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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ROBERT LEWIS, LEE STRASBERG, STELLA ADLER
AND SANFORD MEISNER IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT RESEARCH ABOUT
THE STANISLAVSKY SYSTEM**

by

RUTHEL HONEY DARVAS

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

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Approved By:

Advisor

Date

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Bradley Sean Darvas

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Stanislavsky System, a psycho-physical approach to acting training developed by Konstantin Stanislavsky, has a long and storied history of misinterpretation. This study, using recent research about the Stanislavsky System, examines the teachings of four notable acting teachers—Robert Lewis, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner—to determine whose philosophy most accurately reflects the Stanislavsky System as it is now understood. In order to best understand this study and the use of certain source materials, a historical framework is necessary. A brief summary of Stanislavsky’s life and career, identification of key researchers and sources, and a brief history of the Group Theatre follow.

Stanislavsky’s Life and Career

Konstantin Stanislavsky was born in Moscow, Russia, on August 7, 1863 and began acting at the age of fourteen (Benedetti 2). He began his career with the amateur Alekseyev Circle. After the Circle disbanded in 1888, Stanislavsky began appearing in “risqué amateur productions” (Merlin 2). He adopted the name Stanislavsky both to avoid his family’s embarrassment and because it was the name of a “ballerina whom, as a young boy, he had lovingly adored from afar” (2). His next venture was the formation of the Moscow Amateur Music-Dramatic Circle after which he founded the Society of Art and Literature. In 1898, Stanislavsky co-founded the Moscow Art Theatre with Vladimir Nemirovich Danchenko, (Russian director and playwright, 1858-1943). It was agreed that Stanislavsky would be in charge of “all matters concerning production” and Danchenko would be in charge of “all matters concerning repertoire and scripts” (Benedetti 25). Furthermore, both agreed that the Moscow Art

Theatre company was to be a true ensemble, with no star players, that produced works that were both enlightening and educating (24-25).

With the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre (hereafter referred to as the MAT), Stanislavsky was able to immerse himself in the art; and he began his career as an actor in earnest. He began to understand the problems that actors often encountered and thereafter, throughout his life, he worked to develop a system that would allow actors to approach a role with a psycho-physical technique. Additionally, his hope was that the system could be used both for acting training and for directors to better communicate with actors.

Stanislavsky's first work toward that goal was an autobiography entitled *My Life in Art*, translated by J.J. Robbins and first published in New York in 1924 in English. Although Stanislavsky was Russian, his autobiography would not be published in his native country until 1926. Stanislavsky died in 1938.

Issues in Translation and Interpretation

In 1928 Stanislavsky suffered a heart attack that ended his career as an actor; however, his poor health became the opportunity for writing a work that would fully detail his System. He intended the System to be published in a single, two-part volume comprising how to create the "inner life" of a character and how to express that inner life physically (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* xv). Despite Stanislavsky's intention that his work be published in a single volume entitled *The Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Experiencing*, both the English (1936) and Russian (1938) editions of Part One were published long before Part Two (English 1949, Russian 1954), thus unintentionally separating the emotional, internal aspects of acting from the physical, external aspects (686). In 1990, nine volumes (including ten books) of Stanislavsky's work were published in Russia, consisting of materials intended for publication about the System

as well as other items gathered posthumously, such as class notes, speeches, letters, and lecture materials (xix).

In the United States, there were additional difficulties publishing Stanislavsky's work. Stanislavsky met Elizabeth Hapgood in 1923 when she served as his interpreter at a White House reception during his company's American tour. In 1929 Stanislavsky agreed to work with both Hapgood and her husband, Norman, who was an editor and publisher (xvi). Through this partnership, *An Actor Prepares* was published in the United States in 1936, followed by *Building a Character* (1949) and *Creating a Role* (1961). Stanislavsky's works detailing his System were published in America after being translated by Hapgood from Russian to English (sometimes inaccurately). Bella Merlin, a notable Stanislavsky scholar, wrote of the inconsistencies between Stanislavsky's work and the subsequent Hapgood translations into English:

Along with her husband, Norman, the American translator, Elizabeth Hapgood, substantially edited the texts, after with further snips were made by the Chief Editor, Edith Isaacs. Although the cuts seem simple, some of them are particularly unhelpful. [...] This example throws up another issue: terminology. Stanislavsky was so keen that his writing up of the System was not seen as "gospel," he chose language that was deliberately accessible to all readers. In the English translations, however, Stanislavsky's simple terms, such as "bits" of text and "tasks" for the characters, were subsequently changed to the more scientific-sounding "units" and "objectives," creating a different, rather alienating tone. These examples of incompatibilities in translation illustrate that some of Stanislavsky's original intentions have become muddled. (Merlin 40)

Furthermore, since there were many years between the publishing of each volume, English-speaking readers were left with the mistaken belief that the first volume contained his technique in its entirety, when in actuality there were complementary and progressive volumes that had not yet reached America.

It is likely the Stanislavsky System has been further misunderstood because it began in Russia and evolved over a fifty-year time span, during which it transmigrated to America through former students of Stanislavsky. It is important to note that the students who studied with Stanislavsky and later taught acting in America studied with him at different periods during the evolution of his System.

It is also important to mention that because of translation difficulties, there are also inconsistencies about the spelling of Stanislavsky's name in English. Sharon Carnicke, author of *Stanislavsky in Focus*, attributes this to Russian names being "anglicized according to the guidelines established by the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European languages" (xiii). This accounts for Stanislavsky's surname being transliterated with a final *-i* as if it were Polish. Stanislavsky's name is written: "Constantin Stanislavski," "Konstantin Stanislavsky," "Konstantin Stanislavski" and other various combinations thereof. In keeping with the Russian spelling and Stanislavsky's heritage, his name will be spelled Konstantin Stanislavsky throughout this study unless a quote is used from one of the scholars of his System who utilizes a different spelling. There are also inconsistencies between an individual author's use of "System" or "system." For the purposes of this study, the term System is capitalized as it reflects Stanislavsky's "System" or approach for the actor in creating a character psychophysically.

Key Researchers and Sources

As there are many published resources available about Stanislavsky, it is important to mention that some are more accurate than others. The ever-changing political climate in Russia during Stanislavsky's lifetime, barriers in translation and the fact that much of his original work was translated posthumously have resulted in many discrepancies between Russian originals and

their English translations. Given these differences, great consideration was given in determining the reliability of each source.

Jean Benedetti is a notable Stanislavsky scholar, critic, translator, and playwright. Using Stanislavsky's original writings which were sanctioned by the authorities of the MAT Archives, Benedetti translated *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary* (2008) and *An Actor's Work on a Role* (2010). For the purposes of this study, whenever possible, Benedetti's translations are used because they are the latest and most accurate translations of Stanislavsky's works. Additionally, they are more closely aligned with how Stanislavsky originally intended his works to be published.

Another reliable Stanislavsky scholar is Bella Merlin, an actor and lecturer of Theatre Arts and Drama at Birmingham University. Merlin wrote about Stanislavsky and the challenges she dealt with in writing his biography and explaining his System of Acting:

The challenge for anyone tracing Stanislavsky's biography is that the path isn't linear. Sometimes he ditched an idea only to pick it up again years later; at other times, the preoccupations of his mature life can be traced right back to his childhood. He was full of contradictions and often an artistic maverick. Nevertheless, this is a man who was passionate about theatrical "truth." His evolution as a theatre practitioner can be divided into four broad sections: the amateur years, the director dictator, round-the-table analysis and the final legacies. [...]. Added to all this, there were political events in Russia which influenced his choice of vocabulary, and various artistic "isms" (including Naturalism and Symbolism) also played their part in defining Stanislavsky's System. (1)

From this it is clear that tracing Stanislavsky's biography as well as the evolution of the Stanislavsky System can be challenging. Merlin's book, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (2003), is an informative introduction to Stanislavsky's life and work. Her book also analyzes the Hapgood translation of *An Actor Prepares* (1936) and outlines the System with particular attention to Active Analysis, the very last feature of Stanislavsky's work.

Sharon Carnicke is another important source in this study. Carnicke is a critic, Stanislavsky scholar, Professor of Theatre, Slavic Languages and Literatures, and the Associate Dean of the School of Theatre at the University of Southern California. She is the author of *Stanislavsky in Focus* (1998), which documents the journey of his System from Moscow to America, the evolution of the System itself, and Stanislavsky's use of Active Analysis toward the end of his career. She is also the author of "Stanislavsky's System: Pathways for the Actor" which was published in *Twentieth Century Actor Training* (2000). Carnicke stated, "A map that traces the migration of Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky's System throughout the world, therefore, would show two major points: New York as well as Moscow" (*Stanislavsky* 1). Carnicke's reference to New York is important because she implies that the Group Theatre and its members, which include Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, Lee Strasberg, and indirectly Robert Lewis (all key players in this study), are largely responsible for the System's evolution in America.

Rose Whyman is a Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham with a specialization in Russian Theatre. Her current research is on actor training, Russian Theatre and community theatre. She reads Russian fluently and regularly visits Moscow and St. Petersburg to undertake archival research. Whyman also visits both Russia and Poland to run community arts projects and to write about community arts and Eastern Europe. Her book, *The Stanislavsky System of Acting* (2008), speaks at length of the last development of Stanislavsky's System, most widely known as Active Analysis, and the influence that scientific discoveries had on Stanislavsky's System.

James Thomas is the Head of the Doctoral Program in Theatre at Wayne State University. He is also director of the department's Study Abroad Program with the MAT School.

He is translator of *The Joy of Rehearsal: Reflections on Interpretation and Practice* (2006) and *The Craft of Rehearsal: Further Reflections on Interpretation and Practice* (2007), both of which were written by Anatoly Efros, a prominent Russian director who was Stanislavsky's artistic heir. Thomas is also the author of *Script Analysis: A Guide for Actors, Directors, and Designers* (2009), which is based on Stanislavsky's principles. His translation of *The Stanislavsky System: A New Authoritative Dictionary of Terms* (2009), which was compiled by Natasha Balatova and Anatoly Svobodin from the 1989 Symposium, "Stanislavsky and a Changing World," is also a resource for this study.

Arthur Bartow is the Artistic Director of the Drama Department at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. Bartow's book, *Training of the American Actor* (2006), explores how actor training evolved in America and pays particular attention to the teachings of Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner:

The acting techniques that arose in America as the twentieth century progressed were designed either to emphasize certain aspects of Stanislavsky's work or to react against it. Together, Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner came to represent the troika of Stanislavsky-based approaches to American acting—each focused on a different facet of his forty-year process. (xxiv)

This quote underscores the fact that scholars and theatre practitioners are still trying to evaluate the influence of Stanislavsky on Strasberg, Adler and Meisner, because these figures are largely credited with bringing Stanislavsky's System to the forefront of American acting training.

However, Robert Lewis, a lesser-known colleague of Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner and a Group member, was also a proponent of the Stanislavsky System and had his own perceptions of how it should be utilized. Lewis has been largely overlooked by theatre historians even though he had a long, successful, and influential career as a stage and film director, theatre critic, actor, educator and author. In 1952, he formed the Robert Lewis Theatre Workshop. He also served as

a faculty member at Yale University and Sarah Lawrence College. Before his death in 1997, Lewis wrote three books: *Method—or Madness?* (1958), *Advice to the Players* (1980), and *Slings and Arrows: Theatre in My Life* (1984). *Method—or Madness?* consists of eight lectures Lewis delivered at the Neighborhood Playhouse in April 1957 and clearly defines his understanding of Stanislavsky's System. Although this work was published in 1958, it prefigures the latter phases of Stanislavsky's work such as Active Analysis. It is important to note, however, that Lewis had no access to the research about the last phase of Stanislavsky's career because nothing had been translated at that time and therefore nothing had made its way to America. What this suggests is that Lewis was extremely insightful because he reached his understanding of Stanislavsky's System through his own use of it as an actor, director, and teacher in his acting studio, in rehearsals and in productions. For these reasons, and because his voice and teachings have long been understudied, Lewis is included in this study with his contemporaries, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner.

The works of Benedetti, Merlin, Carnicke, Whyman, Thomas and Bartow are used here to provide new information about Stanislavsky's System while simultaneously correcting misconceptions. Additionally, their works are used to discuss basic principles of the Stanislavsky System which can then be compared to the philosophies of Robert Lewis, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner. By using this research as a basis for comparison, this dissertation attempts to demonstrate that it is the teachings of Robert Lewis that most accurately reflect the Stanislavsky System in its organic entirety.

In addition, this dissertation relies heavily on materials from the Kent State University Special Collections. This study is the first to utilize the Robert Lewis Collection, which holds the entirety of Lewis's manuscripts, letters, and drafts of published works, director's notebooks and

class materials. Personal interviews have also greatly contributed to this study. Robert Ellermann, former student of both Robert Lewis and Lee Strasberg, taught acting in the Robert Lewis Workshops and served as a wonderful source for a better understanding of Lewis's teachings and the manner in which Lewis utilized Stanislavsky's System. Ellermann was very generous in granting numerous personal interviews and sharing materials regarding Lewis. Eddie Burke, Lewis's former student, personal assistant and long-time friend, was also extremely helpful in explaining Lewis's teachings and offered much insight into Lewis as a person as well. Burke continues to teach actors today and uses Lewis's methods to do so.

History of the Group Theatre

Robert Lewis, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner were all members of the Group Theatre and notable acting teachers who have largely contributed to modern acting theories by bringing Stanislavsky's System to the forefront of American acting training. Therefore, a history of each teacher's contribution is necessary to better understand this study.

Lee Strasberg

After his departure from Russia following the Revolution in 1917, Richard Boleslavsky, an actor and student of Stanislavsky's, left the MAT and defected to New York. There he established the American Laboratory Theatre in conjunction with Maria Ouspenskaya, also a former actor of the MAT (Smith 14). Critic Richard Schickel stated that Boleslavsky was "a stalwart of the Moscow Art Theatre" (Schickel 11). It is important to note, however, that Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya studied early on with Stanislavsky in his First Studio (est. 1911) and therefore their ideas were based on Stanislavsky's earliest teachings.

In 1923, Lee Strasberg began his acting training as a student of Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya at the American Laboratory Theatre (Strasberg, *A Dream* 84). Strasberg, born in

1901 in Budzanow, Poland, came to the United States in 1909 and grew up in the immigrant neighborhood of the Lower East Side in New York (xvii). He joined the American Laboratory Theatre after passing a three-part audition “with a great willingness to absorb, but with little knowledge of what it was to be” (63).

Harold Clurman, who co-founded the Group Theatre with Cheryl Crawford and Strasberg, was also a student at the American Laboratory. Schickel wrote of their shared experience at the American Laboratory, “What Strasberg and Clurman took away from the Actor’s Lab [Laboratory] was a belief that just as an actor could be prepared physically for his work with dance, movement and fencing classes, he could be mentally prepared by resort to analogous mental exercises” (11-12). Through his work at the Actor’s Laboratory, Strasberg gained the knowledge that acting could be prepared for with a psycho-physical technique.

Wendy Smith, author of *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America 1931-1940* (1990) wrote that Ouspenskaya’s teaching at the American Laboratory Theatre focused on concentration, while Boleslavsky emphasized the need for an actor to grow by reading literature, looking at fine art, and listening to great works of music (14). In the notebook that Strasberg kept of his classes, he wrote “This is it. This is what it really means. This is what it is all about” (14). The teachings of Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya would continue to be a major influence on Strasberg for the remainder his career.

Through Boleslavsky, Strasberg learned that the “technical means” such as an actor’s voice and body could be trained (Strasberg, *A Dream* 67). More important, Strasberg was introduced to the idea that the actor’s “internal means” or “soul”—that is, imagination, emotion, and inspiration—could be trained as well (67). More specifically, Strasberg felt “the means of arriving at the actor’s imagination, emotion, and inspiration were through concentration and

affective memory” (67). “Affective memory” was the term used by Ouspenskaya and Boleslavsky, which Strasberg later divided into sense memory (“memory of physical sensation”) and emotion memory (the “memory of the experience of more intense responses and reactions”) (69).

It was at the American Laboratory Theatre that Strasberg was introduced to the Stanislavsky System. “My understanding of Stanislavsky’s work had come through the representation of his ideas which I first received at the Laboratory Theatre. Through my teachers there, Maria Ouspenskaya and Richard Boleslavsky, I learned the principles of Stanislavsky’s system” (84). With the knowledge that the American Laboratory taught him about the System, Strasberg would later formulate his own variation of the System which he called the Method. He would later use the Method with both the Group Theatre and the Actors Studio (84).

In 1931 Lee Strasberg became a member of the Theatre Guild along with Crawford, who worked as the Theatre Guild Company’s casting director, and Clurman, who worked as a play reader for the Theatre Guild. Eventually, all three became disenchanted with the Theatre Guild, and, influenced by Boleslavsky’s presence in New York, formed the Group Theatre (Schickel 13). The Group Theatre was structured after its Russian model, the MAT (Carnicke, *Stanislavsky* 38). It was a serious-minded artistic enterprise. Smith wrote, “No Group member was chosen lightly. The directors were looking for ‘a unity of background, of feeling, of thought, of need’” (31).

Inspired by the MAT and the American Laboratory Theatre, the Group Theatre (hereafter referred to as the Group) intended to make use of the Stanislavsky System, as Strasberg understood it, as its exclusive acting system (Bartow xxii). Furthermore, Clurman and Strasberg wanted a group of actors capable of ensemble work, just as the MAT had been (xxii). While

Crawford served as business manager, Clurman served as the Group's director and often gave long inspirational talks to the company (Smith 3). Lewis recalled:

Most passionate and evangelical of the three, Harold [Clurman] exhorted us all to relate the theatre to life. He defined the word theatre as something that need not only be the presentation of a production for the entertainment of the public. He spoke of an ensemble of dedicated artists—actors, playwrights, directors, designers—collaborating through a common technique, to create unified presentations of plays that would reflect, for their audience, the life of their times. (*Slings* 37)

All members were considered of equal importance and each received the same salary regardless of whether he/she performed a lead role or an extra. The fact that each member would use the Stanislavsky System is also significant in understanding the mindset of the Group because it gave every member of the Group, whether actor, director or designer, a common vocabulary with which to communicate with one another.

Bartow stated “Ultimately, Clurman became the evangelistic theorist for the founding of the Group Theatre, and Strasberg became the man with ideas for turning these theories into unified practice” (xxii). It was Strasberg who served as acting coach and director for this new methodology with its young, inspired, naïve recruits. Smith stated, “Clurman, still uncertain of his own directorial skills, insisted on Strasberg as the person best equipped to train the actors in the technique that would unify Group productions” (36). While Stanislavsky preferred to call his way of working the System, Strasberg used the term Method, short for “method of work” (36).

The actors, some amateur and some professional, were enthusiastic about Clurman's motivational speeches and the opportunity to use the Stanislavsky System (36). The Group achieved success with such productions as: *The House of Connelly* (opened in 1931 and directed by Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg), *Waiting for Lefty* (opened in 1935 and directed by Clifford Odets and Sanford Meisner), *Awake and Sing!* (opened in 1935 and directed by Harold

Clurman), *Paradise Lost* (opened in 1935 and directed by Harold Clurman). Smith wrote of the Group that it was a “theatre that spoke powerfully and truthfully to a broad audience about the moral and social concerns of their times, of collective action that would make the theatre and the world a better place, of art and life inextricably intertwined. They changed the American theatre, they changed their own lives, and they did it together” (429). The Group, an ensemble of talented and passionate theatre artists, would largely be responsible for making their interpretations of Stanislavsky’s System part of the American theatre heritage.

Although it was a time of enormous creative stimulation, there was also much unrest within the Group because many of its members were unhappy with Strasberg’s idiosyncratic interpretation of the Stanislavsky System. In 1934, Clurman, Adler (who was a member of the Group Theatre since it was founded in 1931) and Strasberg all traveled to Moscow to see first-hand the work of the MAT as well as that of the prominent Russian directors Vsevolod Meyerhold and Evgeny Vakhtangov. Adler observed classes at the MAT and Vakhtangov Theatre and “was impressed at the broad variety of classes available to actors: dancing, acrobatics, gymnastics, fencing, diction, and Meyerhold’s biomechanics, in addition to the improvisations and internal work on a part pioneered by Stanislavsky” (176). Strasberg was also greatly impressed by the work of the Vakhtangov Theatre, although he felt that “the great disappointment of their visit was the Moscow Art Theatre itself” (177). Not realizing that Stanislavsky was very ill at this time and had no involvement with the MAT for some time, Strasberg was most disappointed with their productions. Part of his displeasure may have stemmed from the fact that the MAT was under enforced Sovietization at the time. In fact, Strasberg and his colleagues’ visit to Moscow were closely supervised by the Soviets. In any case Smith wrote, “The Moscow Art Theatre seemed to Strasberg to have abandoned its quest for

truthful emotion without acquiring a compensating theatricality” (177). For Strasberg, who placed extreme emphasis on true emotion with the actors of the Group, this was probably the ultimate disappointment.

Clurman, co-founder of the Group, arrived in Moscow to join both Adler and Strasberg, however, Strasberg left to return to America in late June of 1934 (176). On July 3, 1934, Adler and Clurman traveled to Paris and met with Stanislavsky face-to-face (Reynolds 31). Adler and other members of the Group were not happy with their practice of Stanislavsky’s System at home. This prompted Adler to study with Stanislavsky personally for five weeks in Paris, at Stanislavsky’s apartment near the Bois de Boulogne, where he was “recuperating from an illness” (Lewis, *Slings* 70). While studying with Stanislavsky, Adler expressed her displeasure with the results of his System. Stanislavsky responded that if the Group was not achieving success with his System, it may have been because they were using it incorrectly; possibly Strasberg was placing too much emphasis on emotion memory (70).

During her period of study with Stanislavsky, Adler copied a chart (Appendix A) comprising the various elements of his System, of which emotion memory was only one small element (70). Ironically, it was during this trip to Russia with Clurman and Adler that Strasberg’s faith was renewed in emotion memory as the cornerstone of his Method. Strasberg was impressed by the work of the Russian director Vakhtangov, another student of Stanislavsky’s. Strasberg visited Vakhtangov’s widow who proudly read two of Stanislavsky’s letters to his pupil:

Strasberg was so moved he had tears in his eyes; the letters confirmed his judgment that Stanislavsky considered Vakhtangov his heir and that the younger man’s reformulation of the system, in particular the use of “inner justification” (the technique Strasberg called “adjustment”) was a logical extension of the system. This belief allowed Strasberg to reconcile his

continued faith in affective [emotion] memory with his new interest in more stylized work. (Smith 177)

Because he felt that his visit with Vakhtangov's widow had affirmed his personal interpretation of Stanislavsky's System, Strasberg would continue to place extreme emphasis on emotion memory.

Strasberg and Adler eventually came to differing viewpoints about how the System was meant to be used. Although Strasberg's faith in affective memory remained stubbornly steadfast, Adler felt compelled by her lessons with Stanislavsky to return to the Group with a new understanding of the System. In front of the company's members, she confronted Strasberg about his errors in his utilization of Stanislavsky's teachings (Lewis, *Slings* 71). The day after Adler explained her new-found understanding of the System, Strasberg called a meeting and announced, in response to Adler, that he was not utilizing Stanislavsky's System but Strasberg's Method (71). In an interview with Ellermann on March 9, 1980, Lewis, who was one of the Group's founding members, said that Adler's report was both a "revelation and a "breath of fresh air." "That was the first time," Lewis continued, "that we sort of had a direct line to the horse's mouth because she got it then from the master himself and not through various directors, disciples, whatever" (Ellermann, Interview). Lewis recalled:

Strasberg, of course, blew a gasket because he couldn't have his authority questioned. The next day he gave a speech in which he [Strasberg] screamed, "I don't teach Stanislavsky's method, I teach Strasberg's Method!" and he wiped the word Stanislavsky out of his lexicon until it all blew over. Then he took it back later after he [Stanislavsky] had died. That was the first chink in Lee's armor. Up to that he had been the Pope. No one could ever question his ability. There were many more after that until he finally left the Group. (Ellermann, Interview)

Clearly this incident damaged Strasberg's credibility with the Group's members. Until that point, Strasberg had been regarded as the leading expert about Stanislavsky's System; however, this event caused many of the Group's ensemble to doubt Strasberg's ultimate authority. Smith confirmed this when she wrote, "The contretemps over Adler's lectures badly damaged Strasberg's prestige and, possibly, his self-confidence; some Group actors felt in retrospect that he never directed again with the same assurance" (183). No doubt this incident would be one of the factors Strasberg considered in his decision to leave the Group.

Strasberg left the Group in 1937 (293). Although the Group ultimately broke up from financial difficulties, Adler's confrontation with Strasberg after her studies with Stanislavsky was decisive in its ultimate demise in 1941. The Group had an impact of enormous proportions on theories of acting, acting training, as well as directing in America. Howard Kissel, editor of Adler's *The Art of Acting*, said of the Group:

It also seems no accident that the longest lasting effect of the Group was pedagogical. The Group produced many fine actors, a number of great directors, but the most influential result of its short but turbulent life (the Group barely lasted a decade) was the creation of some of the most respected acting teachers of the postwar period—Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, Robert Lewis, and, of course, Stella Adler. (264)

Out of the struggle to truly understand and practice the principles of the Stanislavsky System, four of America's greatest acting teachers would be born.

The Actors Studio was originally founded in 1947 by Elia Kazan and Robert Lewis. Both agreed from the start that Strasberg should not be part of the Actors Studio faculty as they did not agree with certain aspects of his interpretation of the Stanislavsky System (Lewis, *Slings* 188). However, Lewis left the Studio in 1948 after a disagreement with Kazan regarding the musical *Love Life* (188). Lewis had initially been asked to direct the play but turned down the offer

because Kazan suggested the play needed revisions. It angered Lewis to find out that Kazan had later accepted the assignment to direct the play after he had turned it down at Kazan's insistence (188). After Lewis's departure, Kazan had difficulty finding a replacement for Lewis and with much reservation hired Strasberg in 1951. Kazan then left the Studio as he felt that there should be a "single method of instruction" for the sake of consistency (190).

After Kazan's departure in 1951, Lee Strasberg became director of the Actors Studio and brought his variation of the Stanislavsky System—that is, the Strasberg Method—to the forefront of acting theory in America (Schikel 7). Strasberg is said to have taught many famous Hollywood stars emerging at the time including Anne Bancroft, Montgomery Clift, James Dean, Julie Harris, Marilyn Monroe and Paul Newman. As head of the Studio, he clarified the difference between Stanislavsky's System and his own Method:

I have always stated simply that the Method was based on the principles and procedures of the Stanislavsky System. I began to use these principles in the early thirties, training and working with young actors in the Group Theatre, and then later in my own classes and at the Actors Studio. However, I have always referred to our own work as a "method of work" because I never liked the implication of the term system. Additionally, in view of the many discussions and misunderstandings as to what the system is and is not, plus the confusion about the earlier and later periods of Stanislavsky's work, I was unwilling to make Stanislavsky responsible for any of our faults. (*A Dream* 84)

While Strasberg's Method was greatly influenced by his understanding of the Stanislavsky System, Strasberg continued to explore and refine his Method throughout the remainder of his career. In 1969 he founded the Lee Strasberg Institute, a school for fee-paying students, where he continued working until his death in 1982.

In this dissertation, the following sources are used to explore the acting principles of Strasberg. Strasberg's own work, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (1987) is

used because it is the seminal work on his approach to acting. This study also uses *The Lee Strasberg Notes* (2010), edited by Lola Cohen, as a source for the teachings of Strasberg. Cohen, a former student of Strasberg, has compiled lecture notes from his classes which offer great insight into his Method. Additionally, the work *Strasberg at the Actors Studio: Tape Recorded Sessions* (1965), transcribed and edited by Robert H. Hethmon, is used as another determining work on the acting technique of Strasberg.

Stella Adler

Stella Adler was born in 1901 to a theatrical family that included five older siblings who were all actors. She was the youngest daughter of Jacob and Sarah Adler, both members of the prominent Yiddish Theatre in New York (Smith 19). Adler made her stage debut when she was five years old and her father “held her out to the audience at curtain call, crying, ‘She’s yours too!’”(19). She grew up acting alongside her parents often playing children’s roles. Although she was frequently acting, she studied at public schools as well as New York University. As a teenager, Adler “acted in the wide range of repertory characteristic of the Yiddish Theatre: contemporary folk drama, Shakespeare, European classics” (19). At the age of eighteen, she made her London debut playing Naomi in *Elisa Ben Avia* and remained overseas a year in order to continue playing the role. While in London she met her first husband, Horace Eliaschceff, which later ended in divorce (19). At the age of twenty, Adler made her English speaking debut, however, shortly afterwards she suffered from tuberculosis and did not perform for three years (19). In 1922, Adler had the opportunity to see the MAT perform in New York, which was to have a influential and long-lasting impact on her career. At age twenty-three, Adler decided to enroll in the American Laboratory Theatre for which she was “roundly laughed at by her brothers and sisters for her ‘seriousness.’ The gay, laughter-loving Adlers saw no need for

studying acting: you simply went out and did it; it was your life” (19). In 1931, Adler joined the Group and later married Clurman, one of its founding members. Although she left for Los Angeles in 1937, she continued to perform with the Group until it disbanded in 1941 (120). Adler went on to teach Stanislavsky’s System in her own way and was eventually regarded as a celebrated acting teacher in her own right. The Stella Adler School of Acting in New York City was founded in 1949. It is likely she founded her school in order to teach her interpretation of the Stanislavsky System because she was the only member of the Group that had the opportunity to work with Stanislavsky directly in 1934. Of her time in the Group, she said, “I’d known people who were participating in the Stanislavski technique. I myself was part of the Group Theatre, where the technique was supposedly being used. But as an actress who had a great deal of experience elsewhere, I resented acting with some of the principles used at the Group Theatre” (Adler 235).

Because of her growing discontent, Clurman urged her to meet with Stanislavsky in the spring of 1934 for a better understanding of how the System was to be utilized. Remembering her meetings with Stanislavsky, Adler said:

Stanislavski and I soon achieved the greatest closeness of director and actress, and very soon it was just actor and actress! We worked together for many weeks. In those periods, there were certain things he asked me to do. Particularly, he made clear that an actor must have an enormous imagination, uninhibited by self-consciousness. I understood he was very much an actor fed by the imagination. He explained the enormous importance of the imagination on stage. (237)

Of Stella Adler and her theories on acting and the theatre, Kissel wrote, “Stella Adler’s understanding of the theatre was shaped by three men—her father, Jacob P. Adler, one of the towering stars of the Yiddish theatre; her husband and colleague, Harold Clurman, the founder and spiritual leader of the Group Theatre; and Konstantin Stanislavski, the Russian actor who

was the first to understand the special problems of the modern theatre and to formulate a technique to deal with them” (263). Adler taught many famous actors including Marlon Brando, Robert DeNiro and Harvey Keitel. After founding her school in 1949, Adler taught her understanding of Stanislavsky’s System until her death in 1992.

Stella Adler’s *The Art of Acting* (2000), compiled and edited by Howard Kissel and authored by Adler, is composed of lectures and exercises she used in classes at her school in New York and is the primary source used here as the basis for the Stella Adler Technique.

Sanford Meisner

Sanford Meisner was born to Hungarian Jewish immigrants on August 31, 1905 in Brooklyn, but to escape from neighborhood anti-Semitism, the family soon moved to the Bronx (Meisner and Longwell 5). Meisner knew from an early age that he wanted to be an actor. He wrote, “I lived, as I’m afraid I still do, in a world of fantasy” (6). After graduating from Erasmus High School in 1923, he entered the Damrosch Institute of Music, which later became part of the Julliard School, to study piano (6). At the age of nineteen, Meisner went to the Theatre Guild School of Acting with the hope that they would accept him despite his inexperience. Meisner remembers his interview: “I remember lying elaborately about my past in the theatre; it may have started with Salvini for all I know. I remember them laughing” (6). His exaggerations must have served him well because he received a scholarship to study at the Theatre Guild School of Acting. It was there he met Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg, who was to become a major influence in Meisner’s career. “Strasberg had a great, uplifting influence on me,” Meisner remembers, “He introduced me to quality actors and artists of various kinds, and this helped enormously to solidify my emotional needs. I learned from him” (7). When Strasberg and Clurman mentioned that they were starting their own theatre, which would eventually become

the Group, Meisner had no reservations about becoming a member of the acting company. Meisner, at only twenty-five, became one of the founding members of the Group Theatre (8). “Without the Group,” Meisner said, “I would have been in the fur business” (8).

When an interviewer asked Meisner how he was introduced to Stanislavsky’s System, he credited Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler; “In the Group Theatre, by the pioneering leadership of Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg [and] from Stella Adler, who worked with Stanislavsky and to whom I listened to attentively and rewardingly” (10). Regarding the exercises he developed, which were based on his understanding of the System, he told an interviewer, “All my exercises were designed to strengthen the guiding principle that I learned forcefully in the Group—that art expresses human experience—which principle I never have and never will give up” (11). After leaving the Group, Meisner became a well-known and respected acting teacher. “The only time I am free and enjoying myself is when I am teaching,” he said, “I love the analysis of the technique. I like to work with people who bring a certain seriousness and depth to what they’re doing. I feel alive and related when I’m teaching” (11). Some of his pupils include Robert Duvall, Diane Keaton, Jon Voight, Mary Steenburgen and David Mamet.

Meisner headed the Drama Department at the Neighborhood Playhouse located in New York City starting in 1935. In 1958, he became Director of the New Talent Division of Twentieth Century Fox. From 1964-1990, he served as Head of the Neighborhood Playhouse. In 1985, in cooperation with Jimmy Carville, Meisner opened the Meisner/Carville School of Acting. In 1995, the Sanford Meisner Center was opened in Los Angeles, California where it is still in operation. Meisner died in 1997.

Several sources are used for the Sanford Meisner portion of this study. *Sanford Meisner On Acting* (1987) by Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell is the primary source for Meisner's theories about acting. Larry Silverberg is a former student of Meisner's and author of several authoritative books about Meisner acting training, which he termed the Meisner Approach: *The Sanford Meisner Approach* (1994), *The Sanford Meisner Approach Workbook II: Emotional Freedom* (1997), *The Sanford Meisner Approach Workbook III: Tackling the Text* (1998) and *The Sanford Meisner Approach Workbook IV: Playing The Part* (2000). In this study, Silverberg's books are used as well because they are invaluable sources for understanding the Meisner Approach.

Robert Lewis

Lewis was born in 1909 in Brooklyn. Initially, he had a strong ambition to become an opera singer. He recalled his mother taking him to a music instructor in Brooklyn to "have his voice tested. He wrote, "This was my first audition, and it set the pattern of agony for all subsequent ones, mine and those of others I eventually had to judge." The instructor was not impressed with Lewis's voice and suggested to his mother that he learn to play a musical instrument. Lewis made a very telling statement when he wrote, "I still shudder thinking of this important rejection. From that moment on all the activities of my life—acting, directing, teaching, whatever—I'm sure have been attempts to sublimate my original aim to be an opera singer" (*Slings* 17). Despite all of his latter achievements, Lewis, like many theatrical artists, claimed that it was his first experience with rejection that fuelled his lifelong ambition to better himself as a theatre practitioner.

Lewis attended the Brooklyn Music School Settlement at the Institute of Musical Art in Manhattan, later renamed the Julliard School of Music, where he began studying the cello, music

theory, sight-singing and piano (17). After standing in for a leading actor who came down with laryngitis during a rehearsal of a piece called *Marsyas the Faun*, Lewis discovered that he was much happier acting than playing the cello (18). Accordingly, after staying one more year at the Brooklyn Music School Settlement, he left to become a full time actor. He joined Sue Hasting's Marionette Company with which he toured during his later teenage years. At the age of twenty, Lewis became a member of the Civic Repertory Theatre, which was founded and directed by Eva Le Gallienne (Smith 29). However, Lewis soon grew tired of repeatedly being cast in small roles. He began directing one-act plays in the basement of the Civic Repertory Theatre for small audiences made up of company members. To his surprise, at the end of the season, Le Gallienne informed Lewis that he would not be hired for the following season. The only explanation she gave for not rehiring Lewis was that she felt he had a "place in the theatre" but "not as an actor" (29).

In any case, Lewis was not discouraged. He joined a group called the Actor's Workshop in the belief that acting as part of a permanent company was the best choice for him (Lewis, *Slings* 35). Not long after, Clurman and Strasberg visited the Actor's Workshop to see their friend Sanford Meisner in *Gods of Lightning* (35). Lewis also had a small part in this play, though Strasberg thought he was merely indicating rather than really feeling his character's emotions during the performance (36). However, Clurman and Strasberg must have felt that Lewis showed potential as an actor because they invited him to attend meetings regarding a new theatre project they were organizing. Lewis recalled that Strasberg was so "impressive" that "I accepted his, and Clurman's, invitation." Lewis continued, "I realized later, of course, that Clurman, and even Strasberg, must have sensed some qualities in my acting they were interested in, or they would never have invited me" (36). Significantly, at twenty-two, Lewis was the

youngest actor chosen by the directors to join the Group (39). Wendy Smith wrote of Lewis's time with the Group:

Bobby Lewis was an especially ardent student; he strove in his work for a stylized, heightened theatricality in which movement played an important part, along with music and visual effects. Lewis was something of a renegade in the Group, whose belief in emotional truthfulness and relevant contemporary drama meant that most of their productions were in the realistic tradition of the nineteenth and twentieth century European and American Theatre. (90-91)

This is a critical observation in understanding Lewis not only as an actor, but as a director as well. Although he was a member of a company known for extremely realistic productions, aesthetically Lewis was interested in nonrealistic theatre and would continue to be for the remainder of his career.

Although Lewis began his theatrical career as an actor, he knew early on that he would find his niche in the theatre as a director and teacher. Lewis remembered that he “wanted to be a director/teacher from the beginning of my career. I knew I’d never be a John Barrymore” (Ellermann, Interview). Lewis probably had this realization because he was most often cast in small, comedic roles and knew that his short, round stature would prevent an audience from finding him credible in a leading, romantic role. Although Lewis enjoyed acting, he saw himself as a director more so than as an actor. According to Ellermann, “Lewis saw himself in the mode of Vakhtangov” (Ellermann, Telephone). Lewis, like Vakhtangov, was known for his use of “poetic staging.” Ellermann explained poetic staging as “giving the context of a play in an imaginative way, it comes from Vakhtangov. Every play has its own reality and the particular reality in each play is different” (Ellermann, Telephone). Eddie Burke, Lewis's former student and assistant, said that members of the Group teased Lewis as he “was always trying to find different means of expression” in his work (Burke). It was Strasberg who came to Lewis's

defense by calling him the Group's own Vakhtangov, which was a serious compliment considering Strasberg's high opinion of Vakhtangov (Smith 174).

Lewis may have been a renegade with nonrealistic inclinations, but nevertheless he fit well into the Group. His pride of the Group's work is reflected in his statement:

The Group Theatre proved that a company of artists, surviving for a mere ten years, with a commitment to a certain kind of theater, evolving a craft to express its talent, although that craft was not all-embracing stylistically, could be a potent force in the theater, here and abroad, in its lifetime and, indeed, for future generations. In other words, the basic idea was right. (Lewis, *Slings* 101)

During his time with the Group, Lewis ultimately “codified” Stanislavsky's System through his assiduous note-taking. Lewis took detailed notes throughout his life, especially during his time with the Group. Lewis took notes on Clurman and Strasberg's lectures about the Stanislavsky System as well as his own experiences as a Group member. Burke stated during a personal interview, “Lewis was the only one who took notes when Adler came from Paris in '34; the chart in *Method—or Madness?* was the result” (Burke). Burke emphasized that “Stella was speaking from memory—Lewis was the only one who took notes—he was the one who codified it [the Stanislavsky System]” (Burke). Although Adler returned from Paris with a chart detailing the System and notes taken by a friend during her study with Stanislavsky, it was Lewis who had the insight to write down all of the information that Adler gave the Group about the Stanislavsky System after her return from Paris in 1934 (Smith 180). Lewis was also the teacher who shared Adler's version of Stanislavsky's chart by publishing his recreation of it in *Method—or Madness?*. Lewis would continue with his note-taking throughout his career. Later as a director and acting teacher, Lewis took copious notes on all of his productions and classes. Lewis's notes served as a tool for him to teach the System accurately as opposed to relying on memory which

can fade with time. Not only this, Lewis used his notes to write about the Stanislavsky System in his work *Method—or Madness?: The Highly Acclaimed Lectures on The Method School of Acting* (1958).

Throughout the personal interview with Burke, he expressed his happiness about the focus of this dissertation, saying, “I’m trying to tell people about the greatest experience of my life and first I have to take fifteen minutes to explain who Robert Lewis is” (Burke). Burke describes Lewis as “smart, strong, funny, loved traveling and was vibrant ‘til the very end, open to all new experiences” (Burke). Next, Burke logically asked, “The biggest, most ironic question: why wasn’t he so famous?” Burke attributes this to the fact that he “only did one movie,” whereas his contemporaries had more successful Hollywood careers (Burke). Lewis’s lack of Hollywood success was not because of his acting, however, but because he did not like the process of movie-making. Burke recalled that while making *Anything Goes* with Bing Crosby, Lewis was “very [emotionally] ill” and often “taking ten aspirin a day” (Burke). Ellermann felt that Lewis was lesser known than Strasberg, Adler and Meisner because he conducted traveling workshops (under the name of the Robert Lewis Workshop) rather than teaching at one specific site as did his contemporaries.

It is unfortunate that Lewis never received the same recognition as that of his more famous colleagues. Despite his not being a better known figure, Burke asserts that one of the things that set Lewis apart from his contemporaries was that, “Bobby loved actors. He was an actor first. When he saw someone who was really trying—he loved that—taking a risk, he loved that. He was very nurturing to people who would try crazy things” (Burke). Burke still teaches the Robert Lewis Technique and describes working with him “the greatest experience of my life”

(Burke). It is Burke's informed opinion that Lewis warrants a more important place than he currently holds in the history of American theatre.

Lewis's biography, *Slings and Arrows: The Theatre in My Life* (1984), is the best source for information about his life but is referred to only briefly here because it does not directly serve the purposes of this dissertation. This study also uses the Kent State University Robert Lewis Collection, which holds Lewis's manuscripts, letters, drafts of published works, director's notebooks and class materials. In addition, personal interviews are used as an excellent source of accurate and reliable first hand information regarding Lewis. Robert Ellermann was a former student of both Lewis and Strasberg. While studying with Lewis, Ellermann also taught acting courses in the Robert Lewis Workshop. Eddie Burke was not only a former student of Lewis's, but was also his personal assistant and taught acting in the Robert Lewis Workshop as well. Lastly, this study makes use of Lewis's works: *Method—or Madness?: The Highly Acclaimed Lectures on The Method School of Acting* (1958) and *Advice to the Players: Robert Lewis on Acting* (1980).

This dissertation is a comparative analysis of the key concepts of Stanislavsky's System as they were employed by Robert Lewis, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner. The concepts are explored independently in chapters two through six. Each chapter begins with an exploration of the concept as understood by Stanislavsky, after which his use of the concept is compared to Lewis's use of the same concept. Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner's understanding and use of the concepts are then explained and compared to that of both Stanislavsky and Lewis. Each figure's use of the concepts is compared and contrasted with what I argue to be the most recent and accurate understanding of the concept in Stanislavsky's System as indicated in the work of Jean Benedetti, Sharon Carnicke, Bella Merlin and Rose Whyman. By utilizing this

research as a baseline for comparison, this dissertation attempts to establish that the teachings of Robert Lewis most accurately reflect Stanislavsky's System in its organic entirety.

CHAPTER TWO THE CONCEPT OF ACTION

Lewis, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner all spoke of the importance of action, yet they understood the concept somewhat differently from each other. Lewis and Adler both spoke of action being of the utmost importance to the actor. Strasberg seems to have had an ambiguous relationship with the concept of action. For him, apparently, action was analogous to behavior. Furthermore, when he spoke of behavior, he often merged it with his ideas about the creative if, motivation and substitution. Meisner also dealt with action differently from Stanislavsky. Meisner taught the concept of action by using exercises that facilitated action.

Although the word “action” is commonly thought of as a term for something being done (as opposed to being said), or the most exciting part of an activity (“he always heads straight for all the action at the party”), the word has a very different meaning when it is examined using the lens of the Stanislavsky System. Action is paramount in Stanislavsky’s System. The importance of action was illustrated by Stanislavsky’s assertion that action is what sets theatre apart from other art forms. Because the concept of action can be complicated, for the purposes of this study the concept is divided into seven parts: (1) the distinction between action and emotion; (2) internal action; (3) external action; (4) the magic if; (5) given circumstances; (6) the beginning, middle and end of an action; (7) and the size of actions. Although Stanislavsky and the other figures in this study may not have formally divided the concept of action in this way, nevertheless it facilitates the understanding of each figure’s position in relation to Stanislavsky’s System.

Stanislavsky’s concept of action serves as a standard with which to compare the similarities of Lewis’s understanding of the concept of action, both in its theory and in practice

with actors. In turn, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner's understanding of action are compared with that of Stanislavsky. Additionally, differences among Lewis, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner are discussed. The research illustrates that Lewis had the most comprehensive understanding of action and was closest in theory and practice to Stanislavsky.

Stanislavsky

In this section, a review of the literature on action and Stanislavsky's ideas about action are used to develop an understanding of the concept in its entirety. A definition of action and an explanation of its importance to the Stanislavsky System, which Francis Fergusson termed the "Moscow Technique," can be found in "The Notion of Action" (Fergusson 85). Fergusson was an American scholar and critic who wrote *The Idea of a Theater* (1949) and *The Human Image in Dramatic Literature* (1957). Significantly, he was also a student at the American Laboratory Theatre during the same period that Strasberg and Clurman studied there; he studied acting with Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya from 1926-1930.

Fergusson wrote, "In my opinion, the notion of 'action' is the most basic, and potentially the most valuable, part of the Moscow Art Theatre technique" (85). He also acknowledged the intricacy of defining what Stanislavsky meant by the term action, and, to further complicate the issue, students of Stanislavsky also tend to interpret the meaning of their teacher in different ways (85). Fergusson's understanding of Stanislavsky's System was derived from his classes with Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya: "Action was certainly a word we heard the most frequently from them; from Boleslavsky in his rehearsals and informal talks, from Madame [Ouspenskaya] in her classes in the technique of acting" (85). Fergusson said that Boleslavsky spent the first few weeks of working on a play by analyzing the play's action as well as the main action of each character, which Boleslavsky termed the "spine" (85).

Fergusson recalled that Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya attempted to define action by comparing it to the term motive, but under the condition that “you understand that a man’s real motive is not necessarily what he says it is” (86). From this, it can be understood that an action is a character’s underlying reason for doing something. Fergusson confirmed this when he stated that according to his teachers, “All action, they would say, aims at some ‘objective’” (86). Fergusson said that it was a good idea to describe the action as “an infinitive, for action is the movement of the psyche, not a passive state, like a mood” (86). Because action implies what characters are doing, it is logical that the use of an infinitive (i.e., to get to Moscow) would be undoubtedly helpful.

Fergusson posed the question: “was it mere coincidence that the Moscow Art Theatre used the exact same word—action—that Aristotle used as the basis of his theory of art?” (86). If so, this would imply that the MAT borrowed the term action from Aristotle. Although Fergusson never investigated where the MAT learned of the term action, he stated, “I am convinced that Boley [Boleslavsky] and Madame [Ouspenskaya] were talking about the same thing as Aristotle was: they too saw the movement of the psyche toward the object of its desire [...] as what the dramatist was imitating in plot, character, and language, and what the actor imitates in his own feeling and perception” (86). Although it is not absolutely certain that the MAT used the term action in the same way that Aristotle had used it, Fergusson concluded that the meaning of the term was the same. Action is a character’s reason for doing something.

In any case, Stanislavsky’s System is made clearer by relating it to Aristotle’s concept of action (86). Fergusson said that the use of action in order to analyze a play “points to the object which the dramatist is trying to show us, and we must in some sense grasp that if we are able to understand his complex art: plotting, characterization, versification, thought, and their

coherence” (86). Furthermore, he believed that the purpose of the Moscow Technique was to enable to the actor to “perceive and imitate action so that he can play accurately the roles that dramatists of all kinds have written” (87). In other words, by identifying the character’s action with an infinitive formulation (i.e., “to find the culprit” in the play *Oedipus*), the actor is led to pursue the action inherent in the play (86). Thus, the function of the actor is to imitate action, a function that Aristotle believed to be the essence of drama itself. “The notion of action and the imitation of action,” Fergusson said, “is the connecting link between the art of the dramatist and the interpretive art of the actor [...]. But wherever they got this notion, the Moscow Art Theater’s lore of action has, potentially, great value. It provides a kind of bridge between theory and practice; points to the pre-conceptual basis of the dramatic art; and offers a means of access to masterpieces of the tradition that our contemporary mental habits obscure” (87).

Sharon Carnicke also attributed Stanislavsky’s understanding of action to Aristotle:

Harkening back to Aristotle, Stanislavsky points out that action distinguishes drama from other forms of art. In the Russian edition, he traces the origin of the word “drama” (cognates in Russian and English) to the Greek word “dran,” meaning “to do.” (*Stanislavsky* 88)

Carnicke wrote that after a student performance of *Three Sisters*, Stanislavsky said, “Altogether our art is the art of action. The word ‘act’ comes from the Latin word ‘actus,’ which means action; the word ‘drama’ is of ancient Greek origin, also meaning ‘action’” (147). For Stanislavsky, action is the means by which the art of portraying a character was expressed. Moreover, “Stanislavsky takes Tolstoy’s definition of art—‘feeling’—conveyed through ‘recognizable external signs’—and translates it for the actor as ‘the life of the human spirit of the role transmitted through external artistic form,’ or more simply put, experiencing expressed through behavior” (147). As a final point, “While Stanislavsky believes that the effort to convey

emotion unites all the arts, action distinguishes theatre from others” (147). Accordingly, for Stanislavsky, theatre meant action.

Having discussed the concept of action, it is important at this point to distinguish the difference between action (i.e., what the actor is doing), and emotion (i.e., what the actor is feeling). Stanislavsky held that action is a vehicle by means of which emotion would arise as a byproduct. In other words, by pursuing inner and outer actions, emotions would arise spontaneously. He confirmed this position when he advised actors to choose an action and not worry about emotion because it would arise of itself as a natural result (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* 43). “Think hard about what has gone before and re-create it. Don't be concerned with the result” he said (43).

He said as well:

The true actor should not ape the outward manifestations of passion, or copy outward form, or indulge in mechanical playacting according to some ham ritual or other, but perform actions in a genuine human fashion. You must not play passions and characters but react under the influence of passion, in character. (43)

Action must be expressed in the form of a verb because it is active; the actor is actually doing something, whether external, internal or more often a combination of both. To formulate actions, furthermore, it is helpful to place the term “I want” in front of a verb (149). This leads the actor to action (149). Emotion, on the other hand, can best be expressed thorough the use of a noun. Stanislavsky made this distinction when he stated, “A noun is a representation, it expresses a certain state” (149). He continued by stating that “nouns only express these representations figuratively or in terms of form, with no attempt to suggest dynamism or action” (149).

The end result of playing actions without inner justification, Stanislavsky warned, is activity without purpose. There is no specificity in what is communicated to the audience. It is

only when the actor pursues external actions justified by a character's inner action, wants or needs that acting becomes artistically "truthful." "Outer action is a response to inner impulse" he said (137). The actor begins with an inner impulse which in turn leads to an urge for an inner action. Inner action leads to external action.

Stanislavsky addressed the "art of experiencing." That is, experiencing action. Tortsov, the fictitious acting teacher in *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, tells his students, "I gather that the study of acting comes down to mastering the psychotechnique of experiencing. Experiencing helps us to fulfill the basic purpose of creative work, which is to create 'the life of the human spirit' of a role" (20). Not only should actors experience a role internally, but also "[they] must embody that inner experience [of action] physically. Outer communication relies very strongly on an inner experiencing in our school of acting" (20). The actor must communicate to the audience physically (externally) the action he/she is experiencing psychologically (internally). From this it is clear that the subdivisions of internal action and external action are intimately linked, because it is internal action that leads the actor to external action.

It is also important to understand that Stanislavsky used the term action for both external, physical action as well as inner, mental action. Tortsov clarifies this himself when he tells his students, "The value of art can be defined by its inner content. So I will modify my formula and say: acting is action—mental and physical" (40). After an exercise in which Tortsov captures the attention of his students by simply sitting in a chair, he states, "You can be motionless and nonetheless fully active, not outwardly, physically, but inwardly, mentally [...]. Physical stillness is the result of intense inner action, and that is especially important and interesting in creative work" (40). It is then that Tortsov goes on to explain that acting is not merely a physical exercise

whose quintessence lies in externals; it is a psychological exercise as well. It is for this reason that Stanislavsky often referred to his System as the “psychotechnique” of acting.

Also integral to Stanislavsky’s theory of action is the device of the magic if, a potentially powerful tool for developing action that is also artistically truthful. By simply asking, “What would you do if...?” actors can be propelled into logical action. That is, “What would I do if I were in the same given circumstances as the character?” Stanislavsky wrote,

What we have here is a device, a creative idea which, through the operation of nature itself, produces an action that is apt, a real action, one which is essential if we are to achieve the goal we have set ourselves [...]. The secret of “if,” as a stimulus, lies in the fact that it doesn’t speak about actual facts, of what is, but of what might be... “if”...This word is not a statement, it’s a question to be answered. The actor must try to answer it. (50-51)

Talk of the “magic if” naturally leads to the subject of given circumstances, another concept related to action. Stanislavsky defined given circumstances as all the facts of the play, as well as the director’s and the actors’ ideas about the play (Merlin 48). He explained that these circumstances are “given” because “circumstances which for the dramatist are supposed for us actors are imposed, they are a given. And so we have created the term given circumstances and that is what we use” (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 52). Given circumstances stimulate the magic if, which “always launches the creative act and the given circumstances develop it further” (53). Stanislavsky insisted that the two ideas cannot exist in isolation. “If is a spur to a dormant imagination,” he said, “and the given circumstances provide the substance for it. Together and separately they help bring about the step forward” (53). Careful study of the given circumstances helps an actor to find the action which the character needs to undertake. In other words, action—whether internal or external—is based on facts found in the play itself.

Internal and external actions, Stanislavsky said, have a beginning, middle, and end that lead in turn to other actions. Each action should flow into the next, which chain collectively forms the through-line of action: “Life is movement, action. If they [actions] do not form an unbroken line spontaneously, naturally, we have to develop it onstage. This operation proceeds with the aid of the feeling of truth and the constant care for the physical life of our own nature as human beings” (Stanislavski, *Work on a Role* 25). In other words, an actor must perform actions continuously at every moment on stage. From the moment an actor first enters a scene until he/she exits the stage, he/she is performing a continuous chain of actions, each of which must be followed through from its initial impulse, to its internal action, and then to its external expression in physical action. After coming to terms with the actions in this thoroughly organized way, the actor should be able to discover if a character achieved what he/she wanted by taking this particular course of action or, on the other hand, if he/she must explore a different action in order to achieve his/her goal.

Stanislavsky addressed the issue of the size of actions when he said that actions can be “large, medium-size, and small.” Large actions are essential to the play by definition, and, in turn, are made up of medium-size and small actions. They are all “organically related to one another.” By merging the large, medium-size and small actions together a path, i.e. “through-action,” is formed that “guides the actor during performance” (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 141-143, 314).

It is helpful to look at what present-day scholars and teachers of the Stanislavsky System have to add about each of the subdivisions of action discussed above. First, they all make a distinction between action and emotion. Stanislavsky, of course, believed that action is a vehicle for emotion. Merlin agreed when she said, “If they [actors] pursue their actions imaginatively

and truthfully, they can't help but arouse the appropriate emotions" (47). Once again the idea emerges that the proper emotion will arise of its own accord when the actor places his/her focus on executing the proper actions for the character. Carnicke, for her part, added that "During the performance, the actor places full attention on carrying out the required action, with the character's emotions arising as a natural result. By focusing solely on action, the actor experiences something akin to the role's emotional life as a subsidiary effect" (*Pathways* 25). Merlin and Carnicke agree, both with each other and with Stanislavsky, that when actors place their attention correctly on action the appropriate emotion will be evoked as a result.

Carnicke expanded on Stanislavsky's idea about the organic link between inner action and physical action:

The first, most persuasive [idea] is Stanislavsky's holistic belief that mind and body represent a psychophysical continuum. He rejects the Western conception that divides mind from body, taking his cue from French psychologist Theodule Ribot, who believed that emotion never exists without physical consequence. (16-17)

About the "magic if," Merlin wrote: "Throughout *An Actor Prepares* Stanislavsky emphasizes the importance of emotion in actors and here he offers 'if' as the most direct route to arousing direct feelings" (47). And Carnicke said: "Stanislavsky also advocates using the magic if to help identify action. 'What would I do if I found myself in the circumstances of the scene?'" (*Pathways* 25).

Carnicke also has more to add about the concept of given circumstances and how it can stimulate the actor toward logical action:

Note that Stanislavsky includes in the given circumstances not only all the details in the play, but also the historical and social research as well as whatever the director and designers of the production have decided. The character's situation, thus described, poses a problem, which must be solved by means of action. The actor next decides what the character

needs to do to solve the defined problem, thus leading naturally to the specific action for that segment of the play. (25)

Thus, no matter what the source is, the given circumstances can ultimately lead actors toward the proper actions.

Another idea of Stanislavsky's that Merlin expanded on is the System's special relationship among external action, the magic if, and the given circumstances: "By means of these three components (Action, If, and the Given Circumstances), Stanislavsky invites the actors to percolate the fictions of the play (Given Circumstances) through their own imaginations (If) to stimulate believable 'Actions' and 'feelings that seem true'" (51). It is generally agreed, then, that in Stanislavsky's System correct actions are the result of imagination supported by internal and external actions derived from the given circumstances (48).

It is clear from the above discussion that action can be a complicated concept to come to terms with in a practical, non-intellectual way. Nevertheless, for actors to have a practical understanding of the Stanislavsky System, and use it correctly, and to their best advantage, it is essential for them to reach an understanding of action as a whole and in its parts.

Robert Lewis

Lewis gained a clear understanding of the centrality of action from his time in the Group. In his notes from a lecture by Clurman on June 23, 1931, he wrote, "Action—what is happening—the reason for being on the stage [...] (Lewis, "Clurman Notes"). In *Advice to the Players*, he refers to action as "intention" which for him is virtually the same as "objective," "action," or "subtext" (Lewis 52). He maintained that it does not matter what action is called as long as it is an inherent part of the working process of an actor (52). For the sake of clarity, in this section of the dissertation, Lewis's term intention is referred to as action/intention. Lewis

stated that without action/intention “Acting becomes mere line reading and the actor indicates what is supposed to be happening instead of creating it” (52).

Lewis made an important detour in *Advice to the Players* by frankly referring to Stanislavsky’s System. He tried to dispel the mistaken idea that action/intention was invented by Stanislavsky and the MAT. He did this by citing examples of action from the writing of Edith Evans and Sarah Siddons, actresses who both employed action/intention as part of their technique before Stanislavsky’s System was known outside of Russia, or, in the case of Siddons, before it was even developed. These two English actresses intuitively used action, but without formally identifying it as such. Lewis stated, “It is not so much that some theoretician invents, or decides upon, a principle and then the artists absorb it into their craft. Rather, we study the great artists, try to understand what they do, and then set about formulating techniques to help us to those ends” (53). He told his students how Stanislavsky observed the work of actors such as Eleonora Duse and Tomasso Salvini and formulated ideas about what they did that made their work so convincing. Lewis correctly understood that Stanislavsky’s System is basically an “articulation and codification of techniques that working artists [...] hit upon through instinct, experimentation, and trial and error” (54). This is part of what made Lewis unique as an acting teacher. He was not dogmatic in his approach to what was then known about the Stanislavsky System because he recognized that it is purely a set of tools for the actor, embodied in tradition, and intended to help the actor when necessary.

After introducing the idea of action/intention with this qualification, Lewis stated unequivocally that, “Intention [action] is the most important element of the acting craft” (55). He tried to focus attention on action/intention by basing it on what was introduced to him at the Group, where action was by and large of secondary importance. He said that action/intention is

“what you are really doing on the stage at any given moment, regardless of what you are saying (or not saying, if it’s a silent scene or if you are listening). It is, in fact, your reason for being on the stage” (54). Like Stanislavsky, Lewis believed that actors should place their attention on action/intention instead of emotion or character (55). It was his belief that if actors concentrate on actions/intentions, emotions and character will emerge accordingly and, most important, logically and artistically truthful.

Lewis, like Stanislavsky, said that for an action/intention to be truly useful, it must be expressed with a verb that leads to action (59). He said that when an actor has a problem formulating the action/intention of a character, it is often helpful to use the term “I wish to...” before the action verb. This practice also leads the actor to connect personally with his/her partner (60). An action/intention may also be focused on an object, whether “concrete or abstract”—for example, a significant property or image (61). Lewis said that although playwrights may sometimes specify a certain emotion in the stage directions, an action/intention should still be chosen to lead the actor to the emotion the playwright has described (55). Each character has his/her own actions/intentions, of course, because it is when these actions/intentions are at odds with one another that conflict arises (67). Lewis’s idea of action-generated conflict is important because it means that he agreed with Stanislavsky that the “sense of the play” is carried by action/intention (55-56). Lewis said, “The choice of those wishes is the actor’s moment by moment contribution to the play, to which the author has already made his contributions: the theme (e.g. good vs. evil), the metaphor (in situation and character), the structure, the language” (67). In other words, it is the actions/intentions that convey the sense of the play to the audience.

For Lewis, moreover, action/intention referred specifically to psychological action and not physical action (52). Lewis said of his time with the Group that “too many people confused it with physical action, [but] we meant inner action. When I say doing, of course, I mean doing inside” (Ellermann, Interview). This is essentially consistent with Stanislavsky who said as the fictitious Tortsov, “In each physical action there is something psychological and in each psychological one there is something physical” (*An Actor’s Work* 180). Lewis’s statement makes it clear that he, like Stanislavsky, believed that action and the impulse to action are basically internal experiences. And that this internal experience leads the actor to external, physical action.

Lewis’s teachings are also consistent with Stanislavsky’s on the subject of the “magic if.” In the foreword to Hapgood’s translation of *Creating a Role* (which has since been translated by Benedetti into *An Actor’s Work on a Role* sans Lewis’s Foreword), Lewis wrote about the magic if:

The question always asked in making the part true to himself is, “What would I do if I were in so-and-so’s [the character’s] situation?” Yes, always the character’s situation: his life in his city in his time, and so forth; not my life in my city in my time, as we sometimes suspect modern “methodists” are thinking. (vi)

In an interview with Charles Marowitz, Lewis further elaborated on his sense of the magic if:

I remember we were told the question you were always to ask yourself was: “What would I do if I were in that situation?”—which is a lot of shit because I’m not Hamlet, I’m not Macbeth, I’m not Hedda Gabler. What you have to ask yourself is: “What would I do if I were that character, in that play, in that period, in that class,” etc. And then you use your sense of truth to transform yourself into that character. (Marowitz 77)

This statement reflects Lewis’s belief that the magic if is about the character in a given situation and not about the actor in a given situation. Once again, Lewis’s understanding of the magic if

was more in line with Stanislavsky's System. This understanding means that the magic if is a valuable tool for all styles of theatre, not just Realism, as many mistakenly believe.

Stanislavsky linked the concept of action to that of given circumstances. Correspondingly, the comments that Lewis made directly and indirectly about this issue indicate that his understanding of "situation," "relationships" and "How am I doing it?" were comparable to Stanislavsky's given circumstances. For example, Lewis said that an actor "must consider the situation" and his/her "relationships to the other characters" (*Advice* 57) and an actor should not only ask him/herself, "What am I doing and why am I doing it?" but also "How am I doing it?" (159). Thus, by asking these questions, the actor logically familiarizes him/herself with the given circumstances in the same sense as Stanislavsky's System.

Lewis also agreed with Stanislavsky that actions/intentions have a beginning, middle, and end. "Actions begin and end," Lewis said. "They end by being finished, or interrupted, or they are interrupted and resumed" (61). In his notes from the Group, Lewis wrote, "Emotion may be altered and action remains the same [...]. Actions begin and end—the end may be: 1) Fulfillment of the actions or 2) Action interrupted" (Lewis, "Clurman Notes").

Stanislavsky taught that actions must not only have a beginning, middle and end, of course, but also that each must join together logically with one another. Lewis, for his part, emphasized that "the inner line supports the outer form" and the intentions must always flow one to another unbroken (*Advice* 68). It is this path of intentions that form each character's overall action/intention which Lewis called the "spine" of the character (Lewis, "Clurman Notes"). For Lewis (and most other Group followers) the term spine is equivalent to Stanislavsky's term "through-action" (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* 314).

In addition to each character having a spine, Lewis referred to the overall action/intention of the play as the “spine” as well. In his Group notes, Lewis wrote, “Spine is specific action which runs through a part or play” (Lewis, “Clurman Notes”). Of course, an actor choosing “inspired” and creative actions/intentions for the whole play can help the audience understand the production with greater insight (Lewis, *Advice* 56). Furthermore, if an actor has a firm grasp of the spine of the play, his/her character’s spine will become clear. Furthermore, he/she will thereby have an understanding of how his/her role fits into the action of the play as a whole (61).

Lewis’s verbal statements may help to clarify his thinking, but a look at his studio work is necessary to conclude that he also focused on action in practice. Lewis always began his lessons by introducing the concept of action/intention and by encouraging his students to explore the process of formulating and playing actions/intentions within given circumstances. At the Robert Lewis Workshop, students start with wordless exercises to help them concentrate on moment-to-moment actions/intentions instead of dealing with the problem of having to improvise words. One such exercise consists of an actor coming home to find a letter containing news about an upcoming audition for a role the actor desperately wants. The actor is then told that his/her overall action/intention for the exercise is “to be cast in the role.” That action/intention must then be divided into three parts (i.e., beginning, middle, end): (1) gathering materials such as resumes and headshots, for the audition; (2) going over the audition material; and (3) getting dressed and leaving for the audition. The actor is also told to create obstacles for him/herself to make improvisation more theatrical, and to make sure that the inner line of actions/intentions remains unbroken (70).

Another exercise is also silent and was one of Lewis’s favorites because it offers many options for actions/intentions (72). The actor is walking down Fifth Avenue in New York City,

handed an envelope by a stranger, and told not to open it until he is alone. The actor then finds him/herself standing in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral with the following actions/intentions: (1) making sure he/she is not being watched, (2) opening the envelope and reading its contents, and (3) hearing the door to the cathedral opening. The actor is then reminded that these given circumstances must be specific; that the actions/intentions must be continuous; and to create obstacles to make his/her performance theatrical (73). Having encouraged the actors to find and play actions/intentions in these specific exercises, Lewis continued to build on the process of finding actions/intentions throughout succeeding lessons.

While Lewis and Stanislavsky have many similarities, the main difference between them lies in Lewis's use of the term intention and his idea that action/intention is fundamentally an internal experience. Considering that Lewis later said internal action leads the actor to physical action, however, this difference is more a matter of terminology, that is, a distinction without a genuine difference. Stanislavsky used the term action, which could mean internal or external action depending on the context; and Lewis used the term action/intention with the assumption that accurate internal action leads logically to external action.

Lee Strasberg

The ideas of Stanislavsky and Strasberg regarding the concept of action are now discussed to identify parallels regarding the concept of action. Of his time at the American Laboratory Theatre, Strasberg said that Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya emphasized the concept of action in their teaching. For this reason, Strasberg undoubtedly recognized the meaning of this concept:

Action is not a literal paraphrase of the author's words, nor a synonym for what transpires onstage, nor a logical analysis of the scene. Action has always been the essential element in the theatre. The very word implies that. Every actor makes use of one or another kind of action. (*A Dream* 75)

In other words, Strasberg understood the essential role of action in the theatre.

But, significantly, Strasberg spoke of action only as a tool that could be used in a “moment of difficulty” and referred to this process as the “use of an action” (*Strasberg At* 136). In other words, he believed that an action could be used by the director to obtain a certain emotional “quality” necessary for a character but temporarily difficult for an actor to grasp. Furthermore, according to Strasberg, the reverse is also true. That is, the actor can help the director by using “an action” under certain temporary conditions (136). Strasberg explained how to “use an action”:

This word is frequently used but sadly misunderstood. People think it means only one thing, a literal paraphrase of the author’s words, a synonym for what transpires on the stage or a logical analysis of a scene. But we know that concentrating on the logic of every scene very often does not create the necessary [emotional] colors. An action that does not differ very much from the conventional or mechanical way of performing a particular task does not add anything. Actions are valuable only when they define areas of behavior which otherwise the actor would not create. (136)

For Strasberg, therefore, playing an action was basically a short-term means for an actor to illuminate underlying emotional behaviors. “An action gives her [an actress] some real thing to play and to think about,” Strasberg said, “It gives the director the quality he wants, a quality the actress would not create except in the most accidental way” (137). How Strasberg reached this understanding of action, which varies widely from the ideas of both Stanislavsky and Boleslavsky, Strasberg’s teacher at the American Laboratory Theatre, is not known.

However, Strasberg thought of action mainly as an external phenomenon; he spoke only indirectly about the inner qualities of action: “Words are action,” he said. “The word does not begin with the speech. The word begins with an object which it seeks to define. The word

originates in the effort to communicate to another person” (213). Although somewhat cryptic, this statement seems to indicate that Strasberg believed inner action begins with a psychological impulse, which in turn leads to physical action. On this point he is also in agreement with Stanislavsky and Lewis.

Strasberg did not say much about the difference between action and emotion, such as the practice of action being expressed as a verb or emotion being expressed by a noun. He did, however, help actors to formulate actions for a scene by asking, “What do you want? [...] You wanted to do something. What did you want to do and why?” (159). In this way Strasberg seemed to be urging the actor to use a verb to express action.

In order to play actions, Strasberg’s Method required actors to understand Stanislavsky’s concepts of communication and adaptation. For Stanislavsky, communication means “the act of being in contact with an object or in communication with another person, verbally or non-verbally” (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 683). Adaptation refers to “a modification of behavior in response to a reaction so as to fulfill an appointed task” (682). Strasberg references both communication and adaptation when he said: “The second stage of the actor’s training is to develop the ability to carry out actions truthfully and logically. At the same time, the actor learns to respond and adjust [adaptation] to his partner, not simply in a mechanical way, but by actually trying to convince his partner by making sure his meaning is clear [communication]” (Strasberg, *A Dream* 160). Strasberg held that exercises in improvisation are the most helpful way to teach actors how to play truthful actions while simultaneously communicating and adapting to their partners:

Thus, there is a stage in training—and also usually in working on a part—where you do not help the actor by setting him tasks related to final results in the scene. At this moment you do not worry about whether the problem is logically right or wrong in relation to the scene. At this stage

you help the actor by setting him tasks that help to encourage in him the kind of response which he has to be capable of giving in any play under any conditions. (*Strasberg At 147-8*)

From this, it seems that Strasberg was more interested in adaptation than in action. Strasberg felt that action is only helpful for the actor if he/she chooses actions that can be repeated many times and still bring about the same emotional response. If the emotional response can be repeated the actor should then focus on whether his/her actions are truthful the scene.

Although Strasberg spoke of the importance of action, he placed supreme emphasis on emotion. In fact, he believed that action is not even necessary as long as the emotion is sufficiently truthful. When he visited Moscow in 1934, Strasberg attended productions at the MAT, but was disappointed by the “sloppy direction and lack of acting discipline in MAT productions” (Smith 177). It should be noted that Strasberg’s visit to the MAT occurred shortly after Stalin’s decree that the doctrine of Socialist Realism be the enforced Soviet standard to all the arts. Additionally, Stanislavsky had not visited the MAT’s premises for some time. Upon his return to America, and after Adler’s famous address to the Group Theatre, Strasberg gave a long talk of his own about the Group Theatre’s “experiences over the past three years and [especially] his observations about the Russian Theatre” (181). Strasberg believed MAT had “failed to keep up with the times” (181). He “then turned around and admitted that, yes, Stanislavsky had new ideas, but [those] ideas were all wrong” (181). According to Smith, Strasberg then said:

Action we have always used but the emphasis on action as the main thrust, no. If you are unable to bring in emotion, then what is the point of action? Stanislavsky says clearly, “If your senses are working and if you’re in good adjustment with your partner then all you need is the action.” If everything works perfectly you don’t even need the action. However, if you have only the action and the other things not, then nothing’s working. (181)

Undoubtedly, Strasberg disagreed with the information Adler gathered from her meetings with Stanislavsky. Adler understood Stanislavsky to say that if the actor focused on actions, emotions would arise of their own accord. “For Strasberg,” Smith wrote, “true emotion had to be found before the action could be played; his comments indicated that he didn’t even think that action was required at all.” Otherwise stated, Strasberg believed that action is not necessary if truthful emotion is present, while for Stanislavsky action was of the sovereign and emotion was of secondary importance (181). Despite the fact that action was emphasized at the American Laboratory where Strasberg studied, it is significant that he rarely used the term as such, choosing to speak of “behavior” instead. This is because Strasberg felt that the use of the words actions or intentions “give the actor too much a sense of the mechanical” (Cohen 45).

Strasberg also reformulated Stanislavsky’s “magic if” into what he called the “creative if” (Strasberg, *A Dream* 85). Strasberg wrote, “Stanislavsky’s formulation of the creative if [magic if] consists of the proposition, given the particular circumstances of the play, how would you behave, what would you do, how would you feel, how would you react?” (85). Strasberg believed the way Stanislavsky formulated the magic if/creative if, would work only for contemporary plays and “does not help the actor attain the necessary intense and heroic behavior that is characteristic of the great classical plays” (85). Consequently, Strasberg modified Stanislavsky’s magic if to include what he considered Vakhtangov’s version of it: “The circumstances of the scene indicate that the character must behave in a particular way; what would motivate you, the actor, to behave in that particular way?” (85). It was Strasberg’s understanding that Vakhtangov had altered Stanislavsky’s magic if by substituting the actor’s personal experiences for the experiences of the character. This distinction between actor and

character was significant because, according to Strasberg, the way a character behaves is not necessarily the way the actor would behave in the same situation. Strasberg said:

The reformulation not only requires the actor to create the desired artistic result, but demands that he make it real and personal to himself in order to achieve it [...]. The actor is not limited to the way in which he would behave within the particular circumstances set for the character; rather, he seeks a substitute reality different from that set forth by the play that will help him to behave truthfully according to the demands of the role. It is not necessarily the way he himself would behave under the same circumstances, and thus does not limit him to his own natural behavior. (86)

Strasberg believed that his version of the magic if, the creative if, was an up-to-date improvement of Stanislavsky's original and Vakhtangov's succeeding adaptation of it. However, it seems that Strasberg may have misunderstood both Vakhtangov and Stanislavsky's concept of the magic if. Because in addition to behavior, Stanislavsky's magic if also takes in the given circumstances of the play, including historical period, social class, etc. In other words, according to prior determination, the magic if includes the character's given circumstances as such. Yet Strasberg seems to have overlooked or disregarded this important factor.

Furthermore, Strasberg felt that often actors were too "inexperienced" to utilize the "magic if." Because of this, Strasberg used his understanding of Vakhtangov's approach in which the director suggests a "substitution, a substituted reality which has no relation to the scene, but which, for the actor, creates the event" (149). Strasberg felt that a "substitution" helps make the quality the director seeks personally meaningful to the actor (Smith 19). As an example, when directing Racine's *Esther*, Strasberg told the actors who were playing kings to think of themselves as priests. The actors were more familiar with how priests would behave and it brought about the sense of dignity Strasberg felt their roles required (19). Because the "substitution" is suggested by the director, the director retained control of the direction and scope

of the “substitution.” However, taken to the extreme, a “substitution” might lead to the actors playing situations which do not have anything to do with the text (142). Nevertheless, Strasberg used “substitutions” whenever possible and insisted they were helpful to the scene (19).

Stella Adler

The similarities between Stanislavsky’s understanding of action and Adler’s are numerous. First and most important, Adler believed in the central importance of action. “Everything we do in the theatre is an action,” she said, “That’s what acting means” (Adler 56). And she added, “Acting and doing are the same. When you’re acting you’re doing something, but you have to learn not to do it differently when you act it” (44). In other words, actors no longer have to think about acting by and of itself, because they develop into their character as a matter of course. “If we truly do these actions, we don’t have to worry about ‘acting.’ If we’re actually doing something, we don’t have to worry about faking” (87).

Adler also believed that actions must be defined in terms of active verbs and that the actor should begin building a vocabulary of actions from which to draw. This habit of work is important because “An actor develops a character from the things he does. That’s why the actor must understand the actions.” Actions are even more important than words because, “It’s not words that make a performance [...]. It can only be seen as action” (103).

Adler referred to Stanislavsky’s concept of inner action as “justifications” (125), which will be identified hereafter as inner action/justification or bracketed when referring to her work. She said, “The justification [inner action] isn’t in the lines, but in you. What you choose as your justification [inner action] should agitate you, should help you experience the action and the emotion” (125). Adler followed Stanislavsky’s thinking that that inner actions/justifications are shaped by the character’s “wants” from moment to moment (125). Also, that the actor should

formulate actions/justifications that lead to external actions. Clearly, Adler understood that internal and external action are inseparably linked to one another just as Stanislavsky did.

Adler taught that there are two kinds of actions/justifications, “instant and inner.” “Instant justification,” she said, “gives you the immediate reason for what you’re doing. It removes the abstract part of acting” (125-126). Adler’s concept of inner action/justification is along the lines of Stanislavsky’s thinking about action in general. Adler said:

Instant justification is what gets the motor started. To keep running you have to have inner justification. Instant justification doesn’t affect me inside. Inner justification does. It arouses and moves me. Inner justification is what the actor contributes to the playwright’s lines. (133)

Thus, for Adler, instant justifications are the equivalent to what Stanislavsky called impulses. And just as he said that the impulse leads to internal action, Adler said that instant justification leads to inner justification.

Adler spoke little of external action as such; however, she implied its importance in her teaching. *Stella Adler: The Art of Acting* was written as a series of classes using Adler’s acting technique. In the third class, titled “Acting is Doing,” she addresses the concept of action (44). One of her exercises asks students to describe an object from nature. She explains her rationale behind the exercise: “It is always useful to study nature, because nature is large and timeless. Most of the time we take it for granted. In doing so, we demean life” (45). The goal of the exercise is to learn that the external action consists of both describing the object and trying to communicate with the audience. After two students complete the exercise, she says, “It requires a certain energy to make your partner see what you see and understand what you understand. Simply for you yourself to see and understand is not enough” (47). The students become aware of the reality of external action by trying to experience communion with their partner or the

audience. Thus, the importance of external action is discovered not intellectually but experientially, that is, by actually trying physically to transfer their observations to someone else.

Given circumstances and its material relationship to action were important to Adler as well. Her idea was that the playwright provided “the play, the idea, the style, and the conflict” and that it was up to the actor to understand the character through “the framework of the character’s own time and situation” (139). “Every time we perform an action,” she said, “we have to be aware of the world in which the action takes place. The more carefully we can see that world, the easier it will be to perform that action” (45). Taking her cue from Stanislavsky, she continued: “When we act, primarily we perform an action. Our second objective is creating a reason for the action. This is called justification [inner action], and before we continue examining actions we must look into it” (125). She explained that when choosing actions for a character, the actor has three steps to make use of the given circumstances: first, to ask him/herself if he/she has actually done this particular action; secondly, if the actor has only seen it done; and last, the actor can go to his/her imagination to find an action (103-104).

Adler was of the same mind as Stanislavsky about the need for a beginning, middle and end for each action. She stated:

An action has to go somewhere. It has to have an end. It can’t just hang. Now if I said to you, “Count,” it wouldn’t work, would it? But if I say, “Count the blue blouses in the room,” it works immediately. Every action has an end, and object. An action is weak unless you finish it. (45)

Adler understood how difficult it is for actors to play an action in its entirety. She felt that most often they do not make the end of the action clear or even play the end of the action at all (45).

Finally, Adler shared Stanislavsky’s thinking about the actor’s need to not only analyze the script for a character’s actions, but also consider the size of the actions in relation to each

other with the aim of ensuring that each action merges logically into the next. Adler said the actor's "job is to study actions, to analyze them, to find their anatomy, their spine" (86-87). This statement is a parallel to Stanislavsky's idea that each character has a path, or through-action, of action.

To summarize the comparisons between Stanislavsky and Adler, Adler spoke little of external action although Stanislavsky stressed its importance. However, Adler accurately reflected Stanislavsky's ideas regarding the distinction between action and emotion, internal action and the "magic if." Additionally, Adler is in agreement with Stanislavsky regarding the given circumstances, the beginning, middle and end of an action, and the size of actions.

Sanford Meisner

Meisner, like Stanislavsky, Lewis and Adler, felt that action is the heart of an actor's work. Meisner's definition of acting implies the need for action: "Acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (Silverberg, *Meisner Approach* 9). The meaning for Meisner is that the actor should live truthfully in the imaginary given circumstances of the play, focusing on living through the character's actions.

In his practical work with actors, however, Meisner approached action differently from his colleagues by using what he termed the repetition exercise as a springboard for inner action. Larry Silverberg is a former student of Meisner's and author of several authoritative books about Meisner's approach to acting. Silverberg explains the exercise as follows: Two actors sit across from one another. "Partner A" makes a "physical observation" about "Partner B," such as, "You have a green sweater." Partner B simply repeats what Partner A has told him. Silverberg said that the "rule here is to have whatever [unprompted] experience you have and repeat," whether it is laughter or boredom (*Meisner Approach* 11-14). This is intended to teach the actors that their

response “comes from their partner” (14). Meisner said by engaging in this exercise, “Repetition will induce real emotion and the logic stays mental” (Meisner and Longwell 47). According to Meisner, the actor need not be concerned with emotions; they are simply a byproduct of the events like the repetition exercise with a partner. Actors continue with the repetition exercise throughout their training in the Meisner Approach, and the exercise becomes more involved with more instructions for the actors to follow as they continue to learn about action.

Inner action, then, depends on reaction, which Meisner called “Working Off,” and which is comparable to Stanislavsky’s concept of internal action. In other words, the actor must rely on inner impulses to act in response to his partner. “You don’t pick up your cues,” said Meisner, “you pick up your impulses” (72). Although the concept of external action is implied more than expressly spoken, nevertheless, this exercise can potentially guide actors to an initial understanding of internal action and its relationship to external action. However, Meisner’s “Working Off” leads the actor to be reactive, which is in opposition of Stanislavsky’s System where the actor is more proactive in working with his/her partner.

Krasner states that the value of the repetition exercise is that it allows the actor to use his own impulses to “verbalize what they perceive in the other actor” (Krasner 144). This kind of work relies on an actor to make use of inner action. “For Meisner, impulse is a response to internal or external stimuli” (145). As the actor reads the external stimuli from his partner, immediately it must be processed through the actor’s own experience, background, and perceptions, namely their filter. The actor must then respond “by acting on the stimuli, creating an ‘impulsive’ behaviour that emerges truthfully and spontaneously from reactions rather than from pre-planned behaviour” (145). The actor must be completely alert and ensure that he/she is really talking and listening to his partner. Therefore, he/she is acting moment-to-moment as

he/she is continuously adapting to what is being given to him/her by his/her partner. In this way, it can be said that, in truth, for Meisner acting was not solely about action, but about the action of reaction (146). For Meisner, the actor's action depended on the action of his/her partner. It seems that this approach would be particularly valuable for film acting which depends heavily on "reaction shots."

Meisner referred to action directly, however, when he talked about the "reality of doing." Silverberg said, "Acting is not emoting. Acting is doing something. Of course action does demand of us the ability to access our own rich emotional life and the way in, the organic way, is through meaningful doing" (*Meisner Approach* 4). Accordingly, Meisner encouraged his students to genuinely perform the action and not merely pretend or indicate to the audience that they were performing it. When you do something," Silverberg said, "you don't pretend to do it, you really do it. As I said earlier, this is the underpinning of all of our work, for ultimately when we are supposed to be madly in love in a moment of a play, we must be madly in love at that moment" (6).

Meisner regarded given circumstances to be as important as Stanislavsky considered them to be. "The playwright gives you what to say," Meisner said, "our job as an actor is to fill the role with life" (49). However, the reality of the play's text might be different from the reality the actor has experienced thus far in his/her own life. Accordingly, Meisner told his students to remember that "Everything in acting is a kind of heightened, intensified reality—but it's based on justified reality" (45). Regardless, "My chief concern," Meisner taught, "is for you—for anybody—to act out the life of the scene as intended by the playwright" (200).

Action is not only the source of behavior but also the signifier of character, which is another point of similarity that Meisner shared with Stanislavsky. "Character reveals itself by

how you do what you do!” (188). Thus character is revealed to the audience through the actor’s moment-to-moment actions as well as the adaptations used in achieving those actions.

The most obvious difference between Meisner and Stanislavsky is in the exercises used to learn these subtle concepts and their distinctions. Meisner depended heavily on the repetition exercise, which was central to his approach. But although Stanislavsky used many exercises, there is no record that he ever used anything like Meisner’s repetition exercise. Meisner said that he developed this exercise specifically to counteract what he believed were the impractical exercises undertaken at the Group:

These [exercises] were general verbalizations of what we thought was approximation of our situation in the play. We were retelling what we remembered of the story of the play using our own words. I came to the realization that it was all intellectual nonsense. A composer doesn’t write down what he thinks would be effective; he works from his heart. (36)

Meisner devised the repetition exercise because he thought that if the actor is truly talking and listening to his/her partner, over-intellectualization could be avoided (36).

Additionally, Meisner and Stanislavsky differed slightly in their use of the “magic if.” Meisner spoke of Stanislavsky’s magic if as well; however, he used the phrase ‘as if.’ Furthermore, “This phrase, ‘it’s as if,’ he said, “is called a ‘particularization’ in pure terms used by Stanislavsky” (137). When speaking of the Meisner Approach here, this concept will be referred to as the magic if/particularization.

Meisner taught that the device of the magic if/particularization can be of help if the given circumstances seem excessively foreign to the actor. In this respect, the magic if/particularization is critically vital for a student of the Meisner Approach. “A particularization [magic if] is a personal example,” he said, “chosen from the actor’s imagination that “emotionally clarifies the cold material of the text” (138). And, “When you come to text that is ‘cold to you’ or the

‘circumstances are alien to you,’ you use a particularization (as if) to ‘describe for yourself a situation that would bring you personally to the emotional place you need to be in for the sake of the scene’” (138). The given circumstances and the magic if/particularization influence how the character will choose his/her actions. Meisner said, “What I am saying is that the truth of ourselves is the root of our acting” (45). In this way, the actor is using their very self as the primary tool in the creation of the character. Although Meisner attributed his ideas about particularization to Stanislavsky, they differ in that Meisner specified that particularization is strictly a product of the actor’s imagination, i.e., not the actor’s own life experiences. It should also be noted that here also lies a difference between Strasberg’s “substitution” which is a product of the actor’s own life as opposed Meisner’s magic if/particularization which makes use of the actor’s imaginative life.

Summary

In summation, in order to have an understanding of Stanislavsky’s System, it is crucial to understand the concept of action in its entirety, including the distinction between action and emotion, internal action, external action, the magic if, the given circumstances, the beginning, middle and end of an action, and the size of actions.

Lewis, like Stanislavsky, believed that action/intention is the most important element of drama (Lewis, *Advice* 55). Both Lewis and Stanislavsky stressed that there is a distinct difference between action and emotion. Because the word action implies doing, Lewis and Stanislavsky both believed that for an action/intention to be most useful for an actor, it must be expressed with a verb, because verbs lead to action (59). Additionally, both Lewis and Stanislavsky believed that action begins with an impulse that leads to internal action. Accordingly, the internal action the actor experiences leads logically to external action. Lewis and Stanislavsky both believed

that action involves the magic if, which could be a powerful catalyst for action. Lewis, like Stanislavsky, employed the concept of given circumstances. For example, when Lewis said that the actor should not only ask him/herself, “What am I doing and why am I doing it?” but also “How am I doing it?” (159). Furthermore, both teachers believed that action/intention has a beginning, middle and end and that each section of action merges logically into the other. Finally, the importance of relative size in the handling of actions/intentions is dealt with by both Lewis and Stanislavsky.

To summarize the similarities between Strasberg and Stanislavsky, Strasberg was of the same opinion as Stanislavsky on several issues related to action. He did believe, like Stanislavsky, that action has an internal component that begins with an impulse which can potentially lead to external action. In addition, he seemed to help actors formulate actions by asking, “What do you want?” just as Stanislavsky did (Strasberg, *Strasberg At* 159). Strasberg and Stanislavsky’s differences include the distinction between action and emotion; the magic if; given circumstances; the necessity of a beginning, middle and end; and the relative size of actions—concepts Strasberg barely recognized in his work. Strasberg’s understanding of the magic if, for example, draws no distinction between the character’s response to a situation and the actor’s response in the same situation. Yet Stanislavsky distinguishes quite clearly between the two worlds.

Adler and Stanislavsky’s views on action have many similarities: that action must be described as a verb; that action comprises an inner and outer component, the importance of given circumstances; that action has a beginning, middle and end; and that actions have an appropriately defined size. But Adler also differed from Stanislavsky in important ways. For instance, Stanislavsky often spoke of internal action being an inducement to external action,

whereas Adler made little mention of external action as such, other than saying that an actor must communicate with his partner with external means. Moreover, Adler made no mention of the magic if or its relationship to given circumstances and action.

Stanislavsky and Meisner seem to agree more or less about the concept of action, including the distinction between action and emotion, internal action, external action, given circumstances, and the size of actions. However, Meisner and Stanislavsky differ in their ideas about the magic if and the types of exercises used to learn about all of the subdivisions of action.

Each of the figures studied here had his/her own comprehension of action and each one taught it somewhat differently as well, yet it was Robert Lewis who had the most comprehensive understanding of Stanislavsky's original ideas about action. Lewis alone addressed all the components of action according to Stanislavsky's way of thinking.

If one were to rank Lewis, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner on a continuum of closeness to Stanislavsky's System regarding action, Lewis would be closest in his ideas to Stanislavsky, then Adler and Meisner, and, finally, Strasberg.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONCEPT OF IMAGINATION

Stanislavsky, Lewis, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner shared the belief that imagination is vital to the actor. Like Stanislavsky, Lewis held that imagination must be used by the actor both to enhance the given circumstances and to make them believable for the actor, and in turn, the audience. Strasberg believed that imagination has three aspects: impulse, belief, and concentration. Adler taught her students to strengthen their imaginations because it is so vital to the work of the actor. Meisner also stressed imagination, although for him imagination is a tool for the actor to use in the process of preparation. Although there are numerous points of comparison, all of the key players addressed the value of imagination, even if they approached it somewhat differently.

In this chapter, imagination is considered in the following ways: the importance of the imagination and fantasy; imagination and given circumstances; “the mind’s eye”; active and passive imagination; and the state of “I am being.” Robert Lewis, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner’s ideas are compared with those of Stanislavsky.

Stanislavsky

Imagination is so fundamental to the Stanislavsky System that an entire chapter is devoted to it in *An Actor’s Work: A Student’s Diary*. Tortsov frequently reminds his students how the “magic if” propels the actor into the realm of the imagination (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 60). He says, “The play, the role, are stories, a series of magic and other ifs, Given Circumstances which the author has made up. Genuine facts, the normal world, do not exist onstage. The normal world is not art. This, by its very nature, needs inventiveness. And that, in the first instance, is manifest in the work the author has produced” (60). He goes on to say that it

is the actor's task to turn the world of the play into "theatrical fact" and that imagination is an important tool to do so (60). "The imagination takes the initiative in the creative process, drawing the actor along behind it," said Tortsov; and "without imagination you cannot be an actor" (63-64). Stanislavsky speaks of the need for the actor to have an artistic (i.e. sympathetic) imagination because it allows them to "get close to someone else's life, transform it into his own, discover exciting qualities and traits they have in common (14). Imagination forms the human connection between the actor and the role. The benefit of imagination is that it has no boundaries and is inexhaustible in the number of the creative opportunities it can provide the actor.

Tortsov distinguishes imagination from fantasy by saying, "Imagination creates what is, what exists, what we know, but fantasy creates what isn't, what we don't know, what was and never will be. But perhaps it could be [...]. Fantasy knows everything and can do anything. Fantasy, like imagination is essential" (61). Imagination, in other words, refers to what the actor could conceivably experience in real life; fantasy refers to what could not happen in real life, but what could happen in a play if the fantastical elements were made to appear logical. For example, the work *Peter Pan* falls under the realm of fantasy because fantastical elements such as fairies and flying boys who never grow old are objectively unreal but are made to appear logical in the story.

Tortsov demonstrates the work of the imagination in connection with Alexander Griboyedov's play *Woe from Wit* (1825). At this point in the students' work they have analyzed the text intellectually. They thoroughly understand the facts of the play, and now it is up to their imaginations to turn these mental facts into "living, genuine, personal feeling" (107). Imagination shifts the words of the text to an emotional level.

Part of the actor's ability to use imagination effectively is the ability to become familiar with the idea of the "mind's eye." Tortsov says, "Judging from personal experience, to imagine, to fantasize means above all to see the things one is thinking about with the mind's eye" (73). This means not only being able to talk about the character, but also to see mental images as if looking at a film. The mind's eye supplies the actor with visual images for the given circumstances of the play as well. Stanislavsky asserted that for every moment of the play, the actor must have "a continuous line of fleeting images" that "depict the given circumstances in color" (74). The images conjured in the mind's eye "create a corresponding mood inside, which then acts upon your mind and evokes the matching experience" (74). Stanislavsky said the imagination and the use of the mind's eye will cause the actor to have a feeling best expressed in the following way: "I see with my internal vision certain artistic images which I see have an environment similar to my character, to both its internal life and its external expression" (Thomas, *Stanislavsky Dictionary* 9). In this way, the mind's eye helps actors not only to better understand the given circumstances of the play, but their character's feelings and actions as well. What is paradoxical about the images in the mind's eye is that they simultaneously enable the actor to become more rooted in the given circumstances of the text and thus in the concrete world of the play.

The mind's eye also provides the actor with a vivid inner life. This is emphasized by Tortsov when he tells his students, "Constantly watching the film of your mental images will, on the one hand, make sure you stay within the play, and, on the other, unfailingly and faithfully guide your creative work" (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* 74). In order to set off the imagination and create images for the mind's eye, Stanislavsky recommended asking the questions: who, when, where, why, for what reason, and how (83). Asking these questions enables the actor to

“burrow under the external facts and events to find there, deep under them, another more important, deeply latent emotional event which perhaps caused the external fact itself” (Thomas, *Stanislavsky Dictionary* 48). Furthermore, asking, “What would I do if my fiction became fact?” enables actors to activate their imagination and convert mental impulses into external action. These questions are crucial: “It is important that this [mental] impulse be aroused and experienced by us not only psychologically but physically” (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 84).

Stanislavsky spoke about active and passive imagination. Actors use passive imagination when they are simply mental observers of the images their imaginations create. However, when they become participants in the mental images, they use their active imaginations. Stanislavsky said, “I can be the audience of the things I imagine, but I can also be a character in it, that is mentally take part at the very center of the imaginary circumstances” (*Work on a Role* 118). When actors begin to have a stronger sense of themselves as the center of their imaginings, they begin to feel that there are goals they want to achieve. It is then that they are stimulated into physical action.

It is important to note the connection between imagination and physical action. Tortsov states, “Actors’ work doesn’t consist only in using their imagination, but also in the physical expression of what they have imagined. Transform the imaginary into reality” (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 67). That is, imagination is the critical link between understanding a character on an intellectual level and transforming the actor into the character physically. This is referred to by Stanislavsky as the state of “I am being.” “In our vocabulary,” he said, “‘I am being’ refers to the fact that I have put myself in the centre of a situation I have invented, that I feel I am really inside it, that I really exist at its very heart, in a world of imaginary objects, and that I am beginning to act as me, with full responsibility for myself” (70). “I am being” is when “I

mentally start to ‘to be,’ ‘participate’ in the life of the play” (Stanislavski, *Work on a Role* 119). Merlin wrote that the state of “I am” is the actor saying, “I am in this situation (albeit imaginary) so I will respond as truthfully as I can for the character” (25).

Stanislavsky helped students to strengthen their imaginations through instructional exercises, which taught them how to use their imaginations while working on a role. For example, he asked the actors the question “What if?” to set up a scenario in which they are in an apartment that used to belong to a madman who is waiting outside the door to reclaim his former home after being discharged from a mental hospital (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 47, 83). As this scenario is open-ended, the students have the opportunity to use their imaginations as to determine how they would respond if they were in that situation and to explore how the improvisation would end.

Robert Lewis

Lewis felt that imagination is the “material of all the work you do while you’re acting” (Ellermann, “4th Class”). He stated, “Stanislavski knew this [imagination] to be a thoroughly practical piece of technical equipment for the actor. He put it down here big as life as one of the most important ingredients of acting” (Lewis, *Method* 34). Lewis also spoke about the exercises Stanislavsky devised to develop the actor’s imagination (34). Stanislavsky did not claim that his System could give imagination to someone who “doesn’t have it,” Lewis said, but that actors must develop their imagination to use it more effectively as a creative tool (34). In fact, Lewis defined imagination as “the material of all the work you do while you’re acting” (Ellermann, “4th Class”). Lewis also distinguished imagination from fantasy. “Imagination is something rooted in truth,” he said, “but your fantasy takes off from there” (Ellermann, “4th Class”). The significance here is that Lewis acknowledged imagination as a tool to help the actor believe in what is

objectively real in the text and fantasy as a tool to help the actor believe in what is outside the limits of objective reality.

Lewis and Stanislavsky believed that actors must be able to use their imaginations to make the given circumstances of the character more concrete for themselves. For example, in his classes Lewis sometimes referred to a production of *Teahouse of the August Moon* he directed in 1954. During the rehearsal process for that production he instructed an actor to sit in a certain position during a crowd scene and the actor refused, saying it was uncomfortable for him. Lewis responded by explaining to the actor all of the reasons his character could sit in this way based on the given circumstances. The actor understood Lewis's reasoning and subsequently used his imagination and the given circumstances to justify the way Lewis wanted him to sit onstage (Lewis, *Advice* 37-39).

Lewis referred indirectly to Stanislavsky's concept of the mind's eye as well. Just as Stanislavsky said that an actor must use his mind's eye at all moments of the play, Lewis said, "You are using your imagination all of the time on the stage, not only about physical things, but about ideas [i.e. images] too. One must be able to imagine situations and believe them" (*Method* 34). These ideas, or images, as Lewis called them, help the actor to make the given circumstances concrete in a manner comparable to the mind's eye of Stanislavsky's terminology.

Stanislavsky spoke of active and passive imagination, and Lewis indirectly spoke of this as well when he said that actors "create/convey/achieve emotion not through concepts of things but through things themselves" (*Advice* 33). Simply imagining things or ideas passively is less helpful for than active involvement in the images. It is only when actors place themselves at the center of their imaginings that they are using their active imaginations.

At this point it will be helpful to study how Lewis used imagination in his acting classes. In the fourth class discussed in *Advice to the Players*, Lewis begins to work with imagination. He conducts several exercises to strengthen the actors' use of their own imaginations. For example, one exercise begins with an improvisation using a pencil. For Lewis, objects "have certain properties" that come from nature, and actors should be able to recognize the essence of such an object and use it creatively (Ellermann, "3rd Class"). The actors are instructed to observe the pencil carefully and it is then handed to a student who is expected to improvise an activity in which the pencil is used as "any object other than what it actually is" (Lewis, *Advice* 30). The actor is cautioned not to turn the exercise into a game of "charades," and Lewis also reminds the students that actors must believe utterly in their own actions onstage. Furthermore, he warns that if a student is not able to find genuine belief in this one short exercise it is unlikely that he/she will be able to muster the belief necessary for a full-length role (31). This coincides with Stanislavsky's idea that actors must use their imaginations every minute of their two hours on stage. They must use their imaginations from their first entrance to their last exit, whether for a class exercise or a two-hour play.

Although there are similarities between Lewis and Stanislavsky in their understanding and use of imagination, there are differences as well. Lewis did not say anything that implied knowledge of Stanislavsky's state of I am being.

Lee Strasberg

Strasberg, too, acknowledged the importance of imagination. *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* contains some of his lectures about this importance. "In acting, imagination has three aspects," he said, "impulse, belief and concentration" (Strasberg, *Strasberg At* 94). Strasberg also thought that imagination can be conscious (i.e., active) or unconscious (i.e., passive):

“Impulse—‘the leap of the imagination’—may be conscious or unconscious in origin” (94). However, Strasberg said that impulses are “useless without belief, which is the actor’s faith that what he is saying, doing, and feeling is both interesting and appropriate” (94). Strasberg said that concentration both causes and is a result of impulse and belief. He continues:

In other words, the actor cannot really think on the stage unless he is concentrated, and he cannot be concentrated unless he is really thinking onstage. Imagination thus operates in terms of these three interacting factors, and only when all three are operating does imagination in acting function. (94)

Strasberg felt that truthful acting is a result of training the actor to “receive impulses from imaginary stimuli” that he/she makes believable to him/herself and “thus to awaken the proper sensory, emotional, or motor responses” (94).

Strasberg also spoke of the imagination being an essential tool to use when the given circumstances might be completely unfamiliar. He said, “Heightened imagination means that you’re able to picture the possible realities in a scene, to conceive more than the ordinary, and to imagine what can happen” (Cohen 46). Heightened imagination enables actors to relate to unfamiliar given circumstances, such as a different time, place or situation (46).

Strasberg may have acknowledged the importance of imagination, and its conscious and unconscious nature, but he did not speak of it as comprehensively as Stanislavsky did. For example, he did not speak of fantasy, the mind’s eye or the state of I am being. Additionally, Strasberg did not use exercises which focused solely on the actors’ use of their imaginations. Rather the exercises he most commonly used dealt with imagination, relaxation, concentration and emotion memory all within the same exercise.

Stella Adler

Adler said that actors must acquire a broad range of knowledge from which to draw to strengthen their imaginations. “From now on you must only live imaginatively” she advised, “You will see and act in imaginative circumstances. To do this isn’t hard if you accept that everything you can imagine has in it some truth for you” (Adler 66). From this it can be gathered that Adler, like Stanislavsky, understood the fundamental importance of imagination.

She also addressed the organic relationship between imagination and given circumstances, that is, that the make-believe given circumstances of the play can and should become real using imagination as a tool to do so. Adler said accurately, “You’ve imagined it. Therefore it exists. Most of acting lies in this minute knowledge of what you see and what you do. Anything that goes through your imagination has a right to live” (66). Echoing Stanislavsky almost verbatim, she said imagination enables the actor to step out of his own life and into “other people’s lives” or what actors “take for ‘real’ life” (64-65). “The circumstances are dictated by the play,” she said, “and your imagination must be equal to the play’s demands” (65).

As for the energy level of one’s imagination, she said, “The most important thing we have to do is condition, to limber up the mind. Learn to stimulate the imagination. The imagination is what animates the instrument, keeps it in tune. It’s the ignition key. Without it, nothing else works” (64). By “the instrument” she seems to refer to the actor’s image-making instrument, namely, the mind. It was both Adler’s and Stanislavsky’s conviction that everything depends on exercising and strengthening the imagination. And also like Stanislavsky, she developed appropriate exercises to deepen and strengthen her students’ imaginations. In one exercise, she asks the students to imagine walking along a country road. They are to take note of factual details such as the weather, a branch that has fallen on the road, a clothes line on the side

of a nearby pond, etc. (66-67). She points out that playwrights often provide only the basic facts; therefore, it is the actors' professional responsibility to make those facts come alive in performance by means of the storehouse of their imaginations. "The facts will remain dead until you realize that each thing has life. As actors, you must give us the miracle of life, not [merely] the [basic] facts" (67).

An exercise called "traveling" is another one that Adler used frequently. It involves choosing an object and describing it with whatever thoughts come to mind. The goal is to "choose some object and see where it takes you imaginatively" (71). Adler felt this was helpful because it encouraged actors to be open-minded and allowed their imaginations roam freely. "One way we can enliven the imagination is to push it toward the illogical" she said, "We're not scientists. We don't always have to make the logical, reasonable leap" (71). The miracle of the imagination is that it does not need to be objectively logical or reasonable for it to be helpful to actors.

Adler further recognized the importance of imagination in handling properties, called personalizing, which she believed could provide actors with insights about their characters. "Personalize the props by endowing them with some quality that comes from you," she said (79). It is like children placing a stick between their legs and jumping up and down to pretend they are riding a horse: "That indeed is what acting is made up of—the conviction of the child that the stick is a horse" (78). She reminded her students, however, that they should always begin from the given circumstances of the play: "There are very specific circumstances. It is the actor's job to delve into them, to imagine them, not just find circumstances in his own life that correspond to them. There are none" (80-83). This is a very subtle, important distinction from Strasberg

because Adler, like Lewis, emphasized actors should use their imagination to begin from the given circumstances as opposed to imagining events from one's own life.

Unlike Stanislavsky, but like Strasberg, Adler spoke only in a roundabout way about the value of fantasy. Moreover, she did not discuss the mind's eye, active and passive imagination, or the state of I am being. Adler's imagination exercises are noticeably different from Stanislavsky's as well. For Adler, the imagination is strengthened mainly through descriptive activities, such as those detailed above. Although Stanislavsky introduced the concept of imagination with such descriptive exercises, he progressed to exercises that prompted inner and outer action as well. When actors merely describe images without a sense of their potential physicalization, it can lead the actor to over-intellectualization. Stanislavsky felt that acting is both a mental and physical activity and that imagination should be a catalyst for physical action. "Actors' work doesn't consist only in using their imagination," he said, "but also in the physical expression of what they have imagined" (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* 67). Adler's approach to imagination seems to have been largely mental, while Stanislavsky's was always aiming toward expressive physical action.

Sanford Meisner

Meisner defines acting as "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances," which obviously stresses the importance of imagination (Meisner and Longwell 63). He taught that the benefit of imagination is that it is not necessarily dependent on real-life experiences. Meisner said, "In other words, what I am saying is that what you're looking for is not necessarily confined to the reality of your life. It can be in your imagination" (79).

Meisner also spoke about the function of imagination when dealing with the given circumstances. One of the tenets of the Meisner Technique is that "acting is doing," and

imagination provides a starting point for the doing (Silverberg, *Meisner Approach* 3). Meisner stated, “Next thing to ask is ‘why are you doing this activity’—if you decide why, you are exercising your imagination” (54). Evidently, Meisner agreed with Stanislavsky that imagination helps to make the given circumstances seem concrete.

Both teachers also made use of the imagination in its active and passive forms. Meisner spoke of this when he said that imagination “is daydreaming. It’s daydreaming which causes a transformation in your inner life, so that you are not what you actually were five minutes ago, because your fantasy is working on you. But the character of our daydream is taken from the play” (84). Both teachers also felt it is the active imagination that fosters a connection with the given circumstances.

Meisner’s application of imagination as a tool for the actor is illustrated by the following exercise. He assigns his student-actors short, two-person scenes. They are to prepare by imagining what has happened to their characters and their emotional states the moment before the scene begins and then by simply reacting to each other and playing their actions “truthfully under imaginary circumstances” (61). However, Meisner does not directly address the mind’s eye or the state of I am being in this or other exercises. Furthermore, whereas Stanislavsky spoke of imagination in direct terms, for Meisner the concept of imagination was usually included under the general heading of preparation, meaning “that device which permits you to start your scene or play in a condition of emotional aliveness. The purpose of preparation is so that you do not come in emotionally empty” (78). This is somewhat different from Stanislavsky, who said the actor must have “a continuous line of fleeting images” that “depict the Given Circumstances in color” (*An Actor’s Work* 74).

Summary

For the purposes of this study, Stanislavsky's concept of imagination is divided into the following subdivisions: the importance of the imagination and fantasy to the actor; imagination and the given circumstances; the mind's eye; active and passive imagination; and the state of "I am being."

Lewis and Stanislavsky are in agreement regarding imagination and the given circumstances, the mind's eye, active and passive imagination. However, Lewis did not speak specifically about Stanislavsky's idea of fantasy, nor did he say anything that implied knowledge of Stanislavsky's state of I am being.

While Strasberg acknowledged the importance of imagination to the actor, he did not speak of the role of fantasy, the mind's eye and the state of I am being.

Unlike Stanislavsky, Adler spoke only indirectly about the importance of fantasy. Moreover, she did not discuss the mind's eye, active and passive imagination or the state of I am being. The imagination exercises she used are different from Stanislavsky's as well. It would seem that she felt the imagination is strengthened mainly through descriptive activities.

Both Stanislavsky and Meisner acknowledged the importance of imagination; however, in practice each handled it differently. As part of the Meisner Technique, actors use their imagination largely for emotional preparation. Furthermore, Meisner taught imagination mainly through the repetition exercise.

As with the concept of action, the research presented suggests that Robert Lewis shared the most points of comparison and fewest points of difference when compared to Stanislavsky's concept of imagination.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONCEPT OF BITS AND TASKS

Before discussing bits and tasks in some detail, it is important to point out that Stanislavsky used different terminology for these concepts at different points in his life. In order to better understand all these and other terms discussed in this dissertation, Merlin's reproduction of Lewis's chart, an overview of Stanislavsky's System, is included as Appendix A. Appendix B is Benedetti's chart and illustrates the terms Stanislavsky employed at different points in his career. Appendix C is a chart created by the author of this dissertation that organizes terms of Stanislavsky and the four principal teachers in relation to one another. These charts will help the reader to understand and compare the terms used for a particular concept by each figure discussed in this dissertation.

Not only did Stanislavsky use various terms at different points of his career, Elizabeth Hapgood used different terms herself in the first English-language translations. For example, she translated Stanislavsky's literal term bit as "unit." To further complicate matters, the term bit is commonly referred to by theatre practitioners as "beat," which carries different but related meaning in English. Carnicke discussed the thinking behind this translation conundrum when she stated, "In the United States, this term [bit] has been transformed into 'beats,' which may derive from 'bits' of the play strung together like 'beads' on a necklace when pronounced by Russian émigré teachers" (*Stanislavsky* 171). However, Bella Merlin and Benedetti used the term bit. Therefore, for consistency the term bit will be used in this study.

Lewis acknowledged the importance of the concept of bits and tasks. He defined bits as the distance from the beginning to the end of an action. He also referenced tasks as being the

goals the character tries to achieve within a bit. Despite the difference in terms, it is evident that Lewis understood Stanislavsky's concepts of bits and tasks.

Strasberg used the term problem in place of tasks, but for him the word problem implied anything that inferred with the internal or external expression of the role. The underlying difference between Adler and Stanislavsky is one of terminology difference without a specific definition; Adler never specifically used the terms bits and tasks. Therefore, although in certain instances she used the term action to mean task, it is not certain that Adler meant task in Stanislavsky's sense. Although Meisner, for his part, felt that tasks as such were imperative, and his very definition of acting implied the centrality of the concept; nevertheless, he did not specifically use the term task. His vocabulary used the term doing: "The foundation of acting is the reality of doing" (Meisner and Longwell 16). On the other hand, his vocabulary did not include the terms bit or task because he felt that doing so would lead to over intellectualizing.

Stanislavsky also identified the following subdivisions of tasks, which will also be used in this study: unnecessary and necessary tasks, physical tasks, everyday tasks, basically psychological tasks, psychological tasks, creative tasks, conscious tasks and unconscious tasks. As with the concepts of action and imagination previously discussed, the research suggests that Lewis had the most agreement and fewest differences when compared to Stanislavsky's concepts.

Stanislavsky

In *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, Stanislavsky used a colorful simile to introduce the concept of bits. A full length play is likened to a whole roasted turkey, which cannot be eaten whole but must be carved into bits to be eaten one small bit at a time. Similarly, a full length play cannot be tackled in its entirety (135-136). It must be broken down into manageable sections,

which Stanislavsky termed bits. Tortsov says, “The technique of dividing into Bits is quite simple. Just ask yourself, ‘What is the one essential thing in the play?’ and then start to recall the main stages, without going into detail” (141). It is essential to divide the play into bits because a specific performance task is contained in and required for each bit (142).

After introducing bits, Stanislavsky introduces tasks. Benedetti explains that Stanislavsky defined tasks as the character’s needs (110). In *An Actor’s Work: A Student’s Diary*, Tortsov’s student learns that an actor can have “large, medium-size and small, primary and secondary tasks which can be merged into each other” and in merging they create a “fairway” (143). It is this fairway, (i.e., through-action) that guides the actor “during the performances” (314). Just as people in life have tasks and perform actions to fulfill them, it is the same for the stage. Tortsov states, “Theatre consists in staging major human Tasks and the genuine, productive and purposeful actions necessary to fulfill them” (143-144). By uncovering the tasks and performing actions to fulfill them, actors cease to merely pretend to be their characters, no; they psychophysically perform the character’s very actions. This process Stanislavsky called “living through” or “experiencing.” Tortsov confirms this by stating, “Tasks make an actor conscious of his right to go onstage, and live his own life, one parallel to the role” (144).

First, the actor must determine which tasks are “necessary” and “unnecessary” (145). Tortsov lists eight guidelines with which to determine a necessary task. Necessary tasks are: (1) “related to the play,” (2) “right for the actor as a person” and true to the character as well. In addition, necessary tasks (3) aid the actor in achieving “the basic goal of acting, the creation of the life of the human spirit in the role,” (4) “drive the role forward,” (5) are believable not only to the actor himself but also to the other actors in the play as well as the audience; (6) are inspiring to the actor and “are capable of stimulating experiencing,” (7) are “typical of a role”

and “precisely” related to a play’s meaning, and (8) “are rich and correspond to the deeper meaning of the role” (145). By these means, actors will come to understand the relative importance of their character’s individual tasks and be confident they are indeed “necessary” for the character (145).

Tortsov also suggests further subdivisions: physical tasks, everyday tasks, basic psychological tasks, psychological tasks, and creative tasks (145). Physical tasks are what Tortsov also calls “physical actions” (147). For example, pouring someone a glass of wine is a physical task. Tortsov says that coming into a room, saying hello, and shaking hands with someone are examples of everyday tasks, i.e., “Psychology has nothing to do with them” (145). However, if someone tries to shake Tortsov’s hand while expressing an emotion such as respect, this is referred to as a “basic psychological” task because it has a noticeable motive behind it (146). Next, there is the psychological task which “requires a lot of forethought and feeling” and there is “a lot of resistance to overcome” before it can be achieved (146). In other words, the motive is substantial, psychologically speaking. Regardless, Tortsov insists that the most important thing is that the task excites the actors and compels them to achieve their tasks (146). Tasks such as this are referred to by Tortsov as genuinely creative, because they stimulate the “will to create” (146). As all tasks should stimulate the actor’s will to create, all tasks should be genuinely creative.

Finally, Tortsov states a fundamental rule: physical and psychological tasks cannot be separated from one another (147). In other words, all tasks are ultimately psychophysical, at least to some degree. “In every physical, in every psychological Task and its fulfillment,” he says, “there’s a great deal of the other. There’s no way you can separate them” (147). Just as in life itself, there is no division of body and mind in acting. Every physical task contains a

psychological, inner motive, and every psychological task must lead to a physical task. Tortsov says, “Carrying out a physical task truthfully helps you create the right psychological state. It transforms a physical task into a psychological one. As I have already told you, any physical Task can be given a psychological base” (147).

To determine the physical task for each bit of the play, Tortsov recommends that each bit should be given a name that reflect its meaning (147). It is important to note that bits are defined with a noun phrase (i.e. “mother-love”), but tasks are defined with a verb that leads to reciprocal action (148-149). Also, Tortsov says it is helpful to place the phrase “I want” before the verb (i.e. “I want to take hold of them and never let go”) (149). In this way, actors are better able to feel the action as something to be done (149). Tortsov reminds actors that the most important thing about tasks is that they should “excite” the actors, because if they are excited by their actions, their enthusiasm will be conveyed to the audience (151).

Robert Lewis

Before Lewis’s ideas of bits and tasks can be discussed, it is important to clarify the terminology that he used because it is different from that of Stanislavsky. Lewis uses the term “beat” for bit and “problem” for task. Hereafter, Stanislavsky’s term will be followed with a slash and then by the term Lewis used, i.e. bit/beat. When Lewis is directly quoted, however, his term will be followed by Stanislavsky’s term in brackets, i.e. “beats” [bits].

Lewis recognized that each action/intention contains bits/beats and he believed that every role should be divided into bits/beats, which he defined as “the distance from the beginning to the end of an intention [action]” (*Method* 33). Lewis, like Stanislavsky, also compared the role of bits/beats to that of “phrases in music” (33).

Lewis also spoke unambiguously of tasks/problems and their relation to action/intention:

For example: suppose I was going “to stick-up” a party and I had to come into the room where the party was going on “to case the joint.” That is my main intention [action] in the scene. First, when the butler opens the door, I study him and the way he takes my hat and I figure it’s a pretty rich apartment; this is part one in my “casing the joint.” Next, I look into the room, checking over the furnishings and observing what kind of people are there. That’s the next little “problem” [task] I have within the main intention [action]. Then I see the hostess and I study her from a distance—and her necklace [...]. Anyway, the point is that my main desire “to case the joint” is fulfilled by the successful execution of these various small “problems” [tasks]. (34-35).

Actors should identify the main action/intention within a scene and then identify all the tasks/problems they encounter while trying to fulfill those actions/intentions. They should continue performing each task until it is fulfilled, interrupted, or thwarted (35). For Lewis, then, it would seem that action/intention is primarily internal, while task/problem is primarily external.

Stanislavsky stated that a psychological task is contained within every physical task and vice versa, and Lewis said virtually the same thing. For Lewis, an inner action/intention leads inexorably to a task/problem. Lewis said, “You always have to find some inner justification for doing it—which in a way brings us back to our old friend Stanislavsky—because, after all, our behavior does not come just from the outside, but from the inside” (Marowitz 82).

In *Method-or Madness?*, however, he also described how he treated action/intention in rehearsal. As a director, he helped actors to find their actions/intentions for every moment of the play, generally by encouraging them to simply “talk and listen” to one another, an exercise that helped actors to understand what their characters wanted from one another (Lewis, *Method* 143). Lewis also divided his scripts into bits/beats, and gave them each titles (146). As rehearsal work continued, Lewis continually used blocking to guide actors in finding their actions/intentions throughout the play (147).

Lewis not only used bits/beats and tasks/problems in his directing but also in his teaching. According to Ellermann, Lewis taught: “The play—the situations are created by conflicting ‘wants’ [tasks] and that creates the drama in performance!” (Ellermann, “7th Class”). When characters in the play each have different tasks/problems, conflict, the source of drama, is created.

Clearly Lewis’s idea of bits/beats and tasks/problems closely mirrors Stanislavsky’s. They both believed that actors should first identify the main action and then identify all of the tasks/problems encountered while trying to fulfill this action. Lewis, like Stanislavsky, utilized bits/beats and tasks/problems in the classroom, rehearsals and when directing (*Method* 143). Like Stanislavsky, too, Lewis also broke the script into bits/beats, and gave titles to each bit/beat (146).

The primary difference between Lewis and Stanislavsky is that of vocabulary. To make matters even more complicated, Lewis said that action/intention specifically refers to inner action, not physical action (29). However, whenever Lewis referred to inner action there was the implication that it would result in physical action (Ellermann, Telephone).

In his notes from Clurman’s lectures Lewis stated, “Actions [i.e. intentions] from start to finish are called beats (bar lines) [i.e. bits]. The play can be carried on by the right actions even when emotions are absent” (Lewis, “Clurman Notes”). Although Lewis’s terminology is often confusing, it is significant that even as Clurman continued to use the term action, Lewis used the word intention in its place after leaving the Group.

He explained his reasons for this:

This word “Action” as used here in 1934 was the term we employed in the Group Theatre, too. (Of course it meant inner action—not physical action.) If you have read the books, you know it is translated by Mrs.

Hapgood as “Objective.” [...]. These days some refer to “Action” as “Intention.” (Lewis, *Method* 29)

Thus, for Lewis the term action meant inner action, which automatically induces physical action. Ellermann stated, “Whenever Lewis said action he meant inner action and the implication of what you are doing” (Ellermann, Telephone). Apparently, Lewis considered inner action and outer action to be inseparable, because inner action automatically induces the corresponding physical action. Although Lewis’s terminology is different, his thinking here is still consistent with Stanislavsky.

Despite the difference in terms, Lewis considered it important to call attention to the concept of action/intention in itself:

It has been called many things in many books and some people don’t call it anything; but it is a process that is going on, if they are really acting. I myself don’t care if you call it spinach, if you know what it is, and do it, because it is one of the most important elements in acting (*Method* 29).

Lewis may have used different terms from Stanislavsky, but he shared Stanislavsky’s belief that actors must understand the thinking behind the concepts of action/intention, bits/beats and tasks/problems.

Lee Strasberg

According to Lola Cohen, Strasberg’s former student and author of the *Lee Strasberg Notes*, Strasberg and Stanislavsky shared a similar understanding of the term “problem” (xxvii). For example, one time Strasberg employed the term problem in response to an acting student who rationalized the outcome of an exercise on the basis of the successful use of concentration (Strasberg, *Strasberg At* 159). Strasberg said:

Everything involves concentration! The kind of concentration you use has value only in terms of the problem. Now if you will please tell me the problem, I will tell you what to do. I don’t know what you have in mind. You wanted to do something. What did you want to do and why? (159).

In this context, it seems that Strasberg's understanding of the term problem was comparable to Stanislavsky's task. If this assumption is indeed accurate, then there would seem to be a similarity between the thinking of Strasberg and Stanislavsky on this point—that actors must have a task, meaning a problem they have to solve.

Yet, Cohen said that for Strasberg the term problem meant “obstacles or blocks that impede the actor's physical or emotional expression” (xxvii). Thus, it would seem that Strasberg's use of problem is actually different from that of Stanislavsky's use of task. As a result, Strasberg did not, or could not, speak of the several subdivisions of tasks that Stanislavsky found so useful, i.e., unnecessary and necessary tasks, physical tasks, everyday tasks, basically psychological, psychological, creative tasks, conscious tasks and unconscious tasks.

Stella Adler

Adler's concept of bits and tasks is ambiguous. Her use of the term action seems comparable to the term task, at least in context it appears so. For example, “An action is something you always give yourself and is something you can do. You define the object of your action, and you make it something you can handle” (Adler 56). Because she said that an action is something actors can do, it is logical to assume that she used the term action to also mean task in Stanislavsky's sense.

Adler also spoke of tasks as verbs: “When we study a script, we're trying to find what actions it requires of us. When we're performing these actions—whether it be ‘to teach’ or ‘to learn’ or ‘to escape’ or ‘to pray’ or ‘to beg’—we communicate the nature of the action to the audience” (86-87). If indeed Adler used the term action synonymously with the term task, then the assumption can be made that her ideas about tasks are comparable to Stanislavsky.

The underlying difference between Adler and Stanislavsky is that Adler spoke of action and not of bits and tasks. Additionally, Adler, unlike Stanislavsky, did not speak of unnecessary and necessary tasks, everyday tasks, basically psychological, psychological, creative tasks, conscious tasks and unconscious tasks.

Sanford Meisner

Meisner did not use the terms bits and tasks. He explained his reasoning: “My approach is based on bringing the actor back to his emotional impulses and to acting that is firmly rooted in the instinctive. It is based on the fact that all good acting comes from the heart, as it were, and there’s no mentality in it” (Meisner and Longwell 37). Even though he did not specifically use the term, Meisner felt that it was imperative, however, that the actors have tasks. His very definition of acting implies that it is based on the concept of the task, “The foundation of acting is the reality of doing.” Furthermore, Meisner stipulated, “If you do something, you really do it!” (16-17). Actors must really do, or have as their task, what their characters want at every moment of the play.

Meisner had two rules for actors: 1) “Don’t do anything unless something happens to make you do it,” and 2) “What you do doesn’t depend on you; it depends on the other fellow” (34). Just as Tortsov tells the actors that the use of an objective task can put a stop to merely pretending, Meisner stated, “So you don’t have to play at being the character, it is right there in your doing it” (24). Because the actors are really trying to achieve their tasks, they do not have to worry about pretending.

Meisner master teacher Larry Silverberg, like Stanislavsky, used the term beats in place of the term bits. He defined a bit/beat as “a unit of action” or the distance between the beginning and ending of a task. And reaffirmed this when he said:

So, within a beat [bit], a character has one primary thing he or she is trying to achieve [task]. When that which the character is fighting to accomplish changes, we have a new beat [bit]. Using beats [bits] is a very helpful tool in getting absolutely specific about what it is you are doing in each moment of the play. Because, if I were your director, and I were to stop and ask you, “What are you doing right now, what are you after here in this moment?” you must be able to answer me in a specific way (Silverberg, *Workbook Four* 187).

From Silverberg, we can gather that Meisner and Stanislavsky felt similarly about the concepts of bits and tasks. The actor must have a specific task to accomplish within each bit. When the task is accomplished, a new bit, i.e. unit of action, begins.

Silverberg referenced Stanislavsky’s turkey-dinner metaphor when he said:

The play is like a river, but we can’t possibly experience the entire river at one time. As you travel along a river, you are continually flowing into new landscapes—yet—all parts of the river organically relate to the whole. [...]. So, the play must be broken down into act-able portions, each portion flowing into the next, and all portions related to the whole.” (187)

It can be gathered that Meisner’s understanding of bits and tasks was comparable to that of Stanislavsky.

Although there are similarities between Meisner and Stanislavsky, there are differences as well. Meisner consciously chose not to use the term bit or task because he felt that doing so would lead actors into over intellectualizing. For the same reason, Silverberg opposed the use of the term objective. In *Sanford Meisner Approach: Workbook Four*, he stated:

Almost every actor, in every acting class around the country, learns how to “play an action.” And in many acting classes, playing an action or “pursuing your objective” [task] is the primary focus. This results in the creation of, what I call, “objective [task] actors”—actors who have intellectually chosen to “play an action,” but have no real idea why they are playing it! I am saying that, “They do not know why they are doing what they are doing!” (167)

Silverberg also felt that because the “objective [task] actors” have no genuine idea why they are doing what they are doing, they do not connect psychologically with their partners onstage (168). Furthermore, Silverberg also felt that the terms action and objective are too “cold and technical” (168). Therefore, instead of using the terms action or objective, Silverberg used the simpler term “Doing” (*Workbook Three* 3). Since Silverberg was a personal pupil of Meisner’s, it is logical to assume that Meisner felt very strongly that the term objective should not be used in working with actors either. Finally, and understandably, Meisner did not subdivide tasks as Stanislavsky did.

Summary

For Stanislavsky, the term bit means a small section of action out of the entire action of the play. And within each of those bits, there are tasks, which can be further organized into unnecessary and necessary tasks, physical tasks, everyday tasks, basically psychological tasks, psychological tasks, creative tasks and psychophysical tasks.

Out of all of the key players of this study, Lewis’s understanding of bits and tasks was the most comparable to Stanislavsky’s concepts of bits and tasks. It is rather unclear how Strasberg viewed tasks, because it can be argued that his use of the term either was or was not comparable to Stanislavsky’s. If Adler identified actions and tasks to be identical--which is rather unclear from the research—then she was in agreement with Stanislavsky. Meisner deliberately chose not to use either term. However, it is logical to think that Meisner’s definition of doing meant that he had knowledge of bits and tasks in Stanislavsky’s sense. As with the concepts of action and imagination discussed in earlier chapters, here again it is established that Lewis had the most points of comparison and fewest areas of difference with Stanislavsky’s system as we know it today.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONCEPT OF EMOTION MEMORY

Of all of the concepts discussed in this study, emotion memory remains the most equivocal and hotly debated. Furthermore, it seems that often the concept of emotion memory is mistakenly recognized as being the only feature of the Stanislavsky System. In the Stanislavsky System, however, actors must avail themselves of everything in their real and fantasy lives to create the characters they are playing. It is the actors' job to encourage and coax the emotions out of memories and personal experiences that are proper for their characters; Stanislavsky's emotion memory exercise is only one tool that can be used by actors, if needed, in order to accomplish this. Lewis, Strasberg, Adler, and Meisner each acknowledged the reality of the concept of emotion memory and related exercises. However, each figure had a very different opinion about the practical value of emotion memory.

Because there are still many misconceptions about the concept of emotion memory, and to have a firm understanding of the concept itself, it is important to start with the most accurate and recent translations by Benedetti and scholarship by Merlin. In this chapter, Stanislavsky's conception of emotion memory will be examined. This will serve as the criteria with which to compare the understandings between Stanislavsky and the other key players in this study. Whether or not each figure used the concept of emotion memory in their work with actors will also be discussed. The research will attempt to show that Robert Lewis who had the most accurate understanding of Stanislavsky's original concept.

Stanislavsky

Significantly, Tortsov introduces the concept of emotion memory only after teaching the concepts of action, imagination, and bits and tasks. After watching his students repeat exercises

they had worked on previously, he criticizes the students for an unsuccessful performance. The students insist that they were actually feeling all of their actions in the scene, but Tortsov declares, “Everybody inevitably feels and experiences something at every moment of his life [...]. The whole question is what precisely you were ‘feeling’ and ‘experiencing’” (Stanislavsky, *An Actor’s Work* 196). Even though the students had remembered all their physical actions, still they were not feeling any genuine emotions and thus their actions were cold and uninteresting. Merlin wrote of this, “Tortsov uses their findings as an illustration of how acting becomes mechanical and formal when actors don’t invest their performances with their own human responses” (61). The actor’s personal response is what makes the performance come alive. Without using his/her personal responses, the actor’s performance seems cold and uninteresting.

In response to his students’ lack of genuine emotion in their actions, Tortsov states, “I, as the audience, am much more interested in knowing how you were responding internally, what you were feeling. It is your own individual experiences, which you bring to the role from the real world that give it real life” (196). Tortsov calls this issue emotion memory which he defined as “memory of feelings.” He also refers to Theodule Ribot (1839-1916) who used the term “affective memory” and whose work Stanislavsky was introduced to in 1908 (197). Ribot “discovered that, if patients remembered times when they were healthy, they recovered faster than those patients who engaged less actively in their own process of recovery. The effect of past-tense memories on present-tense circumstances was applied by Stanislavsky to fictional situations in drama” (Merlin 61). This reference to Ribot is significant because Stanislavsky developed his system from his own personal experiences as an actor, from observing other actors widely acknowledged as successful, and from the science of psychology, which was still embryonic as a subject of study (Benedetti 46).

Following Ribot, Tortsov distinguishes two branches of affective memory: sense memory and emotion memory (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* 203). About sense memory, Merlin said, "Sense (or sensation) memory involves a process of consciously recalling the sights and sounds from the original experience to excite sensations here and now" (61). Although taste, touch and smell are included in sense memory, Tortsov observes that they are not as strong and more supplementary (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* 61). Merlin explained:

Emotion memory has a more psychological, less tangible quality than sense memory: often when we recall past experiences, we find that the feelings conjured up are now stronger, weaker or simply different from the original, but that change is perfectly valid. In fact, it is not just the feelings that change. The memories themselves don't remain fixed: they merge with each other and with our imaginations. That is not to say the memories become weakened, but, rather our responses as actors to emotional nuances have to become more sensitive. (61)

Emotion memory is dynamic in nature. Memories change because they are absorbed by the imagination and combined with other memories.

Kostya, a student of Tortsov, remembers an accident involving a man killed by a streetcar, and then realizes that this memory had merged with his memory of an old man attempting to feed an orange to his dead monkey (Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work* 203-205). Tortsov replies, "All these traces of similar experiences and feelings are distilled into a single, wider, deeper memory [...]. This is a synthesis of all like feelings. It is related not to the small, individual parts of the incident but to all similar cases" (206). On which Merlin elaborated, "So the power of an emotion memory needn't necessarily lie in the remembered details of the original experience, but, rather in the connections that the actor's imagination makes and the resonances of those connections" (62). Seen in this light, it is not simply the ability to recall the vivid details of the memory that is beneficial to the actor, but more powerful is the effect of the memory on the actor's imagination, that is how it affects him/her emotionally. Merlin supported

this understanding when she stated, “Emotional recall is, therefore, not an end in itself—it is the fine-tuning of an actor’s psycho-physical sensitivity; it is the mixes of the colours in the actor’s imaginative palette” (62).

However, emotional stimuli are not only internal. Through a series of exercises, Tortsov teaches that emotions can be stimulated by external stimuli as well through memory. Tortsov then guides the students in a series of improvisations. He asks them to sit near him and then arranges a few pieces of furniture. He asks the students to tell him what corresponding emotions are evoked by the arrangement of the furniture and in what circumstances they would use such an arrangement. Merlin explained the rationale behind the exercise: “The psychological journey is therefore from outer stimulus (the furniture arrangement) to spontaneous inner sensation, then to imagination and potential action” (63). The value of the exercise lies in its teaching actors that what surrounds them externally affects them internally. They should identify their inner impulses and then use their imagination as a basis for action.

Next, Tortsov rearranges the furniture and gives the actors seating arrangements within the new physical setting. The actors are instructed to say what moods the new arrangements of the furniture evokes in them. Also, they are to state under what circumstances they would sit in the way he instructs them to sit. This exercise is important because the actors are required to move, just as in rehearsals when the director gives them their blocking, and which the actors must justify by means of an objective (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 215). Another emotion memory lesson involves the “proof through opposites” exercise (215). Tortsov sits down as though class is about to begin. After the students settle into their normal seating arrangements for class, he then places them in awkward seating arrangements not conducive to a normal class setting. Some students are seated farther away from others while some are instructed to sit with

their backs to Tortsov. This lesson is intended to teach students that even though they are seated in opposition to their objectives and emotions, nevertheless the staging and their emotional state still have to be linked (215). As Merlin stated, “They experience the contradiction between how they feel (their inner state) and the positions in which they are put (their outer reality) and then somehow they have to motivate the actions provided by the director to express their objectives” (63).

This exercise is also a valuable lesson in taking direction since actors learn that they must motivate the direction they are given by the director. Tortsov confirms this when he states:

You are now acquainted with another whole series of external stimuli: the setting, the lights, the sound and other production effects, which create the onstage illusion of real life and living atmosphere. If we bring together all the stimuli you are already familiar with, and add those you still have to learn about, then you have stored up a handsome number. That’s your capital, your psychotechnique (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 225).

This statement reiterates for the students that what is around them externally, including the set, lights and sound, can affect them emotionally, that is, can influence their emotion memory. “Possibly one of the most important lessons to emerge from the chapter on emotion memory,” Merlin stated, “is that the process is more important than the result. The result (emotion) will only arise if the process (the actions) are appropriate and executed with a sense of truth and faith” (63). In other words, to utilize emotion memory, actors must understand that it is connected with the concepts they have learned thus far: action, imagination and bits and tasks (64).

Tortsov builds on the idea that emotion memory depends on what has already been learned: “Each successive stage in our studies has brought a new decoy (or stimulus) for our emotion memory and recurrent feelings. In fact, the magic ‘if’, the given circumstances, our imagination, the bits and tasks, [...] the truth and belief in inner and outer actions, provided us

with appropriate decoys (stimuli)” (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 225). Benedetti expanded on this power of emotion memory when he stated:

Stanislavski realised that this faculty of vivid recall—dependent, in life, on chance—could be harnessed to the creation of performance. If the actor could define the emotion that was required of him at any given moment and then stimulate an analogous feeling from his own experience then his interpretation could attain a new level of reality and the gap between actor as individual and the actor as performer could be bridged. The actor and the character would become one (47).

Merlin and Benedetti both agreed with Stanislavsky that the knowledge gained from previous studies is cumulative. Emotion memory is the means by which the actors merge action, imagination, and bits and tasks into the image of a character in performance.

All the same, there is still ongoing debate surrounding the use of emotion memory. Many acting teachers place extreme emphasis on this one aspect of Stanislavsky’s System, while virtually ignoring all the other concepts he wrote about. Others undervalue emotion memory and consider it obsolete because Stanislavsky later placed so much emphasis on physical action and active analysis. Merlin wrote, “Emotion memory is a tricky aspect of Stanislavsky’s ‘system,’ often misunderstood by practitioners, who either place too much significance on its use or who dismiss it out of hand as psychologically unhealthy” (60). As Merlin referenced, there is also a certain amount of stigma surrounding the concept of emotion memory because some teachers consider the technique to be unwholesome for the actor, even psychologically harmful. Stanislavsky found emotional memory important enough to devote an entire chapter to it in *An Actor’s Work: A Student’s Diary*, thus it should be acknowledged as a significant component of his System. Accordingly, the emphasis each figure of this study placed on its importance is helpful to explore.

Robert Lewis

Lewis, like Stanislavsky, was a firm believer that the proper use of action would involuntarily summon the correct emotion. The three primary tools actors have at their disposal are the mind, will and feelings. Actors use their minds to make choices about their characters and their will to accomplish these choices. However, feelings are the most difficult to control. Lewis said:

Of the three big motors we use as actors—our mind, our will and our feeling—the mind is the least capricious. With our mind we make our choices. Our will, which is used in order to execute these choices, is more capricious. Our feeling, the amount and nature of our emotions, is the most capricious. (*Advice* 119)

Emotions are elusive, and when the director and actor are overly analytical in speaking about emotions and how to induce them, emotions can become even more elusive or even non-existent for the actor.

Lewis's definition of emotion is imperative to understand in relation to understanding his concept of emotion memory. He made a distinction between the terms emotion and emotionalism (121). Lewis felt that, "Emotion is that genuine and appropriate feeling that comes from correct art. If the character understands his character, knows what his inner action is, has established his relationship to the other characters, and has an appropriate reference from his experience going for him, we can assume that any feeling generated by such work will be genuine, true, artistic" (122). We can interpret the above quote to mean that Lewis, like Stanislavsky, felt that emotion which is honest and authentic comes about from actors understanding their characters, their relationships to the other characters in the play and the characters' actions that encompass their understanding of bits and tasks.

However, Lewis defined “emotionalism” differently: “Emotionalism is related to pathology in the sense that it is self-induced. If we see it exhibited in life, we say: ‘Oh, that person is a hysteric, trying to feel something that does not come rationally from living through that particular situation” (121). Lewis felt it was unfortunate that emotionalism is often associated with acting and that the usual response to such overly dramatic acting is to say, “Oh, he’s going to get great reviews and leave them cheering every night” (121). In other words, actors often make the mistake of equating a good performance with the display of emotions in extreme manner.

Lewis, like Stanislavsky, also distinguished between “sense memory” and “emotional memory [emotion memory]” (122). Sense memory, according to Lewis, is “the ability to recreate sensory effects without the presence of the actual stimulus” (122-123). Lewis also felt, however, that actors instinctively use sense memory to summon an appropriate emotion. To recreate the “sickly, ingratiating smile” and the feelings of anxiety he needed to portray an arsonist in the play *Paradise Lost*, for example, Lewis used his memory of an ether-soaked cone placed over his nose and mouth when his tonsils were removed (47-48).

Although this is a good example of how Lewis used sense memory, both he and Stanislavsky felt that the ability to use emotion memory required a different approach. Lewis stated, “In remembering situations that occurred in the past, the physical aspects of the event—the time of day, the place, the objects, the people—help bring back the emotion. One uses one’s sensory recall automatically in emotion memory exercises. But the ability to recreate the truth of objects, sounds, and so on, through our senses and the ability to bring forth the feeling through emotional memory are two distinct techniques” (123). In other words, recalling a physical sensation is different from recalling an emotion. Recalling the smell of newly-mown

grass is different from recalling the childhood feelings of a parent's death, and thus requires a different technique to do so.

Lewis also used the terms emotional memory and even affective memory instead of the term emotion memory (123-124). For, according to his own research and personal experiences with the Group, the terms were virtually interchangeable (124). Lewis explained, "The term 'affective memory' seems to have derived from Theodule Ribot's work *Problemes de Psychologie Affective*, although, Eric Bentley points out, Ribot himself used both 'emotional memory' and 'affective memory' and the terms have become interchangeable" (124-125). For the purposes of this study, in any case, the term emotion memory is used.

Just as Stanislavsky referenced Ribot about emotion memory, Lewis also had knowledge of Ribot's experiments and of his theory that emotion could be recreated when remembering an event from the past (125). However, Lewis, like Stanislavsky, felt it was important to caution actors that they cannot remember exactly how they felt at a moment in the past. "However," said Lewis, "if you recall the physical events that happened at some time in your past that then resulted in a strong feeling, the chances are that you will feel something again" (125). Nevertheless, it is still important to remember that actors may view past events differently from the time the events initially occurred.

Both Lewis and Stanislavsky felt that the use of emotion memory is particularly helpful when actors are expected to enter a scene requiring extreme or unusual emotion. For example, it can be difficult to achieve offstage the level of emotion necessary to enter a scene in tears. Lewis said, "All actors in history have, at some time or other, had the problem of needing some feeling they were not getting from their rehearsals. Often this occurred when it was necessary for them to come on stage full of this important emotion" (121). In such special instances, emotion

memory can be valuable to achieve the necessary emotions. Lewis always advised, however, that the best and most helpful source of feelings is the play itself and the situations in which the characters find themselves (123).

Lewis felt that the proper feelings could also be evoked through the use of actions/intentions and tasks/problems. He stated, “A second way to summon up feeling is through the fullest playing out of strongly chosen, imaginative intentions [actions]” (123). Furthermore, actors should choose images and phrases for their actions/intentions that will serve as a potential catalyst for strong emotion (123). Rather than simply “to put him down,” for example, an actor might say, “to crush that bedbug,” because the latter formation suggests a feeling of disgust more actively (123). Emotion memory should be used only when, after exploring actions/intentions and sense memory, actors are still unable to evoke the proper feeling or the degree of feeling.

Lewis did feel that the use of emotion memory had its risks, just as Stanislavsky did. The major disadvantage is that actors might evoke personal emotions that are not accurate for the character. Lewis wrote in his journal, “[A] bad artist makes his suffering the world’s versus the good artist making the world’s suffering his own [...]. Your own emotion is not an end in itself” (Lewis, “Strasberg Notes”). That is to say, actors must not make the mistake of evoking emotions that reflect their own feelings instead of those of the character. Choosing an incorrect past event could lead to the substitution of personal truth for “theatrical” truth (Lewis, *Advice* 128).

Additionally, as a result of how emotion memory was used in the Group, Lewis felt that overusing the exercise can be problematic:

Richard Boleslavsky brought Stanislavsky’s ideas on affective memory to this country in 1925 and demonstrated them at the American Laboratory Theatre to, among others, Stella Adler, Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and many of the original members of the Group Theatre. From 1931 on,

Lee Strasberg taught his version of the technique to the rest of us in the Group. (He's still teaching it.) We overused it to the point of "taking a minute" to prepare emotionally before every single entrance. We'd sit on the side of the stage, eyes closed, relaxed, concentrating, doing some affective memory exercise to "get in the mood" of the upcoming scene. As I remember it, listening for your cue sometimes created a bit of a problem. (125)

Even then, apparently, Lewis felt that emotion memory was occasionally interfering with his creative work.

However, Lewis felt that the next mistake an actor could make in the use of the emotion memory exercise is even worse. Actors may use the exercise as preparation for a scene, and after entering, instead of playing their actions/intentions and listening to their partner, they may try to preserve the emotion through the remainder of the scene out of fear that it will fade (130). Lewis stated that actors were then in a "psychological grip" and will be "deaf and blind" which would prevent them from listening to their partner onstage (130). Actors should therefore release this sought after emotion after they have entered the scene and from then on focus on playing their actions. As a result, their behavior as well as their emotions will be artistically truthful.

Like Stanislavsky, the idea of truth in emotion was a critical concept of Lewis's and was a theme that he echoed throughout his theories on the emotion memory exercise. He speaks of this connection in *Method-or Madness?* stating, "It is the truth that is really experienced, but artistically controlled, and correctly used for the particular character portrayed, the complete circumstances of the scene, and the chosen style of the author and the play being performed" (99). Moreover, it was Lewis's assertion that the emotion memory exercise can be used within any genre as "truth is truth in any style" (*Advice* 133).

Because Lewis acknowledged the primary connection between sense memory and emotion memory, it is useful here to examine the classroom exercises he used to develop sense

memory and emotion memory. One exercise involves remembering the daily line of activities. “While going to bed—go back and relive—reconstruct—re-experience every single second of what you did all day—second by second—all the sense-physical details you can experience! Good exercise in sense and emotion memory” (Ellermann, “3rd Class”). Another memory exercise is called “Matchbox.” It consists of the actor studying a matchbox for three minutes to accurately remember every tiny detail. Not only to remember the matchbox itself, but also to “tie them together into the whole picture of the experience” (Ellermann, “3rd Class”). Thus, the participants must draw the image of the matchbox exactly as they see it in their minds, after which the drawing is compared to the original. This exercise “teaches you to concentrate by sensory details and their whole images so you really deal with reality-life and truly acting” (Ellermann, “3rd Class”).

Although Lewis and Stanislavsky viewed the concept of emotion memory similarly, there was one major difference between them. In *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, Tortsov teaches emotion memory through the use of emotion memory exercises. By contrast, Lewis used sense memory exercises to develop skills in concentration and sense memory as such, which was then intended to enhance his students' use of the emotion memory exercises.

Lee Strasberg

Like Stanislavsky, Strasberg's concept of emotion memory was greatly influenced by the work of Ribot. Strasberg wrote at length about the origins of the term emotion memory and cited Ribot's idea that memories of an event “can be revived in the consciousness spontaneously or at will, independently of any actual occurrence which might provoke them” (*A Dream* 111). The importance of Stanislavsky's discovery of the exercise, according to Strasberg, is that it answered the question, “What happens when the actor is inspired, or what is the nature of the

actor's inspiration?" (112). Like Stanislavsky, Strasberg attempted to answer this question by means of the emotion memory exercise.

Strasberg agreed with Stanislavsky that evoking the basis of an emotion can be a challenge for the actors. Strasberg wrote, "While mental or physical actions can be controlled at will, emotions cannot" (114). Therefore, Strasberg felt actors should develop skills to be able to inspire themselves to feel emotions at will by using emotion memory exercises. He acknowledged that many actors would become anxious when faced with the emotion memory exercise because they feared losing control over their emotions. However, he felt that the emotion memory exercise actually helps actors gain control over their emotions (115-116). He said, "This interaction between the artist and his instrument is precisely what transpires when the actor performs. [...]. The Method, therefore, is the procedure by which the actor can open control of his instrument, that is, the procedure by which the actor can use his affective memory to create a reality onstage" (122). For Strasberg, emotion memory exercises are essential for actors to create accurate and artistically truthful emotions onstage.

Because emotion memory is such a crucial part of Strasberg's Method, it is helpful to have an insight into how he taught actors the exercise. First, the actors are to relax "so that there is no interference between the activity of the mind and the other areas that are being induced to respond" (114). Strasberg felt that if the actor were not relaxed, both mentally and physically, it was probably because they were trying to anticipate the way in which the emotion would occur, which would interfere with the spontaneity of the exercise (114). After relaxation is achieved, the actors then concentrate on the five minutes before the remembered event occurred. Strasberg, like Stanislavsky, acknowledged a strong link between sense memory and emotion memory; therefore, actors must try to remember every sensory detail about the initial event (115).

By remembering what was seen, felt, smelled, and heard in vivid detail, the “sensory concreteness of these objects can stimulate emotions” (115). For instance, if the actor remembers being in the yard and it being very hot, he must try to remember where he felt the heat on his body. That is, “the actor localizes the concentration in that area to create not just a memory but a reliving of that particular moment. The actor remembers what he had on: the sight, texture, or sensation of that material on the body” (115). The actor must try to remember the event, not in the series of small steps through which the event occurred, but through all of the sensory details that surrounded it (115). That is, not the emotion itself, but the sensory details and objects that initially created the emotional response (Cohen 27). Like Lewis, he acknowledged that the actor’s response to the memory may have changed since the time he experienced the event. However, the key is that it is how the actor “is affected today”: *that* is what “becomes the emotion memory” (27).

One difference between Strasberg and Stanislavsky is that Strasberg felt emotion memory should be at the center of the actors’ work. He claimed that the later phases of Stanislavsky’s System were ineffective because Stanislavsky moved farther away from “his early emotional approach” (Strasberg, *A Dream* 149). Strasberg’s reasoning was that he had seen MAT productions during their tour of the United States in 1923-4, and, more importantly, later MAT productions during his trip to Russia in 1934, and felt the latter to be inferior. He reasoned that this was because MAT had moved away from an “internal approach” (145). Incidentally, Strasberg was correct in his observation even if he may have been misguided in his understanding. He would not have realized that by 1934, not only had Stanislavsky been canonized by Stalin as the compulsory model for Socialist Realism but also that the entire

Russian theatre had become forcibly “Sovietized,” isolating it from the wider world of theatre and depriving it of the genuine creativity it had become widely known for.

Although Stanislavsky felt that sense memory contributed to an actor’s use of emotion memory, Strasberg felt that sense memory and emotion memory were one and the same. “Affective memory [emotion memory] is the basic material for reliving on the stage,” he said, “and therefore the creation of a real experience on the stage. What the actor repeats in performance after performance are not just the words and movements he practiced in rehearsal, but the memory of emotion” (113). Strasberg’s insistence that emotion should be the primary focus of actors’ attention is in sharp contrast to Stanislavsky’s idea that emotion is a byproduct of action.

Lee Strasberg’s son, John, revealed that another difference was that Strasberg’s Method limited actors’ ability to be spontaneous while performing. John Strasberg is a member of the Actors Studio, a former student of his father, and a distinguished acting teacher in his own right. He freely acknowledged that while using some of the principles his father taught, he has nevertheless adapted them in his own work. In reference to his father, John Strasberg stated, “What he did very well, aside from inspiring people, was work out a system of well-thought-out exercises so that if an actor studied he could learn a very simple, clear way in which to come into contact with his feelings” (Mekler 93). Significantly, he later stated:

I think my father’s work, to a great extent, centered on teaching an actor to stimulate and manipulate his emotions. And I use his work carefully because I do think that acting can be just a manipulation most of the time. On the other hand, when you watch wonderful actors on a good night, you’ll see purely spontaneous moments—within a very structured form—but it’s totally spontaneous. My father’s work really didn’t permit that to take place. (93)

In other words, Lee Strasberg's approach to emotion memory may have had an effect opposite to that for which it was intended.

Stella Adler

When Adler spoke about emotion memory, it was usually to teach that actors should focus on action versus feelings, because feelings result from action. She said, "The great paradox of acting is that the actor must act real things in an unreal, imaginary setting. You must do everything you can to make the world of the stage real, and you do that by actions. If you go to your memories you're creating your own play, not the author's" (Adler 139). However, like Stanislavsky, Adler did acknowledge that actors could use emotion memory as a tool when the proper emotion for the text could not be aroused through action. Adler stated, "If you need an action you can't find in a play then you can go back to your own life—but not for the emotion, rather for a similar action. In your own personal experience you had a similar action to which you had an emotional response" (139). Adler, like Stanislavsky, felt that by recalling events that took place in the actor's past, actors can relive the emotions as deeply as when the event was originally taking place. The similarity between Adler and Stanislavsky on this point is clear.

However, Adler sometimes contradicted herself on the subject of emotion memory. Sometimes she said that it could be used as a tool, while at other times she said that the use of the actor's own experience could be detrimental to the performance of the character and the play:

You have to get beyond your own precious inner experiences now. I want you to be able to see and share what you see with an audience, not just get wrapped up in yourself. Strasberg is dead. The actor cannot afford to look only to his own life for all of his material nor pull strictly from his own experience to find his acting choices and feelings. The ideas of the great playwrights are almost always larger than the experiences of even the best actors. (65)

Adler felt that the ideas of playwrights are typically more interesting than those of the actors' own personal experiences. However, she also stated that in her technique, the emphasis should be on the actors themselves: "It's the part of the approach to acting that concentrates who you are, not who the character is [...]. This technique is about doing, not about feeling" (83). This could be confusing to actors studying her technique, because it is unclear whether actors should make use of their own personal experiences or, on the other hand, if doing so could be detrimental to the character and the play. Despite this discrepancy, it is clear that Adler and Stanislavsky agreed that emotion memory can be a helpful tool for the actor when action does not lead the actor to the emotion required for the scene.

Sanford Meisner

Meisner's theories on the actor's use of preparation were introduced in the third chapter of this study, in which it was explained that, according to Meisner, actors could use their imagination to emotionally prepare for a scene. The imaginary situation, however, must contain elements of objective reality so that it moves actors emotionally (Meisner and Longwell 99). Meisner used words such as "specific" and "meaningful" in regard to the objectively real component of the emotional preparation for a scene (103). If actors make use of memories that are "specific" to the circumstances of the scene and "meaningful," the proper emotion for the scene will be evoked.

After the scene is underway, however, the actors should play their actions reciprocally, from moment to moment, always open to the ways in which the other actors respond. "Another thing, which cannot be repeated too often," he stressed, "is that preparation lasts only for the first moment of the scene, and then you never know what's going to happen." Meisner felt that failing to release the emotion that arises as a result of this preparation is a serious "pitfall" in the process

of preparation; it can lead actors to “projecting” their personal “state of being” onto the other, rather than playing the actions of the scene itself (79). Actors should therefore release this sought-for emotion after they have entered the scene and thereafter focus on playing their actions.

Meisner and Stanislavsky did differ on two major points regarding the concept of emotion memory, however. First, Meisner stated unequivocally that he did not use the emotional memory exercise. He shared his reasoning for this:

In the early days of the Stanislavsky System, Mr. S. was looking for true behavior, and if what he wanted was great pleasure, he asked where you look for the reality of great pleasure. His answer was simple: you remember a time when you were under the influence of great pleasure. That’s called “emotion memory.” I don’t use it, and neither did he after thirty years of experimentation (79).

Meisner did not use the emotion memory exercise because he felt that Stanislavsky used the exercise only in the early phases of his career and then ceased using it later in the final development of the Stanislavsky System. However, this is not quite accurate, for Stanislavsky did not so much abandon emotion memory as relegate it to a less important role in his System.

Meisner also felt that most young actors do not have the life experience necessary to employ emotion memory as a tool (79). If actors do not have life experiences similar to those experiences of the character, emotion memory will not help achieve the correct emotional state, and then other means are necessary.

Summary

Following the example of Ribot, Stanislavsky divided affective memory into two parts: sense memory and emotion memory. Sense memory is a process of purposefully calling to memory the sights, sounds and smells of a previous experience to awaken the same or similar

sensations in the present. Emotion memory refers to “personal memories which arise spontaneously” as actors explore the “dramatic situation” or memories that are “consciously evoked to strengthen natural reactions” (Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work* 683).

Lewis and Stanislavsky were in agreement about the concept of emotion memory. Each acknowledged the distinction between sense memory and emotion memory and their distinctive value to actors. In class, however, Lewis did not use the emotion memory exercise as such. Rather, he used exercises that strengthened the actors’ sense memory in the hope that their ability to use the emotion memory exercise on their own would improve.

Strasberg, like Stanislavsky, acknowledged both sense memory and emotion memory. However, there were two major differences. Strasberg felt that emotion memory is the key to the work of the actor. Furthermore, Strasberg felt that sense memory and emotion memory are indistinguishable.

Adler and Stanislavsky both believed that actors could use emotion memory as a tool when the proper emotion for the text could not be aroused by the use of action. However, it is unclear whether Adler felt that the emotion memory exercise as such was beneficial or detrimental to the work of an actor.

Meisner chose not to use the emotion memory exercise. He felt that Stanislavsky only used the exercise in the early phases of his career and then abandoned it later in the development of his System. Additionally, Meisner felt that young actors may not have sufficient life experience to use emotion memory effectively as a tool.

In summation, out of all of the figures studied, it was Lewis who was closest in agreement with Stanislavsky regarding the concept of emotion memory. In Stanislavsky’s System, the concepts of action, imagination, bits and tasks are cumulative. Actors must have a

clear grasp of each concept before emotion memory can be understood and used. Therefore, it stands to reason that because Lewis had the most areas of similarity with Stanislavsky in the concepts discussed in previous chapters, he also had the best understanding of the concept of emotion memory.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVE ANALYSIS

This chapter will explore the evolution of Stanislavsky's concept of active analysis during the last phase of his career. Although some scholars suggest that the concept of active analysis as such did not really exist, this study suggests that it should be considered the culmination of Stanislavsky's System. Although Lewis was unaware of the existence of active analysis, as such, he still was nevertheless closest to Stanislavsky on this concept, both in theory and practice. Strasberg and Adler seem to have been deficient in any concept approaching active analysis, even though some of their work shows indirect similarities to its foundations. As for Meisner, no sort of understanding of active analysis, either directly or indirectly, is apparent in either research about Meisner or his own writings and teachings, however, some comparisons to Stanislavsky can still be made.

Because active analysis is still not widely understood or even generally known in the west, it is essential to begin by looking into Benedetti's new and comprehensive translations of Stanislavsky. This chapter will also look into recent works by Bella Merlin, Rose Whyman, as well as Susan Trauth and Elizabeth Stoppel *Sonia Moore and American Acting Training: With a Sliver of Wood in Hand* (2005).

The knowledge and application of active analysis, and/or analogous concepts, by Lewis, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner will be compared to Stanislavsky's concept as we know and use it today.

Stanislavsky

The concluding years of Stanislavsky's career marked a chapter in his System now known as active analysis. Active analysis is considered to be the culmination of his System and

embodied the true intent of how the System could be most beneficial for the actor and the director in actual performance. Until 1910, Stanislavsky had been working on actor training in two components: “work on one’s self” and “work on the role” (Merlin 24). According to Merlin, “He had come to believe that actors could only work from their own raw materials if they really wanted to stir their creative wills. In other words, they had to put themselves into the characters’ circumstances and ask themselves: ‘What would I do in this situation? What do I want? Where am I going?’” (24). This chapter of his career combined self and role into a combined state of “I am” (25). Benedetti also referred to the state of “I am,” however, he used the term “I am being” in its place (Stanislavski, *Work on a Role* 48). For the purposes of this study, “I am” will be used.

The introduction of the tool called “I am” changed the emphasis of the System. While the actors still used themselves as a creative starting point, the addition of I am now added the words and world of the author, which in turn led to the emergence of a third persona, i.e. the character. Merlin wrote, “Although actors might now begin with their own personality, they didn’t stop there: they stepped beyond their individual employs [i.e. typecast lines of business] into the character as written by the playwright. This transition provoked many questions for Stanislavsky about the relationship between the actor and the role and, in 1914, he altered his notion of the ‘creative state’ to the state of ‘I am’: ‘I am’ in this situation (albeit imaginary), so I will respond as truthfully as I can for the character” (Merlin 25). By acknowledging that actors are placed in imaginary situations but responding as truthfully as possible for their characters, their own selves are now truly living in the imaginary given circumstances of the character. The tool of “I am” allows the actors to achieve a balance of themselves and the given circumstances of the text simultaneously and seamlessly.

Throughout 1923-24 the tool of “I am” ultimately developed into the final stage of Stanislavsky’s System, that is, active analysis. Merlin wrote of this time:

Some years later, in 1923-4, the Moscow Art Theatre embarked on two tours of America to ease the Theatre’s ailing finances. The Americans had gone wild for the Russian “psychological” acting, and were hungry for lectures and lessons to help them achieve equally detailed performances themselves. By 1924, Stanislavsky provided an actual step-by-step guide into the state of I am, beginning with factual knowledge and ending with heartfelt emotion. At the centre of his “guide” lay the actors’ need to search for the “right bait”—that is, the right actions—to arouse their feeling. Having “caught the feeling,” actors had to learn how to control it. Inspirational acting depended upon a fine balance between conscious control and subconscious spontaneity. (25)

In other words, the tool of “I am” was broadened to incorporate action: I am in this imaginary situation, and so now I will undertake the most truthful actions for the character that are possible for me. By adding action to “I am,” Stanislavsky’s System was now on the threshold of what would become active analysis.

It was at this threshold point in his thinking that Stanislavsky began working on what became known as the Method of Physical Actions. His goal at this moment in time was to search for means to engage the actors’ mind, will, and feelings simultaneously. Stanislavsky began to sense that “following the line of action in the role was a way into the emotion, but [significantly] this did not contradict his earlier beliefs because for him the two things were inseparable” (Whyman 63).

Previous to this time, Stanislavsky’s way was to approach the script initially by intellectual analysis “at the table,” then with actors on their feet—but—only after extensive work around the table. However, at this point in Stanislavsky’s career, he felt that “real human feelings were a vital part of good acting, and that every gifted performer possessed the appropriate raw

materials” without resorting to massive amounts of intellectual work beforehand (Merlin 28).

Stanislavsky wrote in a letter to his son Igor in 1936:

We break up the whole play, episode by episode into physical actions. When this one is done exactly, correctly, so that it is true and inspires our belief in what is happening on stage, then we can say that the line of the life of the human body has been created. This is no small thing, but half of the role. Can the physical line exist without the spiritual? No. So the internal line of experiencing is outlined. (Whyman 63)

Stanislavsky’s letter is significant because he acknowledged that good acting encompasses not only the mind and feelings but also the concrete physicality of actors. And by delineating the line of physical actions for a character, the actors simultaneously access that character’s thoughts and feelings, i.e., the natural wellspring of their actions.

For an actor to develop a way into a character, Stanislavsky believed it was crucial to find the right stimulus for the actor’s feelings. Merlin wrote:

It was just a matter of finding the “right bait” to arouse them. Over the years, he had tried to find the “right bait” through analysis, observation, affective memory and imagination. The tricky part was that, once actors’ emotions were aroused, they had to be able to stop them in an instant, and to change them as appropriate. Yet Stanislavsky recognized that the emotion-centre was highly capricious and, as such, almost impossible to manipulate consciously. The fascinating contradiction in the acting process, therefore, was how to arouse and then control something as teasingly uncontrollable as emotion. (29)

Concluding that living through a series of actions helps actors summon and—more importantly—control emotion, Stanislavsky no longer considered emotion as the starting point for an actor. Instead, emotion could and should be the result of action, or what he called psycho-physical action. Benedetti explained, “There is a physical aspect to thought and a mental aspect to action. Physical work can act as a powerful stimulus to the imagination and the unconscious” (90). Stanislavsky set out to devise a rehearsal method that would address this idea. Merlin

wrote, “Instead of true emotion being the end-product of an acting technique, he wanted to devise a rehearsal process of which emotion was a by-product” (29). In other words, Stanislavsky turned his attention from his former emphasis on actor training to his new interest in the rehearsal process, employing physical action as the logical connection.

The traditional rehearsal process was divided between intellectual table work and physical staging. This new approach employed both at the same time. Merlin wrote, “In other words, he sought a process in which emotions arouse inevitably from the actions, rather than actors consciously trying to arouse emotions as the main challenge to their acting skills. After all, the emotion-centre wasn’t the only piece in the jigsaw: an actor’s intricate mechanism also included the other two ‘inner motive forces’ of will and thought. Could it be that, if actors actively did something (will) and fully believed in what they were doing (thought), appropriate emotions might arise accordingly?” (29).

In 1935, Stanislavsky’s health and the prevailing politics of the time had kept him from active participation in the work of the Moscow Art Theatre for several years. He now worked solely with his Opera-Dramatic Studio, formed in the same year, teaching students at his apartment. He began to focus on action; more specifically, what he termed the “Method of Physical Actions” (29). “Physical actions were small, achievable tasks that were directed straight towards the other actors on stage,” Merlin explained, “the motives behind those actions were both practical and psychological” (29). This transition point in Stanislavsky’s work led to several misunderstandings, or at least ambiguities. For example, there is some debate whether the method of physical actions and active analysis are one and the same, after all there seem to be similarities between them. According to some, for example, the method of physical actions and active analysis are different in name only. Soviet Socialist Realists preferred the term “Method

of Physical Actions” because it fell in line with their theory that “there was nothing about man that couldn’t be changed by social reform. Reason ruled: emotion was out!” (33). With this in mind, it is easy to see that the Socialist Realists would prefer to term the technique the method of physical actions because it implied a singular emphasis on physical life with little or no attention, if not complete disregard for, emotional or spiritual life.

Sonia Moore, a student of Vakhtangov’s who became a notable acting teacher in America, felt that the value of the method of physical actions was that it was a rehearsal technique that could be reduced to “a simple truth: by establishing a line of logical physical actions that reveal character truthfully the internal life of the character unfolds naturally” (Trauth and Stoppel 31). For Moore, the method of physical actions was strictly a rehearsal technique and not the culmination of the Stanislavsky System. Merlin described the method of physical actions as follows:

Step 1 was as simple as possible: the actors read a scene. Step 2 involved a small amount of discussion to clarify what the scene was about, how it divided into “bits” and what was its main “action.” In Step 3, the actors got up and tried out the scene using improvisation. They often began with a “silent etude,”- in which they worked attentively—but silently—through “the line of physical action,” testing whether the actions they had chosen during the preliminary discussion were appropriate or not [...]. After the etude, further discussions (Step 4) identified which moments had worked in the improvisation and which ones had fractured the logical line of physical action. Then the actors went back to Step 1. (30)

Using this scheme, the actors continued to work through each and every physical action in the play.

It is important to note that while the emphasis was on silent etudes, the playwright’s words were gradually introduced into the improvisations. Following each improvisation, the actors would discuss its outcome from the standpoint of what worked and what did not work in creating the “unbroken line of physical actions” (30). “Through these developing improvisations,

the actors were able to fine-tune their actions and fix them to form the scene's 'skeleton', known as the 'score of physical actions.' This precise score could then be repeated until habit became easy and ease became beautiful" (30-31).

On the other hand, more recent—and less Soviet-biased—scholars believe that the method of physical actions was only a temporary conditional practice that eventually culminated in Stanislavsky's active analysis. Merlin stated:

The Method of Physical Actions seemed to be a psycho-physical "cure-all." Stanislavsky summarized it as a simultaneous creativity of all the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical forces of human nature: "this is not theoretical, but practical research for the sake of a genuine objective, which we attain through physical actions." Yet there was still another step to be taken. His understanding of "practical research" would in fact fuel his ultimate experiment in acting practice, now known as Active Analysis. (32)

Maria Knebel was a student of Stanislavsky's at the Opera-Dramatic Studio, who dedicated herself to transmitting the final work of Stanislavsky in its purest form. She believed that the method of physical actions was indeed the final result of the Stanislavsky System. Significantly, however, she also felt that there was no difference between the method of physical actions and active analysis. They were two sides of the same coin. Knebel felt that active analysis was Stanislavsky's method of "analysis through action," i.e., analysis of a play by means of action, and the method of the physical actions was the same (33). Knebel's view was that active analysis was a tool for the actor to analyze the play by using their bodies, imagination, intuition and emotion during rehearsal in order to better understand his character (Merlin 34).

In point of fact, a logical kinship exists between the method of physical actions and active analysis. To elaborate, the method of physical actions consisted of outlining a scene by means of action and then repeating the sequence of outlined actions while gradually introducing the words

of the author. Active analysis, on the other hand, expanded this approach to include “the structure of a scene, the ‘anatomy’ of a play, the very medium of drama itself. So the logic of the sequence was less important than the experiential discoveries made through active [i.e. physical] research” (34). In other words, active analysis was and is a process of actorly discoveries, while the method of physical actions aimed at the external expression of conclusions.

To paraphrase Merlin, active analysis is conducted as follows: 1) The actors read the scene; 2) They assess the facts of the scene to ascertain the main events of the scene, as well as the action within the scene; 3) The actors improvise the scene using their own words and using all of the facts they remembered from their discussion of the scene; 4) The actors read the scene again and compare it with their experience of the improvisation; and 5) The actors memorize the scene using the words of the author. Several steps in the process are essential to a clear understanding of active analysis and its kinship with but difference from the method of physical actions (34).

Step two requires actors to go beyond simple improvisation; it requires improvisations to be grounded in the textual “events” of the play (34). An event is “something that generally would not or should not happen. As a result, it changes everything, causes new ideas and feelings in a character, forces a character to see life in a new way, and changes the direction of a character’s life” (Thomas, *Script Analysis* 2). The idea of events connected with Stanislavsky’s earlier experience in actor trainings. He learned that bits and tasks could sometimes be problematic because actors might become too excessively concerned with the details instead of seeing the big picture. Benedetti wrote, “Experience had shown [Stanislavsky] that too great a preoccupation with individual bits and tasks led actors to forget the overall meaning of the play” (93). To

counteract this tendency, Stanislavsky now encouraged the actors to understand a play in terms of its “events.”

In steps three and four of active analysis, the actors improvise a scene based on what they understand from their discussion of the scene and then re-read the scene and while discussing their improvisation. Merlin wrote, “They noted which facts were retained and which were forgotten, and whether the inciting event took place. Rehearsing a play with Active Analysis consisted of repeating this four-stage process of reading, discussing, improvising and discussing” (35). The actors would continue to try to incorporate as many facts as possible with each subsequent improvisation of the scene.

“The power of Active Analysis lay in its immediacy,” Merlin wrote, “It acknowledged the reality of the situation (‘Okay, we’re on stage, so what shall we do?) and combined it with a sense of playfulness (‘But what would we do if...?’)” (35). Stanislavsky referred to the technique as: “Here, Today, Now” because the actors use themselves as a starting point; they analyze the material in terms of how they feel and what they think in those moments in those factual circumstances (35). “Here, today, now” acknowledges whatever the actor is feeling and then “the necessary adjustments can be made” in order to fulfill the character’s actions according to the text (35).

Because the actors are analyzing the play on their feet, there is no divorce of mind and body as in traditional rehearsals. Benedetti wrote, “Having established firm contact with the material of the play in his own person, the actor is then ready to start taking on the specific characteristics of the role, almost by osmosis” (93). The beauty of active analysis is its use of the actors themselves, what they are feeling spiritually, emotionally and physically, as the starting point to rehearse that day.

Active analysis is a method with action at its heart. Merlin wrote, “Active Analysis was based upon simple actions; therefore, it required no creative ‘force’ or impossible demands. All the actors had to do was to carry out those simple actions carefully and, as Knebel described it, that action would become their own” (36). Benedetti agrees: “There is to be no forcing, no attempt to cram his nature into an alien mould. He is also ready for the author’s text now that the necessity for it had been created and it can be seen as the inevitable expression of all that has gone before” (94). Because the actor lives through the events that the character experiences, he finds that he needs the playwright’s words in order to express what his character is thinking, feeling and wanting. James Thomas states:

For Stanislavsky the purpose of active analysis was not to develop a ready kind of scenic image [form] but so that at once, from the very first steps, the actor’s work included not only the mind, but also the whole physical organism, the whole essence of the actor, to help him feel more rapidly ‘himself in the role and the role in himself.’ Only then can he freely create within the given circumstances of a role, sufficiently mastered by him through an etude. (53-54)

Active analysis satisfied Stanislavsky’s predicament of developing a rehearsal method that would use the given circumstances of the text to engage an actor’s body, mind and emotions while also allowing him/her to gain a relatively rapid psychological grasp of character. The actor actually fuses with the character psychophysically in order to form a new persona:

The process of character-creation is not one of self-effacement but of self-transformation whereby one’s own life experiences become the experience of the character. A third being is created, a fusion of the character the author wrote and the actor’s own personality, the actor/role. It was, as he [Stanislavsky] put it, a new child, with the author as father, the actor as mother, and the director as midwife. (Benedetti 95)

Active analysis is understood by many as much more of a way of improving an actor’s performance. It is a method through which the experiences of the playwright, actor and director become united in performance.

Active analysis is the authentic culmination of the Stanislavsky System. Benedetti wrote, “What the new method [active analysis] does is to bring all the elements of the System into greater unity by making them organic to the actor and his process” (95). Knebel wrote that Stanislavsky’s development of active analysis “absorbs everything discovered by him before. Without understanding this, one cannot grasp the novelty of the discovery. The fact of the discovery cannot fail to stun us even today” (Trauth and Stroppel 35). All of the concepts within the Stanislavsky System explored in this study—action, imagination, bits and tasks and emotion memory—now exist to provide the foundation of active analysis (45).

Robert Lewis

Lewis had no way of knowing the conclusions that Stanislavsky had reached about active analysis at the end of his career. *My Life in Art*, Stanislavsky’s hastily composed autobiography, was published in English in 1924. In 1934, Stella Adler gave her famous report to the Group explaining her studies with Stanislavsky and his reaction to the Group’s understanding of his System. Stanislavsky’s first volume on acting, translated by Elizabeth Hapgood, was published in 1936. The only other work by Stanislavsky himself that Lewis had access to was published in Hapgood’s translation in 1949. There was also a random collection of essays by Russian professionals knowledgeable about the System, compiled by the influential theatrical agent Toby Cole and edited by Lee Strasberg, which was published in 1955 under the title *Acting: A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method*. These essays were translated specifically for the Group to use as study aids. As a member of the Group, of course, Lewis would have immersed himself in all these publications. But he was also aware of the publication time lag among them as well as its significance in the development of Stanislavsky’s ideas and their eventual implementation in America (Lewis, *Method* 59).

Lewis also knew that *An Actor Prepares* and *Building A Character* were intended to be published as one volume that would address the internal and external aspects of approaching a character at the same time (59). Lewis had no access to the method of active analysis as such until Stanislavsky's *Creating a Role* which was not published until 1961. In other words, if Lewis developed an understanding of the mechanics of active analysis it would have been through his own creative exploration.

Lewis knew that Stanislavsky's System had changed and evolved a great deal over its lengthy period of growth:

But his attitude, from all the material that I could gather from the things he himself said, was a very fluid one. For over fifty years he was constantly changing and experimenting and improving. He had many different periods of his life, at least three major ones, in which he was constantly experimenting. Up to his death, he was looking for new ways of helping the actor to work. (162)

This statement reflects Lewis's awareness that the System was not intended to be either static or dogmatic.

Lewis was correct in his idea that there were three creative phases in Stanislavsky's career. First, 1898 to 1905, the period of the founding and establishment of the Moscow Art Theatre with Nemorovich-Danchenko. Second, 1905 to 1928, which included Stanislavsky's "initial work on the System with the unsuccessful Povarskaya Studio (1905), the more successful First (1911), Second (1916), and Third (1920) Studios (1905-1920s). The third period, 1928 to 1938, when Stanislavsky suffered his first heart attack, retired from active performance, and began "the second period of his work on the System" (Thomas, "Active Analysis"). It is important to remember, however, that despite Stanislavsky's impression of assurance given by his publications, the System was always evolving in an attempt to "develop a more

comprehensive grasp of the rehearsal process and actor training” (Thomas, “Re: Active Analysis”).

Lewis also made a significant statement that reveals what he knew about Stanislavsky’s repeated modifications to the System:

He religiously studied those laws in his own work and in the performances of great actors. Still, he was very reluctant to publish his books on his Method. Mrs. Hapgood, the translator, had a time getting him to agree to have the books printed at all because Stanislavski felt that it was too final. And to his Group Theatre visitors in 1934, he said, ‘If the System doesn’t work for you, forget it.’ Then he added, ‘But perhaps you do not use it properly.’ Even at the end, when he was dying, he was experimenting in his idea of tempo-rhythm with a wheel of different-colored light bulbs. He watched this wheel as it turned in different tempi to see what effect color and movement would have on emotion. So it certainly ill-behoves us to be too dogmatic about our interpretations of his Method. (*Method* 54)

Lewis instinctively felt that that it was appropriate to try out new ideas. When asked how Lewis could have known about Stanislavsky’s work with the “wheel of different colored light bulbs,” Burke said that he learned about this from Stella Adler after her visit with Stanislavsky in 1934 (Burke). This would also explain how Lewis knew that Stanislavsky instructed his “Group Theatre visitors,” meaning Adler and Clurman, that if his System did not work for them, they should not feel obligated to use it.

An important characteristic of the Robert Lewis Technique is its non-dogmatic approach to the Stanislavsky System. Lewis said of the System, “I have also indicated that the particular technique we were discussing in these talks, the Stanislavski Method (that was under fire), was set down by this very human, working director in an attempt to isolate what he felt good actors were doing when they were good” (*Method* 161). Lewis did not deify the System, but he greatly admired its intentions and results.

To Lewis's way of thinking, if Stanislavsky was continually improving, then Lewis should do the same with his own theories. Lewis stated, "We must also study all new techniques, thus constantly expanding our understanding of fundamental beliefs" (74). The System "is all there to know about and to study and to use when, and if, the need arises" (53). With this in mind, it is informative to learn if and how Lewis arrived at conclusions in his own work that were analogous to those of Stanislavsky.

Active analysis grew out of Stanislavsky's desire to address the actor's mind, feelings, and body simultaneously when analyzing a play and creating a character. Lewis had some knowledge of Stanislavsky's thoughts about the relationship of mind, body, and feelings. This is clear from his statement, "'The three motors of our psychic life,' as they are rather floridly called here, are 'Mind, Will and Feeling (Emotion)'. The first gives us ideas and the understanding, the second gives us the power to execute our wishes, or problems, and the third fills us with the fuel of expression. The mind is the easiest to control, says Stanislavski, the Will a little harder, and needs disciplining, and Emotion is the hardest of all to summon and control" (29). Like Stanislavsky, Lewis acknowledged the need for a technique that would address the "three motors" simultaneously.

Moreover, Lewis's understanding of the value of improvisation is an important part of his understanding of active analysis. Lewis explained this when he stated:

Improvisation, defined simply, means playing a scene in your own words instead of those of the author. [...] Improvisation is the control of the problem [task]. I use the word "problem" [task] here to mean the intention [action] of the scene. As you improvise, you must observe the inner form of the scene, where one section ends and another begins. (79)

Furthermore, Lewis thought, improvisation can also lead actors to a better understanding of the events in a scene, because actors must have a concrete grasp of the events to ensure that they

adhere to the scene's basic structure. Improvisation required the actors to trust the structure of the scene, the playwright, and the entire play. In this he sounds close to, if not identical with, active analysis.

In order to be successful, active analysis depends on “the whole physical organism, the whole essence of the actor, to help him feel more rapidly ‘himself in the role and the role in himself.’ Only then can he freely create within the given circumstances of a role [...]” (Thomas, *Stanislavsky Dictionary* 53-54). This sort of idea was not news for Lewis, as he wrote in his Group notebook:

Assuming we have an emotion, how is it apparent to the audience? How can we make it so? [The] actor's ability consists of [his] senses being alive and showing—audience is receptor like radio receiving set—but: actor should be ideal machine for transmission of emotion by becoming alive to all things actor becomes more ideal instrument (like every artist). (Lewis, “Strasberg Notes”)

Lewis termed this idea “growing out of yourself,” because the characters are created by the actors' own selves during the process of improvisation (Lewis, “Clurman Notes”).

Furthermore, a successful improvisation could also inspire actors to discover scenic information often hard to find even in the best of plays. Lewis stated, “If it is a good play, its clues will jump out at you and stimulate you. A good play will also play a great deal of itself by itself if you will let it” (*Method* 75). By improvising the events, and steadfastly guided by the given circumstances, the actors frequently gain clues about character and their motivation.

The key to the method of active analysis is its special blend of improvisation and text analysis. In Stanislavsky's method of active analysis, the actors improvise a scene using their own words and then re-read the scene to check themselves to ensure that they had performed all of the events of the scene logically and correctly. This process is repeated multiple times until the improvisation (“etude” in Stanislavsky's terminology) becomes virtually identical with the

author's scene itself. Lewis often worked the same way, especially when his actors reached an impasse:

I have used it [guided improvisation], for example, to force a connection, a relationship, between two people working in a play when I couldn't get them to do it, for one reason or another, any other way while saying their lines in the play. Whatever the reason was, I could not get them to talk or listen to each other and really play the scene in the author's words. So I said, "Now that you know the make-up of the scene, the intentions, just get up and do it in your own words. Forget the lines of the play; if some lines do happen to come to you, say them, and don't try not to say them." As soon as they finished, I made them go right back and do the same scene with the author's lines, trying to retain what they gained from that little improvisation. But you must watch and insist that the problems of the scene are executed, the inner form retained, and that they don't ramble and say, "Did I tell you of the time my grandfather...?" That's the prevalent danger. (80)

Lewis's statement above acknowledged three important ideas that improvisation is an invaluable tool: first, when the actor is not connecting with the words of the scene; second, stays true to the events of the scene; and third, keeps in mind his/her character's actions/intentions while staying true to the original order of the events and without rambling or deviation. Once again, Lewis's ideas sound similar to, if not identical with, active analysis.

Similarly, Thomas stated that the benefits of active analysis are threefold: First, the actor is "immediately more connected [to the scene] through events [of the scene]"; second, the actor "directly experiences the play without the director or playwright getting in the way"; and third, the actor's first experience of the scene "is a psycho-physical experience which goes through the events [of the scene]. The director understands that the actor is not a playwright and so the actual dialogue is only "gradually added." Furthermore, he said, ideally "There is a seamless transition to using the words [of the author]." After improvising the events of the scene using their own words, "actors want [the] words" of the playwright as they find that they need them to best

express the feelings-thoughts-words of the character (all quotations: Thomas, “Active Analysis”).

Lewis understood actors’ being unable to perform due to an inability to connect emotionally with the words of the playwright. But he said, “It is a mistake to wait to act until you feel. I think that you must act and feeling will come; but in the meantime you must act. (Talk, listen, execute your proper intention, etc. etc.)” (*Method* 90). Here his words are practically the same as those of Stanislavsky, especially in relation to the part played in active analysis by actively doing. Lewis was speaking about improvisation, of course; however, he used improvisation guidedly as an analytical tool to stimulate the “three motors” and the feeling-thought-word. These ideas are completely in accord with Stanislavsky’s principles of active analysis.

Lewis also understood the role of improvisation as an openly analytical tool: “I have found that if you use the mind, which includes the understanding of the whole play, the situations and the characters, and if with your will (if you are really talking and listening) you fully execute exciting intentions, then the proper emotion should be present” (95). He grasped that talking and listening actually means analysis of the play by means of active doing:

As I play my intention I connect so [strongly] with my partner that I see how my action is landing on him or her and this communion is what gives special life to my inner action. Then, as I listen, I don’t just hear what my partner says in order to get ready to slap him with my next intention but I listen, actively, with an awareness of how what I am hearing fits in with my ongoing inner line and is, indeed, a continuation of it. (*Advice* 91)

During an improvisation, the performers must be actively receptive to each other, that is, not merely waiting to say the next line, but truly listening and adjusting to what the others say and do. Listening and adjusting in real time is another outcome that induced Lewis to champion active analysis in deeds, if not in Stanislavsky’s actual words.

Another point of convergence between Lewis and Stanislavsky is the “magic if,” or “as if,” which both understood to be at the heart of this uniquely improvisational rehearsal process. Lewis stated, “If it [i.e. the emotional connection] is something even deeper that you need, something more subtle, then you also have the ‘as if’ phrase. You can say to yourself, ‘What is it like? What is the nature of this moment? What more can I understand by it since it itself doesn’t seem to generate my motor emotionally?’” (*Method* 95).

Appropriately enough, Lewis often integrated Stanislavsky’s improvisational approach into his own rehearsals. Lewis’s rationale was:

A character that you are going to play needs normal growth. How much time you have to prepare a part is not so important as the order in which you prepare it. You should not do things you are not yet ready for, such as the forcing of emotion in the early stages which does violence to your insides; or the leaping (in the beginning) at elements of characterization which often leads you to a cliché rather than to a character. (140)

Lewis described this rehearsal process in his writings. At the first rehearsal, one person read the play aloud to the actors. At the second rehearsal, the actors each read their own parts aloud. At this rehearsal, Lewis encourages the actors to begin exploring their role. At the third rehearsal, the actors read aloud again, but the director also adds brief comments important for getting at the gist of the play. During the third rehearsal Lewis felt that “the director should tell you something of the end product. In other words, he should give his production talk: what he is working towards, what his interpretation is” (145). The actors should write down the main idea of the play as well as that of their own role, while also sketching out the ways in which the other roles contribute to the main idea (145). Immediately after this, the cast should read through the play again and “see how these production ideas of the inner form and the physical style really do inspire the actors to a greater understanding of their parts” (145). This kind of reciprocal relationship between thinking and doing is a hallmark of active analysis.

The next rehearsals are more exclusively intellectual in nature because the actors have to discover and clarify all the individual actions of their characters. “This consists of digging out and putting down, on the page opposite your speeches in the script, what you actually intend to convey by the lines of the author” (147). Here the actors mark the bits of the play and title them to induce “an [emotional] attitude toward that passage and help [...] choose colorful intentions [actions] within it” (147).

Then it is back to active reading, “trying to see how much of this inner form that the director has given out remains” (147). Actors are discouraged from staging and encouraged to do as much as possible while still in their chairs, sometimes sitting or standing close to their scene partners. Lewis advised, “You are thus creating for yourself the desire to move, the need for the staging,” which is still to come (147). During these rehearsals, the use of improvisation is important as well:

You check over the sections, or intentions, of the scene carefully. Now you improvise it. You don't make it a different play. You do this scene but in your own words. The second after you finish the improvisation [...] go right back to the beginning of the scene and do it with the author's lines. The inner pattern of the sections that you have established in your head is fresh in your mind. The values of connection, relation to the partner, sense of talking and listening, etc., that you developed improvisationally should adhere to the actual scene. Maybe not all of it will, but then that's a subject for discussion after you've finished the scene. (Lewis, *Advice* 82)

The actors improvised the play in pieces without memorizing their lines, and then reviewed their improvisations to determine if they were correct in playing all of the events of the scene. New insights about the scene or its characters are seen as an opportunity for more discussion. Lewis stated, “It's quite possible that in improvisation you get a little moment like that that enriches the inner life of the dialogue and that you might never have discovered without the improvisation.

But whatever happens, it all has to be working within the form” (83). As long, that is, as the discoveries remain within the parameters of the structure of the scene in hand.

During such improvisational activities, the actors also have to actively account for the given circumstances. Lewis warned, “It’s not enough to play your action. You must create the logic of the situation not simply accept it” (85-6). Taking the given circumstances into account is absolutely necessary because only then will the actors be “dealing with a [concrete] situation based on the truth of your relationship, your characters, the circumstances, and so on, and not playing your intention abstractly” (86).

At the next stage of rehearsals, the director begins to actually stage the play:

Take the scene or a section of it and have the actors involved do the scene in the chairs so that they get that wonderful connection again which they have lost a bit through having to get their positions. Then, as soon as they have got the connection back again, I let them get up at once and do the scene in the positions. I do each scene in the same way so that the final positions come out of what the scene is about. (Lewis, *Method* 148)

Lewis also advised his actors to prepare “the desire [for the] obstacles lying just around the corner” such as props, costumes, lighting, and sound (148). The next stage of rehearsal follows the traditional pattern: running the play and polishing its external features, adding expressive design and technical values and dress rehearsals (148).

For Lewis, working improvisationally in the early stages of rehearsal ensured that the main focus remained on inner actions/intentions and that the feelings-thoughts-words were comprehensible. “Therefore, you naturally spend a larger proportion of your allotted rehearsal time—whether that be four weeks, two, or one—on the inner problems because you know you are going to accomplish the physical staging comparatively quickly” (151). Lewis’s rehearsal process was comparable, if not identical, to Stanislavsky’s method of active analysis. In both methods, the actors approach their characters using their mind, body and emotions

simultaneously. Lewis's improvisational technique and Stanislavsky's active analysis both offer actors a process through which the experiences of the playwright, actor and director can become creatively united in the performance.

Lewis knew that his improvisational method was readily applicable for realistic plays:

There is a definite realistic form that exists and I tried to point out what that form was—the successful scene-by-scene solving of the desires, wishes, intentions, whatever you want to call them, of each character in relation to the entire theme of the play. And that it was a form one could write down and keep and refer to, just as one could refer to a notation of a dance or a musical score. I said that realism had its human problems, dealing as it did with the heart, mind, and will of actors, but that that is all the more reason why we should be interested in what will hold it to a form. (164)

Nevertheless, Lewis was firm in his belief that his technique, which mirrors Stanislavsky's System and its culmination in active analysis, were also applicable to plays for which he had a special temperament and affection, namely, poetic, lyrical plays, including those of Shakespeare, musicals and especially—Lewis's favorite form—opera:

In poetic theatre there were still further and stricter questions of form to be observed. While in the realistic theatre one is concerned a great deal with what one is doing in a scene and why one is doing it, one should not be unmindful of how one expresses this "what" and "why;" and in the poetic theatre, while all should stem from what one is doing and why one is doing it, the whole business of how one expresses it takes on a much larger significance and a greater amount of controls. (164)

Lewis's method, as well as active analysis itself, addressed the issue that "style"—the what, why, and how he refers to—that can be a particular problem for actors.

Regardless of genre or style, Lewis believed "all art must have form, that theatricality must grow out of, and be built on, real substance, and that truth need not be drab or limiting if it is clothed with a sense of form and nurtured by our imagination" (165). What is really important is the actors' adaptation to that form. The actors must ask "What would I do if I were that

character in that situation (in that play, by that author, in that period, of that class, etc., etc)?" (Lewis, *Advice* 88). Like active analysis itself, Lewis's improvisational method placed the actors directly in connection with the play's events and therefore encouraged them to adapt to all the given circumstances, whether realistic or nonrealistic in nature. As artists, actors must have a "sense of the whole," a "sense of style," and a "sense of form" (Lewis, *Method* 117). The accurate expression of form was his ultimate aspiration. "The form of a performance lies in the successful scene-by-scene fulfillment of the main intention of each character in relation to the theme of the play" (117). And, "Everything in acting is creating and creative. During the whole rehearsal process the inner line is a living, changing thing. It's the sense of form that I'm talking about" (Lewis, *Advice* 83).

Ultimately, improvisational rehearsal helps actors in the search for creative truth, which was defined by Lewis as "the truth that is really experienced, but artistically controlled, and correctly used for the particular character portrayed, the complete circumstances of the scene, and the chosen style of the author and play being performed" (*Method* 99).

Lewis's improvisational method incorporated virtually all the components of the System explored in this study. But although Lewis and Stanislavsky had many areas of agreement, there may have been one significant difference. Lewis said that after encouraging the actors to improvise, he then instructed them precisely where and how to move on stage. To what extent Stanislavsky did so is unknown because he was unable to complete his final production, *The Misanthrope*, before he died.

Lee Strasberg

Strasberg may have had some knowledge of Stanislavsky's use of at least one part of active analysis: the method of physical actions. In *Lee Strasberg Notes*, he speaks about

Stanislavsky's "Theory of Physical Actions" (Cohen 150). His understanding of this tool is that the actors silently perform the actions of each scene, and if they are able to accomplish this satisfactorily, they then move on to the actual text. Strasberg concludes that the Theory of Physical Actions was a false path, however, because he thought that emotion—his personal holy grail—could not be induced through physical actions (150).

During the summer of 1931, Strasberg directed Group members in *The House of Connelly* by Paul Green. Wendy Smith, author of *Real Life Drama: The Group Theatre and America 1931-1940*, wrote of the actors' excitement about Strasberg's non-traditional rehearsal techniques (Smith 36). Phoebe Brand, one of the Group's actors, remembered, "Lee took it upon himself to give us a complete technique, from A to Z, and we worked our heads off" (37). Strasberg employed exercises that he had learned during his studies with former MAT First Studio actor Richard Boleslavsky at the American Laboratory Theatre, exercises in observation, sensory recall and improvisation. According to Strasberg, "Improvisation leads to a process of thought and response and also helps the actor to discover the logical behavior of the character, rather than 'merely illustrating' the obvious meaning of the line" (*A Dream* 91). Strasberg, like Stanislavsky, used improvisations in order to help actors discover scenic action.

Improvisation was important to Strasberg in his efforts to stress the importance of "relationship," not only among the principal characters, but also among the minor characters and extras. To make sure that each and every character's identity was specific, "Strasberg devised improvisations that stimulated them to create characters and relationships without the help of written dialogue" (Smith 37). Strasberg also led the actors to improvise scenes not actually in the play itself (Cohen 52). This would enable actors to understand how their characters would

behave in other situations besides those in the script (52). Here a connection can be found with the way in which Stanislavsky conducted rehearsals in his later years:

The words prepare the actor to carry out the activities desired by the author. Yet, as early as the Group Theatre days, by the third day of rehearsal, the actors were already encouraged to get out of their chairs, and without any attention to staging, to walk around and permit the body to begin to function expressively, even though the script was still in their hands. They were not permitted to memorize the words of the play. At the same time, the improvisation relating to the actor's and the character's feelings had already started. (Strasberg, *A Dream* 124)

The method of active analysis depended on not memorizing their lines by rote, and it seems that Strasberg may have worked in somewhat the same way, though less formally. In any case, it is clear that his actors were encouraged to improvise the script in their own words and move freely if they wished to do so.

Spontaneity is another point of agreement between the two acting teachers. Strasberg spoke of the Group's "experiments with improvisation," saying that the goal was "to permit the actor, both in the process of training and in rehearsal, to develop the necessary flow of thought and sensation which leads to the development of spontaneity on stage. This spontaneity must encompass both the prepared actions and memorized lines, and also leave room for 'the life of the moment.' This creates in both the actor and the audience the sensation of something taking place here and now" (91). Stanislavsky's active analysis, which he called "Here, today, now," acknowledges what actors are feeling at the moment, thus allowing them to individually adapt to the actions of the text (Merlin 35).

Active analysis also depends on thorough grounding in the given circumstances, which is another point of agreement between Strasberg and Stanislavsky. Strasberg made much use of the questions: who, what, when, where, why and how before his actors engaged in their

improvisations. He wrote, “Stanislavsky’s formulation is contained in the well-known questions that the actor asks: Who are you? Where are you? What are you doing here? When or under what conditions or given circumstances does this take place? And how? Meaning, which adjustments affect your behavior” (*A Dream* 160). Replied to in depth, such questions went a long way toward improving a performance beyond shallow first impressions.

Another value of improvisation for Strasberg, and a connecting point with active analysis, is its capability to increase the qualities of belief and imagination:

To believe, one must have something to believe in; to have faith, one must have something that encourages faith; to have imagination, one must be able to imagine something specific. The purpose of these acting exercises is to train the actor’s sensitivity to respond as fully and as vividly to imaginary objects on stage as he is already capable of doing to real objects in life. He will, therefore, have the belief, faith, and imagination to create on stage the ‘living through’ that is demanded of the performer. This remains my own major emphasis. (123)

And furthermore:

I have already pointed out that in life, if we believe something is true, we behave as if it were literally true. The actor’s task is to create that level of belief on stage, so that the actor is capable of experiencing the imaginary events and objects of the play with the full complement of those automatic physiological responses which accompany a real experience. (123)

The improvisational component of active analysis compels actors to actually live through events, not merely pretend.

Strasberg’s interpretation of the relationship between emotion and action is a major point of disagreement with Stanislavsky, which unfortunately inhibited Strasberg from ever coming to terms with active analysis as such. “Unfortunately,” Strasberg said, “Stanislavsky’s correct statement that emotion cannot be directly forced has led to the erroneous conclusion that it cannot, therefore, be stimulated. Stanislavsky never gave up the demand that the actor should be

capable of living through a part. However, because of the difficulties he encountered, he hoped to stimulate the actor, who has already trained to the emotional response, by means of psycho-physical actions” (151). In fact, what Stanislavsky actually taught was that emotions could not be *directly* stimulated. He taught that the mind, body, and feelings (emotions) could be stimulated *indirectly*, and active analysis was his principle means for doing so. Strasberg was either relying on incomplete information or got the wrong impression about what was available to him. The bone of contention was, of all things, improvisation. Strasberg commented, “There is, of course, no chapter on improvisation in Stanislavsky’s work; yet the etudes that he describes were improvisations, used not only in the process of training, but in the actual process of production” (106). Nonetheless, a comprehensive explanation of active analysis is described in Hapgood’s translation of Stanislavsky’s third major work on acting, *Creating a Role*, which was published in 1968 and which Strasberg would have had access to when he made these statements in 1987.

Stanislavsky developed active analysis so that an actor can “feel more rapidly ‘himself in the role and the role in himself’” (Thomas, *Stanislavsky Dictionary* 54). And the basis for active analysis is always the given circumstances of the play itself. By contrast, Strasberg’s improvisations are based on situations from the actors’ own backgrounds, (i.e. their own “given circumstances,”) which in turn are substituted as needed for the given circumstances of the play.

Strasberg wrote:

The work in the Group Theatre that created difficulties and confusion with some of the actors stemmed from my unwillingness as a director to accept the actor’s own natural behavior in that set of circumstances dictated by the play. Rather, I was intent upon searching for adjustments and conditions not necessarily related to the play, but still coming from the actor’s own experience. Only that, I felt, would create the desired result on stage (*A Dream* 86).

Strasberg was intent on the actors substituting their own backgrounds for those in the play whenever it became impractical for truthful emotions to emerge of their own accord.

Strasberg also placed conditions on Stanislavsky's fundamental philosophy of "living through of the role" (123-124). Strasberg wrote, "Of course, the degree of living through, the choice of the reality and the variety and intensity of the reality varies from play to play depending on the demands of the playwright, the director, and the actor's own needs" (123-124). Stanislavsky did not speak about a "degree" of living through a role as Strasberg did. It is unclear what Strasberg meant by this statement because everyone knew that he was absolutely steadfast in his search for actorly truth onstage. "I have already pointed out that in life," he said, "if we believe something is true, we behave as if it were literally true. The actor's task is to create that level of belief on stage, so that the actor is capable of experiencing the imaginary events and objects of the play with the full complement of those automatic physiological responses which accompany a real experience" (123). Here is cause for some uncertainty. On one hand, Strasberg said that the degree of experiencing a role varied from play to play, while on the other hand, he said that the actor must always respond as if the play was a "real experience" (123).

The most significant difference between Stanislavsky's use of active analysis and Strasberg's use of improvisation occurred in the process of analysis. Unlike Stanislavsky, Strasberg's actors did not return to reenact and improve their improvisations after analyzing them. Significantly, Robert Lewis noticed this as well. "Why doesn't Lee have scenes repeated after criticism has been given?" he once asked Clurman (Lewis, "Clurman Notes"). For Stanislavsky, and apparently for Lewis as well, such practice was a necessary step for the actors to make sure they improvised all the necessary events of the text accurately and logically. But instead of this, Strasberg only employed general criticisms of the improvisations, criticism that

was not always immediately practicable. Strasberg's use of improvisation and Stanislavsky's use of active analysis had some points of connection; nevertheless they were fundamentally different in terms of their creative and pedagogical philosophies.

Stella Adler

It is well documented that Adler studied with Stanislavsky in Paris in 1934, one year before scholars agree that Stanislavsky began working on the method of physical actions with his students at the Opera-Dramatic Studio. Because some Stanislavsky scholars feel that the method of physical actions and active analysis were one and the same, Adler probably had some knowledge of what is now known as active analysis. According to Smith, Stanislavsky told Adler:

One must never speak of feeling to the actor. [...] We must attack the psychological from the point of view of the physical life so action, not feeling...Find the action and the cliché will disappear. If you act and believe you will begin to feel. (179)

While working with Adler, Stanislavsky also taught that the through-line of action "should inform her entire performance and the various tasks she had to perform in order to create that line [of action]" (180). Because all of these ideas are in line with active analysis and given the time period in which Adler met with Stanislavsky, it is fair to assume that she had some knowledge of active analysis.

Although Adler did not speak of improvisation or anything resembling active analysis, some comparisons with Stanislavsky can still be found. Adler stressed Stanislavsky's viewpoint: theatre is action. She said that if the actors focus on their characters' actions, the proper feelings will inevitably result. Adler stated, "A character doesn't consist of how he feels but in what he does. Feeling comes from doing" (Adler, 93). Action, both physical and psychological, is of course one of the starting points for active analysis.

In active analysis, the actors must live in the given circumstances of the role; however, they must make those circumstances concrete by means of actions. Adler said, “As actors, you must give us the miracle of life, not just the [emotional] facts” (70). And given circumstances are the source of the actions:

Every action you do has its nature, its truth. In order to be truthful onstage you must know the nature of what you’re doing, and it must be truthfully done. Everything has to have its logic. It must have truth, growth (progression) and a beginning, middle, and end (sequence). A play is made intelligible to an audience through the actor’s actions, a series of separate but logically connected physical or psychological activities that breathe life into the play and create the moment-by-moment truth. (103)

Adler clearly staked out a position for herself different from that of Strasberg who emphasized emotion above all else.

Adler also spoke indirectly of the immediacy (i.e. here, today, now) as well. She wrote of Stanislavsky, “He said that where you are is what you are and how you are and what you can be. You are in a place that will feed you, that will give you strength that will give you the ability to do whatever you want” (139). She felt that actors should not deny how they are feeling on a given day. Rather, they should use those feelings in rehearsal for gaining insights into new perceptions about their characters.

Although close to Stanislavsky’s ideas about action in analysis in many respects, there are differences as well. Two possibly contrasting issues involved with active analysis can be found in her work. For example, Stanislavsky wrote about finding yourself in the role and the role in yourself, whereas Adler may have considered the importance of the actor’s personality in preference to that of the character’s. She stated, “It’s part of the approach to acting that concentrates on who you are, not who the character is [...]. It [acting] allows you to understand more than just what life provides you. This technique is about doing, not about feeling” (83). Her

emphasis may have been on the reality of the actor over that of the character, which is the opposite viewpoint of the System.

Secondly, active analysis addresses the mind, body, and feelings at the same time, whereas Adler seems to have emphasized the physical life of the character, sometimes at the expense of the emotional and psychological life: “Character is physicalization—with truth. [...]. Everything you say, everything you do defines your character. The outside is what counts most in character. Your physical self is the most interesting thing in character” (215). Perhaps this was an over-reaction to Strasberg’s well-known emphasis on emotional life. In any case, simultaneous interaction of mind, body *and* feelings is obviously the purpose of active analysis.

Sanford Meisner

One can only surmise as to the extent Meisner knew about active analysis. Meisner was a member of the Group at the time Stella returned from working with Stanislavsky in 1934 and was most likely present for Adler’s report to the Group. Meisner said after her confrontation of Strasberg regarding the Stanislavsky System that he “sided” with her and it was later they became close friends (10). Additionally, when he asked who introduced him to the Stanislavsky System, he said Clurman, Strasberg and “Stella Adler, who worked with Stanislavsky and to whom I listened to attentively and rewardingly” (10). Because Meisner and Adler were good friends, it can be supposed that she shared all the information she gleaned from Stanislavsky regarding active analysis.

Although Meisner never implied any knowledge of active analysis as such, there are some comparisons that can be made regarding the concept. The similarities between Meisner and Stanislavsky begin with their shared belief in the centrality of action. “The foundation of acting is the reality of doing,” Meisner said (16). A close comparison to active analysis is Meisner’s

Word Repetition Exercise (see Chapter Two), which led to four learning outcomes. First, he said “You’re attached to something outside of yourself”; second, “If you’re really doing it, then you don’t have time to watch yourself doing it”; third “They all seem to be very concrete, ‘do-able’ things”; and fourth “When you do something you really do it rather than pretend you are doing it” (24). The actor “did not have to play at being the character, it is right there” in the actor’s “doing it,” which is a close parallel to the etudes used in active analysis (24). Meisner’s emphasis on given circumstances is another connection with active analysis. Meisner’s definition of acting as “living truthfully under imaginary circumstances,” addresses the simultaneous mind, body, and feelings principle essential in active analysis (Silverberg, *Meisner Approach* 9).

Using active analysis, Stanislavsky led the actors to integrate their own personas into their characters. “What I am saying,” Meisner agreed, “is that the truth of ourselves is the root of our acting” (45). So that actors would experience the events of the play without searching for the author’s words, Stanislavsky conducted improvisations around the play’s events and discouraged early memorization of the text. Meisner felt similarly about early memorization, although he approached the problem of rote memorization differently. “Learn that text in as unmeaningful and yet in as a relaxed way that you can,” he taught, “so that you’ll be open to any influence that comes to you” (69). In other words, an actor should “learn words in a ‘mechanical’ [i.e. neutral, dispassionate] fashion so that there is no emotion attached to them, the emotion comes from working off your partner” (70). Paradoxically, it would seem, he felt that learning lines in this way led instinctively to the sort of spontaneity found with active analysis. Meisner stated, “At this early stage of our work, you must rely on your instinctive reaction to the playwright’s text. At this point character is justified by your inner response to what you read in the text” (97). He often said, “Don’t be an actor, be a human being who works off what exists under imaginary

circumstances. Don't give a performance. Let the performance give you" (128). Searching for an appropriate metaphor for this reciprocal process, he said, "First build a canoe and then put it on the water, and whatever the water does, the canoe follows. The text is the canoe, but you must begin by putting the emphasis on the stormy water. I can't be any clearer than that" (116). In other words, talking and listening to your partner is part of the "canoe" and spontaneity is the "stormy water."

Meisner thought character was the result of simply following the journey that the actor's partner put forward:

Well, in one way you never begin on character work. In another way, you've already begun to do characters because character comes from how you feel about something. So every time you got up and did an exercise, you were playing a character, though the word wasn't mentioned. For the most part, character is an emotional thing. The internal part of character is defined by how you feel about something (96-97).

The natural outcome of this attitude of reciprocity is the actor living within the character.

Closer to the formal process of active analysis was Meisner's way of working with actors on difficult passages. He instructs actors in improvising the dialogue using their own words, but also "making a response in your words which contains at least some of the elements in the speech." Next he directs the actors to "prepare and read the actual text" (151). Following this, the actors improvised the passage again and then re-read it again to make sure they had included everything necessary in their improvisations. "You must make a reality of that speech," he instructed; "—make it your own—by giving it real preparation derived from the end of the speech and then relating its content in your own words to your partner" (151). If Meisner had employed this process more consistently and systematically, he would have found himself instinctively making use of genuine active analysis.

Close as Meisner was to Stanislavsky in the practice of active analysis, he was nevertheless isolated from him on other points. For example, his eventual frustration with the improvisations that Strasberg used at Group rehearsals:

These were general verbalizations of what we thought was our approximation of our situation in the play. We were retelling what we remembered was the story of the play using our own words. I came to the realization that it was all intellectual nonsense. A composer doesn't write down what he thinks would be effective; he works from his heart. (36).

Meisner credited this realization for the inspiration of his word repetition game. He may have felt that talking about the basic story of the play is overly intellectual (36); nonetheless, the basic story of the play is in reality the framework on which active analysis depends. It is the basic story, the “chain of events,” arrived at through what Stanislavsky called “mental investigation,” that forms one leg of the stool from which active analysis is built; that is repeated cycles of elementary analysis (“mental investigation”), improvisation (“psycho-physical investigation”) and comparison (Thomas, *Stanislavsky Dictionary* xxviii). The sheer amount of activity involved with active analysis (table to stage, stage to table, etc.) was purposely designed to pre-empt the possibility of over-intellectualizing. Meisner, on the other hand, instructed his actors to make observations and then say them aloud from impulse. For example, Actor One: “You are wearing a green sweater.” Actor Two: “I am wearing a green sweater.” And so forth. “My approach,” Meisner said, “is based on bringing the actor back to his emotional impulses and to acting that is firmly rooted in the instinctive. It is based on the fact that all good acting comes from the heart, as it were, and that there's no mentality in it” (37). Exclusive of mental and physical aspects, Meisner's practice was nevertheless very close to, if less systematic than, what Stanislavsky was searching for with active analysis.

Summary

Lewis had a firm understanding of the fact that the Stanislavsky System was not static, and that it had evolved much over the period of its gestation. He emulated Stanislavsky's belief in such change by ensuring that his own theories of acting were adjusted over time as well. He liberally adapted the System for use with his own actors, but seemingly came to the same general conclusions as did Stanislavsky with active analysis. Although Lewis had no direct knowledge of active analysis, several similarities are clear. Lewis and Stanislavsky conducted and organized their rehearsals in the same way. First, one person reads the play aloud to the actors. Next, the actors each read their own parts aloud. Finally, the actors read aloud again, but the director also adds commentary he/she believed to be essential to the play. In the next few rehearsals the actors work to discover and clarify their intentions through the use of improvisations, while also keeping in mind the events and given circumstances of the play itself. Their actors are free to move around the stage if they were inclined to do so. Lewis also instructed his actors to improvise the play in sections, without memorizing, and then reviewed each section as it was completed in order to see if they were correct in playing all the necessary events. Events that were omitted provided valuable and practical opportunities for discussion. Both Lewis and Stanislavsky worked in this way while allowing more of the playwright's dialogue to be added in each successive cycle through the play. The major benefit of Lewis's improvisational method was comparable to Stanislavsky's. Namely, that the actors are given the opportunity to approach the play using their minds, bodies and emotions simultaneously.

Strasberg and Stanislavsky are also comparable in certain ways on this issue. Strasberg used improvisation to help the actor discover the inner life of the play. He also acknowledged the importance of being here, today, now. Strasberg helped his actors to identify the events and

given circumstances before improvisations began. His actors were encouraged to explore the basic events while searching for the play's inner life by means of their imaginations. Strasberg, however, made the assumption contra Stanislavsky that emotion could not be induced through physical action, and therefore that Stanislavsky's use of improvisation was ultimately ineffective.

Although Adler did not speak of improvisation or any practices that resembled active analysis, some comparisons with active analysis can still be made. She agreed with Stanislavsky that actors must focus on action and the appropriate feeling will result. She taught that actors should be conversant with the given circumstances and she spoke of "here, today, now." However, Adler was unclear on the extent to which actors should use their own feelings in the development of character.

Meisner's practice was near to the point of active analysis when he taught that action was the basis of character. The importance of spontaneity and the use of the actor's own persona were additional similarities. But his use of the word repetition game differed from Stanislavsky and active analysis because he relied on this exercise for the majority of teaching; he did not use anything like Stanislavsky's cyclical analyses, improvisations and comparisons.

Previous research has suggested that Robert Lewis is closest to Stanislavsky's own theories about the concept of action, imagination, bits and tasks and emotion memory when compared to the other figures of this study. Even so, Lewis's own teachings and writings are evidence that he also had the most comprehensive understanding of active analysis as well.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Eddie Burke, Lewis's professional associate, compared the acting principles of Lewis, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner to that of a "big tree and all of them were a different branch" (Burke). In the context of the heritage of actor training in America, Burke's image is very appropriate. Stanislavsky would form the roots of this "family tree" with the Group Theatre serving as its trunk. The branches would comprise the key figures of this study. After close examination of the ideas of Lewis, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner, there are many areas of similarity among each of the figures and Stanislavsky's System, not least in the perspective of the latest research. This should not be a surprise considering that all the figures shared the common experience of the Group Theatre. Moreover, Lewis, Adler and Meisner were close friends, which earned them a Group nickname, "The Weird Sisters," probably arising from the fact that they were notoriously inseparable and tended to isolate themselves from the rest of the Group's members (Burke). Compared with his friends, however, it appears that Lewis had an understanding of action, imagination, bits, tasks, emotion memory and, significantly, active analysis nearest to what we know today about Stanislavsky and the development of his System.

Lewis's long-term contribution to American Theatre was not only his comprehensive understanding of the System, but also his sensible approach to it. He saw the System as a tool to help actors create their roles. And, again significantly, he believed the System was germane to any style of theatre, whether realistic, poetic, or non-realistic. It is not surprising that Lewis held Vakhtangov in such high regard, as both were interested in nonrealistic forms of theatre and poetic staging (Ellermann, Telephone).

Lewis encouraged his actors to take creative risks beyond realism, both in his rehearsals and acting classes. Actors were challenged and inspired by his articulate talk and joyful outlook which were a welcome contrast to Clurman's verbosity and Strasberg's aloofness. Lewis could have made a place for himself in film, as many Group actors eventually did, but he felt that his true home was in the theatre as a director. Meryl Streep, Rue McClanahan, Robert Reed and Henry Winkler were among his well-known students. More than is widely known, he also closely worked with Marlon Brando, Maureen Stapleton, Karl Malden and Ann Bancroft. Lewis was "smart, strong, funny and vibrant until the very end," and by all accounts was liked and respected by virtually all his professional colleagues and others who knew him (Burke).

Having said this, it is equally important that Lewis and his ideas should be more widely known and referenced in the sphere of acting and directing. Unlike Strasberg, Adler and Meisner, Lewis did not establish a permanent theatre studio. He preferred an acting studio that traveled, teaching at universities, moving back and forth between New York and Los Angeles. Perhaps having a permanent studio might have ensured him more recognition in the world of American Theatre. Yet there is also a more thoughtful reason. Lewis made it clear to his close friends that he "did not want his work frozen in time like the other systems [of actor training]" (Burke). He felt that actor training was "a living thing," always developing and adjusting to each individual actor and play (Burke). Like Stanislavsky, Lewis felt that a system of actor training should grow and expand over time through the efforts of diligent practitioners.

Limitations and Future Research

The writer of this dissertation has attempted to be as comprehensive as possible, but there were obvious limitations to this study. All the main figures are deceased and so there were no opportunities for personal interviews. The dissertation was therefore restricted to their writings

and second-hand accounts of their rehearsals, classes and workshops. The important exception, of course, was the availability of Robert Lewis's archives at Kent State University, which has provided useful information beyond Lewis's published writings. There has been one dissertation published about Robert Lewis, entitled *The Theatre Art of Robert Lewis: An Analysis and Evaluation* by Steven C. Reynolds (see References). However, the study is biographical and is therefore similar to Lewis's own autobiography, *Slings and Arrows*, which was referred to only briefly as it did not directly serve the purpose of this dissertation. Despite these limitations, studying the published works of Lewis and the other figures has arguably provided sufficient information to draw its abovementioned conclusion. Namely, that Robert Lewis had the most comprehensive understanding of the Stanislavsky System *in its entirety*.

Much research remains to be done, of course. Lewis's production books were helpful, for example, and it would be just as helpful to know more specific information about the other key figures. For example, Robert Ellermann asked, "Where are Stella Adler's notes from her meetings with Stanislavsky? That would be the subject of a dissertation" (Ellermann, Telephone). Fortunately, we do have Lewis's record of Adler's meeting with Stanislavsky. According to Burke, "Lewis was the only one who took notes when Adler came from Paris in '34; the chart in *Method—or Madness?* was the result" (Burke). Burke emphasized that "Stella was speaking from memory—Lewis was the only one who took notes—he was the one who codified it [Stanislavsky's System]" (Burke). It was Lewis who re-created the chart that appears in Merlin's book about Stanislavsky and at the end of this dissertation. Thanks to Lewis's diligence, we have first-hand accounts of the Group and America's original working encounters with Stanislavsky and his System, thus helping to preserve essential facts of American Theatre history.

Eddie Burke and Robert Ellermann both studied with Lewis and taught at several of his traveling workshops. They also had a first-hand acquaintance with other figures in this dissertation. More of their knowledge and experience needs to be studied. Lewis reconstructed all his lectures in *Advice to the Players*; however, it would also be helpful to see even more information about Lewis and his ideas become available. A series of books like those Larry Silverberg wrote about Sanford Meisner would be an important next step. Strasberg felt that “Stanislavsky’s work, interpreted in the light of Stanislavsky’s achievement, can appear to be limited to the realistic style” (Strasberg, *A Dream* 175-176). But Lewis knew that the System was equally applicable to other styles as well, including Shakespeare, opera, and musicals. Thus, a study explaining how Lewis’s methods could be utilized in these styles would be a logical subject for research as well.

Respected director, teacher and writer Charles Marowitz said this of Robert Lewis:

Of all the original stalwarts of the Group Theatre—Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, Cheryl Crawford, Elia Kazan, Clifford Odets, etc.—The most unorthodox was the director Robert Lewis. While everyone was following the aesthetic party line—which in the thirties was the Stanislavsky System, soon to become under Lee Strasberg ‘the Method’—Lewis was experimenting with a variety of nonnaturalistic Styles, broad theatricality, and other preoccupations that did not endear him to the Group rank and file. (75)

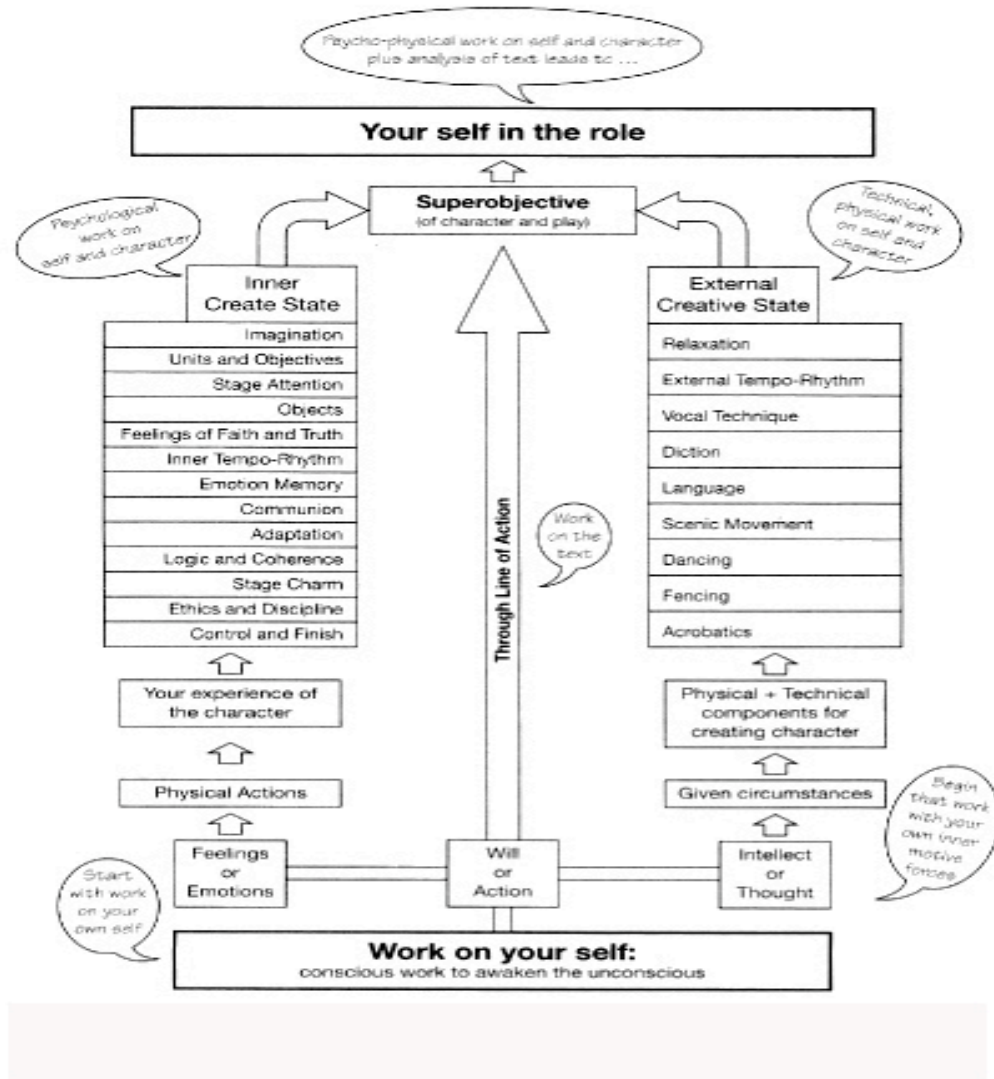
He credited Lewis with having “extended Stanislavsky’s teachings and directed some of the finest productions of the thirties, forties, and fifties” (75). Furthermore, Marowitz stated, “He is, in my opinion, the only man of the thirties who has effectively made it into the [present], the only director of that period whose aesthetic made it into the [present], the only director of that period whose aesthetic managed to keep pace with the changing times” (74-75). Marowitz was correct. Lewis had a deep understanding of the Stanislavsky System as a whole and used it

successfully working in many different styles. It is clear that Robert Lewis still has more to offer to contemporary American actor training.

APPENDIX A

An Overview of Stanislavsky's System

Below is Lewis's reproduction of Adler's chart depicting Stanislavsky's System as it appears in Merlin's *Konstantin Stanislavsky*.



Lewis, Robert. "An Overview of Stanislavsky's System." Chart. *Method—or Madness?*. New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1958. 34. Rpt. In Merlin, Bella. *Konstantin Stanislavsky*. New York: Rutledge, 2003:81. Print.

APPENDIX B

Stanislavski's Terms

The chart below illustrates the different terms Stanislavsky used in *An Actor's Work on Himself* and the Opera-Dramatic Studio as well as the terms Hapgood employed in their translations of Stanislavsky's publications.

Analysis	"An Actor's Work on Himself"	Opera-Dramatic Studio	Hapgood
Decide provisionally what the play is about	Supertask	Supertask	Superobjective
Break the play down into its major component parts	Major Bits	Episodes/ Events	Units
Decide what each actor has to do in each of the major component parts, what does he want or need	(Basic) Task	Basic Action	Objectives
Break down the major component parts into medium and minor parts	Medium-size and minor Bits	Facts/Events	Units
Decide what each actor has to do in each of the medium and minor parts, what does he want or need	Task	Task	Objective
Decide on what he does to fulfil that need	Actions	Actions	Actions
Check whether the sequence of needs and actions is logical and coherent and relates to the subject of the play	Through-action	Through-action	Through-line of action

Benedetti, Jean. "Stanislavski's Terms." Chart. *Stanislavski: An Introduction* New York:

Routledge, 2000: 110. Print.

APPENDIX C

Comparison of Terms

Below is a chart that will help the reader to understand and compare the terms used for particular concept by each figure discussed in this dissertation.

Stanislavsky	Lewis	Strasberg	Adler	Meisner
Action	Intention *Seen In Dissertation as Action/Intention	Action	Action	N/A
Bit	Beat *Seen in Dissertation as Bit/Beat	N/A	N/A	N/A
Task	Problem *Seen in Dissertation as Task/Problem	Problem	N/A	N/A
Emotion Memory	Emotion/Affective/Emotional Memory *Seen in Dissertation as Emotion Memory	Emotion Memory	Emotion Memory	Emotion Memory

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ABSTRACT**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ROBERT LEWIS, LESS STRASBERG, STELLA ADLER AND SANFORD MEISNER IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT RESEARCH ABOUT THE STANISLAVSKY SYSTEM**

by

RUTHEL HONEY DARVAS

August 2010

Advisor: Dr. James Thomas**Major:** Theatre (Directing)**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

Decades of interpretation based on incorrect and incomplete information regarding Stanislavsky and his System have erroneously guided the advent of modern acting theory in the United States. This study, using current research about the Stanislavsky System, examines four notable acting teachers—Robert Lewis, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and Sanford Meisner—to determine whose philosophy most accurately reflects the Stanislavsky System as it is now understood. The concepts of action, imagination, bits, tasks, emotion memory and active analysis are each explored independently. Each concept is examined as it relates to the System and then compared to the concepts as interpreted and put into practice by Lewis, Strasberg, Adler and Meisner. This study suggests that it is Lewis who had the most comprehensive understanding of the System and was closest in practice to Stanislavsky.

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Ruthel Honey Ellen Darvas earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Theatre Arts with an emphasis in Performance from the University of Texas at Arlington in 1995. After this, she attended Texas Woman's University where she earned her Master of Arts in Drama with an emphasis in Performance in 1999. In the summer of 1999, she participated in the Globe Summer School Program through Washington University in Saint Louis where she received acting and directing training at the Globe Theatre in London, England.

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