

Senior Thesis  
Eddie Datz  
*Biloxi Blues*  
By Neil Simon  
Eugene Morris Jerome  
Malcolm Gets



## Going from Good to Great

Professor Tiza Garland teaches all of her Movement students the important mantra, “Technique is for when Talent doesn’t come to work with you.” I define “Talent” as the skills that someone naturally is born with and could utilize with little to no training. In Theatre, I believe Talent allows actors to play roles that they naturally connect to-but their “range” ends there. While Talent is an important base for any good actor, Technique allows the actor to harness that Talent and turn it into a consistent, bankable product that will keep them working and growing throughout their entire career. Out of the 275 scripts I have read in my life, I have never found a character I am better suited for at this point in my life than Eugene Morris Jerome in Neil Simon’s *Biloxi Blues*. Besides the fact that Mr. Simon is my favorite playwright of all time (I have read all of his 30+ plays-some multiple times-along with both of his personal memoirs), I am extremely similar to Eugene in many ways. So, based on my definitions of Talent and Technique, I theoretically could have put on a perfectly passable performance by just going with my gut instincts and using nothing that I have learned in my time at The University of Florida. However, I have far too much love for my craft to have left this performance up to just mere Talent. Taking what I have learned from my Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance with a specific track in Acting, I was able to use my Technique to take my performance from Good to Great.

Prior to entering rehearsals, I did my background preparation for the character. I was fortunate with this specific play in that it happens to be a part of a trilogy, and Eugene is the only recurring character throughout the entire series. Even though I had already read all of Simon’s plays before, I decided to specifically re-read the trilogy to see where Eugene was

coming from in the preceding play, *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, and the following play, *Broadway Bound*. At the end of this Thesis, I have included my “*Brighton Beach Memoirs* Trilogy Notes” in their entirety. From these notes and my reading of Simon’s real memoirs *Rewrites* and *The Play Goes On*, I developed my concept of how I would approach Eugene’s monologues and asides using the principles of Standup Comedy!

In *The Play Goes On*, Simon says, “I’ve also been able to find **humor** in my pain.”

Comedy is an integral part of Eugene’s Jewish culture and identity. My reasoning for approaching *Biloxi Blues* (a play that never specifically references Standup Comedy) this way was this: The *Brighton Beach Memoirs* trilogy is semi-autobiographical. Eugene is based on Neil. Neil Simon never specifically did stand-up comedy, but he was a comedy writer, so he knew how to write comedically while expecting to invoke some sort of reaction from an audience. Eugene is a writer. Eugene’s memoirs would have a similar effect, so Eugene reading from his memoir (giving an aside to the audience) should follow the rules of Standup Comedy!

Using this logic of studying Neil to create my version of Eugene, I worked with everything I have learned from my Comedy Practice and Improvisation courses to help me tackle the comedic elements of Eugene and the play as a whole. When I performed Standup Comedy for the first time in Spring 2018, the best lesson I learned was: If you want to be funny- don’t *try* to be funny! Just tell the truth. The audience laughed the most when I said things that I didn’t think were funny at all-they were just how I truthfully felt-but that is what made them so funny. Applying this principle to Eugene was a bit tricky because there are times throughout the play that he is specifically making a joke and trying to make the other characters laugh. However, Jewish humor is very sarcastic, self-deprecating, dry, and deadpan.

So even when telling these jokes, I worked with the concept that I learned from my Comedy Practice professor Dr. Charlie Mitchell: “the only way to do a comedy scene is to play it completely straight.” Also, Simon said in *Rewrites*, “No matter how funny lines are, they’re nothing more than funny lines if they do not push the play forward.” These philosophies helped me find the underlying truth of Eugene’s jokes. For example, when Sergeant Toomey is calling Eugene’s bluff about having to fast because of his religion, Malcolm had me say the line, “El Malaguena” right to Toomey’s face without averting my eye contact as I had been doing before to try to get a laugh. This made the situation much more uncomfortable, awkward, truthful, and consequentially funny. In *Broadway Bound*, Eugene’s older brother Stanley tells him, “every good comedy has conflict and a character who desperately wants something.” This rule of comedy writing helped me realize the importance of Eugene’s Super Objective (to become a writer, not get killed and lose his virginity) and why Simon strategically has Eugene say it near the beginning of the play—to give the actor and the audience an understanding of why Eugene acts the way he does throughout the rest of the play.

Regarding Eugene’s asides, I worked with the concept I learned from Stephen Rosenfield in my Comedy Practice course of Joyous Communication. This is the theory that a standup comedian must make the audience feel like they should be nowhere else in the world but there, watching that performance. The best standup comic’s subtext would theoretically be, “Thank God you’re here, you just *have* to hear what I have to say!” Ideally, the audience would then think, “Well, thank God we are here to listen to your story!” This goes along with entertainment legend Steve Martin’s advice that the comedian must make the audience, “lean in, rather than lean back.” To make the audience feel this fun urgency, I used a tip I learned

from Professor Tim Altmeyer: To heighten the comedy, raise the stakes! I played with Eugene not just speaking to hear himself talk, but instead reminiscing and getting the audience to understand his story! This made my energy and choices much more specific. Rosenfield also says that the standup comic “can’t ease into this. [The] sail has to have wind behind it from the start.” I easily related this to the importance of keeping the pace and energy up at the start of the show, because I knew this would dictate tone and energy of the rest of the performance.

Working with the principles I learned in Improvisation, I actively stayed engaged by remembering that, while I may have read and rehearsed the script a hundred times, this is the first and last time that this character is saying these lines at this point in the story, so I had to act with that same level of spontaneity. Also, my director Malcolm Gets reminded us to “listen, but not anticipate” what the other characters were saying to us. By saying my thoughts on the lines, it cut the air between the lines, adding a necessary energy that allowed me to maintain my spontaneity while still picking up the pace so that the scenes wouldn’t drag. Malcolm then reminded me to direct my asides to a specific audience member (as opposed to my original plan of speaking to the audience as a whole). This reminded me of the idea in Standup Comedy, sketch comedy writing, and playwriting that more specificity actually helps people relate even more than if one panders generally in an attempt to relate to everyone. By speaking to one person, I was able to make my words more specific and have more meaning, because I was no longer just announcing them to the world but was now actively working to tell my story to a single individual. In the same line of thought, when I said, “If I fell in love with her she’d be perfect,” I deliberately avoided making the line overly-mushy or silly for a cheap laugh. Instead, I said the line sincerely, which produced a few audible “aww” reactions from audience

members each performance. By not trying to be funny, I achieved the desired effect of making the audience truly feel something (as opposed to a lesser actor who would have perhaps gotten a laugh out of the audience, but at the cost of the integrity of the truth of the moment.)

Another concept I went into this production with was the idea that shame and guilt are an integral part of the Jewish culture and identity, and therefore critical to understanding Eugene. Simon even describes his process of writing in *The Play Goes On*, as “releasing your darkest secrets and your most **shameful** thoughts...in order to free yourself.” This influenced my character development of Eugene, because it helped create this ever-looming pressure that dictated a lot of my reactions to what happens throughout the play. For example, when we are playing the game describing our ideal final days on Earth, Hennessey says he would spend it with his family. While everyone else teases him, I used shame to make me think about Eugene’s family and why he didn’t think about them in the first place. Going hand-in-hand with shame, a Rabbi in the award-winning play *Angels in America Part 1: Millennium Approaches* says, “Catholics believe in forgiveness. Jews believe in **guilt**.” When Sergeant Toomey informed us that there was a thief amongst us, I played with Toomey making me feel **guilty** for something I hadn’t done, which helped me stay engaged and hang onto his every word. Later on in the play, I worked with intense shame for not sticking up for my fellow Jew, Arnold Epstein, and then later trying to atone for that shame in my following scene with him. This affected my relationship with Epstein, as well as how I reacted to everyone else’s insults directed his way.

Speaking of insults, Malcolm told the cast to “lean into the insults” and “risk being disliked”. This helped our words have a “bite” to them, but it also made us feel even more like

a band of brothers. Working and living like a family, this helped me find the love in the scenes. “Finding the love” was an especially important concept going into the scene where Eugene is alone with Rowena. Even though Eugene and Rowena were clearly not in love, the characters could still care for each other. Malcolm suggested when I thank Rowena for wiping my nose with a hanky, that I make it vulnerable. This allowed for a tender moment between us (instead of it just being uncomfortable). This scene also required me to use the more physicality than I needed in the entire rest of the play, because the first few times I performed the funny lines of Eugene losing his virginity, I merely read them in a goofy manner. Once I started physically convulsing my body and engaging my breath, it made the sounds that came out of me more involuntary and natural, which thoroughly heightened the comedy of the scene. Keeping the stakes and comedy high was important to Malcolm for this scene and the scene prior, so I played with the concept from the acting book *Practical Aesthetics* of “As If”. Waiting outside the room to see Rowena, I played “As If” I was about to go on the “Doctor Doom’s Fearfall” ride at the Universal Islands of Adventure amusement park: “My friends are all doing it. I’m excited, but I’m also terrified. While I know for the most part that I will probably get out alive, there is so much that could go wrong!” This easily allowed me to translate the mixed feelings associated with visiting a prostitute (something I have never done) to something I could actually relate to for the entire scene.

While I was not born in New York like Eugene, I was born in Boca Raton, Florida (which is sometimes lovingly referred to as “New York-relocated”) to a mother from Long Island and a father from Brooklyn. Entering this production, I thought it was inevitable that I would need to use a New York dialect. I worked with Professor Susan Schuld on New York dialects and played

with one for the entire first table read, but then Malcolm asked me to drop it because he said it was not necessary for telling the story. This reminded me of a story I had heard about how Adam Driver, the actor who plays Kylo Ren in the new *Star Wars* trilogy, apparently came into the first film with a character voice he had been working on for weeks. On the first day on set, the director respectfully told him he liked the voice but that he wanted to go in a different direction. Adam Driver put his ego aside, listened to his director and went on to deliver what I believe is the best individual performance in the entire series. Inspired by Driver, I immediately respected Malcolm's choice and listened to him without question. However, I do believe that Neil Simon is like William Shakespeare in that there is a specific rhythm to his words. I can easily hear these rhythms/inflections while reading Simon's scripts because, while my family has not said most of what his characters have specifically said, I could easily hear them saying it because they use the same inflections. Just recently, my mother said to me, "When I'm happy for too long, I get nervous." This was almost verbatim something that Eugene's mother says to him in *Broadway Bound!* Legendary actor Jack Lemmon once said that you cannot take a single word out of a Neil Simon line, because it will throw the whole rhythm off. In order to honor these rhythms while still respecting my director's wishes, I dropped the New York pronunciation of words, but I kept the musicality of the New York Jewish/Yiddish inflection in my voice. When it came to Eugene briefly donning a "Southern" dialect, I did not do any research as I did for the New York dialects, because I specifically wanted it to be inaccurate and clearly fake. I reasoned that, if Eugene did not understand the nuances of the real Southern dialect, then neither should I. However, as Susan taught me; the dialect/accent should never overpower the storytelling-then it is just distracting and false. So, I strategically dropped the

dialect immediately when Rowena mentioned her husband, because not only did I wish to avoid overusing the comedic effect of the silly dialect, I also remembered the truth of the situation: Eugene is already extremely nervous to be away from home, at war, visiting his first prostitute, and losing his virginity, so Rowena mentioning her husband would completely take Eugene over the edge and cause him to lose his cool. Thus, it would be highly unrealistic for him to maintain his dialect after learning that new information. Giving this much thought to one line may not be the objective of the merely *talented* actor, but the actor with a *technique* such as the one I have developed cannot help but dedicate all of this energy to every single *word*, let alone every single line.

Malcolm also made a great point about using our vocals, saying we should think of our “voice” not just as a vocal sound, but as our personal stance. This helped me find meaning behind my words, because I did not just use my voice physically, I also used it to convey where Eugene was at specific points in the story. For example, I worked with a vocal character arc of having Eugene’s voice start higher and squeakier and then get progressively deeper as the training toughens him up (and, of course, once he loses his virginity to Rowena). One of my favorite acting pioneers that I have studied at UF is Michael Chekhov, because his technique completely aligns with my philosophy that acting should never be physically or mentally dangerous. Chekhov’s technique allows the actor to get the most out of their own body to create the illusion of real, consistent emotions. My favorite tool that Malcolm had me use was the same one my vocal professor Yanci Bukovec had me use a few years ago: say the lines as quietly and simply as possible. At first, this seemed counter-intuitive to the cliché of every actor being told from an early age to project whenever onstage, but it actually helped me

connect to the language in a much deeper emotional way. Yanci always said that if he were to write a book on Acting, he'd title it, "*Acting...Don't!*". This was because he felt that many actors fall into the trap of overplaying the words, instead of just *being* and allowing the truth to come out on its own. Describing Eugene's ideal woman in this quiet, simple way, I actually felt myself choke up and tear up with emotion! When I told the audience that Donald Carney never sings anymore (one of the saddest lines in the play in my opinion), I also avoided being overly theatrical and instead said it as simply as possible. This allowed the emotions to come to me while also allowing me to actually process the weight of my words.

Working with Chekhov's concept of Personal and Overall Atmospheres helped influence my chosen Given Circumstances for Eugene. I first learned how powerful conflicting Atmospheres can be when I played Frank Lubey in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* in Fall 2017. There is a moment in the first act where everyone gets tense and uncomfortable (the Overall Atmosphere), and then I busted in unknowingly with boisterous and bubbly energy (my Personal Atmosphere) that completely contradicted that Atmosphere (creating comic relief for the audience). The opposite effect happens later in the play when George has come home and is having a nice time laughing with the family, and then Joe walks in and the air is sucked out of the entire scene. Back in Biloxi, Mississippi, when I first enter the scene where the other guys are reading my memoirs (the established Overall Atmosphere), I have no idea, and I arrogantly stride in with the cockiness from having just lost my virginity in the prior scene. This created a beautiful tension amongst the other characters, because they (and the audience) knew I was making a fool out of myself. I also applied Atmospheres to the transitions and entrances/exits,

because Malcolm reminded us to always enter and leave in character, as well as to let my preceding monologues influence the transitions into the following scenes.

Probably the most influential lesson that Malcolm taught me regarding my relationships with the other characters was the Power of Stillness. When I first rehearsed the scene where the play takes its first dark turn and Arnold describes the horrible antisemitism he had just experienced, I had been physically and visibly reacting to everything he said. I was doing this to stay fully engaged, but Malcolm told me to just listen, take it in and let the words affect me without my “help”. It was amazing how much this allowed me to truly listen and hear what Arnold said, as well as kept me from distracting the audience by making the scene about me. This lesson was proven to me once more a few weeks after we closed *Biloxi Blues*, because I was watching another play where one of the actors was overreacting to everything one of the other characters said in their dramatic monologue. I know the actor believed he was being “engaged”, but it just proved to be extremely distracting and consequentially amateurish.

To reinforce the idea that Technique has more power than Talent, acting pioneer Konstantin Stanislavsky said, “Ability without work is only raw, unprocessed material.” Malcolm said it best when he told me: “Keep it simple. Trust that you’re enough!” The Talented Actor without Technique may think he needs to “help” the script by adding unnecessary tropes and clichés to make his performance fuller. But by trusting that I am interesting enough on my own, letting Neil Simon’s brilliance speak for itself, and connecting everything I have learned during my time at the University of Florida, I was able to take my performance from Good to Great!

My Senior Thesis would not feel complete without a summation of everything I have learned in my time at The University of Florida College of the Arts School of Theatre and Dance. The following is what I have titled “The Datz Master Technique”, compiling all of my notes from the past four years into ten pages. While I may or may not have necessarily used all of these tools specifically for *Biloxi Blues*, I now have all of these tools at my disposal as I enter the professional entertainment world!

## **The Datz Master Craft/Technique/Process:**

Background:

- Research Playwright
- Read all of the playwright’s other works
- Read any works referenced in the play
- Read playwrights of a similar genre
- Research the time period
- Research the place
- Find the love in the character.
- Discover personal vs. overall atmosphere/mood
  - 1. Imagine the air around you filled with a certain Atm. 2. Become aware of the reaction within you. 3. Move and speak in harmony with the Atmosphere. 4. Radiate it back into the space around you.
  - Think about environmental factors (weather, safety of the neighborhood you’re in, etc.)
- Discover Relationships
  - Do your character’s movement qualities fit perfectly w/other characters’, or do they contradict-and do they get along because of that?
  - What do others think of you?
  - Is your character typical compared to the others?
  - Does your character mimic other characters in the play? Ex: Dale Harding starts *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* by trying to be on Nurse Ratched’s side, then slowly goes over to McMurphy’s side. Starts show acting more like Ratched, slowly devolves to act more like McMurphy as show goes on.
- Know what character just did off stage and what they’re doing once they leave (entrances/exits)
- Create Backstory
- Create Afterstory (where will character go after play ends?)
- Find the author’s purpose in putting that character there, and how it goes w/their theme/style.
- Find the layers/hidden meanings behind/underneath the words.

- How does all of these exercises affect your partner? Do they complement them, contradict them?
- Take what your partner just gave you, and add to it.
- Find similarities and differences b/w you and the character
- Think about your second impressions about the character so you don't fall into any stereotypes
- Character arc-how does he change throughout course of the play?
- Uta Hagen:
  - For historical/classical/period pieces, read novels, diaries, letters, and biographies of the time. Don't think of what "they" did back then-put yourself there!
  - Know who the follower and leader are in the scene, allowing for a give and take. Know who has the upper hand based on many factors including maturity, intelligence, common sense, responsibility, age.
  - Think about the weight of meeting someone for the first time. Have you heard about them before and do they meet your expectations/assumptions? Are they warm or take getting comfortable with you to be warm?
- Memorizing:
  - Classic way-memorize first line, then first line second line, then first line second line third line, etc.
  - Memorize the lines backwards (last line, last line second to last line, etc.)
  - Record yourself saying your lines monotone and partners' cue lines with expression. Listen whenever you would otherwise be listening to music (walking, showering, driving, etc.)

#### Exercises:

- Switch places w/partner to see opposite side. Ex: In *The Medea*, have Jason now be immobile on a snake-protected chariot while Medea moves around, instead of the usual way of performing that scene.
- Exaggeration rehearsal
- Create secret for yourself, preferably in given circumstances but could be anything. (Seems to work best when it's something you specifically do not want your partner to find out, because constantly trying to hide it/figuring out how much they know is a good way to stay engaged.)
- Literal/Essential/As-If
- Similar to merging as one with partner, try looking at character in imaginary mirror and merge with him-don't lead or be led, just follow him and let him follow you (similar to Meisner repetition).
- Focus your energy on your partner
- Raise the stakes
  - Best way to be a great partner is to be a bigger problem.
- Scoring
  - Find all possible tactics for each beat, put on back page of scene, then choose from those. How obvious is your character in their tactics? As in, can other

characters/audience easily tell what they're doing? And does that character want that?

- Find tactics that coincide w/Laban/Chekhov actions. Ex: **Throw** her under the bus, **push** him away.
  - Find synonyms for the Gestures. For Penetrate, "Prod for information"; "Poke a hole in their story"; "Fuck someone up". For Tear, "Tear someone apart"; "Rip heart out"; "Tear someone down"; "Tear it up"; and "Claw someone's eyes out." For Smash, "Shatter expectations"; "Break your heart"; and "Crush your dreams".
- Triangle Theory=choose one tactic, go to direct opposite, then one completely far left field.
- Let objective be different than outcome
- Don't need to always be against your partner. Can be you and your partner against the world.
- Play w/ just verbs, just adverbs, just nouns, just adjectives
- Focal Points
  - 1. Me
  - 2. You
  - 3. Here
  - 4. There
  - 5. Everywhere
  - Tunnel vision
  - Eyes at different levels of open
  - Also consider head/chest/pelvic girdle focus (Ex: Can be looking up with chest forward and head to the right)
- Subtext
  - Paraphrase the monologue to get the gist of it
- Imagery
- Tempo/Rhythm/Speed
  - First rehearse with slow speed, then each time rehearse make faster and faster
  - Acceleration/Deceleration
  - Legato/Staccato/lyrical/melodic/chaotic
- Pitch/Volume
- Punctuation
- Enunciation
  - Consonants
  - Vowels
- Find the character's voice (pitch, nasality, dialect, clarity).
  - Score the vowels/consonants
- Yanci/Malcolm exercise of saying it as quietly/simple as possible
- Opposites
- If scene starts right in the middle, improvise what went into it (like opening of *Reasons to Be Pretty*).
- Find the character's habits.

- Do it in different period styles (Greek, Shakespearean, Restoration, Commedia, Realistic, Melodramatic, Absurdist, etc.)
- Do “bad acting” to help remind how not to do it
- Do your “special skills” listed on your resume while rehearsing. Ex: Spin ball on finger, dialect, impression while rehearsing monologue
- Shakespeare:
  - Find a reason to be very close to our partner when saying the words “thee”; “thou” “thy”; and “thine”; and to find a reason to be about six feet away from your partner on “you”; “your”; and “yours”.
- Allow your character’s thoughts to conflict and contradict.
- Let the **physicality** influence the voice/choices, not the other way around! This will allow you to surprise yourself/make discoveries.
  - Expansion/Contraction
  - Find the character’s walk (weight, posture, energy, center, injuries, etc.)
  - Engage the breath
  - Physical Listening (and don’t distract from what is going on by over-reacting)
    - Listen to yourself. Let what you’re hearing lead you. Don’t let emotion lead.”
  - Physical Improv (react to each thing partner says with different, improvised gesture/pose)
  - Radiate/Receive
  - Physical levels/altitudes
  - Transitions:
    - Slow transition w/fast movements and vice versa
  - Want vs. need
    - want to move fast need to move slow and vice versa
    - Wants/needs can and usually are linked, but need to distinguish b/w the two
    - Theoretically, a 5 year old should have same needs as 25 year old
  - Animal
  - Veiling w/character drawings.
  - Extremely near/far from partners (want to be near but need to be far/vice versa)
  - Sudden vs. Sustained
  - Direct vs. Indirect
  - Toward/Away
    - If your blocking doesn’t allow you to externally move toward/away, then use it internally!
  - Make a trailer of a day in the life of your character’s job.
  - Archetypal Gestures
    - Push/Pull
    - Gather/Throw
    - Reach/Drag
    - Lift/Smash
  - Laban Effort Actions

- Can utilize multiple actions at once. Ex: Glide in majority of body but Press in hands.
- Weight: Light/Strong
- Time: Sustained/Sudden
- Space: Indirect/Direct
  - Float (Light/Sustained/Indirect)
  - Punch (Strong/Sudden/Direct)
  - Glide (Light/Sustained/Direct)
  - Slash (Strong/Sudden/Indirect)
  - Dab (Light/Sudden/Direct)
  - Wring (Strong/Sustained/Indirect)
  - Flick (Light/Sudden/Indirect)
  - Press (Strong/Sudden/Direct)
- Keep the spine involved
- Psychological Gestures
  - Do the gesture w/out words, then words w/Gesture, and finally words without gesture
  - Listen to a piece of music...while listening, try to imagine what kind of Psych Gesture you can find to incorporate the inner movement of the music w/its Quality. It is not important whether you take one musical phrase, or a series of them. Rather it is essential that you get inspiration for your Psych Gest from the source that is as remote from any naturalism as the music is. Rehearse it several times, then try to find another Psych Gest connected w/the first. The music itself will be your guide. Rehearse the 2<sup>nd</sup> Psych Gest, then produce both of them, following their inner musical connections. Do this until you are able to enjoy both of them in their inner, harmonious connection.
    - Do same with piece of abstract art, objects in the room, etc.
  - add 3<sup>rd</sup> psych gest not inspired by music, but inspired by yourself born out of the two previous gestures and own “free inner impulse, your own sense of harmony, taste, and Feeling of Beauty.” Then add more gests, and eventually won’t need to start back at gest #1 each time. turn these gests into acting gests more and more, gradually and step by step.
  - Imitate people you know in your everyday life. Then choose character from play/novel, then theatre/film actors, then random people on the street. So observe, imitate, find psych gest. Don’t think, “Oh, they would never do that.” Think, “If they had to do that, how would they do it?”
  - What is my VICTORY gesture? How will I respond when I get what I want? What am I going toward? What is my LOSS/Failure gesture? What do I feel inside that I can no longer tolerate? What am I avoiding?
- Repetition
- Smile (or lack thereof)

- Embody abstract objects/paintings.
- Run w/unconventional poses
- Isolation
  - Body parts
  - Words
  - Thoughts
- Balance
  - Don't play "drunk" or "confused" or "crazy". Play someone trying to find mental/physical balance but can't.
  - Don't play "cry" but play "trying to hold back tears"
  - Don't play "stutter". Play someone who knows what they want to say and desperately wants to say it but just can't find the words.
  - Don't play "accent/dialect", play someone who is aware/insecure of the accent/dialect while in a land that is foreign to them and try to overcome that.
  - Edge of balance (physical and mental. Lean over until you can't help but fall)
- Energy Initiation: Core, Proximal, mid-limb distal
- Fill the empty space
- Let visual/audial cues affect your movement
- Grow/Shrink
  - Vertical-Lengthen/Shorten
  - Horizontal-Widen/Narrow
  - Sagittal-Bulge/Hollow
- Give yourself different circumstances that have nothing necessarily to do with the play itself. Ex: Walls are closing in, writhing on the floor, etc.
- Michael Chekhov:
  - Imagination/Focus:
    - Look at object and describe its every detail. If start to get distracted, fight it.
    - Same as ^ but for imaginary objects and noises.
    - touch invisible object with invisible hands, then embrace with whole being.
    - same but once have firm grasp on object in mind, begin to do things that have no relation to the object, like speaking with people, moving something else, finding hidden thing, open certain page of book, and while doing this try to maintain inner bonds that connect you w/object in mind.
    - Take a book, open a page at random, read a word from it and see which image it conjures up before you. This will teach you to *imagine* things rather than confine yourself to abstract, lifeless conceptions of them." Once you get these images, follow them for several minutes. Let it develop its independent life, ask it questions/give it demands. Collaborate w/your creative images.
    - picture yourself playing a role, then others playing that same role. Notice differences b/w them.

- create comedic and then dramatic character in your head. Work on it many days or weeks, then put it in diff situations/environments and watch how it lives/reacts.
  - Find imaginary body and move with it, even if it is taller/leaner/shorter etc. than yours.
- “Choose some very simple business, like cleaning a room, finding a lost article, setting the table. Repeat this action at least twenty or thirty times. Each time avoid repetition of any kind. Do each action in a new way with a fresh inner approach. Keep only the general ‘business’ as a spine for the exercise. By doing this exercise you will develop your originality and ingenuity, and with them you will gradually awaken the courage of your individual approach to all that you do on the stage. As a result, you will later on be able to improvise on the stage quite freely at all times. This means that you will always find new, individual ways to fulfill old business, remaining within the frame given by the director.
- “Imagine a Center in your chest from which living impulses are sent out into your arms, hands, legs, and feet.” Move throughout room and do simple business with this. “In addition, while moving on the stage ever so slightly- perhaps only your finger moves- you will feel intense streams of power coming from your chest to your finger.” Like initiation
- do simple movements/”business” and then do them w/specific qualities. Then add words while keeping the qualities.
  - look at or imagine diff plants/flowers and ask what/how they’re doing. “a cypress streams upward (Gesture), and has a quiet, positive, concentrated character (Quality).”
  - “Move with a quality (caution), the quality awakens a sensation (danger), which coaxes a feeling (fear).”
  - do same gestures/qualities but then just do them in your imagination and don’t move your body. If struggle, go back to first step of doing it in body then move back to brain.
  - Molding: “Make abstract movements w/your hands, arms, legs, and feet, and finally, with your whole body. Your task is to fulfill all these movements w/inner power and awakened activity, so that you will feel as if you mold the air, or even a thicker, heavier substance, around your body. Each movement must leave an outline in your surroundings. Muscular tension is not necessary. The meaning lies in the psychological power of Molding, of overcoming the imaginary resistance and in giving the imaginary substance a definite form. The movements must be broad, full, and clearly differentiated from one another. Vague and indefinite movements have no place in this exercise. Do the movements in diff tempos, w/diff intensities; even in slow and Molding movements, the power and awakened activity must not slip away from your consciousness. Drop the idea of Molding the air around you. Complete any business, as was suggested, and let the Molding character in your movements live in your inwardly by itself,

- without your special attention to it. Create some simple improvisations.” Connect to filling the empty space in the room.
- Flowing: every movement is slurred into another in an unbroken line. Although they must be well shaped, these movements must have neither a beginning nor an end, but must flow into one another organically. Here it is also necessary to have activity and a certain power, but the character of the movement must be wavelike, growing and subsiding. Change the tempo. The element of air must be felt around you, as if it were the supporting surface of a wave
  - Flying: Imagine...that your whole body has tendency to lift itself from the ground.” “element of air...must be experienced as one that stirs and urges.”
  - Radiating: Imagine that invisible rays stream from your movements into space, in the direction of the movement itself. Send out these rays from your chest, arms and hands, from your whole body at once. Can imagine golden tubes connecting you to everyone on stage.
  - Ease: Start w/small movements, then proceed to a larger and wider expansion of them so that in the end you can run and jump around the room, filled w/the Feeling of Ease. Now choose any simple business and accompany it w/a few words. Fulfill this task with the utmost inner and outer ease. You will learn, later on, to apply this quality on the stage, even when performing heavy movements, heavy moods, psychologically depressed moments, or when using heavy speech.
  - Form: Give everything a beginning, middle and end.
- Three Sisters (Different than Four Elements)
    - Floating= “sensation of weightlessness, suspension, detachment, levity or neutral buoyancy.” Diff than “Flowing” quality of movement. There are the 3 sisters which is diff than 4 elements. Fight gravity.
    - Falling= “yielding to gravity”. Lose to gravity.
    - Balancing=trying to stop or break the fall. The state is imbalance, unbalance, and instability. One tries not to topple or drift...It is a very highly charged state of energy that, like a tightrope walker, is most riveting in a chaotic struggle for control. Suspended.
  - Jewelry= “small special touches on your character that are mannerisms, use of props, costumes, hands and feet that evolve organically from the psychology of the character.”
  - “Real inspired acting is never doing, it is always happening.”
  - “An actor has to burn inside with an outer ease.”
- Thinking (head) (images)/Feeling (chest) (emotions)/Willing (legs) (physicality)
  - Alexander Technique:
    - Notice what you notice
    - Be aware of your roots (your feet) and connection to the ground at all times
    - Lead with the head/neck and let the body follow
  - Uta Hagen:

- Consider performing improvised scenes with your scene partners backstage/during rehearsal process to learn more about the characters
- The recall of something seemingly unrelated to the event, something only peripherally perceived at the actual time, was the very thing that had escaped the reasoning censor, thereby allowing the recall through the association. It brought back the emotion as a summation of the memory.” In other words, we as humans don’t want to give up control of our emotions. When we laugh or cry, we are taken by our emotions temporarily, dropping our censors of ourselves. That is why if you think about a sad event but remember the surrounding circumstances that will not have been blocked by the censor.
- When imagining the fourth wall/side, attach imagined set pieces to real things in the theatre to make them more tangible. Ex: If outdoors, imagine a tree not just anywhere, but directly next to a real door in the theatre. This will make it easier to imagine. Develop the fourth side early on in rehearsals. Don’t try to turn the exit sign into a window, place the window next to the exit sign. Imagine 5 or 6 things on the wall.
- Think about character’s clothing. How does it make them feel? Why did they pick it out for this occasion?
- When starting monologue, don’t start with words. Act the words as if you couldn’t speak, then add words.
- When addressing the audience, you leave the world of the play but not the character in the play. Also, imagine the audience is an audience of the world, not audience in this real world. And since the audience you are talking to is your partner, know the relationship. Is the audience your friends or foes? We must know what we want from them-to gain their sympathy, win them over, bully into submission, enlighten them, always taking into consideration the time and circumstances of this moment in the play. Don’t address anyone directly/look them directly in the eye. Pretend there is someone else in between real people or something like that.
- Consider finding character’s handwriting and writing letters to other characters in show.
- “If it is important that the other actor look at you, make him do so by your actions.” Don’t tell other actor anything.

#### Warm-Ups:

- Listen to music that fits character’s emotional state
- Listen to music that fits time period

#### Theories:

- The way I perceive it, acting is almost like the Blue Man Group. It’s normal men who paint themselves blue and suddenly they are these characters. We “paint” on our characters on top of ourselves. That’s what it means when we’re using our own natural/realistic tendencies with the character layered on top. The character is the “paint”.

- If you can't be the superstar of the show, make their job as easy as possible. Be a "superstar" role player. If you're not LeBron James taking the game-winning shot, set the screen, pass him the ball, have good positioning-do what you need to do to give him the best look at the basket as possible.
- Treat scripted writing like improv. This is the first and last time the character is saying those specific lines in that moment in time in the play, even if it is the thousandth time you the actor have said it.
- Remember people fight because they've devolved in intelligence. Fight starts w/mean words, then cursing, then shoving, etc.
- While analyzing a character, it is critical to discover what they have, what they want, how they are going to get it, and what happens if they do or do not achieve it.
- Emotions have to be the byproduct of the actions.
- If what you're thinking as a performer doesn't show on stage to the audience (even if they can't exactly put their finger on it), then it doesn't matter.
- When you're playing Tag, you don't think about the history of Tag. You just worry about not getting tagged by It at all costs!
- You can learn a lot more by slowly going down the hallway and opening all the doors as opposed to sprinting down the hallway.
- "Trust the text. If you do, it'll play for you."

## **Brighton Beach Memoirs Trilogy Notes**

### **Brighton Beach Memoirs:**

**Eugene Morris Jerome**

**Notes from Movie:**

- Need accent
- Mom always nags me
- I say of Laurie “she better have a bad heart or I’m gonna kill her”
- I’m not a particularly happy person. I’m not depressed, I’m just in the awkward puberty stages.
- Squeaky voice
- I love/worship my dad
- Family has whiney tone, almost like Lois Griffin.
- I’m hunched over, not comfortable in my body yet
- No one ever says “I love you”, but it goes without saying.

**Play Analysis:**

1. **Theme**≡When life seems tough, just be thankful for your family. Whenever the show gets chaotic with all of their everyday woes, Jack mentions the war and his family members who have or haven’t gotten out of what would become Nazi Europe, and then everything else is put into perspective.
2. **Central Conflict**≡The Jerome family is filled with hard workers but still the family can’t make ends meet. Between this and their everyday family feuds, the household can get fairly chaotic!
3. **Rising Action Key Events**≡ Stanley gets fired from his job, Nora asks her mom to allow her to audition for a Broadway show, Jack gets fired.
4. **Climax**≡ Kate and Blanche have a fight that has been boiling up their whole lives. Stanley runs away to join the army because he can’t face his father after gambling away \$17 that they desperately needed.
5. **Denouement/Resolution**≡Stanley comes home and makes peace with his parents, Kate and Blanche plan to help her move into the Murphy’s house across the street, Nora and Blanche make up, and Jack gets a letter about family coming in from Europe (which puts things in perspective for the family).

**Scene Analysis:**

- A. **Given Circumstances**≡ In Borough of Brooklyn, Kings County, City of New York. Live in lower-middle-income area inhabited mostly by Jews, Irish, and Germans. Laurie is 13. The Murphys that I reference are Cossack-Russian. Laurie can be sassy. My dad had a heart attack 3 days ago. He passed out on a subway and a cop had to bring him home. He was trying to make extra money driving a cab at nights and he just plain wore out. The doctor says he has to stay home for 2 or 3 weeks, but pop won’t listen to him. Laurie is spoiled by my mom and aunt because of her “condition”. I feel like my childhood ended when Stanley closed the door to leave. I hated mom and dad for making him work so hard, and I hated Stan a little for leaving me to grow up on my own. For the scene, I’m not wearing shoes because I’m in the house. Laurie shouldn’t be either. I’m scared of my father’s health scare. Right before/during the scene, the house is quieter than ever before. My Aunt Blanche is

- packing and my parents are in their bedroom. I had to talk to somebody or else I'd go crazy, and Laurie was my only option because Nora has been bitchy lately.
- B. Intention/Objective=I want to get my thoughts out, and writing it down just isn't working well enough as an expressive outlet.
- C. Obstacle=Laurie just wants to read her book to distract herself from the real world and the fact that she'll be moving homes and schools.
- E. Result=I learn a little more about Laurie and how her family dealt with their dad dying. I get the courage to break the news about Stanley to my parents.

### Character Analysis:

- A. Physical Description= I'm almost 15 (born 1922), annoying, too energetic. I am wearing knickers, a shirt and tie, a faded and torn sweater, Keds sneakers, and a blue baseball cap. Jewish-looking.
- B. Emotional Profile= All I want to do is write and do what boys do. I want to make it to the Yankees. I hate my name, I find it nerdy. I hate liver and cabbage but I LOVE ice cream.
- C. Relationships= I refer to Stanley as "Stan" sometimes. I either worship the ground he walks on or hate him so much I want to kill him. I'm given a hard time a lot. I idolize Stanley. Our mom is a neat freak; not against hitting us. Stanley is 18 and a half. He wears slacks, a shirt and tie, a zip-up jacket, and a cap. Stanley can talk himself out of any kind of trouble. Stanley's compassionate, funny, charming, likeable, witty, physically fit, noble, and responsible but a bit rebellious. He stands by his principles, hard working. Stanley taught me the napkin trick. Stanley is mad at me for bringing up his job at dinner; he calls me a pest for interrupting. Stanley cares about me and my future as a writer. I always play baseball on the wall when Laurie is studying, which annoys her. Because of Laurie's "condition", I have to do twice as many chores. I'm in love with my 16-year-old cousin, Nora. Laurie is a bit of an annoying little sister to Nora (like I can be to Stanley, and like Blanche can be to Kate and Jack could be to his older brother before he died in the war.) I get blamed for everything in the house. I know how to get under Stan's skin. Stan tells me not to curse or smoke; even though he does. I frustrate those around me because of how smart I am. They can't out-word me. My dad says I always talk like I'm in a Sherlock Holmes story.
- D. Back Story= Very poor family. Couldn't afford to send Stanley to college and if things don't turn around, I don't know how they will send me either unless I get multiple writing and academic scholarships. This is the year that I started noticing girls. Nora started developing about 8 months ago; I have the exact date written in my diary. I'm always the errand boy for the house, always running to Greenblatt's to pick up bread and butter. Mention radio show, something I always was interested in.
- a. Family:
- i. Brother=Stanley
  - ii. Father=Jack
  - iii. Mother=Kate Epstein Jerome
  - iv. Aunt=Blanche (matriarchal)
  - v. Cousin=Nora
  - vi. Cousin=Laurie
  - vii. Aunt=Celia (matriarchal)

- viii. Uncle=Ezra (matriarchal)
- ix. Uncle=Eddie (matriarchal)
- x. Uncle=Michael (patriarchal, died in war at 19)
- xi. Great Aunt=Rose (patriarchal, Jack lived w/her and Maury)
- xii. Great Uncle= Maury (patriarchal)
- xiii. Great Cousin= “Uncle” Leon (Rose/Maury’s son, Jack’s cousin. Served in navy, wounded, decorated)
- xiv. Great Cousin= “Uncle” Paul (Rose/Maury’s son, Jack’s cousin. Served in navy, wounded, decorated)
- xv. Great Cousin=Sholem (Jack’s cousin. Him and family got out of Poland into London w/his wife mother, and all four children [my cousins]).
- xvi. Grandfather=Ben Epstein (matriarchal)

E. **Secrets**≡ Private: I’m [adorably] official about my memoirs, leaving instructions for them not to be opened until 30 years after my death. Uber: I don’t just want to see Nora naked. I want to have sex with her. I would marry her if society allowed it. That’s how much I love her. But I know it could never happen.

Foreshadows:

- Jack tells Kate he’ll never leave her, but they do sarcastically talk about him cheating on her and she says she sees how women look at him. He also tells Stanley, although its seemingly referencing gambling: “Someday, I’ll tell you some other things I did that wasn’t so perfect. Not even your mother knows.”
- Stanley runs away to army, and Jack tells him the day when they’ll get drafted for real is coming soon.

Miscellaneous:

- Look up NY Yankees listed.
- *The Thirty-Nine Steps* movie
- *The Citadel* by A. J. Cronin

### **Biloxi Blues:**

- Biloxi, Mississippi
- 1943
- 21 years old
- They nickname me “Shakespeare”
- I hate lima beans

Miscellaneous:

- Look up *The Great Gatsby*

### **Broadway Bound:**

- Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, New York.

- February 1949
- 27 years old
- no one in my family thinks I'm funny
- I think Ben is funny only when he doesn't try to be. He's the "greatest teacher of comedy I ever met... Only he didn't even know I was studying him."
- I want to be a comedy writer w/Stan.
- Stanley is only one who appreciates my humor. When I make him laugh, I "feel like Charles Lindbergh landing in Paris".
- I work in the stock room of a music company.
- I'm sarcastic
- I'm a goofball
- Bit of a smartass
- Not very athletic (at least for winter sports)
- It's not CBS we care most about liking our comedy. It's mom and pop's approval.
- "there's a part of my head that makes me this nice, likable, funny kid... and there's the other part, the part that writes, that's an angry, hostile real son of a bitch."
- I'm naïve, idealistic about love

#### Research:

- Trigger Words:
  - Lawn Guyland
  - Noo Yawk
  - oo-ah.
- Complimentary Study:
  - Jerry Seinfeld
  - Larry David
  - Woody Allen
  - Ken Ludwig
  - Mel Brooks
  - Carl Reiner
  - Comedy shows in general
- Movies:
  - Funny Girl
  - Yentl
  - Fiddler on the Roof
  - The Jazz Singer (Neil Diamond version)

The Frisco Kid