Habit and the potential for actor training with immersive and virtual production technology

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There is no sound philosophical basis on which to see habit in actor training as bad but when did that ever stop anyone. Frank Camilleri writes that, in theatre, 'habitual patterns [of body use] are usually frowned on as conditioning movement and thus limiting the exploration of a range of other possibilities' (2018: 37). This prejudice is widespread within twentieth-century European Laboratory theatre traditions of actor training that stipulate the 'stripping away' of layers of socialization and that valorize what is thought to reside underneath (Matthews 2014: 68). It is also apparent in the distain for social mores in the post-Stanislavskian traditions typified by Meisner Technique,[1] which is now 'a staple within western drama school training, professional development courses and masterclasses' (Pearlman and McLaughlin 2020: 311). Habits, as Camilleri argues, are often seen as *bad* by actor trainers because they have been formed in the everyday and thus, the critique goes, they constrain movement, speech and behaviour within quotidian parameters thereby limiting and perhaps even inhibiting embodied experiences or representational possibilities. 'Many teachers of acting' therefore 'attempt to reduce or neutralise' (Camilleri 2018: 43) habits altogether.

In redress of prejudice, Camilleri makes the common-sense observation that 'the tendency and potential for change and becoming that

38). Camilleri's notion draws on John-David Dewsbury's 'ecological' sense of habit. Dewsbury describes '*in situ habits,* cued by ecological surroundings and understood as inhabitations' in an 'understanding [of] the human to come into being out of habit ecologies' (2012: 74–5, 81).

The sense in Camilleri and Dewsbury is of habits enmeshed within material patterns and relationships. Dewsbury considers the causative nature of ecologies, sub-textually recalling Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* juxtaposition of learning and habit with the human and the non-human. Aristotle comments on both teleology and causality by which the *doing* and *the thing done* are subordinate to its *cause*.[2] Germane to Camilleri's and Dewsbury's interest in the non-human elements of the 'habit milieu' is that, for Aristotle, the artisan is mostly irrelevant. According to Aristotle, a statue is not because of a sculptor; the sculptor manifests the specific knowledge required but this knowledge, not the artisan who has mastered it, is the *efficient* cause of the statue (*Physics* II 3, 195 b 21–25 (1983)). Accounting for causality, Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu have translated Aristotle's 'hexis' not as 'habit' but 'habitus', denoting something more encompassing than an exclusively behavioural definition and thereby more akin to the habit 'milieu' or 'ecology' in Camilleri and Dewsbury.

Definitive contrasts between habit and

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[1] Meisner Technique is well-established in American actor-training programmes and has 'significant impact in the UK' (Shirley 2010: 200).

[2] In the *Posterior Analytics,* Aristotle states that we have knowledge of a thing only when we have grasped its cause (I 2, 71 b 9–11 & II 11, 94 a 20). That proper knowledge is knowledge of the cause is repeated in the *Physics*: we think we do not have knowledge of a thing until we have grasped its why,