

Meisner Across Paradigms:
The Phenomenal Dynamic of Sanford
Meisner's Technique of Acting and its
Resonances with Postmodern
Performance.

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as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Drama

In May 2012

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Abstract:

The Meisner Technique emerged as a part of the realist, modern theatre of the early-Twentieth Century and extended its influence through the rest of that century, including the 1960s and 1970s when there was an explosion of various forms of postmodern performance. This work will demonstrate that while Meisner's Technique is a part of the paradigm of modern, realist theatre, it simultaneously challenges this ideology with disruptive processes of the sort that postmodern performance instigates. It is the thesis of this work that the Meisner Technique operates according to a set of phenomenologically-aligned imperatives that create strong resonances with certain forms of postmodern performance. This establishes the dynamic wherein the Meisner Technique is able to enter into discourse with instances of the postmodern paradigm of performance.

In the first three chapters I will conduct in-depth analyses of Meisner actors' relationships with their environment, their fellow performers, and their actions from a range of phenomenological perspectives. In the fourth chapter I will apply the conclusions of these analyses to the operation of the Meisner Technique within the paradigm of modern, realist theatre. In the fifth chapter I will set a backdrop to the postmodern field and suggest the issues from this tradition with which the Meisner Technique might resonate. Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight each take one example of an artist from the postmodern field, Richard Foreman, Michael Kirby, and Robert Wilson respectively, establishes their own particular context, and suggests those processes relating to acting/performing technique that might provoke the most productive exchanges. This juxtaposition suggests the places between the practices where discourse might take root and suggests the beginnings of such dialogues.

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