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“A Revolution in Emotion: The Alba Technique”

by Patricia Angelin

I have never told this story before: it always seemed to belong to the other actor, not to me. It was an onstage moment of pure unadulterated terror: I, as Laura in “The Glass Menagerie,” looked up into the eyes of my mother, Amanda, and saw – not Amanda, not a mother at all, but another Laura – another self; and suddenly, inexorably, she grabbed onto me through the eyes...we were immersed in each other’s terror, we were about to drown in emotion – really drown – together. It was horrifying!

My Amanda in this particular New York production – Off-Broadway on 42nd Street’s Theatre Row – was Julie Haydon, who created the role of Laura (with the inimitable Laurette Taylor as Amanda) in the original 1944 production. I had seen Miss Haydon *succeed* as Amanda 3 times: in three widely divergent productions of the play at universities in Minnesota, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, with three different Laura’s. But Miss Haydon and I had a privileged offstage relationship – I was becoming for her the daughter she and her late husband, drama critic George Jean Nathan, never had. She had made me her legal representative for her husband’s estate, his Literary Executrix; I had published an edition of George Jean Nathan’s letters to playwright Sean O’Casey; she introduced me to Tennessee Williams, and his first representative, the great Audrey Wood, was my agent at the time....so we were becoming familial off-stage too. The title of the 1977 bestselling book on mother/daughter relationships, *My Mother/My Self*, comes to mind, because Julie was experiencing a “my daughter/myself – my mother/my daughter” schizophrenic moment. The emotional abyss beckoned. In her eyes was a weird Cervantes’ Don Quixote Hall of Mirrors distortion; she was a person drowning in her conflicted emotions and she was grabbing onto me to pull me down with her. I broke eye contact, disconnected from her, and retreated – stepped back – into Laura. We did not drown that night. For a nano-second, however, there was genuine, psycho-fragmenting madness onstage. The audience *had* to have sensed it.

Well before the frightening onstage moment with Miss Haydon, I generated one of my very own. I was the title character in “The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie” (too young for the role at the time, and I knew it). In the play Jean is betrayed by her protégé. She has a psychotic break with reality – offstage – screaming in her last line, “Assassins!!!”

Well, Jean Brodie broke and so did I. Offstage, in an interior darkness far more black than the most perfect blackout, I fell – mentally and emotionally – with violence, reaching out into the void – and nobody was there but me. There was just enough Patricia, mentally-healthy-girl, to know, somehow, that while Jean had cracked and was shattering, I, Patricia, was *not*, and I must not...go! Internally I screamed: “Help me!” And I recall the sensation of stepping back



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A Revolution in Emotion: The Alba Technique

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one step, and in that step, I “stepped out” of Jean and back into Pat; from the character I had so completely incarnated, back into myself.

It is important for an actor to learn how to step out of character, and there is a simple way to help us to do that that does not involve drop kicking your cat or crying in your beer. This method of emotional induction is called Alba Emoting™. One of the it’s great gifts to actors is a specific set of physical movements which taken together comprise “The Step Out.” It is derived from yoga and Qi Gong traditions and effectively neutralizes emotions neurologically.

I came to this work accidentally. I had never heard of Alba Emoting™ when I first encountered Dr. Susana Bloch and her work. It was 1994, and I had just stepped off a plane from London and, travel-worn, dropped my bags in my room at the great old Palmer House hotel in Chicago and perused the workshop offerings at the American Theater in Higher Education Conference. “Emotion for the Actor” caught my eye because the little description held out the tantalizing prospect of experiencing true emotional neutrality. *That* was what propelled me into the room. Wow. Real “neutral.” To be able to enter into non-feeling – I wanted that!

How many countless times have we been in a scene study class, where the teacher, following some heavy work of anger or sadness by the actors, instructs, “OK. Good. Now go to neutral.” And the actors, fresh from immersion in their scene, dutifully assume a mask, some semblance of physical alignment, but one can see that these actors are *not* emotionally neutral. Quite the contrary, they have what Susana calls “emotional hangover” from the scene all through their bodies.

The ability to come to a neutral non-emotional state is desirable, but I certainly had never seen anyone who could achieve it “on demand.” Therefore, in pursuit of ‘neutral,’ I barged into a small hotel meeting room packed to the gills with the curious of academe. On the floor, lying prone, were several persons in the midst of an exercise, breathing. Dr. Bloch noticed me and beckoned me to join the participants on the floor. “Please do *exactly* as I request,” she said, “breathe this way.” She instructed me specifically how to breathe in and out, and then she came back quietly instructing postural, facial, and muscular changes in addition to breathing, a total of five times. The final instruction, “now...unfocus your eyes,” catapulted me into a full-blown sexual arousal – no context, no psychological or direct physical stimulus – in a room full of judgmental strangers. So sudden, so astonishing was this full-body experience that I shall never in my life forget it! Therefore, using the “sense memory” technique, I can even get to it without using Alba Technique at all, because it has become a part of my emotional memory. My experience that day is called “Emotional Induction.”

Susana Bloch Arendt, Ph.D, then Director of Research at the Marie and Pierre Curie Institute of the University of Paris (CNRS), had identified – one cannot truly say discovered six universal core human emotions – anger, fear, sadness, joy, tenderness (love) and erotic (love) – and “Effector Patterns” which, when exactly reproduced, induce the *subjective emotion*, the real feeling. This tool gives the actor unprecedented access to the self, and to what I call the “Jungian Well of Emotion,” which in turn gives access to the universal human emotional ‘big stuff’ that the actor needs to do the Greeks and other classics. Alba Technique does not replace other analytical/psychological actor training. It is an *addition* to the work of Stanislavky’s American heirs such as Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, and Michael Chekhov, and also to that of Feldenkrais and Alexander with the body.

Once learned – if the actor allows the time and process she requires to get Alba Technique ‘into the body’ – the actor can produce, control, and leave real emotion at any time. Alba means “white,” “fair,” “pure,” (Dr. Bloch’s second language is Spanish and she now resides in Chile), and also carries in Spanish the connotation of “dawn,” “new beginning,” and “revolution.” Alba Technique is a doorway, on the lintel of which is written “Know Thyself!”

Susana Bloch writes in her book, *The Alba of Emotions*: “...a direct physical procedure that consists in the voluntary activation, first and foremost, of specific breathing patterns and then of certain postural attitudes which are all related to a specific basic emotion. When these bodily physical elements are *intentionally activated*, what happens is that the emotional state that is organically linked with that particular type of physical configuration, begins to manifest itself in the person that is producing or reproducing them.”

From the first seminal moment of astonishing emotional induction, and neutralization by way of the “Step Out” protocol, I went on to follow Susana to several university residencies across the USA, and to Paris and Chile for weeks of personal training. I did not originally intend to teach, although I attended the pedagogical-organizational meetings in 1998 and have served as archivist for Alba Emoting in North America. I’ve been a Practitioner for 15 years, using the technique quietly in my own acting, coaching and sometimes in directing. Then, in 2008, when asked by my visionary young colleague, Bradford Louryk, to teach Alba, my knee-jerk reaction was “no.” But in the next instant, I knew just as viscerally that I was wrong. Bradford

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answered: "This is new, Pat. This isn't anywhere else in New York; this work is important; it's the new era and you need to bring it to the New York theatre community."

So, mindful of Bradford's bracing call-to-arms, I set to work deciding *how* to teach Alba in the rarified, stressful New York City environment. In training, I go from very technical body work on the "Effector Patterns" (breath, posture, facial) – referred to as the "Robotic Phase" of training – to get them 'into the body,' 'identified' by body and mind, and then ultimately to a full body/mind connectivity. The training process deconstructs emotions. When the student is able to fully experience all six of the core emotions, the body/mind meaning and value of non-emotion/neutral becomes apparent. The result: the student of Alba becomes one of Antonin Artaud's "athletes of emotion." Like a premiere danseur in ballet, or martial arts master, the Alba actor can creatively move in any direction, knowing her place of balance, her own center, both physically and emotionally. Thus the actor exponentially enhances her ability to go to psychological 'places' she otherwise would not be able to access, to take emotional risks without losing the self in the process.

Emotions are raw, powerful. In Alba Technique training, we go to internal places we've never been to before. This type of work is private, personal and visceral. The way I work with the Effector Patterns is unique to each actor I teach... it also takes as long as it takes. It is a fascinating journey of discovery; a journey to one's center. • 2010

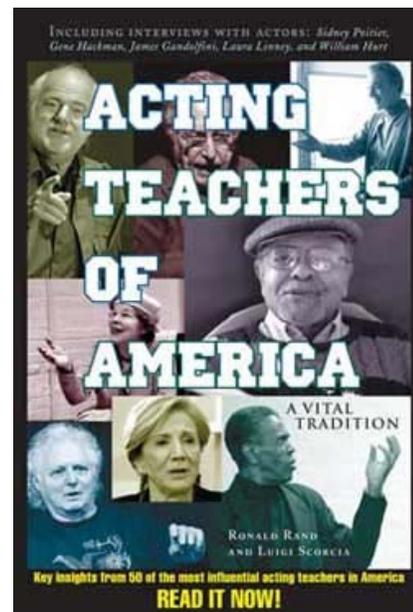
Written exclusively for "The Soul of the American Actor"

photo of Haydon & Angelin, at top: by Dennis M. Size.
photo below of Ms. Angelin: by Aaron Epstein



Patricia Angelin is an international actor, narrator, audio book/VO artist, coach, director and writer. A member of AEA, SAG, AFTRA and Irish Equity, she is Literary Executrix for the [Drama Critic]George Jean Nathan Estate, and also serves the Estate of his wife, actress Julie Haydon. She is currently recording her 8th Audio Book for the Library of Congress at the NYPL for the blind. Angelin has enjoyed teaching as a Guest Artist at colleges and universities and as a Rostered Artist for the Pennsylvania Council for the Arts. Her consulting work for the PCA included Academic Standards/Arts Curriculum for presentation to the PA legislature. Published works include [Dear Sean: Letters and Articles from George Jean Nathan to Sean O'Casey](#) (with Robert Lowery); "Comrades in Arms" (*Eire/Ireland*) about the friendship of O'Casey and Nathan; articles on "Audrey Wood"

and "Julie Haydon" for [Notable Women in the American Theatre](#); the re-issue of [The World of George Jean Nathan](#) (Afterword); and 2 book reviews on Voice for January 2010 issue of *American Theatre* magazine. A certified practitioner of Alba Technique since 1998, she studied directly with Dr. Susana Bloch, creator of Alba Emoting, for over 15 years, and is now committed to bringing the freedom and control that are the hallmarks of this technique to the professional acting community.
<http://www.albatechniqueny.com/>



"It is a law of life that man cannot live for himself alone. Extreme individualism is insanity. The world's problems are also our personal problems. Health is achieved through maintaining our personal truth in a balanced relation of love to the rest of the world. No expression is more emblematic of this relation than the creative act which we call art. No art by its very constitution typifies the social nature of that creative act more than the theatre. The theatre, to be fully understood and appreciated, must be seen as a manifestation of this process of interchange between society and the individual. It must be judged as a continuous development of groups of individuals within society, a development which becomes richer, acquires greater force and value as it grows with the society in which it originates. Only in this way can the theatre nourish us. - Harold Clurman

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