theatre salary,” and therefore they must find industrious ways to use their talent and training, which includes community outreach and becoming a teacher: “I think a lot of our people find their voice in teaching as a result of the outreach opportunities, as well as people who have actually started not-for-profit programs because they are interested in dedicating their lives to using the arts as a form of service to the world.”<sup>24</sup> In addition, others might follow the lead of Ethan Hova and his colleagues from Carnegie and start their own theatre company. The A.C.T alumnus and former Head of NYU’s Graduate Acting Program, Victor Pappas, recommends as much: “What I think is needed is that actors who are trained should start creating their own theatre.”<sup>25</sup>

However, the issue has less to do with student interest in starting companies than with acquiring the capital to support such ventures. As Alexis de Toqueville noted some 175 years ago, America is a decidedly utilitarian society that privileges commerce and industry at the expense of the arts and culture.<sup>26</sup> One need look no further than the US government’s tepid commitment to arts funding, an amount that pales by comparison to other industrialized nations, to arrive at this conclusion.<sup>27</sup> Multiple scholars have

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<sup>24</sup> Kathy Hood, interview with author, 19 July 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Victor Pappas, interview with author, 11 February 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 465-68.

addressed the unfortunate matter of arts funding in the US, including Baumol and Bowen as well as James Heilbrun and Charles M. Gray, among numerous others.<sup>28</sup> While America's regional theatres share part of the blame for compromising US stage acting by redirecting funding from their permanent companies to their architectural infrastructure and marketing campaigns, the fact remains these organizations have always operated with limited resources. If the US is to value its stage actors, some form of external funding is necessary to underwrite its not-for-profit theatres, be they venerable institutions such as many of those comprising the League of Resident Theatres, or developing troupes like EPBB, Brave New World Repertory Theatre, and A Noise Within. If we want to have a flourishing artistic presence in our society, the government must provide adequate financial support, and therein set an example for other contributors to follow. I am not naïve enough to think that this situation is going to demonstrably change in the near future. Given this set of socioeconomic circumstances, it is crucial that actors—and those that train them—create their own opportunities to practice and hone their craft through self-generated projects that strike a tangible and measurable presence in society, much like the fine work being done by Evan Todd and his Juilliard colleagues. By virtue of living in a culture driven by capital gain and the consumption of material goods, actors are faced with the choice of either succumbing to the system's hegemonic forces,

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<sup>27</sup> Despite the minimal financial support from the federal government, since the late-1970s, in some instances, there has been considerable arts funding occurring at the state and local level. Generally speaking, however, a company needs to be established and have earned a certain degree of cultural capital to be awarded external funding, a conceit that makes it doubly challenging for emerging organizations. See Joseph Wesley Zeigler, *Arts in Crisis: the National Endowment for the Arts Versus America* (Chicago: IL, A Capella Books, 1994), 25-44.

<sup>28</sup> William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, *Performing Arts The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music, and Dance* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1966); James Heilbrun and Charles M. Gray, *The Economics of Arts and Culture: An American Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Jack Poggi, *Theatre In America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968).

or they can manage their way around and within it by choosing an entrepreneurial path that both invites and deploys creative thinking, critical analysis, and civic responsibility as part of a strategy that enables them to survive financially, and practice their craft while making a positive difference in the world. Only then can actors once again become “the center of the event.”

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## **Interviews**

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Claire Beckman, Carnegie Mellon University alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 12 July 2011.

James Braha, Carnegie Mellon University alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 16 January 2012.

Alan Blumenfeld, A.C.T. alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 9 December 2011.

Risa Brainin, Carnegie Mellon University alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 13 July 2011.

Jack D. Clay, Southern Methodist University faculty member, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 3 October 2011.

Martha Deering, Carnegie Mellon University alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 19 February 2012.

Geoffrey Elliot, A.C.T. alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 12 November 2011.

Nancy Foy, Carnegie Mellon University alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 30 January 2011.

Scott Freeman, A.C.T. alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 22 December 2011.

Rebecca Guy, Juilliard alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 26 July 2011.

James Haire, Managing Director of A.C.T., interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 9 June 2011.

Richard Hamburger, former Artistic Director of the Dallas Theatre Center and Portland Stage Company, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 7 January 2012.

Margot Harley, Artistic Director of the Acting Company, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 15 June 2011.

Kathy Hood, Administrative Director of the Juilliard Drama Division, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 19 July 2011.

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David Krasner, Carnegie Mellon University alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 31 January 2012.

Kate Levy, A.C.T. alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 9 December 2011.

Donald Marinelli, Carnegie Mellon University faculty member, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 17 July 2011.

Mary M. Mazziotti, Carnegie Mellon University alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 23 January 2012.

William Metzso, former student of Stella Adler's, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 17 December 2010.

J. Michael Miller, President and founder of the League of Professional Theatre Training Programs, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 18 February 2011.

Judith Moreland, A.C.T. alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 2 January 2012.

John Morgan, University of Washington alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 31 July 2011.

Frank Ottiwell, A.C.T. faculty member, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 11 June 2011.

Victor Pappas, A.C.T. alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 11 February 2011.

Dougald Park, A.C.T. alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 22 December 2011.

Barry Pearl, Carnegie Mellon University alumnus, 21 January 2012.

Diane Pritchard, A.C.T. staff, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 10 June 2011.

Sanford Robbins, Carnegie Mellon University alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 13 May 2011.

Thomas Jay Ryan, Carnegie Mellon University alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 1 July 2011.

Jay O. Sanders, SUNY Purchase alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 31 August 2011.

Laura San Giacomo, Carnegie Mellon University alumna, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 25 August 2011.

Lester Thomas Shane, former Carnegie Mellon University student (cut from program), interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 7 July 2011.

Warner Shook, A.C.T. alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 18 January 2011.

Deborah Sussel, A.C.T. faculty member, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 10 June 2011.

Jewel Walker, Carnegie Mellon University faculty member, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 14 May 2011.

Evan Todd, Juilliard alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 31 August 2011.

Arthur Wagner, University of California San Diego faculty member, 10 June 2011.

R. Emmit Walz, Carnegie Mellon University alumnus, interviewed by Peter Zazzali, 13 January 2011.

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