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Martha, Martha, Martha: Searching for Truth in Imaginary Circumstances.

Chelsea Kinser

East Tennessee State University

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Martha, Martha, Martha
Searching for Truth in Imaginary Circumstances

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors

By

Chelsea Kinser
The Honors College
Fine and Performing Arts Program
East Tennessee State University

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Cara Harker, Faculty Mentor

Karen Brewster, Faculty Reader

Scott Koterbay, Faculty Reader

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Martha, Martha, Martha
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Introduction:

This thesis represents a truthful exploration and critique of my work as an actor in the play *Beautiful Bodies* by Laura Shaine Cunningham. The play was directed by Professor Patrick Cronin and performed by six East Tennessee State University Department of Communication/ Division of Theatre and Dance students in the fall of 2012. The process began in early September when auditions were held. The rehearsal process lasted seven weeks, and the show opened Thursday, October 18th and ran through Sunday, October 21st, 2012 in the Bud Frank Theatre located on the ETSU campus. In what follows, I discuss my creative process and the ways in which my character and my craft evolved through the run of the play. I draw connections between my performance of the character, Martha, and the skill and knowledge I acquired through the ETSU Theatre Program. I discovered that the art and craft of acting is grounded in truth. I came to understand experientially what appealed to me intellectually in Sanford Meisner's statement that acting is, "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances," (Stinespring 23).

Part I: Acting Techniques

Over the course of my four years of training at ETSU, I learned the acting techniques developed by Constantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasburg, Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, and Michael Chekhov, among others. Now, I introduce the first of these "masters"— Constantin Stanislavski. Born in Moscow, Russia, Stanislavski began his road to success (and perhaps enlightenment) at a very

early age. Joining his first theatre troupe at the age of 14, his acting technique developed over the years to become one of the most well-known and widely utilized acting methods in America. In his book, *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski states that the *Stanislavski System* focuses mainly on the actor's persistent need to be *believed*, regardless of whether or not he / she is accepted or understood.

One of his earliest methods, *emotional recall*, relies on the actor's ability to remember the preeminent emotional experiences of his/her life, channeling them into the present scene or situation. If the actor cannot pull from personal emotional experience, he/she must use *the magic-if*. In other words, an actor must ask him/herself a series of *what-if* questions in an attempt to discover how a *character's* response may differ from that of the *actor's* (Sarwoski 7). Of all the methods I've studied, I initially felt that I identified most with Stanislavski's system, particularly his concept of *emotional recall / memory*. To quote Elizabeth Hapgood, who translated Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares*, "What is noteworthy is that...Stanislavski realized the flaws of Emotional Memory, and discarded it as ineffective and even potentially dangerous (Sarwoski 22)." I will discuss later in this thesis how *emotional recall* proved effective in performance, but it caused me a great deal of emotional turmoil off the stage. Stanislavski is, in many ways, the "father" of method acting. His ideas created the basis for a revolution in acting technique—inspiring the teachings of Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, and Michael Chekhov.

Lee Strasberg, born November 17, 1901, in the Ukraine, was a student of Stanislavski. Using Stanislavski's ideas, Strasberg developed a method that encompassed the utilization of inner emotional experiences by molding them into

caricatures of emotion, as opposed to realistic emotional responses. His technique explores exaggerated physical expression, making every day responses larger than life. This allows the audience to easily recognize the character's objectives or tactics. In a sense, he is giving the audience a simple physical representation that can be easily interpreted or understood, (*Constantin Stanislavski* 4).

Like Stanislavski and Strasberg, Meisner developed the concept of personal truth for the actor. He said, "The actor's chief instrument is himself. And since no two persons are alike, no universal rule is applicable to any two actors in exactly the same way" (Meisner xviii). Meisner's stance was that acting technique cannot be taught; rather, each individual must take the training he / she has acquired solely as inspiration for his own technical and emotional pathway. The method is different for every actor because it relies on an individual's truth. In other words, each individual has a repertoire of experience that defines his or her own personal method. Meisner says, "The creative teacher in America finds his [her] own style, that is to say his [her] own method, as indeed every artist must," (Soloviova, Adler, Meisner, and Grey 140). Essentially, there is not a universal system.

Stella Adler combined the use of the imagination with organic human response. Unlike Stanislavski's method of *emotional recall*, the actor must imagine a circumstance and pull real experience and emotion from it. Regardless of the actor's ability to pull from personal experience, Adler suggests that the actor must create this emotional experience by allowing the *character* and the self to merge into one being, thusly, allowing the *character* to discover true

emotional responses. Regardless of the actor's experience as a person, he or she must, as a *character*, discover the experience. Adler states, "Each new thing must be experienced...if it is not experienced, it is not truly absorbed." (Soloviova, Adler, Meisner, and Grey 141). Although Stanislavski coined the phrase *the magic-if*, asking and answering any possible *what-if* questions, Adler's work appeals to this concept through the strong belief that, "the theatre exists 99% in the imagination," (*About Stella Adler* 4). Michael Chekhov, a student of Stanislavski, fostered the technique that is known as *the psychological gesture*. This method does not rely on memories, imagination, or analysis. Rather, it relies on *action* - a simple, clear, and repetitive gesture (Gordon 208). Chekhov and Stanislavski teach that a true physical gesture triggers a true emotional response. Through the *psychological gesture*, "you will further discover that the *kind* of movement you make will give your will power a certain direction or inclination; that is, it will awaken and animate in you a *definite* desire, want or wish," (Chekhov 65). In other words, sincere physical choices inspire sincere emotional responses.

Chekhov believed one could discover the same emotional reactions with the use of imagination, imagination meaning, implementing *the magic-if* in lieu of digging up old pains, or executing *emotional recall*. How does one find this so-called sincere external gesture to convey internal emotion? Chekhov makes this technique psychological and physiological using active verbs in the text, as opposed to Stanislavski's *emotional recall* tactic. For example, if the text calls for an actor to burst into tears because they discovered their father died, instead of recalling the emotional woes they experienced when their *actual* father died,

during the rehearsal process the actor should create and repeat active verb phrases that will inspire a true emotional response. They could pound a fist to their heart (to signify heartache) and repeat aloud, “Father died. Father died. Father died,” until the actor believes it to be true, thus triggering the wave of emotions and tears associated with that kind of loss. The *psychological gesture* applies to more than the emotional element of acting; it also applies to the mental aspect. It aids in creating the essence of the character, their soul, their physicality.

Together, these important figures revolutionized the tools that an actor can utilize in the search for honest, organic, and artistic expression. I believe technique is attained through experience, however, these unique yet cohesive methods encourage growth not only in an actor’s technique on stage, but also in their self-certainty and emotional availability as a human being. What is acting? Truth. Being true to the moment, the character, and to oneself.

Part II: Play Analysis

Another important aspect of an actor’s job when creating a character is to analyze the script as closely as possible and to research the play’s production history. As expressed on her website, *Laurashainecunningham.com*, *Beautiful Bodies* by Laura Shaine Cunningham, the production in which I would perform as my thesis capstone experience, had its world premiere at *The Whole Theatre Company* in Montclair, New Jersey, in the 1980s. It was directed by Broadway and film director, Vivian Matalon, and produced by Academy Award-winner, Olympia Dukakis. It was optioned for Off-Broadway, however the funding fell through. It was then produced at the world famous Steppenwolf Theatre in

Chicago and has since been produced in over seven different languages. It is currently “widely produced throughout Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, The Netherlands, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland,” and made its way to Johnson City, Tennessee. The play, *Beautiful Bodies*, is a portrayal of New York City life from the perspective of six women at various stages of adulthood. In the original, the playwright intended the characters to be roughly late thirties / early forties, however the director of the ETSU production conceived them as a decade younger. With a cast of eighteen to twenty-year-olds, it made much more sense to Patrick Cronin, the director of the production, to have us play twenty-five instead of thirty-five. The play takes place on a present-day winter night in a Manhattan apartment at a baby shower thrown by five of the women for the sixth.

The apartment belongs to Jessie, an established author, who hosts a baby shower for their friend, Claire. Nina, bold in dress, body, sexuality, and attitude, is the first to arrive. Lisbeth, a wispy, rather flighty, and deeply emotionally wounded woman arrives shortly after Nina. These three women commiserate about the likelihood of the downfall of the evening’s festivities when Martha (my character) arrives. While Martha sees herself as supportive, truthful, and even inspiring, her friends see her quite in contrast as self-centered, brash, and even rude. Much of the tension of the play is grounded in the power that Martha seems to have in directing the mood of their gatherings. This is not the only tension characterizing the evening. Sue Carol, a waitress striving to be an actress, (a “wacktress,” in Sue Carol’s terms) arrives next, brings with her a host of expected emotional turmoil after leaving her husband for cheating on her. These five friends anxiously

await the arrival of Claire who has been impregnated by a mystery man of a one-night-stand. The women explore a spectrum of feelings about their own issues as well as Claire's pregnancy and the reaction Martha will have once Claire arrives.

Struggling in their own way with individual versions of a "mid-life crisis," each character confronts and wrestles with supreme crises of grown-up proportions: money, relationships, career, and identity. The most provocative theme of their collective story is the complexity of human relationships. As in life, the experiences of these six friends juxtapose admiration with jealousy, joy with anger, isolation with connection, fear with bravery, and resentment with forgiveness.

Beautiful Bodies refuses to choose between portraying women as strong or weak, rather it shows them as simultaneously very powerful and very vulnerable. This is one of the play's most refreshing qualities. So often in media portrayals, women are either fragile, emotional, and incapable creatures, or heartless bitches who have no depth of human emotion. In *Beautiful Bodies*, however, strong, career-minded women are also troubled by love and friendship and the prospect of a family. Ultimately, the friends experience a transformation of sorts as they see the usually stoic Martha have a melt-down. As she melts, she reveals her surprisingly delicate spirit as well as her benevolent intentions. They broaden their understanding of Martha and each other. They come to recognize that there is more beneath the surface, such as with Martha and her breakdown, and sometimes the truth only emerges when the surface cracks.

By determining the *given circumstances* of the play - the who, where, what, why, when, and the how (Handy 1), we determine what information we are

given by the playwright and use it to draw inferences from the text about the characters, the relationships between them, and how they relate to their world.

Applying this approach to *Beautiful Bodies*, prompts the questions:

<i>Who are we?</i>	We are six friends: Jessie, Nina, Lisbeth, Martha, Sue Carol, and Claire.
<i>Where are we?</i>	We are in the living room of Jessie's studio apartment in Lower East Manhattan.
<i>What are we doing here?</i>	We are having a baby shower for Claire.
<i>Why?</i>	Claire is pregnant and we haven't seen her in months.
<i>When?</i>	It is present-day on a winter evening amidst a snowstorm.
<i>How do we relate?</i>	We are all at pivotal moments in our lives.

Jessie, for instance, is known best for her long-term-long-distance relationships as well as penning her sexual self-help books. She is independent and well-established career-wise. Her wardrobe is comfy-casual and warm, as is her apartment. However, she grows less comfortable with being alone. After being in all these long-distance relationships and not having sex for about three years, she is near her wits end. Once so comfortable alone, Jessie comes to realize that she craves intimacy. She wants to remain independent, but she longs for a co-pilot.

Nina's claim to fame is her saucy and blatantly sexual behavior - bright and bold in every facet of her life. She is the heaviest-set of the six. When she is not crash-dieting, she's shoving cake down her throat. Nina, the most static character of the play, does not change through the course of the text. We know very little about Nina.

Lisbeth, the sickly-skinny one (Nina says she has “no ass”) is still hung up over her ex-boyfriend, though it’s been a year since Steve drifted out of the picture. She prides herself in her job as a Zoloft model, claiming that she wants to work her way up to modeling for Paxil. Her romantic life has reached a plateau, and she may even be getting kicked out of her apartment any day now due to the fact that her apartment is not rent-controlled. She isn’t paying very much for it, and the landlord wants Lisbeth out so the landlord’s son can move in.

Martha, the outcast of the play, traipses into the baby shower with loads of expensive gifts and a domineering attitude. When she’s not talking about her current lavish real estate sales, she brags about how much money she has or trips she and her (schmuck of a) partner Donald take, or she is denouncing anything positive by brashly spitting her point of view to the others. She is persistent about making sure to tell her friends anytime they are together about how they need to find a secure job, settle down, get married, and have children.

Sue Carol is a complete mess. Not only is she a starving artist, she fears getting older and in turn, the theatre world deserting her, leaving her to be a washed-up dinner theatre actress - her nightmare. She also works late nights, lots of hours per week, waitressing at a fancy restaurant, only to come home to another woman’s hair in her bed. This wouldn’t be a problem if she wasn’t married, however she is. Her husband has been having an affair - her other worst nightmare. She arrives at the party with all of her belongings hoping to start fresh from the shambles in which her life resides.

Claire is the antithesis of Martha. She is a free-spirit. She carries the baby of a one-night-stand and is not bothered about being a single mother. It will be a fun and terrifying adventure for her!

Beautiful Bodies is not just about six friends from New York; it is about six unique women drawn together celebrating their imperfections with beauty and depth. Each brings to their mutual friendship different bodies of knowledge. Their knowledge, and the experience from which they came, offer the audience a wide array of relatable, and therefore redeeming, human qualities. In this way, the play is a story that is likely to endure.

Part III: Acting Journal: Scenes from the Process

The following is a selection of acting journal entries, which reveals my apprehensions in preparation for performance:

September 6, 2012

(Afternoon before first blocking rehearsal) I was never planning to audition for *Caesar: 2012*, the other main-stage production that opened later in the fall of 2012. I felt *Beautiful Bodies* was more right for me, type-wise. I planned to read the play multiple times over the summer, but never got around to it - I worked at a summer camp, and that is LITERALLY a 24/7 job for 9 weeks, and IF I had time to read, I was nearly passing out from exhaustion.

Finally, a few weeks before school started, I read Act I (and parts of Act II). Pat Cronin, the head of the Division of Theatre and Dance, also my step-father, told me that Martha, the bitchy-Real-Estate-Agent-character, was the best character for me - that I could play that type really well, and as I read, I found myself agreeing with Pat. Out of all the characters (all going through a mid-life

crisis) Jessie - a successful independent writer, Nina - a salon owner / hopeless romantic, Lisbeth - a lovesick Zoloft model, Martha - an bitchy Real Estate Agent (also the glue of the play), Sue Carol - an actress in the middle of a divorce, and Claire - a baby mama of a one night stand, *Martha* was the right character for me.

I heard the first scene of Act I and various monologues throughout the script were the audition material, so I read the material multiple times by myself, then practiced the scene work with my mother and a friend of mine, analyzing the script as we went. Working the scenes before auditions helped me get a grip on the character, but not nearly as much as reading the monologues helped. The monologues helped me solidify the character, Martha. About a week or so before auditions, I fostered my skills, knowledge, and more! And I felt *very* prepared for auditions.

Days before the auditions, I finally got around to reading most of the script. That is the most preparation I have ever done before an audition, which is ridiculously unprofessional, but that was my method...Yikes. I went into previous auditions blindly, maybe briefly reading Sparknotes to give me a better idea, but never reading the entire script. I am not a slacker, I swear, I just have a stressful way of doing things.

I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD / ADD, so it's REALLY difficult for me to sit still and focus on ANYTHING for long...but sometimes I can hyper-focus (and no, it's not as fun as it sounds) for *hours on end* (seriously...like twelve hours rearranging my room back and forth), sometimes on the most miniscule things like fixing my hair, choosing my clothes, rearranging things, organizing, writing, writing and re-writing sentences when my handwriting

doesn't look uniform, etc. And I ALWAYS wait until the last minute to meet a deadline (or something of that nature). I will get it done. It may be turned in at the last last last minute, and it may need some work, but I'll get 'er done.

Anyway, technically, I still hadn't finished reading and analyzing Act II, but I definitely knew more about my character and the context of the play than any other audition I've "prepared for," (plus, if I focused on feeling unprepared in the slightest, I'd psych myself out, feel guilty for not preparing myself more, and blow the audition. Fake it till you make it, y'all).

I believe this past year of school really helped me gain the ability to analyze a script while reading it, to see the world the characters are living in - what colors represent them, what surroundings create them, etc. Most of that credit goes to Theatre Design Basics - a class I struggled in, but now the skills I honed haunt me with awesomeness. I learned SO much in that class about given circumstances and how designing the play (technically, scenically, and costumically. And yes I am aware that costumically is not a word, but just go with it, k?), is JUST as important, if not more important than the acting / performance aspect of theatre. Plus the design process is so beautiful and fun, I almost might like it more than acting! Maybe.

Then came time to audition. Not only did I have to prove that I deserved to be cast in the play to the director, but I had to prove it to everyone else there; I didn't want to receive any backlash for being cast in Pat's play since he is my stepdad - I had to be the best person in there. I feel like I was, not to toot my own horn. I had a much better idea of the production than most of those girls in there, and bitchy is easy for me to play naturally, surprisingly enough.

The first scene didn't end up having Martha in it, which was kind of annoying, considering I'd spent so much time working on her, but I rolled with the punches, and I felt pretty confident. However, a part of me still questioned whether Pat would cast me; there was a TON of talent at those auditions. At callbacks, I became a little more wary than the previous night; I felt unsure. I had fallen in love with all of the characters and was questioning whether Martha was right for me after all. It seemed too easy. I wanted something more difficult, something I'd really have to work on, however when we started doing other scenes that had Martha in them, I felt I filled the position best.

I ended up being cast as Martha, and once I heard of the rest of the cast, it made total sense. I really was the best person for that specific role. I questioned some roles, however. Pat keeps saying how there is not a weak person in our cast, and I disagree a little, but over the course of these next six weeks, I am sure that will change. Our cast is so young, and I am the oldest one, most of them have not even been in a main stage production. It will be a growing experience for all of us, I am sure.

I planned to read the play again before the first rehearsal, the read-through, but I failed to do so. I planned to try to lose some weight, but Christine (the costume designer) told me not to, that I was perfect for the role the way I was. Other preparations include getting off script ASAP; I believe I will truly be able to dive into my character the way I would like if I am off book.

Martha is a snobby mother goose. Her snobbery provides somewhat of a comic relief for the audience, and I understand how to convey that kind of comedy. However, Martha has a break down at the end, which makes her a more

concrete character. Of all the women dealing with their mid-life crisis, Martha - the friend who no one really likes, but everyone keeps around because *sometimes* she's cool, but most of the time she's very obnoxious, and no one knows how to tell her, so they all just talk about her behind her back. Also, she's extremely wealthy, and sometimes it's nice to have that around; if any of the other women were in a jam, they could count on Martha to save them.

Martha is the most, put-together, and by put-together, I mean independently successful, of the six women in the play. However, toward the end of the play we learn that she is the one falling apart the most.

September 14, 2012

Our first rehearsal was a read-thru. All of us: the 6 females cast plus the understudy, our two stage managers, and Pat sat at a table and Pat discussing how he wants this production to go. He wants it to be real. He said he doesn't want it to be a caricature of women and their relationships with each other and their significant others, such as *Gossip Girl*, however, he doesn't want it to be as dark as HBO's hit show, *Girls*.

Toward the beginning, I had the "bitchy" side of Martha down, with her quick snappy lines, but toward the end, I started to lose my grasp on the character as she grew more concrete, more serious.

September 16, 2012

Tonight was very stressful. I almost cried. I felt like I had no idea what I was doing and that I was asking too many questions. I also realized that it is difficult for me to work with Pat, perhaps the main reason being that he is my stepfather, and the lines between our professional and personal relationship is blurred to me. I like his directing style, but at the same time, I want to be told what to do - cross left, cross upstage... not "just see where the line takes you." I'm just afraid I'm going to do something wrong and look like an idiot in front of my peers. I don't have directions to write down, and I'm a visual and auditory person, so when I'm not given directions to write down, I can't remember anything! I learn my lines by linking them with repetitive and consistent movement. All I know is that I want to be off book as soon as possible. I want to be reading my lines multiple times every day so that I have them down. The most difficult thing about tonight is having that giant script in my hand; it is holding me back. I cannot look at the other people on stage and connect with them because I am too busy looking at my script. I am also out of the game a little; I haven't been in a main stage production since Spring 2010, which doesn't sound like that far away, but it really makes a difference.

I felt a lot better after we took a break. I brought up the fact that I felt a little out of practice and stressed about doing "the wrong thing" and not being up to performance level, and Pat told me not to worry about a thing - that this is what rehearsal is for. It was extremely intimidating tonight. Other women intimidate me due to my own feelings of inadequacy, but now that rehearsal is over, I feel the cast will be close. As we rehearsed the scene more and more, I felt more

comfortable in my role. I thought from time to time, maybe someone else would have done a better job as Martha, or perhaps, I should have been cast in a different role, but now I am disregarding those negative thoughts!

September 17, 2012

Tonight went much more smoothly. I do not understand why I put so much pressure on myself. We began with a different character's entrance, so I think that took some of the pressure off me. I am beginning to go with my natural instincts. I feel like the cast as a whole was more productive today, as we are all beginning to understand our characters and our interpersonal relationships. Pat keeps talking about how he wished the play were directed by a woman - that it would probably be an entirely different production if it were. He really cares about this play being authentic,

September 18, 2012

Tonight was so-so. I cannot decide if I like this "organic directing" or not. On one hand, it is nice because he is very open to new ideas and input from the cast, but on the other hand, it can be very stressful and unorganized and I do not feel like our time is used efficiently. Everything just feels very garbled and jumbled, but we all do have decent chemistry together, the cast and director...I'm going to try to make it even better. I want lots of cast bonding to happen. Perhaps that will help things feel more conversational and less forced at times.

Part IV: Reflections: Analyzing the Process

Pablo Picasso once said, "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up," (Michalko 1). This quote strikes me because I took art classes as a child, and during one class we created—in the style of

Picasso, where nothing does or has to make any sense at all—clay faces in pie pans. The face that I created that day is rather horrifying now that I look at it, but back then it was ART. As I grew older, I grew very fond of the performance facet of art: singing, dancing, acting, playing music, et cetera. Now, I am a senior theatre major at East Tennessee State University. My pressing passion—my art—is acting. I want to remain an artist once I grow up, and I recognize that I am on the verge of reaching actual adulthood. What does that mean? Perhaps it sounds simple; graduating college, taking off on my own, and trying to make a living off the skills (or methods) that I have mastered as an actor. Throughout my entire college career, I have studied the methods of whom I believe to be the masters of acting.

Although I studied many methods, I never thought of using the *psychological gesture* while in rehearsal because I honestly knew very little about it. I held onto the method of *emotional recall* because it felt more truthful to me; however, I have learned how truly dangerous that can be. I used *emotional recall* to conjure up true feelings during my breakdown on stage. But those real life traumas I was tapping into to create my character's motivation were still hurting me personally in a very raw way. I was breaking down in my real life, while breaking down on stage.

I also used the *psychological gesture* without even being conscious of it. It is only now in analyzing my experience that I realize *psychological gesture* proved very effective for me on stage and did not give me the emotional hangover that *emotional recall* did. To get into character, I would stand backstage before my entrance and repeat to myself, "My name is Martha!..... My

name is Martha!..... My name is Martha!” almost twenty times until eventually the physicality of Martha presented itself. This ritual made me stand tall and confident with an air of snobbery. If I ever felt I was losing character, I would tip-tap my nails impatiently on any surface available. For some reason, this gesture fit my idea of Martha.

I have learned that *emotional recall* is not an effective method for me at this point in my life, and as an artist in training, I have discovered what I need to do in order to achieve inspiration on stage and I have learned and continue to learn about balancing the demands of my art with the demands of my personal life. As when analyzing the script, one must look at the *given circumstances*, which, as discussed before, is the who, what, where, why, when, and how - the back-story, basically. Researching these key elements assists an actor’s comprehension of the character’s world. In order to understand my method for this particular character, it is important to understand *my given circumstances*.

Before the process of *Beautiful Bodies* began, I was dealing with a severe emotional crisis. It felt like everything caved in on me. I trapped myself in my own personal hell, and it followed me; it trickled into my academics, my emotions, my home life, and professional life. It took a huge toll on my emotional, mental, and physical health.

I gained 30 pounds in a matter of weeks and self-medicated with alcohol, sex, drugs, shopping, and fast food. I stopped exercising, I stopped going to school, and I started smoking cigarettes. I was at an extremely crucial moment in my life - my senior year - my year to shine - and I was losing it. I could barely take care of my dog or myself. I felt disconnected with everyone and everything. I

could not remember anything either. I slept all day - slept through classes, slept through therapy appointments. However, I never slept through a single rehearsal, and I was always on time, but my head was never in a good place; I was an emotional wreck. And in using emotional recall, I stirred up all kinds of extremely recent memories, emotions, and regrets, namely, a recent and most painful breakup of an off and on boyfriend for three years.

We met and fell deep in love summer of 2010 and dated off and on for about three years, until it came to an abrupt stop. He moved on. I did not. I tried my best to get over myself. Instead I turned into whom I like to call, “Intoxichelsea,” the side of me that took over, poisoned by my negativity and self-loathing, not to mention booze. Also, the anxiety of working with my stepfather tacked on more emotions I could not shake. As I mentioned before, the lines between our personal relationship and our professional relationship blur to me at times.

When your *mother* is the head of the department your division is under, and your *stepfather* the head of your division, and *your* friends and teachers talk about or mention your mother and stepfather what seems like all the time (and not always kindly), and you try your damndest to be the kind of daughter that honors her parents by taking into consideration your every action and word because they could potentially reflect negatively on your parents - *constantly* monitoring what you do or say, and secretly resenting them for that, and if that does *not* affect your view of “being off on your own” and taint your idea of “the college experience,” and if you’re not at all bitter about *being* in that position your

entire college career, you let me know, because God DAMN, you must be a super-human. That is so much pressure for one person to handle; I cannot even express the angst I feel at times. I put a lot of that pressure on myself, I am aware, but who doesn't pressure themselves?

I was not solely dealing with that pressure, oh no. I was having a mid-mid-life crisis. On the brink of my mid-mid-life crisis, I was battling a monstrous depressive episode that turned into a shit-storm. Fall 2012, I experienced the WORST depressive episode within the five years of my clinical diagnosis. This worried not only me, but my friends, family, and close professors to death - no one had ever seen me like this. I could not remember my lines to save my life - I was not comfortably off-book, (lines memorized) until the second dress rehearsal, one day shy of Opening Night. This put Pat in a tricky position because I was scaring him from a director's standpoint - what would he do if I couldn't go on? - if I had a mental breakdown?- it also worried him from a parental standpoint. No one had ever seen me like this, not even me.

Pat called and asked me about four or five days before tech rehearsal (when the crew comes in and assigns lighting and sound cues for the performance), if he needed to cancel the show, and I responded with gushing tears in my eyes, "I honestly have no idea. I don't know what's wrong with me," feeling extremely guilty for the possibility of embarrassing either of my parents. I could *not* deal with the pain of embarrassing them, so I gritted my teeth and stumbled through the dress rehearsals until the performances came around, and I was not scared anymore. The show must go on! And it did. Every night my performances felt better, but there was still that fear of completely blanking on

stage - embarrassing my cast-mates, director, and the playwright (who saw EVERY PERFORMANCE, including dress rehearsals, which I felt were the worst and most butchered performances on my behalf), however I did just fine.

Everyone told me I was wonderful in *Beautiful Bodies*. I wasn't at my best, but hey, at least I didn't kill myself, right? I honestly did the best I could given the complications; I still wonder how differently the product would have been had my brain and soul not been so fried.

Looking back at it now, I hated myself throughout the ENTIRE process of *Beautiful Bodies* - I hated every second of it, and I still hate it right *this* very second. I hated myself, I hated the rehearsals, I hated my performances, and I hated my attitude. I looked forward to it NEVER. I would say on a daily basis, "I cannot wait until *Beautiful Bodies* is over I cannot WAIT for *Beautiful Bodies* to be OVER," early on. I was poisoning myself and felt more self-loathing and guilt than ever before, and I became sicker and weaker. I was trapped again. What was the cause of this emotional hurricane? Heartbreak.

Heartbreak! It sounds silly, but it is a very real source of pain for me, and my pain was powerful.- "When the actor's reactions are more powerful, inspiration can appear. On the other hand, don't spend your time chasing after an inspiration that once chanced your way. It is as unrecoverable as yesterday, the joys of childhood, as first love," (Hapgood 189). Perviz Sawoski wrote, "Stanislavski System was seen in a generation of American actors whose only emphasis was on 'internal work based on personal experience,'" (Sarwoski 22), or from what my freshman-year Acting I notes say: the goal is to play the role as naturally and realistically as possible, tapping into your past emotionally. However, I do not

know if I will ever do that again, emotionally recall my past. It's much too painful. From now on, I shall try using the *psychological gesture*.

I have learned in my four years of training as an actor that I work best when I am moving. Movement is my Muse. Whether I am dancing, acting, playing guitar, or going for a run, my head and my heart balance. I have also come to the conclusion that *if* I am to use emotional recall, I need to make sure that I am taking care of myself physically. I cannot allow myself to slip into another slump as I did in the fall. Also, I am still a work in progress - I am an artist in training. It may take me years to find "my method," but I am one hundred percent sure that the *psychological gesture* proves extremely effective as a part of my method.

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Appendix

During my role as Martha, I kept a personal journal (I keep one in general). I enjoy expressing myself through journaling by way of pictures (see pages 36-41 for photo journal), reflections on the day, reflections on life, writing songs and poetry, and documenting things that really strike me. Sometimes there is a doodle here and there. The entries do not necessarily pertain to Martha, per se, but they give an accurate explanation of exactly how I felt during the process. During this production, I slipped into a depressive funk, and it is quite apparent in the journal entries. So buckle up, it is going to be an interesting ride!

September 14, 2012

What's stopping me from drinking

In the afternoon

Just a bit from the bottle

it'll get better soon

September 17, 2012

Mix me up with the worms

in the mud

in the cold hard ground

anywhere but here

let the grubs make a meal

out of my flesh and bones.

September 18, 2012

YOUR TEACHERS ARE NOT YOUR THERAPISTS. KEEP YO' SHIT TO YO'SELF.

I want to:

- go to New York, Cali, Chicago, Boston, Ireland, and Chucktown

(Charleston)

*clean my room and get it lookin' good

*couch & chair & desk over here

- find a home for Duncan (my dog)

* get eyebrows and things waxed

- start a food journal?

I need to:

*make appointment w/ doctor

*work out regularly

*clean my shit and get shit together

*hang out with Sarah?

* find a home for Duncan

*manage my \$\$ better

*get organized

*catch up with school work

*new glasses

*straighten room at Dad's

*bring my bike over

*CHARACTER STUDY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

What is so fucking funny?

why is everyone so fucking

H A P P Y

SHUT

the F U C K

up with your laughter.

I can't hear

all my sad thoughts with

your boisterous

laughter in

my ear

October 7, 2012

Darlin' don't feel alone

There's a place in my heart

You can always call home

It's been rough here lately

rough for the both of us

but we can do it

tear thru the grit and the grime

barrel our way thru it

come on girl, don't be sad

think of all the times we've had

you put your hand up on my hip
and a kiss up on my lip
can't you feel it, I'm ready to go
with my body screaming yes
no time to second guess
can't you feel it, I'm ready to go

and I want you all to myself
and I want you all to myself

things are getting harder
too much heat dries up the water
can't you feel it, I'm ready to go
I don't think I can resist
with your hands binding my wrists
can't you feel it, I'm ready to go

and I want you all to myself
and I want you all to myself

October 14, 2012

There was a CD you made me
before you came to visit.

When I listened to the third track
number 3

I couldn't help but smile

You knew me so well.

I listen to that CD, God knows
how many times

Then the summer came
and when I listened to the songs
while you were off with Her,
my attitude changed.

Every day I saw you with Her.

You used to be mine.

But I melted along.

slow and gloppy
until the summer was over.

I still feel melty.

like an old grilled cheese sandwich
on moldy bread

Moldy and Melty.

I used to look good.

No one wants a spoiled sandwich

in the corner tucked behind the coffeemaker.

Yesterday I rummaged through my old CDs

popped yours in & drove around

Track 3

The song that sandwiched my summer.

There was an old CD you gave me

Haven't heard it in ages (ages)

I always listen to Track 3, baby

Because it's my favorite (favorite)

Why don't you call me anymore

Why don't you call me anymore

You don't have to explain yourself

I can't help but be sad (sad)

You're off with someone else

And I just miss you so bad (bad)

Why don't you call me anymore

Why don't you call me anymore

There was an old CD you gave me

Haven't heard it in ages (ages)

I always listen to Track 3, baby

Because it's my favorite (favorite)

Why don't you call me anymore

Why don't you call me anymore

October 16, 2012 (Two days to Opening Night)

GIVE ME SOMETHING THAT WILL MAKE IT BETTER

give me something that will make it better

F U C K T H I S
S H I T.

give me something

to make it all better

give me something

to take this all away

I've tried, I've tried

but I can't let it go

oh, give me someone to hold

give me something

to distract my brain
give me something
to numb all the pain

I've tried, I've tried
but I still feel the same
oh, give me someone else to blame

give me someone
to call my own
give me a house
that I can call a home

I've cried, I cried
All my tears dried up
Oh, give me someone to love

October 18, 2012 (Opening Night)

I refuse to quit
but I really think I'm losing it

There's a mob outside my door
they've got their torches & pitchforks
and they want answers

October 22, 1012 (One day after Closing Night)

Those who have my heart

they don't appreciate it

those who have my heart

they can't reach it

im getting tired of

trying to teach it

somebody betta recognize

Photo Journal

Production Photos:



Top row: Alexis Turner (Lisbeth), Chelsea Kinser (Martha), Hannah Hasch (Sue Carol)

Bottom row: Callie Barber (Jessie), Courtney Spencer (Claire), Aryn King (Nina)



Martha's Real Estate Spiel



Beginning of Act II

From left to right: Martha (Me), Claire (Spencer), Lisbeth (Turner), Jessie (Barber), Sue Carol (Hasch)



Martha's Breakdown

From left to right: Lisbeth (Turner), Jessie (Barber), Nina (King), Sue Carol (Hasch), Martha (Me)



The Understanding (Whole Cast)

Cast Bonding!



From left to right: Me, Aryn King (Nina), Emily Werner (Assistant Stage Manager), and Hannah Hasch (Sue Carol)



I took everyone out for dessert for Lexi's (Lisbeth) birthday, a very Martha thing to do.

Top left: Aryn King, Hannah Hasch, and Alexis Turner

Top right: Courtney Spencer and Aryn King

Bottom left: Emily Werner

Bottom right: Me!

**Behind the Scenes
Snapshots of the Process:**



Load-in day

(cast and crew complete and assemble the set)



My Fancy “Martha Cigarettes”
These are about \$10 per pack, but the gold filters made it worth the money



What I called, “The Fill Station”
I turned to The Fill Station to wind down after rehearsal.

Personal Snapshots



Left: I took this when I realized I became addicted to cigarettes
Right: When I was on the brink of being dependent on alcohol



Above: This is Intoxichelsea.

Poisoned by negativity.