

## Teaching in Cuba: a voice teacher's awakening to the effects of commodification on the learning process

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No cell phones interrupting, no instant look up on my iPhone app, no *I know better than you* knowledge, no consumer attitude to feeling, sensing, listening. The world of consumerism isn't part of the conversation or learning. After a tough year of tap-dancing my way around the "prove it/I'm paying for answers" attitude, I'm reveling in this tropical utopia where privilege does not bar the body from accepting. (Personal Journal Entry)

Over the course of my lifetime, Cuba has meant many things to me. It has been part of my liberationist, revolutionist identity and I have romanticized its culture and politics. Now, my experience in Cuba has cast into sharp relief the shifting paradigm in my teaching environment and the shifting relationship to my students. As I write in the criticism that follows, my experience as a visiting instructor teaching voice in Cuba has also allowed me to understand and consider more fully my teaching environment at Arizona State University. I had a series of realizations about how the commodification of learning in the United States has affected my classroom.

It is my hope that the use of storytelling will illustrate more clearly my experience; I will also draw upon selected findings from the fields of psychology, economic sociology, and somatic education. I hope to raise critical questions about how the language of the marketplace affects my ability to teach voice to my students at Arizona State University. I aim to speak to other voice teachers and bring their attention to the trend in academic capitalism, the commodification of our classrooms, and the effects on our students as they try to find their voices and bodies under this pressure and in this paradigm.

I begin with a narrative of my teaching experience in Cuba.

### Teaching in Cuba

In May 2012, I spent five days as one of the featured artists teaching at *Trespasos Escenicos, Taller de Investigacion y Creacion Teatral* (Changing Landscapes—Conference of Research and Theatre Making) during the Havana Biannual Art Exhibit. I taught Fitzmaurice Voicework<sup>®</sup> at the *Instituto Superior de Arte* (ISA) in Havana, Cuba. I was the only artist from the United States and worked with guest faculty/colleagues from Brazil, Argentina, Columbia, Cuba, and Nicaragua. Two research assistants from Arizona State University—both of whom spoke fluent Spanish—accompanied me.

The ISA is the leading art academy in Cuba and students travel from all over the island to attend. Established in the former Havana Country Club, the campus is a cluster

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of buildings—some unfinished, some half-restored. Under the faded stucco and chipped paint that now characterizes Cuba one can imagine the opulence and economic prosperity of the pre-Castro Cuba. At the *Instituto*, about 800 students study art, dance, theater, and design. Students wanting to attend the theater/acting program have stiff competition. Seven hundred students auditioned for 12 places and the entrance examinations are comprehensive, including aptitude testing on rhythm, balance, and coordination. According to an email I received from ISA student Carlos Alberto Méndez in December 2012, all education is free.

ISA is where I spent the majority of my time during my trip to Cuba. I experienced film, theater, performance, and visual art that offered critical perspectives on Cuban life and its history. I went to a well-attended Catholic Mass. Life was and is clearly shifting for Cubans, as evidenced by the rise in tourism, the influx of dollars, some limited access to Internet and social media, and the new and much more lenient travel regulations, all of which reflect a transition away from state socialism to a more robust and mixed economy.

I was aware, before and after I arrived in Cuba, of my situated position as an American and of the hegemonic practices of the United States. I knew there would be economic disparities but I was not sure how they would affect my teaching or my experience. Friends had advised me to expect social and economic disparities with regard to telecommunications, social networking, modern bathrooms, goods, and building materials. What follows is an account of how these inequalities affected my classroom and my consciousness.

### **Disparities**

Before arriving in Cuba, I requested mats or pillows in the classroom/studio and asked about the type of floor I would be working on. The first day of teaching, after using the ladies' room at the school to freshen up and prepare before class, I felt fairly silly for asking about the props. Except for in my western-style hotel, I did not encounter a working bathroom while in Cuba. Toilets are flooded, do not have working handles, and/or are missing hoses or have no seats.

That same day I asked Ruben, the ISA facility coordinator, for some crayons, paper, and an orange. This seemed a reasonable request, but the look on his face told a different story. Beads of sweat trickled down his forehead as he began thinking where we might be able to purchase crayons. We took his car to the Centro Commercial, a local store selling electronic and household goods. The shopping experience was extraordinary; it was clearly a shop for Cubans, not tourists.

Before entering, we had to check our bags. Inside, items were neatly displayed, and prices were posted in pesos, not convertible pesos (CUC), the currency for tourism. We found four 12-crayon packs. Ruben made it very clear that finding them was a huge stroke of luck, and the relief on Ruben's face was apparent.

He had the paper but finding an orange would require another adventure and present another challenge. Sensing his discomfort, I suggested we go back to my hotel where we had had fresh orange juice for breakfast. I speculated that I could get an orange from the kitchen. In addition to the orange, I borrowed pillows and blankets, much to the dismay of my hotel, and we did just fine. I was ready to teach.

This experience provided a personal lesson in the material deprivations caused by the United States embargo and the poor Cuban economy.

I was not sure what to expect when I entered the classroom but was pleasantly surprised to find the room had a bank of windows and the students registered for my class

varied in age from 18 to their mid-40s: students from the *Instituto*, professionals from the community, and a panel of speech language pathologists. I taught from the Fitzmaurice Voicework® method—Destructuring.<sup>1</sup>

Fitzmaurice Voicework® frees the breath primarily using adaptations from yoga, shiatsu, bioenergetics, and classical voice training. There are two phases to the Fitzmaurice Voicework. In the Destructuring phase, the actor is led through a series of exercises informed by yoga asanas and integrating bioenergetic tremors. The tremor, a surrendered and vibratory flow, is created when the actor seeks a slight hyperextension of the extremities leaving the torso free of tension. The tremor moving through the body serves as a diagnostic tool. The body's freedom directly correlates to laryngeal freedom, increased emotional availability, and resonance. The second phase, Restructuring, is where the actor harmonizes and synthesizes his discoveries while Destructuring with his or her intent to communicate. The Destructuring work, which includes the tremor, but also touch, and the being seen and seeing each other while breathing—expands the image of self. I begin all of my introductory workshops teaching the Destructuring positions.

As a Fitzmaurice voice teacher, I have had the privilege to study how the body responds to the challenge of Destructuring and I know the spirit of exploration required of the work. I have witnessed the subtle behavior of the breath and its healing properties. The physical and mental challenge of finding the Destructuring positions and then finding a release through the vibratory tremor was relatively easy for these students. It was clear to me that there appeared to be fewer patterns of bracing than I was used to seeing. These students were able to embody the vibratory freedom that we were exploring.

Same dirty floors as in my classroom but heard no complaining from the students. A hot room thick with air, inside and out we could feel, smell the heat enveloping our bodies as we breathed. No need for socks and sweatshirts inside—it was a hot day outside. No chilled artificial environment here—we were one with the elements. Today, I had students of varying ages, sizes, and experience but they all had something in common. They were willing to play. I was also amazed at how quickly they were able to release to the floor. This group is really opening to their emotions. I can teach with a light touch. (Personal Journal Entry)

In contrast, it generally takes my American university students up to a month to begin to even feel comfortable exploring their bodies, integrating their breathing impulse with the impulse to make sound, and allowing their overcharged nervous systems to discharge. Consequently, we went through material much faster and on a much deeper level that I had ever expected.

I started with the breath (Destructuring), alignment, spatial relationships, kinesthetic sensation, touch, and the pleasure of sounding. We eventually began speaking text, and extended speech into singing. The method brought the group to a state of awareness. Students gained knowledge about their individual voices and thus their bodies, and they ended the workshop with wanting to learn more about Destructuring.

When the week was over, I was left with a deep curiosity about a fundamental difference between the learning environment I was used to and the Cuban learning environment. I could surmise that the workshop was an enrichment opportunity without the pressure of grades and that would be the main contributor to the student's responsiveness to the work but there was clearly something more. I have taught many workshops in the US with similar non-graded environments and I did not have these results. I could not help but wonder—were the learning environments so different that they were physically manifested in the bodies of the workshop participants?

### Leaving Cuba

Before leaving Cuba, I spent time with Lilli, an assistant professor at ISA. She is a published playwright and was clearly one of the academic stars of the conference. During the conference, Lilli had been our liaison, making sure we had everything we needed for our teaching and presentations.

I felt a kinship with Lilli—she was my counterpart. We had practically the same jobs and titles but she made \$20 a month and lived in a dorm. My romanticized vision of the tropical utopia without social networks, large universities, and enterprises quickly faded, replaced by a very different image of Cuba. I recognized the binary relationship to my counterpart and the immense social inequities.

### Shifting awareness

I did not intend to write an article on my workshop experiences, but what occurred in the sessions and my feelings at that time prompted me to reflect on my classroom. Introducing and embodying release, tremor, and sound take much longer at Arizona State University. I would even go so far as to say that there could be an attitude of blatant mistrust of the work. I find myself continuously reframing my lessons to continue to prove the validity of the work.

While reading my student's journal entries, I became aware of the relationship my students have with their education. The pressure of financial stress experienced by many American university students has much to do with hindering the learning process; many students work from 40 to 60 hours a week and view each lesson from a cost/value perspective. In a recent journal entry a student wrote, "This class is extremely short, and I wish I could explore breathing and all that jazz more, because I did not get my monies (*sic*) worth."

What is revealing about this student's entry is that s/he is relating her/his experience to how much the course costs. Therefore, the questions I want to pose are these: How do we teach bodies that are in a learning environment that is commodified? How do we teach bodies that are immersed in a materialistic value system?

### Materialism and psychophysical distress

There are a wealth of studies, primarily in the field of psychology (Tim Kasser, Allen Kanner, Marcia Richins, Scott Dawsons and Russell Belk), on the subject of materialism and physiological distress in American children. Schor, a qualitative investigator of consumer society and culture, explores the relationship between materialism and stress:

American children are deeply enmeshed in the culture of getting and spending, and are getting more so. We find that the more enmeshed they are, the more they suffer for it. The more they buy into the commercial and materialist messages, the worse they feel about themselves, the more depressed they are, and the more they are beset by anxiety, headaches, stomachaches, and boredom. The bottom line on the culture they're being raised in is that it's a lot more pernicious than most adults have been willing to admit. (2004, 173)

She further unpacks the effects of materialism on the body:

People who value money and conventional success are less likely to experience positive emotions, such as happiness and joy, and they are more likely to experience negative ones, such as anger and unhappiness. Materialism is related to elevated levels of physical symp-

toms, such as headaches, stomachaches, backaches, sore muscles, and sore throats. These results have been found in samples of men and women, teens and adults, across income groups, and for students and nonstudents. (2004, 174)

Schor's survey on Children, Media, and Consumer Culture had a large sample size and the children studied were between 8 and 13. The findings of her research revealed that materialistic values undermine well-being, increase risky behaviors, and lead to depression. What these studies reveal to me about my voice classroom is that the outside world affects our inside world via the attitudes and values we take on, often unconsciously, that then impact our physiology. The somatically based Fitzmaurice Voice-work® that I share with my students reveals the awareness of the body's internal state. My teaching experience in Cuba gave me a greater understanding of my Arizona State University students who, like many American students, live with continual financial stress in a consumer culture. I am by no means saying that Cubans live without financial stress; on the contrary, they are under huge financial limitations and since the global economic crisis of 2007 have been hit severely by austerity measures (Perez 2009, 116). Also, I was in Cuba for a very short amount of time and would not presume to understand the stresses of everyday life there. But as Cuba shifts to a postindustrial economy and we continue to shift into a digital age, I am aware of what we have possibly lost and what they, possibly, have to lose—an instrument that is psychophysically responsive. Lowen, a physician, psychotherapist, and creator of bioenergetics analysis, wrote in his landmark book, *The Betrayal of the Body*:

It has been said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, but all knowledge is “little” when it deals with life or personal relationships. The knowledge of the ego must be tempered with the wisdom of the body if behavior is to retain a human quality. I would rather see an ignorant woman raise a child with feeling than an educated woman raise it without feeling. Of the two ingredients in behavior, feeling is more important than knowledge. But our whole educational system is geared to knowledge and the denial of feeling.

The educational system should recognize that spontaneity and pleasure are as important as productivity and achievement (1967, 292).

*The Betrayal of the Body* was written in 1967. What would Dr. Lowen think of the current culture of accountability and commodification in education? As a culture we have yet to see the impact of academe as commodity. Alonso, Dean at Columbia University, articulates the narrative of universal commodification in his article “Paradise Lost: The Academy becomes a Commodity”:

The current crisis of the university is a crisis of social legitimation, meaning that the conventional arguments and strategies that were used by the institution to justify its existence and social currency have collapsed. Since no social construct can exist without a legitimizing narrative, the university is trying at present to articulate a narrative that will work successfully in the current culture of universal commodification. The problem is, of course, that our former narrative of social legitimation for the university is written in a language that is untranslatable to the current circumstance. (2010, 2)

Arizona State University, where I have taught for the last five years, has embraced the challenge of conceptualizing a new way of working.

### **The new American university**

With 73,000 students on four campuses, Arizona State University is a great university and a fascinating place to work. Forty-five percent of our undergraduate students qualify for Pell Grants (Blumenstyk 2012). According to the US Department of Education-College Scoreboard, our average tuition of \$10,599 per year ranks in the low category. Arizona residents with gift aid pay as little as \$2231 per semester (“Tuition,” Office of the President 2011). Almost all of our students work and commute. As far as quality goes, ASU Fulbright Scholars number on a par with Yale and Berkeley (Blumenstyk 2012). Our published mission is that “we measure ourselves not by who we exclude, but rather by who we include and how they succeed” (Vision Statement, Arizona State University Marketing Department 2012). The School of Film, Dance and Theatre enrolls 928 students and our stated goal is to build the “artists of the future”. Our undergraduate students receive foundational training in theater and film with numerous concentration offerings, and our graduate students receive unique multi-disciplinary opportunities. My studio classes, on the main campus in Tempe, are capped at 18 and meet for 45 clock hours over the course of the semester.

About 40,000 students, teachers, and staff commute to this campus daily; for students, the simple act of driving and parking on campus can be extremely stressful. The cost of parking, meal cards, library fees, and class dues is a frequent topic of conversation among students. Housing is also an issue; large corporate entities sell a lifestyle to ASU students that costs far more than tuition; this lifestyle includes high-rise apartments, upscale shopping and dining. So though tuition is relatively low compared to some universities, debt continues to accumulate and—of equal importance—affect the mindset of students. Maisano, in “The Soul of Student Debt,” offers:

Student debt subjects the borrower to a distinctly capitalist pedagogy, transforming higher education into an increasingly expensive commodity that is bought and sold on the market. But as the legions of student loan debtors can attest, investment in a college education is no longer a guarantee of remunerative employment or personal financial security. It is an increasingly risky investment that can bring the student debtor into severe financial distress, and in the worst cases, to the door of the bankruptcy court to seek relief. (2012, 3)

I am proud to work at a university so strongly committed to inclusiveness. However, with college education costs soaring, I was shocked to read Troop’s exposé on how many students across the nation have resorted to “body commodification” on a scale as never before:

Students sell plasma, take requests to perform custom erotic acts on Web cameras, or offer themselves as guinea pigs in paid drug trials. A master’s student in Penfield, N.Y., says she was kicked out of her social-work program last June for snuggling with strangers—no sex allowed—for \$60 an hour. A handful of Web sites, like SeekingArrangement.com, promise introductions to young and attractive men and women—often students—for “mutually beneficial relationships.” An advertisement in campus newspapers at three elite colleges offers \$35,000 for the eggs of a young woman with an SAT score above 1400. And though no one in the United States is openly selling kidneys from live donors, Santa Clara University’s Markkula Center for Applied Ethics started receiving inquiries from financially desperate people after it posted an article on its Web site in 1998 exploring the ethical issues that would surround such a market. When the economy tanked, staff members saw a surge in letters like this one:

I just read your information about how many people need a kidney. I would like more information about it and how I could sell one of my kidneys to your university because I really need money. I want to go to college, but it's really expensive. (2013, 2)

These are dramatic examples and not the norm, but the rising costs of higher education are a reality and felt at every university across this country. In response to this changing landscape, Arizona State University has embraced a business model on a grand scale, and President Michael Crow is our “CEO” (Theil 2008). Administration advertises and proselytizes that our students are our product, our research is intellectual capital, and our success depends on our enterprise, innovation, and technology. I share these facts to highlight the consumer mentality within the learning environment at my institution.

### **Academic capitalism**

According to Da Silva in “Commodification in Higher Education and its Effect on Staff–Student Interaction Beyond the Classroom,”

The most fundamental change to higher education in recent times is ‘commodification’ (White 2007, 594). The process began with policy changes in the late 1980s, such as the introduction of fees and the expectation of increased economic accountability. Commodification was initially a change in management strategy but has also come to be reflected in societal attitude—education is commonly regarded as something to be bought and sold. The process of change reflects a movement towards ‘academic capitalism’, a term coined by Slaughter and Leslie (1997, 8). While the policy change was swift, the consequences have been slow to emerge.

Commodification can affect anyone involved in higher education. Staff members are susceptible to increased pressure in their research, administrative and teaching roles, not to mention the general stress of ‘doing more with less’. Students might not appear to be affected, but their attitude towards education, and whether they are willing to actively partake in it, may change with the addition of fees. The exact nature of the above changes will determine whether, and to what extent, staff-student interaction might be affected. (2009, 2)

I learned from emails received in December 2012 from the Chair of the School of Theatre and Film, Jacob Pinholster, that the performing arts training at Arizona State University has been equally affected by commodification and the economic downturn. Specifically, our class sizes have increased, our support staff has been decreased, and our administration has seen more students needing emergency support because of severe economic need. Over the last two or three years, I have mentored more students displaying stress and anxiety about being performance majors than ever before. Many of them lack parental support because of having chosen a major that does not provide economic security. Students enter the university under tremendous pressure of needing employment-based curriculum and vocational skills.<sup>2</sup>

Camilleri, Senior Lecturer on Actor Training at Kent University, articulates this shift:

The paradigm shift in performer training at the twenty-first century coincides with a shift in funding cultures. A combination of sheer necessity and funding opportunities from the 1990s onwards has increasingly pushed laboratories towards ideological perspectives. (2009, 31)

He further describes the “packaging” of this training:

The ideological ‘packaging’ of training takes various forms. The packaging process actually begins with the nomenclature of the practitioners themselves, e.g. the term ‘biomechanics’ and the individual *etude* of, say, ‘Throwing the Stone,’ imply a body of training and a specific technique that as such refers to a content. It is this ‘content’ that then lends itself as knowledge that can be curriculumized and modularized in academia, and which is then subjected to the various regulatory entities (including health and safety, assessment criteria etc.) that came with conservatories, performing arts schools and universities. The whole package is then further processed as a promise by marketing strategies aimed at attracting paying customers. (2009, 29)

And therein lies the shift to “students as customer” that I have experienced as our classrooms and pedagogy continue to be commodified. The branding of our university as the “New American University” and of our performance training program as “The Theatre of the Future” are prime examples of marketing strategies aimed at attracting customers.

In their chapter, “Knowledge in the Marketplace: The Global Commodification of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education,” scholars Naidoo and Jamieson extend their definition of commodification to include the process’s impact on the student–teacher relationship:

Commodification in higher education can therefore be defined as the transforming of the educational process into a form that has an “exchange” value, rather than an intrinsic “use” value.

So, it is not merely knowledge that is packaged for sale but the educational relationship itself is transformed into a relationship that is dependent on the market transaction of the commodity; the lecturer becomes the commodity producer and the student becomes the commodity “consumer.” (2005, 39)

The agency required of the consumer is scant. S/he is paying for the product—pedagogy. In fact, the student–consumer attitude towards the product/pedagogy is that they are paying for a service and it is about their satisfaction. Students who view themselves as *clients* have much more successful learning experiences than those who think of themselves as *consumers*; the client relationship is one that is familiar to the voice profession and certainly for private practice. Clients understand that they are required to participate and therefore it is up to them to achieve a final result. The consumer–producer relationship in a voice class is fraught with problems because of the lack of agency from the student, the “exchange” rather than the “use” value, and the lasting effect on the body of end-gaining or seeking a result. The teachings of Alexander and Moise Feldenkrais, the fathers of somatic education, provide ample examples of the body’s ability and or inability to gain voluntary control over response through self-discipline and discovery. I assert that students who are in a commodified learning environment have further difficulty with self-discipline and discovery because they are buying the product and want the result. They are not interested in the “means whereby”. They want proof that what they put in will provide dividends.

### **Cultural bodies**

What I witnessed while teaching voice in Cuba was a psycho-physical cultural body free of consumer attitude and behavior. I witnessed bodies used to learning and gaining

information somatically. This may be in part because they are physically more active as a society, spending far fewer hours connected to a digital world, and because their education has not yet been commodified. I acknowledge that I had limited time with this group and that I was working with a limited number of students. However, over the decades of teaching voice in United States of America, I have observed a cultural body straddled with financial responsibility and bombarded with a huge infiltration of media, thus resulting in physical armoring. Many of my American students are sensorially full and hungry for results, and I believe this leads to a fixed musculature. Many students' only experience with their bodies and breathing is their workout or going to the gym. They view their bodies with images and pressures of advertising. According to Farhi, breathing and yoga expert:

We live in a time when there is an extreme obsession with looking trim, fit, and most important young. This obsession is artificially created by industries that stand to gain from our cultivated insecurities. We are bombarded with the propaganda of the body beautiful, believing that what we see is normal, and that we, in comparison, fall horribly short of these standards. There are a plethora of statistics that tell us how we feel as a result. Underlying these figures, however, is the undeniable truth that we are willing to feel bad in order to look good. (1996, 38)

I read many students' journal entries about becoming aware of their semi-asphyxiation with clothes, zippers, and held musculature. They also realize that breathing and allowing the full relaxation and tonus phase of the abdominal muscle during breathing brings many benefits. Excerpts from student journals, Arizona State University, Intro to Voice Class:

Today was great. Loved the breathing exercises we did today. I forgot about all the stupid stuff going on in my life and just felt myself breathe. I felt every part of my body for probably the first time. I need to do this on my own.

Today I went to the gym and really focused on my breathing like we do in class when I was lifting. I swear I lifted twice as much.

This work is really different for me. All my life I've spent a lot of time at a desk or working on my computer. I'm realizing I'm not very flexible.

I'm used to holding my belly in ... I feel fat when Micha asks us to breathe with our whole body. I think I'm beginning to understand. Partnering up and feeling each other's ribs really helped.

My American students have internalized market values on a psycho-physical level so much that it has affected their ability to breathe. Rickford, professor of History at Dartmouth, criticizes the corporatization of lives in his op-ed for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*:

I wish to suggest that we—students, professors, all of us within and outside academe—have so internalized market values that we are no longer aware of their control over our psyches, our personalities, our day-to-day existences. We have so utterly absorbed the ethic of individualism, competition, materialism, and private accumulation that we now regard the dogged pursuit of those qualities as inevitable and essential—like breathing. Our collective consciousness has itself been privatized to such an extent that we now struggle to find meaning in human activity whose commercial purpose is not immediately apparent. (2010, 1)

In my classroom, I have found that embodiment is both a concept and an actualization that take time. Framing this “use” is not always apparent to the student at first.

### **Time to embody**

This student being newly introduced to somatic education is discovering its rewards, as s/he reports in his/her journal from my Introduction to Voice class:

In class we have been using things like zafus and yoga mats, and exercise balls to help our breathing. Again, I am becoming more and more aware of my body. Also, I noted I left class much less anxious and more relaxed.

This particular semester my class took place at 9:00 am. I clearly observed that many of my students began their day in a state of anxiety. This anxiety manifests itself through tightening of the jaw, stomach, and neck muscles, while the tongue sits on the roof of the mouth and palms grip the floor. I do not feel that I am overstating that many students in beginning voice are in “startle mode”<sup>3</sup> and it takes weeks of unwinding to bring awareness to the body.

The stressed voice is strident, lacks resonance and nuance, and its direction is inward. I spend a good amount of time (almost half my semester) allowing my students to sense, feel, and vocalize because otherwise I am merely relaying information that will not be embodied. Offering exercise like the Fitzmaurice Destructuring/Restructuring deepens the mind–body connection and develops the ability to allow release in order to increase self-perception and functionality which is primary to all voice work.

There are many students who immediately understand the benefit, but as stated earlier more and more I find I need to justify every single exercise, assignment, and reading for its cost/value. As producer, I am constantly aware of how I package and assemble each class, looking for the best yield from our time. This close analysis is not without its benefits in the streamlining of my course but there is little room for psycho-physical play and experimentation because the students are judging their process and mine as it takes us much longer to move forward with embodiment.

### **Trends and conclusions**

Arizona State University’s new model signifies a further shift towards consumerism in higher education. In our changing world with local and global economic pressures, it is clear to me that the stress of commodification on the learning process has affected both teacher and learner. Teachers are faced with the challenge of students who expect a product and learners in this paradigm leave little room for failure and experimentation. The commodification process affects each institution in our capitalist society differently. I am grateful for the prosperity that our American economy provides, but I question the trend to let economic rationality become a lens through which to view our classrooms, our productions, our students, and our selves. My travels and my reflection allowed me to realize the penetration of commodification into all aspects of society and most alarmingly the physical body. I have realized through this experience some very valuable lessons.

I have discovered that I need to give my American university students the appropriate amount of time to discover new ways of relating to and valuing their bodies and voices. I have set into motion the re-designation of my course from lecture/studio to a studio course. This will give me six more hours of classroom time. Although this is not

a tremendous gain, it does, however, mark an effort toward giving them more time to discover the value of the training.

I will need to assess and re-evaluate my training methods to better prepare myself for the attitudes and expectations of students and administration and their consumer-driven attitudes toward learning. I have made a commitment to not let the capitalist values and economic pressure usurp the body and mind and the relationship between teacher and student. To that end, I must introduce language and concepts that train *artists* not *consumers*, so that students find “use” value for themselves, one that includes social and personal responsibility. Perhaps if students can be empowered and challenged to view themselves as producers then they will find that accountability lies within.

I humbly conclude with the assertion that the commodified body and the commodified learning space require a lengthened learning process in order to find options in self-discovery. I also assert that the commodified value system that is embedded in the enterprise model deeply affects a student’s ability to learn and instructor’s ability to teach as both are burdened with creating a marketable product and in this model there is little room for failure, little room for play, little time to breathe. I believe that it was the relationship to my Cuban workshop attendees, which was student–teacher, not consumer–producer, that allowed me to recognize, by contrast, what I had been experiencing, but had no name for yet, in the teaching environment at ASU.

I view teaching voice more now than ever as an act of liberation and as the practice of freedom from tyranny. Perhaps the verses of Cuban poet and champion of freedom, José Martí may inspire us. Although he is speaking of country his words also speak to our voices, our bodies, and our human condition: “Knowing is what counts. To know one’s country and govern it with that knowledge is the only way to free it from tyranny” (Martí, Onís, and de Onís 1953, 88).

## Notes

1. For a more comprehensive discussion of Deconstructing, see Morgan’s (2012) *Constructing the Holistic Actor: Fitzmaurice Voicework* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing).
2. For an excellent discussion and overview of American Actor Training and the effects of the commercial demands on training, see Lissa Tyler Renaud’s chapter, “Training Artists or Consumers? Commentary on American Actor Training in The Politics of American Actor Training” in Margolis and Renaud’s (2010) *The Politics of American Actor Training* (Routledge).
3. Startle Response—the alarm reaction is a completely natural, involuntary reaction to a stimulus such as a flash of light, a sudden threatening movement or loud noise (Alexander Technique Glossary Definition—[www.hilaryking.net](http://www.hilaryking.net)).

## Notes on contributor



Micha Espinosa is an Arizona-based artist, activist, teacher, and vocal coach. She has performed, lectured, and taught voice around the world since 1992. A member of SAG/AFTRA (and a local Arizona board member), she has performed in film, television, and regional theater. She is a master teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework® and a trainer for the Fitzmaurice Teacher Certification, as well as a certified yoga instructor. Currently, she serves as an assistant professor of Voice and Acting at Arizona State University’s School of Film, Dance, and Theatre, and is affiliate faculty with ASU’s School of Transborder Studies. Her research and scholarship examines and contextualizes the current climate with the training of actors of non-dominant groups. She is passionate about social

justice in actor training, global perspectives, and the cultural voice. <http://michaespinosa.com>

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