

©
Thomas Leeland Cunningham
All Rights Reserved

2011

The Konami Code:
An Experiment in Dialect Pedagogy

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts: Theatre Pedagogy at
Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Thomas Leeland Cunningham
M.F.A. Theatre Pedagogy, Virginia Commonwealth University 2011
B.A. Theatre, Virginia Commonwealth University 2007

Director: Janet B. Rodgers, Professor of Theatre, Department of
Theatre

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
April, 2011

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Professor Janet Rodgers for being a constant mentor and friend; without her patient guidance I would not have made it to where I am today. I would like to thank Dr. Noreen Barnes for compromising on the due dates of papers, but never on the quality. I would also like to thank Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates for the opportunity to explore and implement The Konami Code in a professional setting. Lastly, I would like to thank my students: they inspired this work, and I dedicate it to them.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I: Physicalizing a Dialect.....	8
Shape.....	12
Placement.....	13
Directionality.....	15
Resonance.....	19
Articulation.....	22
Chapter II: Classroom Application.....	24
Challenges in Incorporation.....	24
Incorporation through Front-Loading.....	25
Incorporation through Multiple Units.....	28
Incorporation using a Framing Structure.....	30
Conclusions about Incorporation.....	33
Exercises and Projects.....	34
“Walk-About”.....	35
Mask-Making.....	39
“Adjectives!”.....	41
Application to the Teaching of Phonetics.....	43

Chapter III: Application to Dialect Coaching.....	46
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	46
Working with Student Actors.....	48
Working with Professional Actors.....	49
Results and Reflections.....	53
Other Coaching Applications.....	54
<i>Steel Magnolias</i> -Cultural Arts Theatre, Savannah GA..	54
<i>Southern Cross</i> -Virginia Commonwealth University.....	57
Chapter IV: Conclusions.....	61
 Bibliography.....	 64
Appendix I: Grapes of Wrath Dialect Packet.....	65
Appendix II: Sample Syllabi.....	77
Fall Semester, Bachelor of Fine Arts, 2010.....	76
Fall Semester, Bachelor of Arts: Dialects, 2009.....	81
Vita.....	84

Abstract

THE KONAMI CODE: AN EXPERIMENT IN DIALECT PEDAGOGY

By Thomas Leeland Cunningham, M.F.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts: Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011.

Major Director: Janet B. Rodgers, Professor of Theatre,
Department of Theatre

The Konami Code is a tool for teaching stage dialects that I have been developing for the past three years. I wanted a method that didn't rely on students' having a keen ear for phonetics; rather one that offered context for each dialect, and presented individual sound-changes as small parts of an easy way to digest the whole. Most importantly, I wanted a process that was portable: a set series of applications that my students could incorporate easily into their actor's tool-kit and carry with them into the professional world.

The Konami Code incorporates kinesthetic and imaginative elements into the study of dialects. This thesis discusses the

genesis of the Code, the theory behind it, and my applications of the Code, to date, as both a teacher and a coach. It is a work in progress, and one which I hope you will expand upon even as I continue to do so!

INTRODUCTION

I first came to Virginia Commonwealth University as an undergraduate in the Fall of 2001. I received my BA in the Winter of 2007. Now, in the Spring of 2011, I'm writing this thesis and wondering where to begin. This is a thesis about dialects. But more so, it's a story about pedagogy: how and why I have worked to develop my own peculiar pedagogy of dialect training.

My journey with dialects began years and years back, during my second stint as a VCU undergraduate (it took me a few tries to make it to my undergraduate degree: but that's a different story). The first formal dialect training I encountered was in the third year of undergraduate study with Prof. Janet Rodgers. Much of Janet's process was based on the work of Jerry Blunt¹, supplemented by her own handouts and materials. In addition, we used the text Accents and Dialects for Stage and Screen (Meier, 2008). Meier's text focused on phonetic shifts, lexical sets, and precise sound production. I took to it well, and the dialects came easily. Others in my class were less adept. I

¹ Stage Dialects (Blunt, 1994) was the primary source material.

could understand the difficulties many of them were having, but I couldn't understand why those difficulties were manifesting. To me, dialect study seemed a simple matter of parroting sound. Any complications I faced could be ironed out through repetition.

There was one exercise that Janet employed frequently which I never understood. She would speak a sound aloud and, as the student repeated the sound, with her pointer finger trace the phonetic symbol for the sound on the student's back. Alternatively, she would sometimes ask the student to make abstract physical adjustments while repeating sounds. Both of these exercises baffled me. What did physical sensation or movement have to do with dialects? Dialects were about listening and repeating sound, after all; odd that these consternating exercises seemed to help many of my classmates who struggled with learning by ear.

In my final semester as an undergraduate I served as a teaching assistant for John DeBoer in a section of graduate-level dialects. Half of the class consisted of voice/speech-focused graduate students, all of whom had had experience with dialect study. The other half of the class consisted of graduate students with minimal experience in dialect-study. Several had no experience at all.

This already challenging class composition was made worse by the course curriculum's dual focus on praxis and pedagogy. The culminating project of the course is what still stays with me. Each graduate student was to teach a dialect of their choosing. This project was meant as a synthesis between the practical study we'd focused on during the semester and the techniques for dialect pedagogy we'd explored: bringing the dual foci together.

The voice/speech-focused graduate students demonstrated high competence in dialect production, but each of them chose to emulate Paul Meier's lexical-set-based curriculum structure, and presented their chosen dialect as a list of phonetic shifts. Their presentations were prescriptive, and made a great deal of sense to me since they focused strongly on the elements of dialect study that appealed to my own sensibilities.

The non-voice-focused graduate students, uniformly, had greater difficulty in narrowly defining sound changes and isolating unique phonetic shifts. Their curriculums varied in structure, but those who succeeded shared a common characteristic. In lieu of a great degree of phonetic detail, each of the most effective presenters from the second group made extensive use of imagery and analogy. Rather than narrowly identifying a lexical shift in the carefully chosen vocabulary of dialect study, they chose to characterize multiple sets of

phonetic shifts as part of a general shift in vocal energy or placement. Simple terms such as "farther forward," "more up," "more round," or "really really wide" took the place of close-transcription and, while broad, communicated the general shape of the dialect within the mouth in an extremely comprehensive manner. The changes had a shared context and seemed to make sense together.

It startled me how little of the rigorous and prescriptive methodology seemed to resonate with the non-voice/speech graduates. I began to wonder if I wasn't in the minority (along with others who had a specific interest in dialect/voice) with my preference for close-transcription and fine phonetic detail.

In my first year as a graduate student I had the opportunity to teach dialects. During my tenure as an MFA student, I've taught dialects to undergraduates for a total of four semesters and alongside my fellow graduate students for another semester. But it was my first semester of teaching dialects, and the multitude of aptitudes and learning styles my students demonstrated, that hit me the hardest.

I had a willing and eager group of third-year undergraduates. They were energetic and, for the most part, hard-working. The problem was that some of them couldn't hear all of what I was saying. In fact, the majority of them couldn't hear all of what I was saying. I would speak a sound

aloud, ask the students to repeat the sound, but hear a different sound repeated back to me. I was greeted with looks of confusion when I insisted that they weren't repeating the sound that I had spoken.

Brute-force got us through the first part of the semester. Never short of stubbornness, I drilled sounds into their ears until I got the sounds I wanted out of their mouths. It was exhausting to me and to my students. Worse, it was disheartening. While I was elated when a student finally made the sound I so desperately wanted to hear, the students seemed overwhelmed and lost in their own inability to grasp the sounds in the manner I was demanding.

Learning wasn't taking place, at least not to a degree that satisfied my expectations as a teacher. The product was correct, but the process was all wrong. It was wrong because it was not something that the students could integrate into their own work. It required a red-faced dialect instructor shouting sound-sets at them until they got it right. I needed to make a change.

I thought back to my previous experiences: to the undergraduates who learned with their bodies more than their ears; to the graduate students who understood general concepts and relationships more readily than specific phonemes. I pulled out Janet's tricky exercises from my own undergraduate dialect

study. Those helped some. I turned to music, jokes, and stories to attempt to support the lyrical and tonal qualities of the dialects while offering cultural context. That helped some, too. I tried to focus on exercises and out-of-class-rigor that the students could access without my assistance. If nothing else, that eased their apprehension. By the end of that first semester of teaching I'd resolved to come up with a process for dialect study that worked for me and that served my students' academic and artistic needs.

So, in 2009, this thesis was born. It wasn't meant to be a thesis. Rather, it was meant to be a solution. I wanted to design a method of teaching dialects that didn't rely on students' having a keen ear for phonetics. I wanted a curriculum that offered context for each dialect, and presented individual sound-changes as small parts of an easy to digest whole. Most importantly, I wanted a process that was portable: a set series of applications that my students could incorporate easily into their actor's tool-kit and carry with them into the professional world.

I am still in pursuit of that solution. This thesis is not a reflection on how to build the perfect dialect pedagogy. Rather, it is a chance for me to share my progress in devising a pedagogy that allows me to accomplish my goals as a teacher and dialect coach and to accomplish them to my own satisfaction.

And that progress has been very exciting. It is my hope that on reading this you will find something worth stealing; an exercise to try, a new connection to explore, or an idea to expand upon radically. This is a thesis about exploring and synthesizing pedagogy: what greater triumph than having it incorporated in an unexpected manner into someone else's process?

-Thomas

CHAPTER I. PHYSICALIZING A DIALECT

One of the biggest obstacles I've encountered as an instructor, and an obstacle I've consistently observed other instructors struggle against, is terminology. Often, the words chosen to communicate an idea eclipse the idea itself. Over the course of my graduate work I've observed that the most insurmountable failings of terminology arise when multiple instructors use the same term and for each of them it has a different meaning. A 'beat' to the acting instructor might mean a unit of a scene. A 'beat' to the movement instructor might mean a caesura, or rhythmic pause. I once asked a class of Shakespeare students to 'score' a monologue—intending that they scan and notate the piece. They responded by handing in a three part division of the piece that focused on isolating performance beats. 'Score' was the wrong term for me to use with my Voice and Speech students to arrive at a scansion and text annotation—it was a term already used differently in their acting class.

The problem of terminology is one worthy of attention. Many of the students with whom I have worked in the past three years perceive a large degree of division between the different

elements of their training. At Virginia Commonwealth University acting, movement, and voice are separate classes, taught by separate faculty. What students often miss is that all three classes are offering them tools that work toward the same goal: a well-rounded performance. More so, they are all methods of achieving the same outcome as viewed through different lenses. Bridging the perceived divide between acting, movement, and voice is critical to offering a holistic and well-synthesized performance curriculum. Overcoming the limitations of terminology is one step towards that goal.

To that end, I began to seek parallels among VCU's three core performance classes to incorporate into the curriculum of my voice/speech classes. 'Levels of dialogue'² in acting class are reinforced in my classes by the use of the term 'vocal levels.' 'States of readiness'³ in movement I reinforce with Patsy Rodenburg's term "circles of energy." (Rodenburg, 2008) The more I sought out tools that directly correlated, in spite of divergent terminology, the more I was stunned at the similarities. It occurred to me how essential that similarity is to successful performance. When the acting intention, the

² 'Levels of dialogue' here refers to a concept taught by VCU's Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates. It refers to the relationship between speaker and receiver and how that relationship informs and alters the manner and quality of the interaction (i.e. you speak on a different 'level of dialogue' with your boss than you might with your lover).

³ This term was introduced to me by Dr. Aaron Anderson of VCU. Based on the Suzuki method, 'states of readiness' refer to the levels of energy and physical preparedness the body can sustain. These levels range from a somnambulistic state of low energy to an explosive state of frenetic energy.

physical intention, and the vocal intention all move toward the same objective then the actor is truly present on stage. Cultivating that cross-curricular synchronicity became a goal of mine, and I soon asked the question: how does this notion apply to the teaching and coaching of dialects?

How are dialects reinforced through acting and movement? When teaching dialects the correlation to acting seemed obvious and immediate to me: dialects are a given circumstance of the performance. They are a given circumstance reflected in the voice, and therefore the domain of the voice/speech instructor, but they are considered just as the play's time period, the character's economic status, or any other fact about a character is considered. The application of these circumstances is within the domain of the acting instructor, and it is a skill that must be learned early in the student's coursework. Given the amount of information conveyed by dialects, they are a relatively complex given circumstance—making in-depth study of dialects in the third year a good expansion on long-lain ground-work done in acting studio.

The connection between dialect and movement is less apparent. Thinking back to my experience as a VCU undergraduate, I was unable to find a way in which the work explored in the third year of movement studio was directly supported by, or was directly connected to, dialect study. This

is because I was thinking like many undergraduate students: dividing concepts instead of marrying them. The fact is that the vocal mechanism and the body function in similar manners, and are both parts of the same whole. The vocal mechanism is made up of muscles and bones like any other part of the body. It is manipulated just as a limb or joint, and those manipulations convey intention and reaction during performance. If dialect is a given circumstance in performance, what then is a given circumstance in movement? Posture; a point of balance; a gait; the carriage of weight—all of these physicalizations are elements of a character that, in the same manner as a dialect, inform the performance.

In order to draw a clear line of reinforcement between dialect and movement, I needed to find a way to physicalize dialects and a way for physicalization to enable and reinforce dialect production. That method needed to do so using complimentary terminologies that accurately reflected the similarities between the vocal mechanism and the full body.

1. THE KONAMI CODE

To this end, I devised a system of dialect study I affectionately termed The Konami Method. A name refers to a cheat-code featured in a number of popular video games during

the 1980s. The code is a set sequence of button presses that when executed correctly allows for great ease in completing the game. I found it a fitting title for a system designed to create a set, repeatable method of study that incorporates areas of study into a complete performance. The Konami Method identifies five key elements in dialect production: 'Shape', 'Placement', 'Directionality', 'Resonance', and 'Articulation.'

A. SHAPE.

Shape describes the posture of the mouth, the way in which the lips, palate, throat, and tongue commonly configure themselves. A body's posture affects and reflects its state of energy, its range of motion, and its available physical tactics. So, too, the mouth's posture (Shape) affects and reflects a dialect's vocal quality, its range of sound, and its phonetic substitutions.

A dialect's Shape is found in the 'ready' positions the speaker's mouth most frequently assumes. For example, when speaking Received Pronunciation⁴ the palate is so often raised and the throat opened that, when engaged, the RP-ready-mouth automatically lifts the palate and opens the throat. Achieving

⁴ Received Pronunciation, or RP, is a refined, old-fashioned dialect of British English generally used by upper-class speakers.

this state of readiness is the primary pedagogical purpose of isolating Shape.

Physicalizing Shape is something with which movement students who have worked with masks are very familiar. The entire body can become a mask: the pelvis can become a mouth, the shoulders eye-brows, and the face can become the eyes for the full-body-mask. So, too, the entire body can reflect the Shapes and motions found within the mouth. The extension of these positions into the full-body context emphasizes the foreign nature of the dialect's posture and demonstrates the energy needed to engage the mouth in an unfamiliar arrangement for a sustained period. The body is a larger canvas than the mouth, and it can be easier to sense the desired Shape on that large canvas.

B. PLACEMENT.

Placement is the center of gravity, or point of balance for the dialect. The center of gravity is the point around which the body balances, and is not necessarily a part of the body itself (a character's center of gravity can be three feet in front of her: and she is quite an off-kilter dame). Likewise, a dialect's Placement is the point around which its tonal and

phonetic features rest and it is not necessarily a point within the mouth.

The Placement of a dialect can be observed in two key ways: focus of tone and lexical shifts. Focus of tone is a way of describing the point at which sound vibrates most fully within the mouth⁵. RP can be said to have a forward (or frontal) focus of tone, since a majority of its sounds are released all the way through the mouth before resonating in the alveolar region. Lexical shifts are the phonetic substitutions that differentiate the dialect from General Speech (for the purposes of this my work at VCU, General American Speech). Again using RP as an example, lexical shifts, specifically those in the front vowels, tend toward upward and forward substitutions (as: [ou] to [əʊ], [ɑ] to [ɒ], and less frequently [æ] to [ɜ]). Likewise, there is additional lip-rounding present in RP which emphasized the role the front part of the mouth plays in the formation of the sounds. While not all shifts are forward, the majority of shifts trend in that direction. By observing these trends, and using them to characterize the most commonly activated areas within the mouth, we can describe RP's Placement as forward and high. With each dialect it is important to consider what

⁵ Arthur Lessac offers a tremendous tool for isolating tones and vibrations within the mouth, the "Y-Buzz" exercise, in his book The Use and Training of the Human Voice. (Lessac, 1967)

patterns are most common, since all dialects use a range of shifts and resonances through the entire mouth.

The most direct path to physicalizing Placement is through body-center work. The image I like to use is that of a Cartesian plane. Both the body and the mouth can be visualized as two-dimensional planes, each defined by a vertical axis (the y-axis) and a horizontal axis (the x-axis). The body's y-axis is its height. The body's x-axis is its width. By using the full height of the body to approximate the y-axis of the mouth, and using the full width of the body to approximate the x-axis of the mouth, the body's center of gravity can reside at a physical coordinate point that corresponds to the dialect's location within the mouth. Learning to explore and master balance in a new center is critical to building trust and competence in a dialect's Placement center, which can often be far from native to the actor's mouth.

C. DIRECTIONALITY.

Directionality encompasses the gait of the dialect—the beginning and ending point, levels, steerage, and tempo. The manner in which a body moves across the stage helps define its circumstances. Likewise, dialects move through space in specific, characteristic manners that identify each dialect

handily. A Brooklyn dialect's direct, nasal, vowel-lengthened sound tends toward a fast rate of production and sustains energy fully to the end of the thought. As such, a Brooklyn dialect might be said to have a direct, intense, rapid directionality that travels from origin to destination with great force and energy.

Directionality is an umbrella term used to describe a number of related elements. Breath support, pitch variety, vocal rhythm, and rate of speech are the core mechanics behind Directionality. Breath support describes the way in which the speaker manages/utilizes breath over the course of the sentence/thought. American speakers tend to fall off their breath at the ends of sentences, allowing the breath to drop away. A tendency to air dump (exhale a large portion of breath) at the start of a sentence is another common American breath support issue. Breath support, in terms of physical movement, are the three-dimensional line that connects point A (the start of the thought) to point B (the end of the thought). An American speaker who falls off at the end of her thoughts will arrive at point B with a thud, whereas an RP speaker whose tendency is to use all remaining breath at the end of a thought will arrive at point B with a flourish of energy

Pitch variety describes both the range of pitch (or number of notes) incorporated in the dialect and the frequency of

movement between pitches. Pitch moves up or down the scale as it changes. In this manner, pitch variety is related to the physical level (i.e.: tip-toeing, crouching, crawling) at which the body travels through space. Pitch variety is the vertical element of Directionality and will be more or less prominent depending on the dialect. Pitch changes can occur within words, from word to word, or based on thought/sentence structure. The frequency of pitch variation is also an important aspect to consider when mapping pitch.

Vocal rhythms, when working with dialects, are usually categorized into "more/less staccato" versus "more/less legato." The vocal rhythm of a dialect is a combination of how it manifests syllables and how it regards words. A dialect that manifests syllables and words as very distinct units of sound is staccato in rhythm. A dialect that treats syllables and words as fluid, often elided units of sound is legato in rhythm. This categorization is crucial in understanding a dialect's special relationship. Irish and Jamaican dialects of English, for example, are identical in many regards and very similar in most others; the feature that distinguishes them is their contrasting vocal rhythms. Vocal rhythms are akin to the steerage of the body, or how it navigates physical space. If pitch is the vertical element of the voice, rhythm is the horizontal element. If you were to imagine syllable, word, and

phrase structure as physical obstacles on the stage, vocal rhythm dictates the way in which a dialect moves around those obstacles.

The last element that comprises Directionality is rate of speech. Rate of speech is not a measure of 'fast' or 'slow.' Rather, it is a measure of the time spent elongating sounds and the time spent between syllables and words. Rate changes the amount of time it takes for a thought to go from beginning to end. Time is the element under consideration when we talk about rate of speech or rate of movement, not speed. Speed is the dividend of distance over time. I find it easiest to explain rate using basic physics. If we were to represent rate as an equation ($R = D/T$) where 'R' equals the rate. The variable for distance (D) in our equation is a constant value: the quantitative length of the line or thought (three words, for example). The variable we can observe and modify in order to affect rate is time (T). The more time spent on a single line or thought, the slower the rate of speech will become.

In this manner, rate of speech is directly consistent with rate of movement. Movement students with experience in dance or contact improvisation will have an easy time incorporating the idea of Directionality. There is little difference between physicalizing Directionality in dialect and in physicalizing a dance.

With all elements of Directionality it is important to think of the motion as happening throughout the entire body. The body can move across the room exploring Directionality as can the arm in isolation. So too can the head, or hips. The objective in playing with Directionality is to infect every fiber of one's being with the elements at play so that the voice, too, will become infected with the tempos and rhythms in its manifestation of the dialect.

D. RESONANCE.

Resonance approximates the way a dialect "carries" itself. The strongest part of the body, or the hardest working, calls attention to itself and reveals the emotional center of a character to the audience. This is the role Resonance plays through the voice. Resonance is related to the Shape of the dialect. Tensions within the musculature of the vocal mechanism affect how sound resonates within the body. The Konami Code's exploration of Resonance attempts to expand the role of resonators to active focuses for energy and targets of manipulation.

Most dialects incorporate a range of resonators. In the Konami context, however, Resonance refers to the resonator or resonators most consistently engaged during dialect production.

It is these resonators that are the powerhouse or battery of the dialect. Accurately locating the optimal Resonance of a dialect is important for its sustainability.

Resonance is often contingent of Shape, Placement, and Directionality. Determining the primary resonator for a dialect can only happen once these elements have been explored. Pitch variety has a strong impact on Resonance. General American Speech, for example, typically has a very narrow pitch range. As such, its primary resonance resides solely in the chest. RP, in contrast, has an exceptionally broad pitch variety and primary resonance can be shared between the chest and head resonators, or located primarily in either resonator while maintain the integrity of the dialect. Just because a dialect pitches high doesn't mean the head resonator is the only resonator being engaged. There will always be a degree of sympathetic resonance throughout the body. Likewise, each resonator has a range of pitches available to it, and there is overlap between resonators. The goal in identifying Resonance is to find the resonators that are most vigorously employed and most frequently active. The truest test of Resonance is, using the palm of your hand, to find the spot on your anatomy that is experiencing the most vibration during phonation.

Physicalizing Resonance is neither as straightforward as Directionality nor as immediately transferable as Shape. The

place where a dialect resonates in the vocal mechanism is where it is most often most fully sounded. The physical equivalent is, then, the carriage of weight or locating the place in the body that most often holds the most volume of weight and energy.

An image I use for physicalizing Resonance is that of a caricature drawing. A caricature exaggerates and enlarges the most prominent features of a person. The part of the body that carries the majority of an individual's weight is emphasized and easily exaggerated. Carriage of weight has less to do with pounds and kilograms, and more to do with ballast. Imagine a counter-weight that hangs opposite a heavy pendulum: the counter-weight's role is to ensure that the pendulum remains at balance. If Placement is imagined as center-of-gravity, then Resonance is the counter-ballast that allows Placement to find its balance. Thus, the physical image to play with for Resonance is the idea of the most resonant part of your body becoming the largest—the counter-point, or anchor, to your points of Placement within the dialect. The two points may be close together or far apart: this relationship also reflects the dialect. For example, a dialect with a forward Placement and a nasal Resonance (such as the French) balances very narrowly in the frontal part of the vocal mechanism with tremendous energy. By contrast, a dialect with centered Placement and a chest Resonance (such as General American

Speech), has a broader point of balance with less energy and more stability.

Pedagogically, focus of Resonance is the habit-breaking element of the Konami Method. It first forces the student to center their voice in a part of their body from which they are often uncomfortable voicing from (young women are often uncomfortable in their pelvic and abdominal resonators; young men are often uncomfortable in their head and mask resonators). Second, it roots the dialect in a supported and concrete vocal center. This helps prevent playing at pitch or specific sounds later on by encouraging the actor to root base their dialect on a specific point of balance and from the energy of a specific location within their bodies and vocal mechanisms.

E. ARTICULATION.

I refer to Articulation as 'the details' of a dialect. Just as any physical gesture must be sharp and precise, so too must articulation be sharp and precise to produce a clear dialect. Articulation is the final element to be incorporated in the Konami method, as it serves the role of "clean-up": polishing the dialect for performance. This treatment of Articulation is predicated on VCUs curriculum which devotes a large portion of the second year voice/speech studio to the

study of phonetics and strengthening/isolating articulators. For students with a weaker grasp of the tenets of precise diction, I would revise Articulation's marginal role in the Konami curriculum substantially. I would begin by incorporating Articulation's parallels to physical scoring (as seen in clown or mask performance) to the forefront. Physical scoring involves a complex degree of breath and gesture specificity, designed to allow total accuracy in reproduction of movement. In this same manner, Articulation focuses on accurate and precise production of sounds within the vocal mechanism.

In understanding its role relative to the other elements outline, Articulation is the element that lends the dialect its accuracy and consistency. The other elements are structural in nature: they engage the musculature and/or focus required to achieve the dialect. Articulation is practical in nature: it forges the dialect after the Shape, Placement, Directionality, and Resonance have prepared the body and voice to put the dialect into motion.

CHAPTER II: CLASSROOM APPLICATION

1. CHALLENGES IN INCORPORATION

The Konami Code has grown and changed over the course of my seven semesters as a voice/speech instructor and coach. While its depth and scope have increased, its primary focus on Shape, Placement, Directionality, and Resonance has remained constant. Each of these elements is already a part of any dialect curriculum: the lips maintain a different neutral shape for some dialects, consonants assume subtle shifts in placement characterized through diacritic markings, lyrical qualities and vocal cadence are addressed often as addenda, and characteristic or gender-appropriate pitch ranges are offered up as helpful tools for affecting the proper sound. But none of the elements are brought forward as unifying factors for comprehension or as parallels to full-body integration. So while it is impossible to have a solid dialect curriculum without some passing reference to the core ideas within The Konami Code, part of what makes the Konami model unique is its *focus* on those elements as

essential pedagogical tools. As such, integrating The Konami Code into an already extant course curriculum has been a challenge.

A great deal of leeway is afforded to VCU's voice/speech graduate students in structuring their courses. We are encouraged to play to our strengths and incorporate pedagogical elements with which we have specific experience. In spite of this, the required curricular outcomes are clear, and a degree of consistency among sections is rightly expected. How the Konami method is integrated into the course structure has a tremendous impact on its effectiveness as a teaching tool. When it is introduced, how often it is reincorporated, and how effectively its vocabulary is reinforced are all key elements.

A. INCORPORATION THROUGH FRONT-LOADING

My first attempt to incorporate The Konami Method was in the Advanced Stage Voice and Speech (301) in the Fall of 2009. I had experienced some success with reincorporating elements of Prof. Janet Rodgers' curriculum and syllabus into this course in the Fall of 2008, and so I decided to stick closely to her syllabus. I was itching, however, to begin exploring my new pedagogical notion that didn't even yet have a name (at this point it was called "4-Point-Dialect-Teaching-Idea"). I decided

to introduce my method as a fore grounding for study and incorporate it into the first few weeks of class as preparatory work.

The students took quickly to the idea of physicalizing Shape and Placement. They commented that these elements related directly to work they'd done in the previous semester on character voice. Directionality, and the idea of movement through a four-dimensional space, was a more difficult concept and, in the two weeks I had allotted for preparation, a concept they never fully embraced. Resonance became synonymous with pitch. I discovered that my students' vocabulary regarding resonators was very limited. While they knew a good array of warm-ups and exercises designed to open and engage different resonators, they could identify neither individual resonators nor how the warm-ups/exercises stimulated and activated those resonators. Taking the concept of Resonance into the abstract and then into the physical was beyond the scope of the time I had allotted.

As we had yet to begin work with dialects, I introduced each of the elements of The Konami Code citing examples unrelated to dialects. The Shapes we explored were wildly varied and all far from neutral or first-circle postures. The Placements emphasized breaking the forward plane with unconventional body-parts and exploring new centers of balance.

Examining these elements for their own sake had the exciting side-effect of promoting a true integrating of breath and body. With gentle prompting, the students readily explored how their breath and open-vowel sounds changed as their posture and alignment changed. This essential integration is core to the purpose of the Konami method and was the greatest benefit of addressing the methodology up-front and as a stand-alone concept, free from its application to dialect work.

I was able to call upon this sense of integration later in the semester during actual dialect study. Specifically, it served to evoke a strong sense-memory when encouraging students to activate their full body during performance. Further, the early work on physical extremes became a reliable reference point when encouraging extreme vocal shifts later in the semester. Each semester I've taught dialects, the majority of students are reluctant to make sounds that differ wildly from their own idiolect. Introducing the concepts of Shape and Placement early and exploring physical extreme thoroughly provided the best results in overcoming this issue. The students had already experienced extreme varieties of their own voice within the context of the previous semester of the course, and were, by and large, more willing to take risks in abandoning their idiolect.

The concepts of Directionality and Resonance remained beyond the scope of a two-week introductory period. As such, they were useless pedagogical tools later in the semester. Whenever I would attempt to incorporate the vocabulary of Directionality or Resonance, I fostered confusion. This failing centered on my decision to focus on the concepts exclusively early-on: I discovered that the notions are too advanced to be easily grasped or explored in a limited time-frame. Likewise, I discovered the importance of immediate application of concepts in building a solid foundation of understanding. Talking about the concepts early on and trying to work with the concepts later in the semester was an inefficient means of study.

B. INCORPORATION THROUGH MULTIPLE UNITS

The key curriculum requirement of Advanced Stage Voice and Speech 301 is the acquisition of a minimum of five dialects plus a sixth dialect in the form of an individual project. In the Fall of 2010 I decided to take advantage of this curricular requirement and incorporate The Konami Code (which was by then, indeed, called The Konami Code) by dividing the course into units. Each unit focused on a different dialect and a different key element of The Konami Code as a tool specifically applicable to that dialect.

I broke the units down as follows: RP (Placement), Cockney (Shape), Irish (Directionality), New York [Brooklyn] (Resonance), German (focus on synthesis), Individual Dialect Project (application of methodology).

I was initially very excited by the clean division of the pedagogical elements. Indeed, each of the dialects related with especial strength to one of the elements of The Konami Code. The forward energy of RP reflects in consistent forward sound-shifts, the seemingly absurd back-rounding of Cockney is a key feature, the Irish dialect is most immediately characterized by its forward focus and musical qualities, and Brooklyn's powerful resonance is the hallmark that identifies the uniquely New-York sound. Unfortunately, the clean and exciting coordination of teaching-points did not transfer cleanly into course-work.

I offered an overview of my methodology at the outset of the semester, but chose to reserve detailed discussion of each element for its specified unit. RP was received well, and the Placement parallel was helpful but not earth-shattering for the students. Likewise, Cockney's inherent emphasis on Shape helped give the students a very clear idea of the purpose of deliberate vocal posture. Unfortunately, the previous weeks' work on Placement was difficult for the students to transfer into work on Cockney. Likewise, while Directionality was embraced as a tool for exploring the Irish dialect, Shape (and indeed

Placement) weren't tools the students seemed eager to apply to the Irish sound set.

Resonance, too, was received and understood much more readily when given a dialect-base context than it had been when offered up-front. But, again, the students seemed unwilling or unable to transfer the different elements between units.

I feel that the immediate and specific dialect-based context that a unit-based incorporation offered allowed the students to grasp the purpose and application of each Konami element more fully. Unfortunately, I also feel that the specificity of the context prevented the elements from becoming universally applicable tools. While the unit-based organization furthered my goals of physical integration and incorporation non-aural learning contexts, it did little to promote an adaptable and persistent process for the students.

C. INCORPORATION USING A FRAMING STRUCTURE

In the Fall of 2009 I had the opportunity to devise and teach the dialects portion of a class entitled Dialects and Shakespeare for Bachelors of the Arts, an elective designed to offer VCU's third-year voice/speech curriculum (usually reserved for BFA candidates) to BA candidates. The two semesters of study were condensed into one semester, and refocused to better

support the diverse interests of the BA candidates (teaching, directing, production, playwriting, etc). As the author of the dialects segment of the course, I had full liberty to explore incorporation of The Konami Code. I took great advantage of this opportunity.

I began the semester with a thorough introduction of the methodology, focusing on its theoretical and pedagogical purpose. This provided an excellent spring-board into discussion of dialect pedagogy as a whole, one of the key curricular elements of the course. After thorough contextualization of the method, I asked the students to record their own voices using a sample text and to characterize their own voice in terms of The Konami Code. This led to a discussion of idiolect and regional versus Standard American Speech.

As a frame for course study, The Konami Code was exceptionally effective. It provided an accessible vocabulary for the BA students to employ and even early in the semester promoted greater specificity in describing vocal mannerisms and characteristics.

When we moved to the study of an individual dialect (we focused on the Irish dialect), the first step we took was to discuss samples of the dialect in our shared vocabulary (meaning, in terms of The Konami Code) collectively. I guided the students in a Socratic-style discussion, asking questions

about the dialect and prompting group discussion to arrive at answers that each student participated in formulating. The immediate result was an increased sense of competency among the students. While they were not yet able to identify each specific sound-shift, they were able to characterize and consistently describe the presence of changes and the manner in which the change was occurring (a shift in rhythm vs. a shift in consonant placement, vs. lateralization etc). This increase in competency and confidence carried through to subsequent classes. When a student struggled with a specific sound change, they were able to lean on their understanding of the physical dynamics of their mouth and the Konami-based dialect characteristics effectively.

I feel as though incorporating The Konami Code as a frame for dialect study has by far the most potential for enabling and empowering students with an approachable methodology for acquiring new dialects. The weakness of this method lies in the intellectualization of the process. One of the core objectives of the Konami method is to promote the integration of voice and body. When The Konami Code is presented as a conceptual method for dialect acquisition it is relegated to the head-space. Applying it becomes a thought problem, not an exploration. Intellectualization is an obstacle to effective performance and effective vocal production.

D. CONCLUSION ABOUT INCORPORATION

I've yet to find a method of incorporation that I'm happy with. Framing the course in terms of The Konami Code gave me the best outcomes in terms of building my students' confidence in study and providing them with a useful long-term tool. Offering the Konami method as an up-front exploration designed to prime the body and voice gave me the best outcomes for integrating the body and promoting vocal exploration. Structuring the Code in units associated with specific dialects gave the most direct aid in non-aural dialect acquisition.

If given the opportunity to again teach dialects in the context of VCU's curriculum I would combine all three approaches. I feel confident enough in my development as an instructor to diverge greatly from the tried-and-true syllabus and, likewise, I feel that The Konami Code has demonstrated utility and reliability over several years of use. As such, I would feel confident building an entire syllabus around the repeated integration and reintegration of the Konami methodologies. Beginning with an abstract overview of the physical elements of Shape, Placement, Directionality, and Resonance, I would then move to an intellectual framing of dialect/idiolect through recording and audio sampling. From there I would integrate each element into each dialect studied

choosing one element (Shape, Placement, Directionality, or Resonance) as a primary focus or key feature. Ideally this would give the students the broadest exposure to the beneficial applications of The Konami Code. Whether the positive outcomes of each incorporation method all reinforce one another or whether the negative implications of each incorporation method compound would be the most interesting question—and ultimately determine whether The Konami Code is a viable pedagogical centerpiece or whether it is best used as a supplementary tool.

2. EXERCISES AND PROJECTS

Each time I've taught dialects over the past three years I have innovated new exercises and adapted exercises from the core Voice and Speech curriculum to better incorporate and demonstrate the principals behind The Konami Method. These exercises are examples of a few ways in which the theory and imaginative possibilities of The Konami Method can be reinforced through vocal and physical exploration.

A. WALK ABOUT

This exercise is based on the work of Kristin Linklater⁶ and adapted from an exercise taught to me by Dennis Krausnick of Shakespeare and Co. in 2010. The purpose of this exercise is to introduce the students to The Konami Method and to expand their awareness of their vocal mechanism as a part of their physicality.

I have generally discussed the key Konami terms and their application to the dialect we are working on in class prior to the 'Walk About', but I have also used the exercise as an introduction to the Konami terms and their application. I've found both to be effective, especially when suited to the needs of specific groups. When a group is more academically inclined, I've found discussion beforehand to benefit this exercise. When groups are more eager to jump into an activity, or when they are feeling sluggish and need a pick-me-up, beginning immediately without discussion has been very successful.

After warming up vocally and physically, I ask the students to walk through the space. I begin by guiding my students through Patsy Rodenburg's three circles of energy (Rodenburg, 2008) to reinforce the use of second-circle focus and energy for

⁶ Linklater's Freeing the Natural Voice (Linklater, 1976) is a wealth of exercises that emphasize vocal exploration, many of which are easily adaptable to suit your specific pedagogic needs.

the duration of the exercise. I direct my students to select a point in the room as their destination and to move toward that destination with purpose (clear intention and focus are important for this exercise).

Once the students are moving with purpose through the space I ask them to speak a sample line of text, using the full length of the line to cross toward their destination. They will continue to voice and explore this text during each phase of the exercise.

The text I recommend using is a dialect key-sentence. A dialect key-sentence is a short phrase that incorporates a multitude of sound-shifts indicative of the chosen dialect. Alternatively a dialect key-sentence can repeat a few unusual or difficult sound shifts. In either instance, a dialect key-sentence is meant to provide students with a quick and easy pneumatic device for transitioning into the chosen dialect: a means of activating key sounds and engaging the required vocal shifts. It is an ideal text to use for this exercise, since the marrying of the psychophysical discoveries to the key sounds associated with the dialect is the over-all objective of the 'Walk About'.

For the next step of the exercise I ask my students to consider the Shape of the dialect. While Shape generally characterizes the vocal mechanism, here I ask the students to

adopt the Shape with their entire bodies. I offer suggestions such as allowing the back/shoulders to mimic the back of the throat, the arms to mimic the shape of the lips, or the torso to mimic the shape of the tongue. Throughout this shape-shifting, the students continue moving with purpose, voicing their text. Here I tell my students to expand their shape to a greater extreme, often using a scale of one to ten to characterize the size of their physical and vocal adjustments.

Allowing them to release back into a neutral body and mouth, I then ask my students to consider the Placement of the dialect. Again instructing them to consider their full body as an analog to their vocal mechanism, I direct them to put their center of gravity into whichever part of their body is closest to the Placement of the dialect. I then tell my students to allow that new center of gravity to lead them through the space. I've found that conjuring the image of an invisible plane one inch in front of the student, and the part of the body that leads always being first to break that plane, is helpful in clarifying what it means for a body center to 'lead.' Once again I encourage exaggeration and expansion of the adjustment.

Letting that go, I then ask my students to consider Resonance. The image I use for Resonance during the Walk About is one of volume—in the same sense as a container full of liquid. I ask them to imagine the most active resonators of a

dialect as the most voluminous and to expand those parts of their physicality to carry tremendous weight and girth. During this portion of the exercise I reemphasize focus and intention, as I have observed many students' focus shift inward during this part of the exercise, so curious is the imagined sensation of having a giant-sized head, chest, or nose. By this step the students are hopefully eager to expand and exaggerate on their own—if they aren't, then I keep encouraging them.

Next I release the students into neutral and ask them to consider Directionality. Up until this point the students have been free to navigate the space as they chose. Now I ask them to adopt the *staccato* or *legato* rhythm of the dialect as the rhythm of their movement, and to reflect the pitch variety and musicality of the dialect in the manner of movement. I like to tell my students to 'dance the dialect' during this part of the exercise.

After exploring each aspect individually in a state of extremity, I ask the students to take on all four aspects at once. I then instruct them to reduce the size and exaggeration of their adjustments until only the smallest adjustments remain. As a final step, I ask my students to confine the expression of those adjustments to their vocal mechanism.

The chosen text goes through a variety of mutations during this exercise. Ultimately, once the adjustments are translated

into the vocal mechanism, the text will regain its integrity. Indeed, elements such as rounding, lateralization, palatal shifts, and vocal release are greatly expanding following the exploration.

B. MASK MAKING

This is an exercise I first employed while teaching Dialects and Shakespeare for Bachelors of the Arts. It is adapted from an exercise in Toby Wilsher's The Mask Handbook (Wilsher, 2007). The concept of this exercise goes back to my earliest consideration of The Konami Method. In the study of *commedia dell'arte* style mask, the entire physicality and mentality of a character are summarized through their mask. The lines, angles, and shape of the mask are prescriptive. In this same manner, the characteristics of a dialect's aural quality can be reflected imaginatively through The Konami Method. The purpose of this exercise is for the students to creatively express the key features of a dialect's construction through the fundamental concepts of theatrical mask construction in the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*.

I ask my students to use paper mache, masking tape, clay, or any other suitable craft supply to create masks that demonstrate the four Konami principals of a privately assigned

dialect. Just as in *commedia*, the mask is to prescribe the posture of the vocal mechanism and characterize the imaginative qualities of the dialect (such as its musicality). I disallow the use of color or symbols on the mask, as the shape and construction should be the cornerstones. I ask the students to make their masks outside of class, and try to give them at least a week to craft them.

After the masks are constructed, I ask students to exchange masks with a classmate. At this point students should not know what dialect mask they are working with. Then I ask the students to analyze the 'mystery mask' using in terms from The Konami Method. Finally, I ask each student—based on their Konami styled analysis, to guess at what dialect might be represented. If the mask is well conceived and constructed, the student should arrive at the same set of terms used to describe the dialect in question, even if their unfamiliarity with the dialect prevents an accurate guess.

If time and quality construction permit, I ask students to don the masks and explore them physically in the manner of a *commedia* mask. This is an extension of the 'Walk About' exercise, and requires that the students have a basic understanding of mask play.

C. ADJECTIVES!

This exercise is of my own design. I am frequently asked by my dialect students for hard and fast rules for differentiating lexical shifts and categorizing sound changes. Sometimes these rules exist, many times they do not. I created this exercise to help students who wanted clearly defined labels and rules for making sound changes within a dialect. I have also used a variation of this exercise with students as I teach them the International Phonetic Alphabet, where we focus on individual phonemes instead of phonetic shifts. In this context it serves as a ground-work exercise for building an understanding of the relationships between certain phonemes and which phonemes are articulated or manipulated in a similar fashion. The sound sets I use are taken from Paul Meier's Accents and Dialects for Stage and Screen (Meier, 2008), but this exercise can be applied to any prescriptive list of sound changes. The purpose of the 'Adjectives!' exercise is to highlight similarities among lexical shifts within a dialect and to isolate exceptions to those similarities.

I begin by breaking the class into small groups. To each group I assign a portion of the prescribed sound changes associated with the dialect. I ask the groups to come up with as many adjectives as possible to describe each sound change. I

encourage them to use the same sorts of adjectives we've used in discussion of The Konami Method (adjectives that describe Shape, Placement, Resonance, and Directionality). I also encourage them to stick to concrete adjectives and to avoid abstraction. Lastly, I remind each group that many sound changes will share adjectives and that they are encouraged to repeat themselves.

After each group has had time to work briefly on each of their sound changes, I ask the groups to select Ambassadors. The group Ambassador moves to a different group and takes a complete list of all the adjectives their original group has used thus far with them. I then ask the groups to incorporate as many of the adjectives the Ambassadors brought with them as possible. I give the Ambassadors time to visit and share with each group before I ask them to return to their original groups.

Next I instruct the groups narrow down the lists for each sound change, and eliminate redundancies by selecting the best adjective to describe each feature of the sounds. Finally I ask them to highlight adjectives shared by more than one of their changes, and underline those adjective unique to a single change.

I bring the class back together to compare their work. The next step of the exercise is a full class discussion of the descriptors discovered and the similarities across sound changes. I guide the class to select the best adjectives to

describe each of the dialect's sound changes and to use the same adjectives to describe multiple changes whenever appropriate. I usually ask one or more students to serve as Scribe to keep track of our work.

At the end of the exercise, the class has a series of adjectives that describe the manner, placement, and qualities of each sound change. In addition, they have a clearer sense of the ways in which multiple changes are similar or related and can immediately identify which sound changes are unique and require special attention. This list-making and clustering of ideas helps students understand the interconnectivity of a dialect's sound-shifts and to contextualize the dialect as a single entity comprised of multiple parts rather than viewing it as a series of unrelated and isolated changes.

3. APPLICATION TO THE TEACHING OF PHONETICS

In my final semester at Virginia Commonwealth University, the Spring of 2011, I decided to experiment with applying the terminology and conceptual groundwork of The Konami Method to the study of phonetics. VCU's current Voice and Speech progression is arranged such that second-year students study the International Phonetic Alphabet in their second semester while third-year students, in their first semester, begin work on

multiple dialects using the skills acquired in the previous semester. I had two objectives: first to see how well the terms I had been using in dialect study worked to describe the more fundamental tenets of phonetics and second to gauge whether the incorporation of full-body physicality aided students in isolating and identifying phonemes.

I incorporated the principal elements of The Konami Method as descriptors when discussing the anatomy of the mouth and the formation of sound. I did not, however, outline the method in its entirety or discuss it formally.

Over the course of the semester, the majority my students grew very comfortable with the Konami-style vocabulary I'd provided and each of them demonstrated the ability to identify phonemes in terms of the vocal mechanisms used to Shape them and their Placement within the mouth.

My goal of integrating full-body physicalization was never fully met. Articulation, the fifth Konami element, is the key factor at play in acquiring an understanding of phonetics. Much of the initial work with phonetics focuses on precise formation of phonemes, and isolating their proper construction. As such, I never found an opportunity to integrate physicality in a manner that I felt would not detract from this specificity. I hope, however, to find a means of integrating physicality effectively in future explorations.

Though it is designed specifically to aid in the acquisition of dialects, The Konami Method's core lexicon is definitely transferable to the teaching of phonetics. Its focus on the four elements of Shape, Placement, Resonance, and Directionality, however, is less germane. And indeed, its driving purpose of unifying full-body physicality with vocal adjustment is lost entirely. However, the fact that the same terminology can be applied to both areas with success suggests that The Konami Method can be successfully incorporated into a larger departmental curriculum. Applying the same terminology and the same conceptual imagery across fields of study is one of the reasons I began developing this methodology; by the same turn, applying uniform terminology and imagery across multiple levels of study is also tremendously beneficial in cultivating directed and specific understanding of phonetic shifts and adjustment.

CHAPTER III. APPLICATION TO DIALECT COACHING

1. *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*

In the Spring of 2010, Theatre VCU collaborated with Richmond's Barksdale Theatre for a production of *The Grapes of Wrath*. I served as the vocal coach and dialect coach for the show. This was my first outing into the professional realm, and it was complicated by the fact that the show was cast as a part-student, part-professional ensemble. I was dealing with first-year acting students, thirty year stage veterans, and everything in between. Barksdale is an equity company, and so my job was further complicated by the strict limitations on rehearsal time that were upheld for the non-students within the company.

Dr. Tawnya Pettiford-Wates, a professor at VCU (known as Dr. T) was the director of the production. When I first met with her we discussed the show and her goals for the incorporation of dialect into the narrative of the piece. *The Grapes of Wrath* tells the story of the Joads, a family from rural Oklahoma, who travel across the country to California. As such Dr. T wanted

the dialects and voices of the characters to bring the audience on the Joad's journey, with each stop along the way featuring dialects more and more different from the Joad's Oklahoma homestead. Likewise, Dr. T hoped that—once in California—the Joad's patterns of speech would set them apart from the rest of the ensemble, isolating them within their family unit, and revealing their status as outsiders. I was excited by the potential scope for dialects within the piece while at the same time daunted by the task of bringing such great detail to bear on an ensemble of such radically divergent skills.

After much deliberation, I resolved that the best way to approach the problem would be to build a common lexicon with the entire cast, regardless of their experience level. The Konami Method seemed both an appropriate and exciting place from which to begin. I had already employed it with some success over multiple years of teaching dialects, and indeed a portion of my ensemble was comprised of students who were familiar with the method. More to the point, The Konami Method was created as a foundational lexicon for dialect study. I felt that if it could succeed in fostering common understanding in such a diverse environment then it could succeed anywhere.

I compiled a packet of information detailing The Konami Code, breaking down a few of the key dialects with which the ensemble would be working and provided it to the student actors

ahead of rehearsals⁷. I made the same information available to the professional actors on request, in compliance with Equity standards.

A. WORKING WITH STUDENT ACTORS

I met with the VCU students within the ensemble individually prior to the start of rehearsals, and over the course of rehearsing, during one-on-one sessions scheduled as needed. The majority of the students had not yet studied dialects at VCU, and several had absolutely no experience working with dialects.

In the initial session with each student, I spent time reviewing the materials I had provided and answering any initial concerns. I attempted to keep the sound changes simple and few in number to encourage the inexperienced students. I explored the notions of Shape, Placement, Resonance, and Directionality individually with the students while isolating the parts of the vocal mechanism used for adjustments in the Oklahoma dialect as well as the other dialects required. I placed a strong emphasis on isolating Shape and on finding appropriate vowel length and rhythm through Directionality.

⁷ See Appendix I, Page 65

I used the same strategy with the students who were experienced in dialect study and found that they were willing to take the Konami-styled lessons as given and move directly into dialect production. I was able to offer adjustments and corrections within the Konami context and be understood clearly and efficiently.

After several sessions of individual work, this was also the case with the students who lacked dialect training. While I could not overcome some vocal issues, particularly among first-year students, within the limited time frame of the rehearsal process, I did meet with success in using The Konami Method as the foundation for working with each of the students and was able to phrase my notes and adjustments within that context from the outset.

B. WORKING WITH PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

One of the professionals within ensemble had never worked with dialects before. Most had limited and sometimes negative experiences. Two were very experienced.

The Konami Code proved too complex for effective application with the professional ensemble member with no prior dialect experience. While I had been able to devote multiple coaching sessions to laying a foundation with the student

actors, time and scheduling did not permit me that luxury with the actor in question. The actor was increasingly confused by my attempts to offers tools for distinguishing and separating dialects (she was originally asked to perform three dialects; this was later reduced to two)—which is part of the core functionality of The Konami Code—and ultimately I resorted to prompting her to imitate sounds in a call-and-response fashion. Upon her request I provided audio recordings with which, in her own time, she could work.

The actors who had previous experience with stage dialects responded positively to the Konami idea. In working with them, each actor commented on their ease in understanding the basic formation of the dialect. From the start of the process with these performers my task was to point out missed changes and to eliminate undesirable regionalisms that were affecting the formation of the desired dialects.

Given the experience level of each of these performers, and their collective diligence in working outside of rehearsal, I feel as if I could have used virtually any method of dialect preparation and been met with success. However, it was their positive attitude toward the presentation of the information as both conceptual and prescriptive (as opposed to purely prescriptive) that leads me to call The Konami Method a success. One actor in particular commented that he was unused to dialect

work being so easy. When I asked him to elaborate, he explained that in the past he had only ever been corrected and told to repeat after the coach: in the Konami format he felt more able to build the dialect himself and thus better able to understand what problems he was having and how to solve them. He was pleased there was a method that didn't involve parroting the coach. This pleased me.

The two professional ensemble members with extensive stage dialect experience were opposite extremes with which to work. The first initially declined individual assistance and asserted that he preferred to integrate dialect once off-book. Given his level of experience with dialect work, I ceded the point and focused my attention elsewhere for the first part of the rehearsal process. Unfortunately, when he did begin to incorporate dialect into his work it was not in keeping with the rest of the ensemble. He had been dissatisfied with the materials I provided, and had gathered his own resources to generate his dialect. Unfortunately, the resources he used produced a very different sound from the rest of the ensemble and his dialect was both out of place and inconsistent. He was argumentative and unreceptive regarding my attempts to employ The Konami Method or even the more traditional materials I had prepared. Ultimately, I overcame his resistance by resorting solely to correction and repetition based notes. He remained

inconsistent. In retrospect, it was unwise to trust his judgment on dialect incorporation, despite his experience, since he would have benefitted greatly from both more practice and integration from the outset. While I have seen a select few actors successfully integrate dialect work late in their process, it is neither my preferred method of incorporation nor a method I have seen employed with broad success. Likewise, it pointed to one of the weaknesses of my strategy for coaching the show: I relied heavily on comprehension and application but lacked a strong element of negative reinforcement (close-transcribed corrections, clear lines of correct versus incorrect, and forced repetition for example) that, at least in this actor's case, was very badly needed.

The second actor found The Konami Method interesting and was excited to approach the material in a new way. At the same time, she incorporated her own tools for dialect acquisition in a way that was reliable and comfortable. In working with her, I gained valuable insight into the aspects of The Konami Method that filled gaps in other methods. For example, she found that, unlike any other method at her disposal, The Konami Method evoked for her repeatable physical gestures associated with both the full body and the vocal mechanism that she could repeat to activate the dialect within her mouth. Likewise, we discussed areas where it lacked the required specificity and depth to

stand alone. She pointed specifically to a lack of focus on articulation. These discussions led to my inclusion of Articulation as the fifth key element of The Konami Method—though it is an element I still need to expand. All told, she rated the experience positively and was very successful in her dialect. Likewise, I was able to amend and adapt my own work. My pedagogy and theory both improved greatly because of her insights.

C. RESULTS AND REFLECTIONS

Overall, I was very pleased with my contribution to *The Grapes of Wrath*. Despite the radical diversity of starting skills, the show achieved dialectical cohesion: the dialects all belonged to the same world and none were out of place or distracting (the exception to this case was the experienced professional who resisted direction and did not incorporate his dialect early enough in the process). In this I feel The Konami Code was a very successful tool. I was initially fearful that the disparity in dialect experience would lead to a clear and distracting breakdown of the dialects into two camps. I feel the uniformity of the conceptual concepts as presented in the Konami format aided me greatly in unifying the play's dialects and in communicating effectively to the entire ensemble.

Likewise, the Joad's Oklahoma dialect succeeded in identifying them as a group and separating them from the rest of the ensemble—speaking to the Konami Method's utility as a platform for generating specific and detail-oriented dialects.

2. OTHER COACHING APPLICATIONS

In addition to *The Grapes of Wrath*, I have coached or offered consultation to eight shows, student and professional, over the course of my degree. The Konami Code was in various stages of development during each of these processes, and I did not employ the method in all cases. However, in a few noteworthy cases, I chose to take elements of pedagogy specific to The Konami Method and apply them during the rehearsal process.

A. *Steel Magnolias* - Cultural Arts Theatre, Savannah GA

I collaborated on the production of *Steel Magnolias* in a unique way. I offered dialect consultation remotely. The director, Ellie Pyle, was a friend and former director of mine. Ellie contacted me because one of her actors was unable to reliably produce a Deep Southern dialect. In addition, the actor expressed discomfort in producing certain sounds and fear that she may be harming her voice.

Ellie recorded the actor during rehearsal and provided me with the samples. Very quickly I noticed that the actor was pressing her voice down, using excessive throat tension to affect a lower vocal register. Likewise, while the majority of her sound changes were accurate, her cadence and rate of speech were inconsistent with the Deep Southern dialect she was attempting. When I spoke with the actor, she explained that she was attempting to emulate a southern drawl by speaking a low in her throat as possible.

After speaking with the actor further, I realized that, in Konami terms, she was confusing Placement and Directionality. This confusion was symptomatic in both her vocal discomfort (when I asked her to abandon her attempts to press her voice lower, she reported a rapid improvement) and her inability to capture the rate and musical quality of the dialect.

Given the physical distance, and the initiative and aptitude the actor had already shown in deciphering the appropriate sound changes, I decided that the best course of action would be to provide a resource that the actor could use to improve her understanding of the elements of the dialect she was lacking. The Konami Code seemed an ideal tool for this situation. I provided her with a detailed packet discussing the elements of Placement and Directionality as essential parts of a dialect. I offered examples of the Deep Southern dialect. In

the discussion of Directionality I emphasized the slow rate of speech, characterized by vowel and diphthong lengthening, as the key element of the southern drawl she wished to affect. Likewise, I suggested that the rich variety of pitches available to a Deep Southern speaker was supported by a good deal of release in the throat and neck as another means of warding off her unnecessary and excessive tension.

I provided the packet electronically. Within the week, Ellie contacted me with news of great success. She provided me with a few new samples and, indeed, the actor's improvement was very noticeable. I spoke to the actor later that week. She expressed her relief that I had provided information in a lay-accessible format. She found the terms and physical images easy to understand and implement, and most of all she was glad I had given examples specific to the problems she was having.

I think my greatest success in this unique process was the decision to personalize the application of The Konami Method. Rather than providing the full outline of the method, I offered the actor only the information she needed to reach her goals. Giving her examples specific to both her text and to her own difficulties also proved exceptionally valuable. The fact that The Konami Method could be taken from its very intellectual and theoretical roots and applied in a very actor-centered and personal manner spoke well to the diversity of its applications,

and gave me a better understanding of how I could apply the method in a more digestible (in this case personal) manner.

B. *Southern Cross* - Virginia Commonwealth University

I served as vocal coach and dialect coach on *Southern Cross*. As the title suggests, the dialects in play were variations of Southern dialects—ranging from a very strong Georgia dialect, to a very slight South Western Virginia dialect. Coming into the rehearsal process, since most of them were native Southern dialects, the actors were all familiar with one or more variations thereupon, and much of my dialect work focused on polishing their already existing work.

Four of the five actors in the cast, however, were relatively inexperienced undergraduates in the VCU theatre program: none of whom had had foundation classes in Voice and Speech. They lacked a strong vocabulary with which to discuss their voices and were unable to take adjustments without demonstration and guidance.

As The Konami Code was devised as a tool for vocabulary building and accessibility, I decided to employ it to both the dialect work and foundational breath/speech work we were doing in rehearsal. Since the actors' dialect work was relatively strong, I decided to attempt to filter their breath/speech notes

through the terms and images provided by the Konami Code. My goal became to give 'two-in-one' notes, designed to clarify aspects of the dialect while remedying breath/speech issues.

The most successful application was with an actor suffering from an extreme excess of jaw and throat tension. She held too much tension to release into diaphragmatic breathing or to access her lower register. I devoted time to discussing the Shape and Directionality aspects of the North Carolinian dialect she was using.

We discussed the openness and relaxation in the Shape of the dialect, specifically discussing the openness of the throat and slackness in the lips. I incorporated exercises for jaw and throat release into our coaching time, reinforcing the relationship between the Shape of the dialect and the release provided through the exercises. This approach subverted one of her main issues: trying too hard. When simply asked to release her jaw or neck, she would redouble her efforts to do so and introduce even more tension. By focusing on altering the physical structure of her vocal mechanism (through Shape), she was better able to direct her efforts and showed steady progress in reducing her tensions over the course of rehearsal.

When I discussed Directionality with the actor, I chose to focus on the vertical element of pitch. Though her lack of a lower pitch register was largely symptomatic of her inability to

access her diaphragm, when exercises designed to promote a connection to the diaphragm were couched as pitch explorations she was again better able to focus her efforts. As the Carolinian dialect embraces a wide variety of pitches, I asked her to explore exclusively the Directionality of the dialect for several rehearsals. I asked her to make her lower register, as we had explored in discussion and exercises, a present and powerful part of the dialect's directional energy.

It was our focus on pitch as a concept sympathetic to diaphragmatic breathing that most helped the actor begin to take complete diaphragmatic breaths, and she showed marked improvement over the course of the rehearsal process.

The more experienced actor, a graduate student, also benefited from Konami-filtered direction. The actor had difficulty focusing his tone forward and often lost support at the end of his thoughts. I offered the sympathetic directions that his Georgia dialect required more energetically rounded lips (Shape) and that sustaining a focused energy into his lips would enhance his tonal focus and prevent him from losing the ends of his lines.

This application of The Konami Method was a bit haphazard, and often hit or miss. Transferring Konami terms into breath/speech coaching applications was generally very successful and was the real discovery of this exploration. I

feel it was the marrying of the terminology, more so than the 'two-birds-one-stone' aspect, that served my coaching best.

CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSIONS

I have had a lot of tremendous opportunities during my time in VCU's Theatre Pedagogy Master of Fine Arts program. I count the time I've spent in the classroom teaching as the greatest among those opportunities. The Konami Code is more a product of classroom experience and a pedagogic exploration than anything else. While it began as an overly-organized graduate student's attempt to better codify the terminology of dialect study and its relationship to physical movement, The Konami Method grew in the classroom and has become a pedagogical tool for empowering students and actors who learn kinesthetically to apply their physical talents to the study of dialect.

The trials and errors I've undertaken in the classroom and in dialect coaching over the past three years have yielded not only a useful product, but a product that addresses a gap in my own tool-set as a teacher and coach. The Konami Method has demonstrated itself as a suitable foundational methodology for introducing students and professionals to dialects regardless of their prior experience level. This vocabulary-equalizing factor

is perhaps Konami's greatest strength. By choosing the Konami approach, I am assured that, regardless of the group with which I am working, we are all using the same terminology in the same manner.

I am delighted to share this exploration with you. There remain obvious flaws in the Method. For instance, not every dialect can be narrowly prescribed in each of the four major categories of The Konami Code. The Method's explorations of pitch deal poorly with idiolectical considerations within the dialect. Worst of all, without rigorous emphasis on Articulation of sound and the *specificity* of vowel and consonant formation as a core pedagogic and coaching approach, The Konami Method can lead to broad stereotyping and generalization of dialect. These are flaws I acknowledge and embrace. The discovery that I made over and over during this process has been that The Konami Method is not a monolith: it works best as part of a larger curriculum; as a specific tactic to achieve a desired result. The fact that it is a unique, and often uniquely-suited tactic, is enough for me to call this devised piece of pedagogy a roaring success: warts and all.

I hope you'll find an element of this pedagogical journey to incorporate into your own work. Perhaps you'll remedy some of The Konami Code's flaws, and expand it into a self-sustaining technique—or perhaps you'll distill the whole approach into a

single workshop exercise. In either case (and in every case in between) I will stand elated that my own discoveries have brought you to something new.

I plan on continuing to employ, change, and re-imagine The Konami Code as I move forward in my work as a dialect teacher and coach. I set out to create a tool for unifying terminology, incorporating physicalization and kinesthetic learning into dialect study, and enabling the rapid integration of diverse phonetic aspects of a dialect into one cohesive product. The Konami Code is that tool. It is an imperfect tool. Only continued experimentation and exploration will hone it. I quite look forward to undertaking those experiments and journeys, and cannot wait to discover the new and unusual ways in which this small piece of pedagogy will combine with the new teaching and coaching tools I have yet to discover! If you are half so enthused, this has been quite a successful thesis indeed.

-Thomas

Bibliography

Blunt, J. (1994). *Stage Dialects*. New York, New York: Dramatic Pub Co.

Lessac, A. (1967). *The Use and Training of the Human Voice: A Practical Approach to Speech and Voice Dynamics*. New York, New York: DBS Publications, INC/Drama Book Specialists.

Linklater, K. (1976). *Freeing the Natural Voice*. Hollywood, CA: Drama Publishers.

Meier, P. (2008). *Accents and Dialects for the Stage and Screen*. Lawrence, KS: Paul Meier Dialect Services.

Rodenburg, P. (2008). *The Second Circle: How to Use Positive Energy for Success in Every Situation*. New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Wilsher, T. (2007). *The Mask Handbook: A Practical Guide*. New York, New York: Routledge.

Appendix I: *Grapes of Wrath* Dialect Packet

Grapes of Wrath

- I. Welcome
- II. Introductory Approach
- III. Sound Supplements
- IV. The Oklahoma Dialect
- V. The General South-Western Dialect

I.

Welcome

In this early stage I'd like to take a few moments to lay some ground-work and dispel some fears. While we aren't all assembled in person, I see no reason why we can't all start out on the same foot.

Foremost: I do not, nor does anyone, expect you to offer up a flawless dialect on the first day of rehearsal. The purpose of this packet is to allow you extra time for your own personal process and preparation; it is not a deadline. Each of you will have different struggles and aptitudes as we progress: this is normal, this is fine, and above all it is my job to help you—not your job to fret.

Secondly: The dialects you will be working with are given circumstances. A dialect is as concrete and physical a fact as is a limp or a hunched back—the change just so happens to manifest in your mouth as opposed to your leg or your back. Treat any dialects you are working with just as you would any other physical feature of your character: it exists to inform and shape your character. It does not exist **in place of** your character.

Our production of The Grapes of Wrath will feature a number of dialects. The Joad Family and the Narrator will speak in a distinct Oklahoma dialect. As the family moves farther from home, the voices they encounter will differ greatly from their own. The ensemble will most frequently be using variations on the General South-Western sound, and the General American dialect. A Mississippi dialect, Mexican accent, and few specific variations on the South-Western sound will also appear. As we move forward and the cast-list reaches its final form I will work with individuals on the more specialized dialects and accents. Likewise, as you begin to explore the wide variety of characters you will be portraying, I encourage you to seek out ways in which dialect/speech can be used to draw sharper distinctions between characters and their locales; again, I am here as a resource for you—take advantage of me, and use what I know to help you!

II.

Introductory Approach

There are many ways to acquire a dialect, and different methods come more easily to different individuals. I'd like to present to you the Konami Code Method, so called because at the end of the day it feels like cheating.

There are four key elements to understanding a dialect. If you put your energy into these areas you will find that the dialect comes naturally and without the fuss of trying to get things straight in your head. These elements are: Placement, Shape, Resonance, and Directionality. For the purposes of my examples I assume a familiarity with the General American dialect (or Career Speech).

Placement describes where the dialect lives in the mouth. In your best General American, say: "The beer is in the pick-up truck." Which part of your mouth is most engaged? Where do you feel the most vibration? Most importantly: where is the sound contained? General American lives most fully in the center of the mouth (perhaps a bit forward of center). Try speaking again, this time focusing on a strong and free central mouth.

Shape describes the way the mouth, lips, and tongue are most comfortable when speaking a given dialect. Once again, say: "The beer is in the pick-up truck" (or any sample of text you are familiar with, being careful to use your best General American). What can you observe about the shape of your lips? What about the posture of your tongue? Does the back of your throat become involved, or your uvula? Do your tongue and lips move a great deal? General American is at home in a lateral (or smiling) shape, with the tongue and lips remaining relatively at ease. Try your text again, this time with an easy smile on your face—you'll find that this is still a totally relaxed manner to engage in General American speech. Now try your text with round (kissy-face) lips, or with a very aggressive tongue. General American is not accustomed to such shapes!

Resonance describes the place in the body where the dialect vibrates most freely and most naturally. Common resonators (places of vibration) are the head, mask, chest, and abdomen. However, any place in the body can be a resonator—finding a dialect's resonance is short-hand for finding the source of your breath: the center of your voice. Try your sample text again ("The beer is in the pick-up truck" or whatever you have selected) and observe your resonance. Where in your body do you feel the most vibration? Try placing a hand there and speaking into your palm—does this preserve the dialect, or exaggerate it in an unexpected manner? If the dialect is preserved then you've found a good resonator to work with. The General American is most at home in the chest or (in contemporary speech especially) the throat. Keep in mind that the resonance of a dialect is simply the resonator where the dialect is most "at home"—where it is likely to find its default, or live most frequently. This by no means excludes other pitches, ranges, and resonators from your vocabulary! Quite to the contrary, it provides you a very clear base-line to start from!

Directionality is the final aspect to consider, and is in many ways the most important. Directionality describes the trajectory of the spoken word, and the balancing force the roots it in the body. For example, try your text one last time ("The beer is in the pick-up truck, etc), this time speaking it to an imaginary person across the room. How do your words travel to your imaginary other? Do they move in a straight line? Do

they move in a long arc? Do they move in loop-de-loops and spirals? Is the line tapered at one end, or of equal dimensions?

General American speech tends to move in a long straight line, of equal breadth at both ends. Try your text again, emphasizing this long, even line. This is the first half of directionality. Remember that your voice and your body are part of the same whole—and the rules of balance apply. To send out a long, even line of energy (text), how must the body array itself? Is it firmly rooted or leaning and lounging? Do you lean forward or keep at erect posture? How can you body compensate for the energy you are projecting, to keep you at balance? Try different extremes of posture. Which allows your General American dialect to be most fully expressed?

General American speech tends to favor a firm, balanced stance with a rooted and erect posture. Only a clear, even vessel can accurately project the long, even line of American speech yet the General American speaker prefers to maintain a secure connection to the ground so as not to get dragged forward by his very direct language.

These two considerations (the shape of the text and the posture of the body) are the elements that compose directionality.

As we move forward, keep these elements in mind. If you find yourself having particular difficulty with a word or phrase, first ask: “is something I’m doing alienating the dialect from my body?” That’s to say: “am I so far from the Konami Code that I just can’t hold on to the dialect?” Likewise, and especially in the early stages of your process, I encourage you to take the four elements of Placement, Shape, Resonance, and Directionality to an extreme as a way of nurturing the dialect in your mouth and in your body. In the end, the more you can do to not **think** about the dialect and instead **to allow** the dialect to happen, then the freer you are to focus on your fellow actors and the work you are creating together.

III.

Sound Supplements

At the link below you will find an excellent selection of dialect samples provided by the IDEA website, hosted by Kansas University and dialectician Paul Meyer. Samples six through ten are especially good listens. Take a listen to the samples provided via the website, and try to make a few observations about the speakers using the Konami Code as your guide.

Oklahoma: “<http://web.ku.edu/~idea/northamerica/usa/oklahoma/oklahoma.htm>”

Oklahoma is a region and a dialect that is well preserved in popular culture and folk tradition. As such, there are many resources you can turn to for further examples of the dialect in action. I recommend the The Grapes of Wrath (1940) starring Henry Fonda, and music and recordings of Woodie Guthrie as a place to begin. These are resources I am happy to make available to you, or that you can easily find via the internet.

South-Western:

Nevada: “<http://web.ku.edu/~idea/northamerica/usa/nevada/nevada.htm>”

New Mexico: “<http://web.ku.edu/~idea/northamerica/usa/newmexico/newmexico.htm>”

There are a huge variety of sounds and voices associated with the South-Western United States. As we move forward and you begin to explore choices catered to your specific roles within the ensemble, we can work together to make more specific choices as to your characters locale and the extremity of their dialect.

IV.

The Oklahoma Dialect

The Midwestern and Western part of the United States is an area whose regionalisms are less distinct than areas such as the Northwest or Southeast. The large influx of pioneers and settlers (all of whom came from diverse ethnic, social, and regional backgrounds) led to a greater degree of speech homogenization. As such, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and other Central States have a smaller variation on General American speech than regions such as Virginia, New York, or Washington State.

Your script does an excellent job approximating many of the regional ticks and abbreviations you will need to adopt an Oklahoma dialect. I encourage you to use the text **as it is written** as a guide. From incorrect verb tense (*It don't trouble you*) to truncations of words (*an'* for *and*), Galati does a fine job of providing visual cues for dialect.

As we begin, let's take a few moments to consider how an Oklahoma dialect can be described in our Konami Code method. Take a few moments to listen through a few of your audio samples. Try to observe the Placement, Shapes, Resonance, and Directionality of the text.

Key words for understanding the Oklahoma dialect are: **Forward, Muscular, Practical, Clear.**

Placement: The Oklahoma dialect lives slightly forward of center (just ahead of our General American), and so has a little less room to move around. The shift is very slight, and while a drastic difference will not appear, one can perceive the Oklahoma dialect as more constricted (tightly-packed-in) than a General American.

Shape: The Oklahoma is a much more muscular dialect than General American. The lip sphincter is engaged in the shaping and lengthening of sound. The tongue remains easy-going as in the General American. As a result, the Oklahoma dialect can be thought of as having a lean shape (a more muscular smile).

Resonance: The Oklahoman is more likely to make use of head and mask resonators than a General American speaker. The dialect is rarely nasal, so do avoid slipping entirely into your nose. I find it helpful to imagine my resonance lives in my molars and bicuspid teeth.

Directionality: Much like General American, the Oklahoma dialect extents in a long, even line. However, the Oklahoman's line of text will stretch and taffy at certain points (their vowels). If General American takes a straight trajectory from mouth to target, then the Oklahoma dialect will angle upwards slightly, creating a sensation of vocal buoyancy or lift. As in General American, Midwestern speech tends to be monotone, or flat. The

Oklahoma dialect is no exception—yet its buoyant quality provides it a good deal more energy and purpose than General American.

The body that supports an Oklahoma dialect must first and foremost remain rooted in the earth—to keep extending vowels and bright tones from overpowering the practicality and clarity of their speech.

An excellent resource of the Oklahoma dialect is Jerry Blunt's More Stage Dialects. Much of the following information is taken from Blunt's text, as are several excellent examples.

Now that we've begun to have a foundation for understanding the new shape and arrangement of our mouths when adopting an Oklahoma dialect, let's look at the key sound changes that Oklahomans make. As you read through, refer back to your sound samples and try and listen for each trait described below—don't try and listen for them all at once, instead take it one step and one change at a time. As you begin to understand and hear the changes begin to speak them as well!

- **Vowel Length.** In Oklahoman speech Vowels extend farther than in General American speech. This creates the characteristic drawl that is essential to capturing the region. This characteristic is intermittent, with no strong pattern. However, this trait is especially prevalent in verbs or action words, and in the vowels /ou/ ("go, throw") and /i:/ (seen, fiend). This rule remains flexible, and so should you: take advantage of this characteristic when it enhances the clarity of your speech—omit it when it proves obtrusive. The Oklahoma dialect **does not** add extra vowel sounds; it merely lengthens the existing vowel sounds. Adding new and different vowel sounds (monophthongs becoming diphthongs, diphthongs becoming triphthongs) is a characteristic of the South-Eastern drawl and should be avoided.

Examples:

"toll" /toul/ → /tou:l/

"run" /r^n/ → /r'^:n/

"seen" /si:n/ → /si::n/

"barbarian" /ba:rbeəri:ən/ → /ba::r'beə:r'i::ən/

Examples from IDEA:

Oklahoma 5 (2:55): "Antiques, crafts, junk . . ."

Oklahoma 6 (0:25): "So she was very happy."

Oklahoma 7 (2:14): "Lee . . ."

- **Schwa.** The noted exception to lengthening vowels is that the schwa sound (/ə/; the sound that appears in the first vowel of the word "away"; an extremely minimal sound in Gen.Am.). Schwa will not receive extra length (when not part of a diphthong), and is often eliminated entirely for its failure to adequately express length. In poly-syllabic words, syllables whose vowel is expressed as a schwa

are sometimes dropped entirely. It may be helpful to imagine this schwa as extremely minimized, rather than dropped entirely—it should not prove obtrusive, rather it should allow you to focus on the clarity of your elongated vowels and consonants. In some idiomatic expressions, the more fully expressive /ʌ/ (as in *cup* or *luck*) may be used to preserve the phrase (such as *nuh-uh* for an expression of the negative).

Examples:

“robber” /rɒbər/ → /r'ɒ:br'/

“Thomas” /tɒməs/ → /tɒ:ms/

“away” /əwei/ → /wei:/

“nuh-uh” /nəʔə/ → /nʌʔʌ/

Examples from IDEA:

Oklahoma 5 (1:00): “Letter”

Oklahoma 6 (2:03): “Different”

- **Hard “R”.** Oklahoman is one of a group of American dialects that expresses the “R” sound with a patent “hardness” or increased rhoticity. “R” sounds are energetic and fully formed. It may help you to conceive of them as being pronounced with additional length, however *fullness* might be a better word to describe the change. The “R” is a dominant feature of the dialect—be sure you take advantage of your muscular and engaged lips to form this sound clearly and succinctly. It should not be a stumbling block, but rather your “R”s are an opportunity to enhance the clarity of your speech and make your meaning clear. “R” will also color adjacent vowel sounds—if you were to pronounce “bear” as “bar” you would get a good idea of the strength of the Oklahoma “R.”

Examples:

“rare” /reər/ → /r'eə:r'/

“gravy” /greivi:/ → /gr'ei:vi:./

“robber” /rɒbər/ → /r'ɒ:br'/

“ragnarok” /rægn^ra:k/ → /r'æ:gn^:r'a::k/

Examples from IDEA:

Oklahoma 5 (3:14): “There every year . . .”

Oklahoma 6 (0:30): “Square near Duke Street tower. . .”

- **Gerunds.** As with most rural or lower-classed dialects, a characteristic truncation of gerund (“-ing”) forms is present. In Oklahoma, however, there is a tendency—especially among older generations—to add an additional schwa to the *beginning* of gerunds. For example, *running* might be transposed as *a-runnin'*.

Examples:

“running” /r^nɪŋ/ → /ər^nɪ:n/

“laughing” /læfɪŋ/ → /əlæ:fi:n/

Examples from IDEA:

Oklahoma 6 (2:14): “Singing”

- **Colloquialism.** Particularly in older generations, there is a lexicon of substitutions used for short, common words. Your script does an excellent job incorporating these substitutions. However, take a closer look: how do these changes reflect, reinforce, or alter the changes you have already adopted in your Oklahoma dialect.

Examples:

get → *git*; *for* → *fer*; *was* → *wuz*; *every* → *ever*; *just* → *jist*; *because* → *becuz*; *can't* → *cain't*; *aren't* → *ain't*; *himself* → *hissself*; *it* → *hit*; *chimney* → *chimley*; *thing* → *thang*; *think* → *thank*; *if* → *effin*.

- **Rate of Speech.** The Oklahoma dialect is direct and clear in its presentation. As such, you should feel encouraged to take your time in your speech. An Oklahoman speaks at a measured pace, with being heard correctly and clearly the first time at the top of her priorities. This contrasts many patterns of North-Eastern speech, which tend to be rapid, almost urgent. It also contrasts many patterns of South-Eastern speech, which tend to be languid and slow, almost circling. As you begin to work with the Oklahoma dialect, focus on being deliberate and measured in your rate of speech. Take long, even steps around the room, each one considered and planned as it follows the last. When you arrive at your destination, stop cleanly and clearly. Choose a new thought, a new direction, and set out in the same even, measured manner. This is the rate at which an Oklahoman speaks.

An excellent example for Rate comes in the second half of Oklahoma 7 on the IDEA website. Observe the slight difference in the speech that is being read versus the rate of casual conversation.

- **Cadence (Musicality) and Pitch Variety.** As with many speakers common to the middle part of the United States, Oklahomans have a relatively small variety of pitch changes or rhythmic shifts in their speech. The pitch tends to be flat or monotone from beginning to end, with focus leaning more on denotative/consonant clarity than connotative/vocalic clarity. By no means should you view this as a limitation on your range—rather you should view this as a very clear default setting. A big change in pitch, or a vast departure from standard rhythm (as occurs when you shift from spoken word to song, for example) will serve as a very clear dramatic shift and expression of a large change in your characters state. The addition of a pitch limitation is simply another wall you can burst through with a strong vocal choice (simply make sure it is a choice)! You

can use General American speech as a guide for an appropriate range of pitch and vocal cadence.

An excellent example of pitch and musical variety in the Oklahoma dialect comes in Oklahoma 5 on the IDEA website. Observe how the speaker breaks out of her convention pattern of speaking.

V.

The General South-Western Dialect

The General South-Western sound is much less distinct than the Oklahoma sound. The disparate nature of westward emigration led to a great deal of homogenization in the dialects of the regions stretching through New Mexico and Arizona into California. The focus of our work together will be on maintaining a degree of faithfulness to the sounds most commonly found in the American South-West while emphasizing the distinction between the South-West and Oklahoma. In other words, as we create South-Western voices we must keep in mind that they are distinct, even alien, to the Oklahoman patterns of speech. It may be helpful to begin with the Key Words for the Oklahoman dialect (**Forward, Muscular, Practical, Clear**) and ask yourself: “how does my character deviate from those ideas?”

As we move forward, keep the Konami Code in mind and use its guidelines for the Oklahoma dialect as ways to direct your South-Western voice farther away from the Oklahoma sound.

Placement: The General South-Western dialect lives slightly back of center (just behind our General American, and even farther from the Oklahoman), and so has a lot more room to move around. The shift is very slight, and while a drastic difference will not appear, one can perceive the South-Western dialect as more open (full of breath or space) than a General American.

Shape: The General South-Western moves a great deal more air than the General American. Elevate your soft palate (the back part of your throat) by yawning. Yawn again until you have the sensation of a greater space in the rear of your mouth. This space allows a good deal more air to pass through the mouth, creating the breathy (more aspirated) quality of the South-West. The tongue is a good deal more involved, often lifting in the back to guide sound forward. This results in the characteristic closed (pinched) vowel sounds of the region. The lips are generally relaxed. To further contrast the Oklahoman dialect, you can incorporate a lip rounding or puckering during sounds that demand active lip engagement (try the warm-up exercise “Pitter, Pitter, Patter” with a lateral, muscular smile and then again with kissy, rounded lips: this is an extreme example of the difference). Overall, the General South-Western dialect can be thought of as having an inverted-megaphone shape (a wide and expressive interior mouth, and a relaxed less excitable set of lips).

Resonance: The General South-Western is comfortable in a wide range of resonators, including the nose, head, and chest. In contrast to both the General American and Oklahoman speaker, many natives of the South-West are entirely comfortable living in a nasal resonance. This works well in conjunction with the open, engaged throat. A

chest resonance also takes advantage of the mouth's altered geography. Either choice will be significantly different from the common resonance found in Oklahoma.

Directionality: Much like General American, General South-Western speech proceeds in a relatively straight, flat line. However, the speech of the South-West is far from even. Rather, South-Western speakers tend to drive to the ends of their thoughts or phrases and place extra emphasis on the final word or syllable. As such, the imaginary line of their language is dotted, not solid, with some dots much larger than others! If General American takes a straight trajectory from mouth to target, the South-Western can be thought to meander from side to side a good deal more, taking a small journey to arrive at the end of their thought (a big, bold dot). This journey is not accomplished through a great deal of pitch variation (as in General American, Western speech tends to be monotone, or flat), but rather through changes in rate and emphasis.

The body that supports a South-Western dialect is able to move freely, adjusting its tact to balance the changes in rate and emphasis, yet also capable of taking a strong stance when it arrives at its point of interest—to allow the strength of the thought to be fully realized.

Take the ideas and suggestions above as guidelines, not as rules. There is a great deal of variety to be found throughout the South-West. Remember, the dialect is a given circumstance of your character: perhaps one or more of these rules were not cultivated by your character's circumstances. As members of the ensemble you have a good deal more freedom to explore the bounds of your regionalism—please take advantage of this fact!

What follows are a few very general uniformities of General South-Western speech. As the cast-list is finalized, we will be able to work together to make very specific choices that incorporate these ideas into a fully realized character voice. The following is not the entirety of the work will be doing—rather it is the preparatory materials. Take another listen to the provided samples from Nevada and New Mexico as you read through each of the following characteristics. In addition, what other characteristics can you identify? How are explosive sounds such as “p”, “b”, “t”, and “d” treated? Are all words evenly spaced, or do some run together? **Look to your text.** Are there recurring sounds, or patterns of phrasing that invite a vocal choice? There varieties present in the American South-West provide ample opportunity for creativity and incorporation of new idea.

- **Vowel Shortening.** In South-Western speech vowels are often clipped or shortened to accommodate frequent change in the rate of speech. As a result much of the expressive quality of South-Western speech derives from use of emphasis rather than expansion vocalic quality (a hallmark of Southern speech, including parts of Virginia).

Examples:

“toll” /toul/ → /tʌ/

“run” /rʌn/ → /rən/

“seen” /si:n/ → /sin/

“barbarian” /ba:rbeəri:ən/ → /bərba:riən/

- **Schwa.** In contrast to the Oklahoma dialect, South-Westerners will preserve the schwa sound(/ə/; the sound that appears in the first vowel of the word “away”; an extremely minimal sound in Gen.Am.). Due to vowel shortening, many sounds including /a/ (father, arm), and /ʌ/ (cup, luck) will come much closer to the schwa sound than in General American speech. Note that in the final example (*nuh-uh*), the glottal stop as been eliminated. In the South-Western speech schwa sounds often elide or link syllables together. This promotes ease of speech, and is another distinction from both General American and Oklahoman speech.

Examples:

“robber” /rɒbər/ → /rəbər/

“Thomas” /tɒməs/ → /təməs/

“away” /əwei/ → /əwei/

“nuh-uh” /nəʔə/ → /nəə/

- **General American “R”.** South-Western speech does not incorporate a Hard “R” sound. This is a key distinguishing feature that separates South-Westerners from Oklahomans. The South-Western “R” is the same approximate “R” that is used in General American speech. You needn’t change a thing! However, as the room fills with Joads, all eager to sink in to their “R”s be mindful that you do not do the same!
- **Gerunds.** As with most rural or lower-classed dialects, a characteristic truncation of gerund (“-ing”) forms is present. However, South-Western speakers from regions where a nasal resonance is preferred are more likely to maintain a reductive form of their gerund endings. I encourage you to explore both avenues.

Examples:

“running” /rʌnɪŋ/ → /rənɪn/

“laughing” /læfɪŋ/ → /læfɪn/

- **Rate of Speech.** General South-Western speech is considered and weighted in a manner common throughout the Central and Western parts of the United States. It does not carry a tremendous sense of urgency (as much of the speech common to the North-East does, for example), nor is it excessively languid (as speech common to the South-East often is). South-Westerners do, however, take advantage of their rate of speech as a means of conveying meaning and focus. South-Westerners drive forward to the end of their phrase, placing special emphasis on the word or syllable there. As a result, the rate of their speech is always shifting—gaining momentum as the emphatic word or sound approaches. While their speech is still well-considered, it has a good deal more emphatic quality than a General American or Oklahoman speaker as a result of the oscillation in rate. Pick a point somewhere across the room. Plot a course that is close to a straight line, but allows you a good deal of freedom. Head toward your

destination six steps at a time, each following the last more rapidly. On the sixth step, stomp your foot, thus resetting your pace. Eventually you will arrive at the destination you selected with one final stomp. Pick a new objective, a new idea, and move toward it in the same manner. At your quickest you need not be very fast at all—merely preserve the notion that you are headed toward the most important parts of your idea, and are excited to get there.

- ***Cadence (Musicality) and Pitch Variety.*** As with many speakers common to the middle part of the United States, South-Westerners have a relatively small variety of pitch changes or rhythmic shifts in their speech. The pitch tends to be flat or monotone from beginning to end, with focus leaning more on key words or ideas than on expressive vowel structure. By no means should you view this as a limitation on your range—rather you should view this as a very clear default setting. A big change in pitch, or a vast departure from standard rhythm (in this case the build toward an emphatic idea) will serve as a very clear dramatic shift and expression of a large change in your characters state. The addition of a pitch limitation is simply another wall you can burst through with a strong vocal choice (simply make sure it is a choice)! You can use General American speech as a guide for an appropriate range of pitch and vocal cadence.

Appendix II: Sample Syllabi

1. Fall Semester, Bachelor of Fine Arts, 2010

Advanced Stage Voice and Speech – Dialects: Fall 2010
MW 1:00pm – 2:50pm SSP 204

Instructor – Thomas L. Cunningham
Office Hours –By appointment
TA – Stacey L. Cabaj

E-mail – tlcunningham@vcu.edu
Office – SSP 202
E-mail – cabajsl@vcu.edu

Required Texts and Materials

- Dialects by Paul Meier; to save you money Janet has special ordered this book directly from the author. Your cost will be \$65.00. Please have cash or check (made payable to Janet Rodgers) by the end of the first full week of class.
- Full texts of the most of the plays that your monologues are taken from are available in the Kenneth Campbell Library.
- *Optional Resources:*
 - More Stage Dialects - Book and Tapes by Jerry Blunt
 - The Dialect Handbook by Ginny Kopf (available at VCU bookstore)
 - Accents: A Manual for Actors by Robert Blumenthal
 - Dialects for the Stage by Evangeline Machlin
 - Web site: International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA)
Google or go to the VASTA website <www.vasta.org>
 - An interesting test: www.blogthings.com/amenglishdialecttest
 - A *fantastic* dialect resource: accent.gmu.edu

Course Description

During this semester will we study no fewer than six dialects: RP, Cockney, Irish, New York, French, and a Real Life Character. Time permitting we will explore any number of other dialects and accents including Russian, German, Jamaican, Japanese, South African, Indian, Boston, etc. We will dedicate approximately two weeks to each dialect, and then apply them to short monologues. For as many dialects as possible I will provide you with packets that contain a variety of monologues, but I encourage you to supply your own! Any monologue that has the personality or “flavor” of the dialect we are studying makes a great choice, as does a dusty old monologue in need of new life.

During this course we will also explore a new method of dialect acquisition I affectionately call The Konami Code. Why The Konami Code? Because it’s so easy that it feels like cheating! This methodology incorporates elements of Mask and Linguistics into dialect study, emphasizing shape, resonance, placement, and directionality as the hallmarks for registering and mastering a dialect.

Remember: this course builds on your work during second year. Bring those hard-earned lessons on breath, articulation, and personal ism with you so that, here in dialects, you can continue to refine the use of your apparatus (particularly your mouth and tongue)!

Course Objectives

During this semester you will:

- Select key sentences for each dialect
- Speak only in the dialect we are working on during class!
- Perform an individual monologues for each dialect
- Transcribe each monologue into IPA with notation
- Record each monologue into a digital audio file—you will record the monologue after it is first presented, and again for your midterm/final.
- Engage in cultural activities and research to broaden your understanding of the dialects' contexts!
- Conduct a Real Life Character study to be presented in the final weeks of class—you will want to get started early!
- Gain greater versatility and control of your entire vocal apparatus, using dialect as a vehicle for expanding your range

Remember that we are here to learn, but also to play! Our study of dialect is an excellent opportunity to spend a few hours a week playing with our voices, making new and exciting sounds as we explore and expand our vocal range and repertoire. The harder you work the more fun we can have!

Grading Scale

Monologues and IPA transcriptions will be graded based on the number of errors that occur. They will be graded on the following scale:

0-2 errors = A

3-4 errors = B

5-6 errors = C

7-8 errors = D

> 8 errors = F

Your final grade will consist of your individual monologues, your transcriptions, your midterm, your real life character study, your audio recordings, and your final exam. These grades will be averaged and placed on the VCU grading scale:

A 100-90%

B 89-80%

C 79-70%

D 69-60%

F 59% and Below

Written Work

IPA transcriptions should consist of a type-written copy of your monologue double or tripled spaced with your phonetic transcription hand-written above the printed text. Though many monologues will be provided in packet form, you must retype any monologue you are transcribing to make room for legible and complete transcription. If you are versed in the phonetic keyboard you may also type your IPA. Be neat and legible. I encourage you to make up symbols or short-hands that empower your understanding and aid in memorization—but please provide a key!

Elocution with Thomas

In keeping with departmental policy, you must wear black movement clothing during class times. Likewise you must remove all jewelry prior to the start of class. This includes earrings, bracelets, watches, and any piercing worn above the neck (this most certainly includes any *in* or *about* the mouth)! Dressing appropriately is a sign that you are ready to work and have come prepared to participate.

In addition to appropriate dress, an appropriate attitude and comportment are necessary in maintaining a free and open environment in which to explore our voices. You must show respect and support for the efforts of your fellow classmates. You needn't like them or even agree with them! But you must approach one another with the same grace and professionalism as you approach the *work itself*. So take turns speaking! Share the floor with others! Offer constructive feedback! Expand on one another's ideas, and always—*always*—put the work first while in the classroom.

This semester we will attempt to gain a greater understanding of the fundamental sounds and shapes of our language. The only way to enter into this understanding is with a clear and direct *use* of language. Verbal garbage such as “um,” “like,” “you know,” or “kind of” only inhibits your communication. This aurally offensive particulate matter is not welcome.

There may be times when I will need to place my hand on your body to help with breath or tension awareness, or to aid in alignment. Please let me know straight away if you have any issue or discomfort with this!

The Sacred Space

In order to promote an atmosphere of learning and openness we will be designating our classroom space as our “sacred space.” If you arrive early to the space, please use the time for silent reflection, meditation, or to warm-up physically and vocally for the day's work. You may speak, but please speak only of the work we will do here in Voice and Speech. Please stow your belongings out of the way, and have any materials you will need for the day's work on-hand. I encourage you to bring a spill-proof container of water with you into the space. All other food or drink should remain outside of our holy-of-holies. Please finish eating or snacking prior to entering the space. All this does not mean we won't be having a riotously good time! On the contrary, it ensures we will remain focused on the work and be better able to experience the freedom and joy that it will bring!

Someone Poisoned the Waterhole

New departmental policy dictates that a Student Deputy be tasked with the care and clean-up of our space immediately following class. The Deputy's duties include replacing chairs/desks at the room's perimeter, sweeping the floor, and depositing all trash in the proper receptacle. On the first day of class one of you will be tasked with the mantle of Student Deputy, however I remind you that it is all of our duties to keep the classroom a clean and safe environment! Help your Deputy out, and tidy up your own mess!

Attendance

In keeping with the university attendance policy you are allowed a total of two (2) unexplained absences. Each additional absence will result in the loss of a **full letter grade**. Two tardies (arriving after attendance has been taken) qualify as one (1) absence. If you arrive at class more than 20 minutes late you are absent. If you leave class early without being excused you are absent. As with all of your studio courses, your work in this class is tied directly to your attendance and punctuality! To put it simply: the most important part is showing up. A gentle reminder: *you* are responsible for all missed work due to absence.

Please notify me via e-mail (tlcunningham@vcu.edu –note the misspelling of my name, that is intentional!) the moment you are aware of an upcoming absence: I worry about you!

A Note on Classroom Observations

Over the course of the semester a several graduate students will be joining us in the classroom to conduct teaching observations. Please welcome them to our space, and have no fear: they are here critiquing my work, not your own!

VCU Emergency Directives

1. Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (www.VCU.edu/alert/notify). Keep your information up-to-date.
2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. In case of emergency, listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information (www.VCU.edu/alert).
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VC Police (828-1234). Program this number into your cell phone. Report suspicious activities and objects.

VCU Statement on Safety

What to know and do to be prepared for emergencies at VCU:

- sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (www.VCU.edu/alert/notify). Keep your information up-to-date.
- Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
- Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
- Know where to go for additional emergency information (www.vcu.edu/alert).
- Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

VCU Honor System

Virginia Commonwealth University recognizes that honesty, truth, and integrity are values central to its mission as an institution of higher education. The Honor System is built on the idea that a person's honor is his/her most cherished attribute. A foundation of honor is essential to a community devoted to learning. Within this community, respect and harmony must coexist. The Honor System is the policy of VCU that defines the highest standards of conduct in academic affairs.

The Honor System states that faculty members are responsible for:

- Understanding the procedures whereby faculty handles suspected instances of academic dishonesty. Faculty are to report any infraction of the VCU Honor System according to the procedures outlined in our policy.
- Developing an instructional environment that reflects a commitment to maintaining and enforcing academic integrity. Faculty should discuss the VCU Honor System at the onset of each course and mention it in course syllabi.
- Handling every suspected or admitted instance of violation of the provisions of this policy in accordance with procedures set forth in the policy.

The Honor System in its entirety can be reviewed on the Web at

http://www.provost.vcu.edu/pdfs/Honor_system_policy.pdf or it can be found in the 2010-11 VCU Insider at <http://www.students.vcu.edu/insider.html> .

The Honor System must be upheld and enforced by each member of the Virginia Commonwealth University community. The fundamental attributes of our community are honor and integrity. We are privileged to operate with this Honor System.

Statement on Americans with Disabilities Act

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require Virginia Commonwealth University to provide an 'academic adjustment' and/or a 'reasonable accommodation' to any qualified individual with a physical or mental disability who self-identifies as having such. Students should contact the Disability Support Services office on the Monroe Park Campus (828-2253) or on the MCV Campus (828-9782) for appropriate academic adjustments or accommodations.

VCU Guidelines for Student Conduct

VCU faculty play a critical role in helping to build an environment that is conducive to the academic success of our students. As you know, VCU has policies and procedures designed to create an environment conducive to academic excellence. One of these policies and procedures can be found in a document entitled “Guidelines for Faculty Members Regarding Student Conduct in the Instructional Settings.” This document is available on the VCU Web at <http://www.provost.VCU.edu/pdfs/FacultyGuideToStudentConductInInstructionalSettings.pdf> Understanding these guidelines will help you to encourage classroom behavior that does not detract from the quality of each student’s educational experience. Please read the document and think about your role in promoting a University culture based on mutual respect and civility.

As a reminder, both faculty and students should turn off cell phones and pagers while in the classroom.

2. Fall Semester, Bachelor of Arts: Dialects, 2009

Advanced Stage Voice and Speech: BA Dialects
Fall 2009; TR 3:00pm – 5:00pm SSP 201

Instructor – Thomas L. Cunningham
Office Hours –By appointment

E-mail – cunninghamt@vcu.edu
Office – SSP 202

Required Texts and Materials

- Handouts will be provided as we move through the semester. These make up your Course Packet. As we explore new territory together I urge you to expand and develop this packet along with me!.
- *Optional Resources:*
 - Dialects by Paul Meier; to save you money Janet has special ordered this book directly from the author. Your cost will be \$65.00. Please have cash or check (made payable to Janet Rodgers) by the end of the second full week of class.
 - More Stage Dialects - Book and Tapes by Jerry Blunt
 - The Dialect Handbook by Ginny Kopf (available at VCU bookstore)
 - Accents: A Manual for Actors by Robert Blumenthal
 - Dialects for the Stage by Evangeline Machlin
 - Web site: International Dialects of English Archive (IDEA)
Google or go to the VASTA website <www.vasta.org>
 - An interesting test: www.blogthings.com/amenglishdialecttest

Course Objectives

During this semester you will study Dialect and Accent for the stage. You will approach dialects as individuals, as actors, as dramaturges, as directors, and finally as pedagogues. During this semester you will study two dialects in detail: Cockney, and a Real Life Character. You will also explore many other dialects in class together. During this course you will:

- Explore the origins of dialects and dialect study
- Apply dialect work to a full range of theatrical specializations
- Learn a stage dialect
- Learn to listen to and analyze the sounds that compose a dialect
- Engage in cultural activities and research to broaden your understanding of the dialects' contexts!
- Conduct a Real Life Character study to be presented in the final weeks of class—you will want to get started early!

Remember that we are here to broaden our understanding of the applications of dialect work in the theatre! Any personal experience (or lack of experience!) you have must be brought to the table to answer the question: how does dialect study relate to my art, and how does my art relate to dialect study?

Written Work

Any written work I ask you to submit be type-written in a 12 – 14 point font face, double-spaced, and printed in black ink. Double-sided printing is fine! Multiple pages per sheet is *not* fine! I must receive hard-copies of all written assignments. You must follow MLA format for all bibliographic citations.

Your IPA transcription should consist of a type-written copy of your monologue double or triple spaced with your phonetic transcription hand-written above the printed text. If you are versed in the phonetic keyboard you may also type your IPA. Be neat and legible. I encourage you to make up symbols or short-hands that empower your understanding and aid in memorization—but please provide a key!

About the Real Life Character Study: part of your experience with dialects this semester will be as teachers. You are required to provide an informative hand-out along with your Real Life Character Study presentation. Treat these as a valuable resource for your classmates—a dialect or accent they can take with them and have on file! As much, please type and print this handout in a legible and neat manner!

Elocution with Thomas

This course follows the VCU dress code as listed in the VCU Student Handbook. You need not wear black movement attire each day. Later in the semester we will be exploring our bodies and the space, and you will be asked to dress appropriately.

In addition to appropriate dress, an appropriate attitude and comportment are necessary in maintaining a free and open environment in which to explore our voices. You must show respect and support for the efforts of your fellow classmates. You needn't like them or even agree with them! But you must approach one another with the same grace and professionalism as you approach the *work itself*. So take turns speaking! Share the floor with others! Offer constructive feedback! Expand on one another's ideas, and always—*always*—put the work first while in the classroom.

Attendance

In keeping with the university attendance policy you are allowed a total of two (2) unexplained absences. Each additional absence will result in the loss of a **full letter grade**. Two tardies (arriving after attendance has been taken) qualify as one (1) absence. If you arrive at class more than 20 minutes late you are absent. If you leave class early without being excused you are absent. As with all of your studio courses, your work in this class is tied directly to your attendance and punctuality! To put it simply: the most important part is showing up. A gentle reminder: *you* are responsible for all missed work due to absence.

Please notify me via e-mail (cunnighammt@vcu.edu –note the misspelling of my name, that is intentional!) the moment you are aware of an upcoming absence.

Disabilities

If you have any visual, auditory, ambulatory, or learning disability it is your responsibility to inform me so that I can try to accommodate your needs! See The VCU Resource Guide for details.

Religious Observances

In accordance with University policy, if you want to observe a religious holiday of special importance you must provide advance written notification by the end of the second week of classes so that I can accommodate your needs.

Honor Policy

Please visit the VCU website or see the VCU Handbook to review the official university honor policy. Two university rulings you need be especially aware of: **1. The University requires that cell phones and beepers must be turned off while you are in the classroom. 2. Firearms and knives are not permitted in the classroom or on campus.**

VCU Alert and Campus Security

1. Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts
[<http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify>]. Keep your information up-to-date.

2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information [<http://www.vcu.edu/alert>].
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police: 804-828-1234. Report suspicious activities and objects.

Date	What are we doing?	What did I read?	What is due?
WEEK 1 20-Aug	Discuss the Syllabus Welcome		
WEEK 2 25-Aug	Dialect vs. Accent Dialects in the real world American Tongues		
27-Aug	General American vs. Our Voices Dialects on the Stage		Recordings
WEEK 3 01-Sep	General American vs. RP Irish Dialect		
02-Sep	Irish Dialect		
WEEK 4 08-Sep	Monologue Performances Teaching Yourself Transatlantic		Monologues / Transcriptions
10-Sep	Accents Russian Accent		
WEEK5 15-Sep	History of A Stage Dialect Presentations/ Pub Day		Presentation/ Report
17-Sep	History of A Stage Dialect Presentations		Presentation/ Report
WEEK 6 22-Sep	Voice and Movement Mask		
24-Sep	TBA		Masks
WEEK 7 29-Sep	Class Cancelled		
01-Oct	TBA		
WEEK 8 06-Oct	Real Life Character Studies		Real Life Character Study/ Handout / Lecture
08-Oct	Real Life Character Studies		Real Life Character Study/ Handout / Lecture

Vita

Thomas Leeland Cunningham was born on December 22, 1983, in Petersburg, Virginia. He graduated from The Governor's School for Government and International Studies, Richmond, Virginia in 2001. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Theatre with a minor concentration in English from Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia in 2007. Thomas served as a voice and speech and public speaking instructor at Virginia Commonwealth University from 2007 to 2011. Thomas received a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy with an emphasis in Voice and Speech Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2011.