A black and white close-up photograph of Lee Strasberg. He is an elderly man with a mustache, wearing round-rimmed glasses and a dark suit jacket. His right hand is resting against his chin, with his fingers partially hidden in his pocket. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

THE
LEE
STRASBERG
NOTES

EDITED BY LOLA COHEN

THE LEE STRASBERG NOTES

What can Lee Strasberg teach the modern actor? *The Lee Strasberg Notes* reproduces the original teachings of a unique voice in actor training for the very first time, presenting an enlightening approach to today's practitioners.

Compiled and edited by Lola Cohen, an acting teacher at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute and one his former pupils, the book is based on unpublished transcripts of his own classes on acting, directing and Shakespeare, re-creating his theoretical approach, as well as the practical exercises used by his students.

The book features Strasberg's teachings on:

- Training and exercises
- Characters and scenes
- Directing and the Method
- Shakespeare and Stanislavski
- The theater, acting and actors.

Including a Preface by Anna Strasberg and a Foreword by Martin Sheen, this illuminating book brings the reader closer to Strasberg's own methods than any other, making it a phenomenal resource for students, actors, and directors.

Lola Cohen has taught acting for over twenty three years at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute and for the last eleven years as adjunct professor for NYU's Tisch School of the Arts Acting Program. She has directed productions of plays with student and professional actors including *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Woodstock Youth Theater, Jean Genet's *The Maids* at the Strasberg Institute and Lewis John Carlino's *Snowangel* while 2009 Artist-in-Residence at SUNY-Ulster.

THE LEE STRASBERG NOTES

*Edited by
Lola Cohen*



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The Method is an amalgam of the work of Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold, and the Group Theater. Observing and analyzing their work is essential in forming a practical comprehension of the theoretical approach of our work, the training, and its use in diverse forms of production. People would be mistaken if they looked to any of these sources as independently embodying the Method. For example, Vakhtangov believed the audience should be made aware that they were in the theater. In the Group Theater, we believed that the audience can forget where they are and be transported to the imaginary place of the play, a place that doesn't have to be purely realistic. It has to be a place spiritually, physically, and emotionally on a deeper, higher more intense level of reality where emotions are revived for the purpose of art.

What developed into the Method at the Group Theater has been kept alive at the Strasberg Institute where we have retained the basic discoveries of Stanislavski as I understand them and to which I have contributed additional elements. Our purpose is to create a permanent place where this work would be systematically taught, fostered and interpreted in order to create the foundation for the training of actors and directors. Today, our work is shared with actors all over the world, not just with student actors but with professional actors and directors which is essentially for whom the work is intended.

Lee Strasberg

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PREFACE BY ANNA STRASBERG

This is a work very close to my heart. When our sons, Adam and David, were young, I took them to school in the mornings, so I was unable to get to Lee's class on time. Before leaving, I would say to him, 'I don't want to miss anything. Wait for me.' Of course, he started the class on time.

I needed to think of a way that I wouldn't miss even a moment. I had a microphone set up in the audio booth and a video camera hidden in the back of the room, so Lee wouldn't see it. But he soon realized that the classes were being taped. He laughed and went on with the class, allowing the taping to continue. That is how the tapes of Lee's classes came into being.

Lola Cohen was a dedicated member of these classes. Her training with Lee, her in-depth study of the tapes, and her 23 years of devoted teaching at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute have enabled her to create this valuable guide for anyone seeking an authentic understanding of Lee's work. We admire the heartfelt dedication and labor of love that Lola put into writing this book.

The Lee Strasberg Notes brings to life Lee's wisdom and passion as a teacher and a human being. It presents his life's work, not as a set of rules, but rather as a way to approach the craft of acting and all the other elements of the actor's work. Lee speaks directly to the reader about his technique and exercises, theater history, analysis, and anecdotes, as brilliantly as he spoke to his classes. He continues to astound us with his insights into key figures and artistic movements from Shakespeare to Keats, Kean to Duse, and from the Commedia dell'arte to the Moscow Art Theater, all of which have inspired playwrights, directors and actors, both past and present.

Lee didn't teach us how to act, but rather how to live on the stage or in front of the camera in the imaginary reality of the play. He believed strongly in trusting the playwright's words. In this

PREFACE

wonderful book, his timeless words retain the eloquence, impact, and even the physicality of his voice in rhythm and tone.

Lee's many observations are legendary and continue to resonate, providing insights into his thinking and helping to guide our craft. 'I don't give you talent; I demand it from you.' 'Craft gives you discipline and freedom.' 'Art is in the choice; the choice is that which conditions art.' But perhaps the most relevant reflection for this book occurred when an actress of a certain age asked him if it was too late to learn a new way to work, and he gently answered, 'Madame, art is longer than life.'

In rare revelatory moments, quietly listening to music, Lee reminisced about the people close to him and America, the country which allowed him to live his dreams: his parents, especially his adored mother, Ida, his younger brother, Zalman, whom he lost in the 1918 flu epidemic in New York, and the colleagues and friends who were a part of his creative life in the theater. Lee kept the guiding spirit of these people within, and they had a profound influence on his life.

If there were a dedication to this book from Lee, he would want it to be to those who were part of his life and his life's work.

Anna Strasberg
New York City
July, 2009

NOTE FROM ADAM STRASBERG

When I started film school, I remember feeling completely out of my element. I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my life. Here I was surrounded by all these bright, creative and talented people. What's more they all knew things like what an F-stop was or how to compose a shot, or how to format a screenplay. I knew none of that and felt completely lost and overwhelmed.

I wondered if I belonged there until the day we started working with actors. It was so easy to talk to them, to get them to give me what I needed in a particular scene; we spoke the same language as it were. This fact wouldn't have been so remarkable in itself except that I noticed other film students seemed so uncomfortable and so unable to communicate with their actors.

My father's death when I was only 12 years heralded the beginning of my passage from youth into adulthood. But working with actors in that moment, I realized just how much of his teachings and wisdom had been passed down to me, without my being aware of it – both directly sitting in his lap as he finished his class and indirectly as my mother kept his legacy alive after his death through stories that bordered on parables.

More important than what my father knew and understood, he had the ability to communicate that wisdom, so that even a distracted 7 year old could absorb it. That wisdom and style imparted to me through my childhood is preserved here for you in *The Lee Strasberg Notes*.

Adam Strasberg
Washington D.C.
June 2009

NOTE FROM DAVID LEE STRASBERG

In 2003 I was casting a play about the members of the Group Theater caught in the maelstrom of the Hollywood Blacklist of the 1950s. As part of that process, I was searching for an actor to play the part of my father, Lee Strasberg. As each audition ended, the entire production team, including the director, would turn to look at me and get my reaction before they commented. After this ritual repeated several times, I finally told them, “Don’t look at me – if I cast the Lee Strasberg that I know, none of you would recognize him.” Because the Lee Strasberg that I knew was quiet, he was a reader, a thinker, a father, and a great fan of baseball.

He was also, of course, an impassioned master teacher, yet the fire and conviction he displayed amongst his actors bore little resemblance to the unassuming, humorous man who taught me to throw a baseball. Still both parts are equally valid and equally necessary to properly grasp and use the work he taught.

In reading *The Lee Strasberg Notes*, you must apply all parts of your own humanity, just as my father did in teaching it. To absorb his particular meaning, you must use your logic to understand his directions and allow yourself to be inspired to creativity.

The Lee Strasberg Notes is about training the skills that can make a person powerful. The techniques help you become more self-aware and at the same time less self-conscious. You become more grounded in the present and gain the full benefit of being a human being who is able to soar into the realm of imagination.

I hope this knowledge brings you closer to using all your talents to achieve the dreams that are uniquely and inalienably yours.

David Lee Strasberg
Los Angeles
June 2009

FOREWORD BY MARTIN SHEEN

When I was growing up in Ohio during the 1950s I wanted to be an actor more than anything else in the world, and there was no other actor in the world I admired more or wanted to be more like than James Dean.

Almost from the moment of his untimely death from a car accident in 1955 at age 24 Dean became a cultural icon, a status not diminished since. On the contrary, it is further secured with each new generation's rediscovery of his incredible acting genius. In fact, I dare say there are few actors in the past 60 years who have not been influenced in some way or inspired by James Dean, including the two acting icons of my generation, Robert DeNiro and Al Pacino.

While the origins of extraordinary natural talent in any field remain a mystery, with Dean's early demise we are left in endless wonder. Perhaps the single most important contribution James Dean made was to transcend acting to a deeply personal behavior, and he did it so effortlessly as to make it appear as though anyone could do it including me – so when I discovered that Dean studied with Lee Strasberg I resolved to follow his path when I began my own career in 1959.

Lee Strasberg was the artistic director of the Actors Studio, which did not charge any fee for membership. But in order to gain admittance, an actor had to pass a difficult audition process which, as I recall, consisted of performing two five-minute scenes (one from a modern play and one from a classic) with the same acting partner. For my first audition I chose a scene from *The Zoo Story* and one from *Henry IV Part I*, and though I felt both had gone well, unfortunately, I was not accepted. Since there was very limited space only a handful of actors were admitted each year, but every actor was entitled to another audition every six months. I returned again the

FOREWORD BY MARTIN SHEEN

following year for another try with the same result. At still another audition my acting partner was chosen instead of me. Yet, I was not deterred. Of course, there were many very good acting schools and classes with an equal number of wonderful acting teachers all over New York, but there was only one Lee Strasberg. Alas though, it was not to be. I would have applied to study with Lee in his private classes but I couldn't afford the fee, and I was too proud to ask for a scholarship, so I never had the privilege of studying with him. However, I did have the extremely rare privilege of working with him as a fellow actor!

The venue was a nearly forgotten movie, *The Cassandra Crossing*, filmed in Rome in 1976, a few years after Lee and Anna had co-founded the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute. The movie had an unforgettable cast including Sophia Loren, Richard Harris, Ava Gardner and Burt Lancaster. It was during this production that I came to know Lee, Anna, their young sons Adam and David, and we have remained close ever since.

At the Institute, in the wisdom of his later years, Lee further clarified and illuminated his work, and thus it represents the distilled essence of his teaching.

The spirit of Lee's work lives on in the Institute today, nurtured by Anna's vision and dedication, and it remains the authentic source for training in his technique.

Now we come to the work at hand and thanks in large measure to Lola Cohen's personal insight and judgment, *The Lee Strasberg Notes*, based on Lee's work during these later years at the Institute, is a powerful revelation and a gentle reminder of just why Lee was so highly revered by so many for so long. Far more than a manual for acting teachers, actors, and directors, this work is a personal memoir as well, which reveals Lee Strasberg the man and his work in his own words.

Every serious actor, director and teacher will be enthralled and inspired by the book's content, and I predict it will become required reading for future generations, and this above all: no one would be more pleased than Lee himself.

Martin Sheen
Malibu, California
July, 2009

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Thank you Anna Strasberg for championing this book and for having the foresight, stamina and will to carry on Lee's work at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute in New York, Los Angeles and around the world. Your continuing commitment has made the Institute an international destination for actors who want to come into the theater. You cooperated on the project by providing your insights, knowledge, photographs, and other material from the Institute's archives which you have so lovingly created and maintained. I am grateful for your confidence and trust.

Thanks to Lee's sons, Adam Strasberg and David Lee Strasberg, for their encouragement and support. Over the years you both have made your love and respect for your father's work wonderfully clear.

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To the dedicated senior teachers who have taught at the Institute since Lee Strasberg's time and keep his legacy alive, including: Geoffrey Horne, for his commentary on portions of the material which were invaluable; Irma Sandrey, Hope Arthur, Hedi Sontag and Mark Marno whose devotion to Lee's work is legendary, Amnon Meskin, whose father founded the Habima Theater and was friends with Lee; Institute historian Robert Ellermann for his introduction to my wonderful publisher, Talia Rodgers at Routledge and his contribution to the reading list included in the book; and all the other vibrant, passionate teachers who bring the work to life for the actors who come to study it. Additionally, I thank my later acting teachers Kim Stanley and Jose Quintero for their insights and inspiration; and to Martin Sheen, whose understanding and respect for Lee's work is evident in his fascinating Foreword to this book, and whom Lee greatly admired.

Thank you Susan Brown, PhD and James Joyce scholar, my brilliant and talented editorial consultant, who did such a fine job in helping me prepare the manuscript.

Former Institute archivist Aylam Orian for his efforts in organizing Lee's vast collection of archival material.

Much love and a very special thanks to my family who assisted me in countless ways and who were patient with me during my intense periods of work, my children Cody and Lily Brown and step children John and Nicholas Rudikoff, my parents Rose and Jack Cohen, my brother Fred Cohen and his wife, Jan.

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For his treasured teachings, most of all, many thanks to Lee Strasberg who said, ‘Your tribute to me is in your work.’ This book is my tribute to you.

Lola Cohen
Woodstock, New York
July, 2009

INTRODUCTION

BY LOLA COHEN

Building on the System of the great Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg created an approach to training actors that encouraged them to “understand the nature of their own instrument.” An astute observer of human behavior, he translated his ideas into a concrete discipline (although not written in stone) known as the Method to help actors realize their potential. This work and the revolutionary sequencing of the relaxation, sensory, and emotional exercises injected a new realism and aliveness into the craft of acting by fusing the actor’s own personal experience with a character’s psychological inner life.

Although he worked as a director and an actor, Lee Strasberg was first and foremost a teacher. Fascinated by the creative process and the nature of expression, and driven by his unquenchable passion for excellence in acting, Lee continued to refine and expand his work during fifty years of teaching. At the famed Actors Studio his approach to acting matured, his theories of artistic expression evolved and Lee Strasberg emerged as the teacher of the Method.

At the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute founded in 1969, Lee further refined the exercises and acting practices at the heart of his work with increasingly rigorous attention to relaxation and evolving clarity about emotional memory. The selections in this book were culled from transcriptions of hundreds of hours of classes and seminars videotaped at the New York and Los Angeles Strasberg Institutes and represent Lee’s teaching techniques during the last seven years of his life. For students of the theater, *The Lee Strasberg Notes* represents the final stages in the development of this controversial approach described in the 1965 book *Strasberg at the Actors Studio* edited by Robert H. Hethmon and later in Lee Strasberg’s, *A Dream of Passion* published in 1987.

As Lee’s student in the last five years of his life and a teacher of

INTRODUCTION

his work at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute from 1986 to the present, my initial purpose in transcribing the videotapes was to mine this treasure trove of acting and directing insights to develop material for the permanent use of the Institute in bringing the work into current practice. Lee was concerned that his and Stanislavski's work would be lost and not available to future generations of actors. As he often commented, theater performances are less permanently preserved than the other arts such as painting, music, or cinema.

Having observed students and recognizing their difficulties in absorbing and applying the work, I came to understand that actual transcriptions of Lee's classes would represent a valuable way to fulfill this mission. I also realized that, because the transcriptions represent application – not the polished explanations presented by him in a lecture or in his books – they have an appeal beyond use at the Institute. Passionate, articulate, and embodying an encyclopedic knowledge of theater, Lee Strasberg strove to raise the standards of the craft for actors, and, with these direct transcriptions of his actual classes, actors throughout the world and in future generations can also experience and confront actual demonstrations of his work. Among the material previously unavailable, is a compilation of his work in the Director's Unit where he offers knowledge of the great productions and of effective stagecraft.

With relevant transcriptions from these taped sessions – access to which was graciously provided by Anna Strasberg, Adam Strasberg, and David Strasberg – I seek to honor Lee Strasberg's goals, and preserve his critical contribution to American theater practice. By selecting the clearest and most representative transcriptions of Lee's commentary to actors and directors, my hope is to present Lee Strasberg live, allowing readers to reach a new understanding of his work and even be able to imagine that Lee is speaking directly to them.

In editing, compiling and organizing the material in the book, I was guided by three principles. To reflect the natural divisions still observed in the Institute's four-hour classes – two hours of students working on relaxation and sense memory exercises and then two hours of character and scenes – I have presented selections from the videotapes that treat, in order, the concerns routinely addressed in the classes. In addition, because I was confronted with repetition in hundreds of hours of taped classes, I observed a second goal, to blend the versions of Lee's acting insights and instruction that represent the most accurate and accessible statements of his ideas. He did not present to his classes a comprehensive or sequential

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dissertation defining the Method. As the videotapes illustrate, his students learned by practicing the exercises and performing scenes. The transcriptions in this book are drawn from Lee's comments as he advised and critiqued the students during these two segments of a typical session. A third guiding principle concerns capturing his personality as a teacher, an element I believe is critical to the book's usability and effectiveness. Therefore, I have sought to retain his conversational and free associative style and the rapidity of points made in his commentary to his students. My goal was to maintain the dramatic quality, clarity, emotion, assuredness, and, as much as possible, the formidable flavor of the Lee Strasberg voice.

In his classes, Lee questioned students, critiqued their work, and encouraged them to explore and go further than they believed themselves capable. For example, as these transcriptions reveal, he understood that the ability to relax and concentrate at will is fundamental to the actor's training and is essential for the sense memory exercises and scene work. Lee checked students' relaxation and commented on their progress, giving solutions and suggestions. He used the word "problem" to describe obstacles or blocks that impede the actor's physical or emotional expression. Lee would then expand these comments to all of the students present in the class, emphasizing the universality of the problems. His expectation of seriousness, discipline and passion in the students was manifest in his energetic urgings, praise, and exhortations in which he used humor, wit, and sometimes biting commentary. Some students took his comments personally, although that was not his intent. Throughout his teaching process – guiding the exercises, the work on the self, and the work on character and scene in service of a play – logical, truthful, and believable dramatic behavior was made possible on stage, and it further enabled actors to achieve those values and results in performance after performance.

As an accomplished scholar of the theater, Lee Strasberg's commentary during class also includes references to the actors and directors he considered "great," and who made lasting contributions to acting and theater art. Thus references to the performances of these early figures, including Edmund Kean, Tommaso Salvini, and Eleanora Duse, appear in his commentaries. Lee's seminars often included the playing of rare films or recordings of historic performances, both good and bad, which he used as examples. After he and a class had listened to a recording of John Barrymore, for example, Lee would be highly energized by the material, and carry that passion into his class, waxing poetic about what had just

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been heard and what it meant for the students as an example of what they should or shouldn't attempt in their own work. Acting students, usually totally unaware of these early actors, were encouraged by him to pursue researching them to broaden and deepen their understanding of the craft of acting and the development of his work. Occasionally referred to by Lee in the transcriptions is the designer and aesthetician Edward Gordon Craig and his book, *On the Art of the Theater*. He credits Craig's work, which revolutionized stage design and modern dramatic theory, as having motivated him to pursue a career in the theater.

Along with Craig, modern psychology was the catalyst for Lee Strasberg's seminal work evaluating acting technique, comparing external, internal, and emotional motivation and the development of procedures to aid the actor leading to the development of the Method. In addition to being aware of Freud's work with the unconscious, Lee drew from the scientific results and analytical work of Nobel Prize-winning Russian physician and groundbreaking behaviorist, Ivan Pavlov. Pavlov's theories on conditioned responses in animals and humans contributed to the recognition of the damaging or self-limiting role habitual behavior can have on expressiveness in acting. Lee's development of procedures and exercises for actors to free themselves from the problem of habitual responses is based in part on Pavlov's studies. By siding with the modern psychologists, he was reacting to Denis Diderot, author of *The Paradox of Acting*, who postulated that great acting is the ability to laugh or cry at will, but if an actor can't do that, he or she must use an external technique.

The problems inherent in the subsequent organization and editing of the transcribed material included how to blend Lee Strasberg's various discourses covered in a class. More pressing was reconciling the "voice" of the written words in *The Lee Strasberg Notes* with the passion and style of his spoken words. The editing necessitated selecting and placing together the phrases that would most effectively make his point and preserve his manner of speech. In creating a condensed, cohesive, and organized whole, it was necessary to use the punctuation which Lee's oral presentation lacked. The tapes are notable for their demonstration of his stream of consciousness style where he utilized connective phrases such as "and so on" or "therefore" to create a continuous dialogue of thoughts, references, and anecdotes which would eventually loop back and connect to an earlier or original take-off point. Thus, in my attempt to remain faithful to the beauty and poetry of Lee's style, the task of inserting

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periods and other punctuation was more than a technical and grammatical exercise. Further compounding these difficulties is that some of what he says may not make sense because he often used physical gestures and facial expressions to make a point. When necessary, I have clarified and accounted for this factor.

Lee Strasberg's journey toward his life in the theater began in his twenties, when, to feed his cultural and creative interests, he joined Students of Art and Drama, an amateur club that met at the Chrystie Street Settlement House in the early 1920s. It was here he met his first wife, Nora Kreacun, who was also a member. They met in 1925, married in 1928, and she died in 1929.

In 1923, Lee's imagination was fueled by the arrival of the Moscow Art Theater and actor/director Konstantin Stanislavski. During the two seasons the Moscow Art Theater appeared on Broadway, he saw most of their productions, including Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Three Sisters*, Gorki's *The Lower Depths*, and Dostoyevski's *The Brother's Karamazov*. At that same time Italy's great tragedienne, Eleanora Duse, performing in Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *Lady from the Sea*, also made a profound impression on Lee. He saw John Barrymore "leap across the stage" in *Hamlet* and also witnessed the thrilling Russian opera singer Feodor Chaliapin sing *Boris Godunov*; Chaliapin's naturalistic performance is credited with fundamentally altering acting in opera. He began to dream of a life in the theater, while also devouring and collecting books and listening to classical music and opera, passions that lasted throughout his lifetime.

Lee first enrolled in the Clare Tree Major School of the Theater, a conventional acting school, where in addition to acting classes he studied ballet, voice, and Shakespeare. He became dissatisfied with the school, however, and joined the American Laboratory Theater in Greenwich Village, founded by Richard Boleslavsky, whom he had seen perform, and Maria Ouspenskaya, both of whom remained in New York to teach after the Moscow Art Theater ended its run. The two actors had worked closely with Stanislavski and his pupil Eugene Vakhtangov. It was here that Lee Strasberg learned the Stanislavski System, which was to become the guiding force in the development of his work.

As Lee Strasberg wholeheartedly carried on the work of Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, and Meyerhold, he began applying and testing their techniques and theatrical styles on productions he directed at Students of Art and Drama. These included Anatole France's *I Married a Dumb Wife*, J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, Racine's

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Esther and Andreyev's *Anathema*. In 1925, Lee made his professional acting debut at the Garrick Theater in the Theater Guild's *Processional* and was also assistant stage manager for the Guild's production of *The Guardsman* starring Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontanne. In addition, he acted in Guild productions of *Goat Song* and *Green Grow the Lilacs*. It was at this time that he met Harold Clurman, who was a play reader at the Guild, and Cheryl Crawford.

In 1931, in the midst of the Great Depression, Lee Strasberg, along with Clurman and Crawford co-founded the Group Theater, an ensemble of actors, writers, and directors who through a progressive political perspective created an original American theater utilizing and developing the acting techniques of Stanislavski. For seven years, Lee worked with actors, experimented with style, and directed original plays, many of which mirrored the social and political controversies of the Depression Era. Among the plays directed by him were Paul Green's *The House of Connelly* (co-directed with Cheryl Crawford), Sidney Kingsley's *Men in White* (which won a Pulitzer Prize), and Kurt Weill and Paul Green's anti-war musical, *Johnny Johnson*.

Lee left the Group Theater in 1937, and the next ten years – before the start of the Actors Studio – were challenging. He was teaching at the American Theater Wing and the New School, conducting private classes, directing in New York, working in Hollywood, and supporting a young family. On Broadway, he directed Hemingway's *The Fifth Column*, and in 1941, Clifford Odets' *Clash by Night* starring Tallulah Bankhead. He moved to Los Angeles with his wife, Paula Miller Strasberg (1909–1966), a Group Theater actress, and their children, Susan (1938–1999) and John, and there he directed screen tests at Twentieth Century Fox for Daryl Zanuck and made short films about soldiers coming back from the war. Some of the soldiers attended his acting classes.

There, he absorbed everything he could about film making such as camera angles, cutting, and lighting. After a short stint he and his family returned to New York, and he directed plays on Broadway, including *Skipper Next to God* and *The Big Knife*, both starring John Garfield.

In 1948, Lee was asked to join the famed Actors Studio founded by Elia Kazan, Cheryl Crawford, and Robert Lewis, and, in 1951 he became the Studio's Artistic Director and President, a position he held for thirty-one years. It was here that Lee refined his work as he moderated the sessions in which he critiqued scenes presented

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by the members of the Actors Studio, supervised many of its productions, and was involved with the Studio's Directors and Playwrights Units.

At the Actors Studio, Lee Strasberg participated in the launching of a generation of post World War II actors whose impact on the craft of acting in the fifties changed the face of American theater and film. In the '60s and '70s, many of the young actors Lee worked with at the Actors Studio and in his private classes at Carnegie Hall rose to prominence, proving through their work, that his techniques could apply to film and television as well as theater. During this period Lee divided his teaching between New York City and Los Angeles, married Anna Mizrahi Strasberg, and fathered and raised two sons, Adam and David Lee.

Lee Strasberg's contributions went beyond his work as a teacher and director. He published articles in newspapers, magazines and books, and his article, "Acting, Directing and Production," appeared in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. He was also influential in European theater. Lee conducted an International Seminar on Acting at the Spoleto Festival of Two Worlds in 1962, represented the American Theater at the Stanislavski Centennial held in Moscow in 1963, and lectured on the Stanislavski System of acting in Paris in 1967. Moreover, he held seminars in Argentina and Germany, and lectured at Harvard, Brown and Brandeis Universities, UCLA, and the University of Wisconsin.

Beginning in the 1970s, Lee Strasberg also maintained an acting career in film. Most notable, in 1974, his role as Hyman Roth in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather II* earned him an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor. He went on to highly regarded characterizations in which he applied and tested his work in *The Cassandra Crossing* in 1976, ...*And Justice for All*, *Boardwalk*, and *Going in Style* all in 1979, and he appeared in two made for TV movies, *The Last Tenant* in 1978 and *Skokie* in 1981.

This book, however, seeks to preserve Lee Strasberg's premier legacy, as a teacher who developed a revolutionary approach to acting. The organization of the book recreates the four-hour sequence of an acting class that is preserved today at the Institute: Part 1 (Training and exercises), Part 2 (Characters and scenes) and Part 3 (Scene critiques). Part 4 (Directing and the Method) offers material never publicly presented before which provides directors and directing students with insights about the relationship of the Method to directing and dealing with actors. Part 5 presents Lee Strasberg on Shakespeare and Stanislavski, who are

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discussed separately because of the importance Lee placed on their contribution and impact. Part 6 contains fascinating references and vignettes about aspects of acting and individual figures in the theater, film, and art world that Lee used to illustrate points about acting, directing, or some other aspect of the theater.

It has been twenty-two years since Lee Strasberg's book, *A Dream of Passion*, was published in 1987, five years after his death, and his legacy continues to grow throughout the world. Lee's contribution lives on to inspire future generations of those compelled to act, and his work endures as a creative discipline in which actors discover themselves and build their craft at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute. It's my intention in taking Lee's work and molding it into this book, *The Lee Strasberg Notes*, that a larger and broader audience of actors, directors, and theater students will understand his work and decide from an informed point of view the degree to which it can help them grow as actors and directors.

Lola Cohen
Woodstock, New York
July, 2009

Part 1

TRAINING AND EXERCISES

Editor's note: This section records Lee Strasberg's own words as he oversaw the exercises for the Actor's Unit, the first two hours of the traditional four-hour session. The exercises include relaxation, sense memory, emotional memory, the private moment, the animal exercise, song and dance, and voice exercises. In the Actor's Unit, Lee emphasizes relaxation and concentration as the backbone of the work. He talks to the students about eliminating tension, the role of habits that confine expression, and how to relax in the chair. To help actors take control, he describes the use of sound in eliminating emotional tension, and discusses the "abstract or additional movement," which tests the actor's ability to follow their own commands and break habits. As will be clear from the transcriptions, Lee's ability to focus on and communicate with individuals, discern and analyze their acting problems, and use of the exercises illustrate the depth of his understanding of how to develop craft in acting. Also clear from the classes is one of Lee's deepest beliefs, "that actors must make a commitment to train themselves and continue to work on their craft throughout their careers"; the importance of taking classes and continuing to work with a teacher as a guide is a point he stressed to all of his students.

Lee Strasberg on training

The human being has an extraordinary capacity and can be trained. While the other arts use different materials for expression like words, notes, paint, and train the voice, the speech, and the body, the actor himself is the instrument of expression which calls for special care like a rare Stradivarius. In our work, we develop the actor's concentration and power of observation. We train the imagination, senses and emotions, helping the actor to expand

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the ability to conceive more than the ordinary. Our training nurtures creativity, which is the highest material that can be used for art.

Talent alone isn't enough. What makes for greatness in the actor? Greatness needs that extra effort, which is commitment. When someone with a nice voice who's been singing a while suddenly becomes great, what's happened? The voice hasn't changed that much. It's that the singer commits fully and completely. Otherwise there's a half-hold on the voice, like a batter that swings, but not in a committed way, resulting in the ball not going where he wants. When Babe Ruth swung, he pointed to where he wanted the ball to go, and it went to that spot. He had that sense of commitment and courage, of not being afraid to be wrong. The Babe had played enough to know that sometime or another he'll connect. Actors also need a strong will to connect. That can only be done with continuity, commitment, and courage.

As in most fields of artistic endeavor, however, the fundamentals of the actor's craft must be practiced daily or else you go backwards. The violinist has to continue practicing after becoming a major violinist. If he stops practicing, he loses his skill. This applies to the other arts as well. When a writer writes a novel and then begins to take it easy, the seeds of his creation dry up. Pablo Casals, the cellist and great instrumentalist of all time, kept practicing until his last year at 93. People asked him why he still practiced. He said, "To get better." He was right. If he didn't practice, his skills would not stay at the same level; he'd get worse. Actors must make a commitment to train daily and to work on their craft throughout their careers.

Most actors forget to do the training work and remember only the scene work. Some become stars before they achieve technical maturity. They assume that the training work has already been done and will always be there by itself, but when actors stop working on their craft, they imitate what already has been done, and, after three months, they become stale. After Stanislavski had a heart attack and couldn't work or act anymore, he continued to do fifteen or twenty minutes of exercises a day, and, after fifty-odd years or more in the theater, I still do exercises for fifteen minutes every day.

To heighten yourself as an actor, you also need to know as much as possible about the theater and its history. Learn what came before you. As an essential part of your training, study the great actors of the past, and investigate material that exists – plays,

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novels, and short stories. Read Stanislavski, Edward Gordon Craig, Henry Irving, Denis Diderot, and William Gillette's *The Illusion of the First Time for the Actor*. Study the great critics like Stark Young and H. T. Parker. When Harold Clurman was once accused of being an imitator of Stanislavski, he replied, "What's wrong with that?" As an actor, you steal. The script is only an outline, so read novels for insights into the inner life of characters. Pick new, fresh material, not what other people do, and look for parts where you can steal the scene. There's interesting material in foreign plays that aren't being done here in America.

Because they'll have to work in units on stage, I believe actors on all levels should train in groups or units together, with the teacher setting the sequence of exercises, taking full responsibility for instructing the actor when to go further, and evaluating if the exercise is properly done. Even though in the theater you may work with people with no or little experience, you must be able to maintain a standard of excellence for yourself. Training in a group gives you an opportunity to practice this.

Training, of course, is not a substitute for talent. Enrique Caruso was told not to waste his time, which shows us that we can't always identify talent. The talent of the actor lies in their degree of sensitivity. For a human being, too much sensitivity is very difficult to live with. For an actor, there is no such thing as too much sensitivity. The deeper the sensitivity, the greater the possibility for expression. However, when feelings aren't expressed and you can't access and control them, your sensitivity runs counter to the craft of acting.

The ability to use your talent also depends on the degree to which you learn the technical procedures which our training emphasizes. Through our procedures, we gain control over our muscles, we learn to have control over our minds, and then the actor can start or stop their emotions at will without revealing the difficulties in doing this. The pianist plays all the same notes yet it's the way he plays – that something only he adds – his particular awareness of what he's doing. The more perfect the technique, the more we like it.

Someone starting off may have more talent than someone who has been at the Institute for years, but without training, talent will not grow. We give you the process and the skills to use your talent, but you have to actually do it. Nothing can move you unless you move yourself. You must commit to training every day throughout your career.

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Lee Strasberg conducting an Acting Class/Sense Memory Exercises at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York, 1977



Lee Strasberg addressing acting students in Bochum, W. Germany, 1978

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Lee Strasberg on relaxation and concentration

The heads and tails of the coin of acting are relaxing and concentrating. You relax in order to show that you have control of yourself. Then you concentrate to have control of the imaginary objects you wish to create. Other approaches to acting are immediately concerned with the scenes and their interpretation. Our preparation is contrary. Just because you know what to do in a scene, doesn't mean you're able to do it. To truthfully convey the ideas that the scene demands, we need the ability to relax at will and to apply inner concentration and awareness.

The purpose of the relaxation exercise is to eliminate fear, tension, and unnecessary energy, and to awaken every area of the body. Much of what stands in the actor's way aren't acting problems, but their personal issues that have nothing to do with a scene or its interpretation. Problems of expression arise from inhibited muscles and tension. Without relaxation and concentration the actor isn't in a condition to make full use of his capacity.

Some people have the idea that what we want to do is "free" the actor. I don't give a damn about freedom in that sense. Our work isn't about freeing the actor. I want to put the actor in an artistic prison. The idea that expression is freedom is wrong. Expression means that you have something that you want to express in a way that is clear and true. This isn't possible when you are tense.

A letting-go in each area of the body will allow you to become more responsive and to be sufficiently relaxed so whatever you're working on for the scene or exercise can come through. When the body is relaxed, it's able to move much more easily and with much less expenditure of effort; only then can you command each area of the body to do what you want it to do. To play the violin you have to check to see if it's tuned by adjusting the pegs. If a piano isn't properly tuned and you put your fingers on a key, the note comes out wrong. Tension is like a poorly tuned piano which isn't tuned by just playing it. You must become aware of yourself and your body, like the double awareness of the writer who corrects his own punctuation.

As part of the training and general daily routine for their work, students should practice the relaxation and sense memory exercises fifteen minutes in the morning and fifteen minutes at night. When you're preparing a specific exercise for class, practice relaxation every day for a half hour, then work on the assigned exercise for forty minutes or more. The best time to do an exercise outside of

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class is when you're alone and at ease, enjoy yourself and let the exercise come to you. If you become frightened, stop immediately and go back to the relaxation exercise. There's no real fear in merely being emotional, but I don't want to encourage the sense of fear which may work against the effort you're making.

Trust yourself and have faith and commitment in what you're doing. Tell yourself, "There's nothing I can't do."

Lee Strasberg on habits and conditioning

With relaxation and the exercises, we help the actor eliminate mannerisms that obscure the truth of expression. The basic habitual behavior of human beings leads to the habitual behavior of the actor. No approach to the actor's problems – other than the Method – deals with habits, except in a purely external and mechanical way. Removing habits and involuntary nervous behavior is a new phase in the evolution of our work, which allows for a greater degree of development and control over your own instrument and helps actors to use, shape and apply what they possess.

Unconscious repetitive behavior is not anyone's fault, but a product of our conditioning arising from lifestyle. We are impelled by habits, customs, and mannerisms which Stanislavski called "the stencils of life." A child expresses everything because he's born free. Little by little the child learns to control himself. The human being is initially expressive and then conditioning over the years runs counter to that expressiveness. Habit takes over.

By the time you come to study this work, you've developed a whole panorama and repertoire of patterns of behavior of which you're literally unaware. These strongly ingrained habits result in our unconscious habitual behavior. With some people the head is always up in the air, like a searchlight. The head up indicates, "Let me get that clear." The head tilted sideways indicates a watchful, "Please like me."

When you tell the actor, "Stop that, you have a funny look on your face," the actor is often surprised. "What do you mean, I have a funny look? I wasn't thinking about what I was doing." It's very difficult to convey to the actor that he unconsciously does things, not deliberately, but as a result of unconscious behavior which may develop into mannerisms that can typecast the actor.

When habits are controlling you, they produce forms of expression that are conventional and clichéd. Swaying is the most habitual movement. We have verbal forms of expression which are simply

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conventional such as, “I beg your pardon,” and “May I ...?” These behaviors have nothing to do with the feelings from the real experience; the natural bent towards expression is so inhibited, that the actor can’t express what he’s feeling. For acting, you must go further than the habits permit.

To deal with this problem, we have developed something which I believe is new. Relaxation and sense memory exercises deal with areas of the acting process and of the acting instrument which previously had evaded observation or had been treated purely externally. We try to eliminate the habits of non-expression and inhibitions created by conditioning so that when the impulse starts, it will lead to behavior different from the one to which you’re accustomed. Related to Pavlov’s work on the process of conditioning and the basic connection between the physical and the mental, we seek a conscious control of the faculties. A twenty-year habit may take as long as a year to break, but we believe everything that was conditioned can be reconditioned.

While other training may not hurt you, if it sets habits of behavior, it might. In our work, we want the body to become responsive so that the intensity of the experience the actor is creating – not habit – can emerge.

Relaxation exercise

Relaxing in the chair

In this exercise you’ll strengthen your will and the capacity to control your body doing certain simple things. To allow human behavior and habits to change, we need an accumulative degree of relaxation. Your goal is to relax and then control the muscles so that they’ll obey you. You must show that you can follow your own commands and develop freedom from habit. In the same way they must fit into any environment on the stage, actors must adjust to the chair.

Find a position in the chair that gives you a certain degree of comfort, a position in which you could, if you had to, go to sleep. There isn’t a right or wrong position. Let the chair hold you up. For example when you’re on a train or in a car and you want to sleep, you push yourself out somehow and try to settle in. You get the head back and you relax.

Breathe properly and easily or the muscles will get stuck. Let the body decompress, then create unity between the muscles and nerves,

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and maintain the body as a unit. Don't fiddle around. This indicates an involuntary nervous expression which we don't want. The human will is the strongest thing we know. Remain in control of your energy and your efforts.

The actor should be aware of every muscle in the body, so start to check each area separately by moving one specific part at a time. Define the area of tension, make a connection with the brain, and move it, then let it go. A tightness in the muscles means they are frozen into certain attitudes. Movement is the effort on the part of the mind to contact the area we wish to stimulate, relax, and ultimately control. The purpose of the movement is to draw your attention to muscles that are tense to make sure they respond.

Go inch by inch. Permit the brain to become aware of what muscles and nerves are involved when you make the movement. Be very definite and precise, not general. What are the fingers doing? If the fingers are buckling up it means that a charge of sensation is locked into them and the flow of sensation is held back. By moving the fingers you create a degree of circulation.

Move the legs specifically, watch that they don't become static, and don't sit in the chair with your limbs in a parallel position. Parallel is habitual. Don't stand up lying down. Don't undulate the legs. If you're just changing positions in the chair, nothing is achieved. You're just trading one area of tension for another. Move your arms and legs wide enough to check each muscle, continuing to move slowly.

If you experience the sensation of tingling or "pins and needles," it means you're holding back and there are locked-up sensations that aren't being permitted to come through. It's a good sign because it implies a coming alive in that portion of the body. When the foot falls asleep and you start to move, it tingles. It's a sign of awakening sensation. You must let go and keep moving so the muscles will relax and permit the impulses to find their way. The sensation of trembling may also occur, which is an effort to free or "un-tense" a specific area. Being very ticklish suggests locked-up sensitivity.

If you have an injury, avoid working on that area and inform the teacher.

Releasing tension

Because tension stops the instrument from responding, we must, through relaxation, release the mental and physical tension which is the occupational disease of the actor.

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When tension dominates, expression doesn't come through. To release it, there are four central areas of the head to relax:

- 1 The sides of the temples where the blue nerves go into the cranium. These nerves are working all the time and build up an unnecessary degree of energy. Send a message to the brain and tell that area to relax.
- 2 The bridge of the nose leading into the eyes. Let these muscles of the face relax. You don't need to be so wide-awake. Move the cheek muscles. Watch the brow. The eyebrows get very tense. Let the energy from the eyelids go. Unfurl the face. Tell those areas to relax and let the energy ooze out.
- 3 The thick muscles that go into the mouth and chin, including the tongue. This is the most trained area in the human body, connecting mental energy into speech. With a tight jaw the verbal pattern will be very strong but tense. An enormous amount of energy builds up here. This area deals with the problems of speech. Stretch out these muscles and move them in non-habitual ways. Let them loosen and sag as when you're asleep or drunk.
- 4 The back of the neck, the "cross" between the shoulders and head. Move the head around slowly within the circumference of the neck band in order to locate the muscles that are holding it steady and tense. As you rotate it around, try to feel the different muscles, and relax and loosen them, particularly when they are extended all the way back. Let the head go and float away. Relax the throat. All those areas get clogged up. When the back of the neck is tense, no matter what you do with the other parts of the body you won't be able to fully relax. The neck muscles and nerves are like the strings of a marionette that are connected to the head. They hold on to the various parts of the body and keep it in check. If there's tension, strongly set-in habits of behavior, thought, patterns of experience and expression which we are literally unaware of result in unconscious habitual behavior that leads to imitation. The strings must be loose enough to permit the marionette to move freely. It is the same with the human being.

If mental tension is extreme and the emotional response is very active, there's bound to be a dichotomy between the two. There's even a vocabulary for this type of tension: stiff neck, chip on one's shoulder, getting one's back up. The emotion will come out at times

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without the logic, or the logic will come out without the emotion, and neither is good for the theater. For the stage, a combination of the two, as has been said – “A warm heart and a cool head” – is the basic thing. A cool head means relaxed and aware.

Physical tension is much easier to eliminate than mental tension. An additional important area of tension is the muscles that run down the back. The Reichian School made us aware that the back muscles retain emotionally traumatic experiences locked up from childhood. As the body relaxes, we may tune into memories which we aren’t consciously aware of and that have been locked up. When those muscles move and let go, your experiences will come through, but you must be sufficiently relaxed to release those emotions.

Emotions can be lodged in your body like bones. Psychologists and psychiatrists tell us that an emotional trauma can get tied up in the muscles, and until you release those muscles you cannot release the emotion. When I began touching and checking the back muscles recently during the relaxation, people laughed and cried. I realized that I could help that process by forcing the actor at that moment to immediately relax. When you relax and become able to deal with these muscles, habits begin to change.

When checking the students during relaxation, I sometimes pick up the arm and it may go up or pull back. Usually I see tension in the arms because they’re connected to the brain. Instead of relaxing, the brain suddenly starts to pull the arms in, becoming oppositional. It says, “I’m not going to do that.” This doesn’t mean that you don’t want to relax. It’s the body’s conditioning that says, “Over my dead body.” The oppositional stance is that strong.

People aren’t born oppositional as far as I know. It’s conditioning, a pattern set into the body as an unconscious withdrawal. It means that built into the instrument is something you’re not aware of, and certain areas in the body have become blocked; thus, habits and conditioning are very strong and will interfere with anything you do. For example, if you weren’t allowed to cry as a child, the body pulls in as a result of that conditioning. In the effort to relax, the energy goes the wrong way. It means there’s mental tension.

Experiencing locked sensations is nothing to be frightened of or worried about. Tension is too much or too little energy, not fear. Thank god you have it; you’re alive. On the contrary, you have a whole reservoir of response there. Let’s open the reservoir up and make it possible for you to use it. We have to unblock the sensations because other sensations can’t get through the blocked part.

Relate the problem of tension and relaxation to a car standing

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still with the motor running. What happens? Eventually you run out of gas. The energy is being misused. That's what happens with the actor. We don't know what we're doing; therefore we tense, presumably to retain our equilibrium. It does the exact opposite. Habitual patterns may begin to form. To break the oppositional stance and release tension, the actor must control the muscles that pull in.

Use of sound

We use sound to access basic areas of expression. We make an “Ahhhhh” or “Hah!” sound – even and easy or sharp and explosive – depending on the degree of response seeking expression. These sounds – which we don't make in life – feed the impulse into expression and eliminate emotional tension. The sound is made for the definite purpose of moving beyond habit.

The principle behind the sound is very simple. Human beings, by the time they start their training with us, have already been conditioned to respond, react, and express themselves in a particular way. For example, an impulse may begin to rise within an actor which he was totally unaware of. His conditioning says, “No, I shouldn't express that.” He starts panting and can't get it out. I say, “Speak,” and he can't. That has no value on the stage. In life you're trained not to react. Otherwise you would go around weeping, crying, yelling, and cursing – which you can't do. That's social conditioning, which is necessary to be a part of society. But the stage is not society. The stage is a controlled society where you have to behave purposefully to affect society in a particular way.

When we first make the sound, it's a simple, deliberate effort to breathe which puts you in conscious control. We make an even and easy sound, a vibration. Its purpose is to keep that area free and clear, breaking the habit asserting its power of non-expression.

We don't permit the sound to go haywire and just take off. Emotional flare-ups during relaxation or sensory work are caused by the fact that something is unconsciously and strongly stirred. The body is a mass of impulses, 90 percent or more of which are unconscious. As you relax, some of these impulses seem to be strong enough to burst out. They want to express themselves because it's in the nature of impulse to express itself, just as it's in the nature of water to flow and seek its own level. When there's interference with water, it flows around the obstacle. The same thing is true with impulse. When enough inroads are made into the muscles and nerves, which

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hold back the flow of impulses, emotion will often start to erupt suddenly.

When this occurs during relaxation or sensory work, it's always a sign that the work is beginning to pay off. We want the impulses to come through. At that moment, you then relax in order to achieve control over the impulse. We don't want impulses to shoot out on the stage because if they explode suddenly, they aren't reliable. It may be wrong for the scene. We want to be in control of the expression. When an emotion starts to release suddenly, we make the sound to permit an impulse to be controlled by you and yet to express itself. When that's not enough, we often permit a very staccato, sharp, explosive sound to come through because it's being blocked.

When making the sound, don't try to find out what it means, just do it. The sound should be committed, not frustrated. Fill the lungs with breath. When it comes from the lungs, we get a fuller vibration. Emphasize clarity in the sound. Move both the arms and the legs when making the sound, or else the body remains confined. If the movement is not wide enough, the sound comes out in a contorted way. Open up all the areas of the body in order to permit the impulse to expand itself and travel through the body. Otherwise, the sound has no value. Free the chest area. Be concerned with letting go. Sounds need to reach beyond conventions and clichés. When you add the sound in the exercises, it should be easy and mix with what you're doing. You're in command. This reduces habit.

Be careful that the sound is not compulsive. With compulsive behavior, you're not aware, and you can't stop. Compulsive behavior has no value on the stage. The actor must evaluate the situation and stop at appropriate points.

Abstract or additional movement

In order to make use of ourselves for an artistic purpose we must develop all our faculties to a point where we're in total control of them so what we tell ourselves to do, we'll do. Of critical importance is the ability to control the additional movement – or what we also call the abstract movement. The actor must learn to respond to additional commands and do more than one thing at a time, which is always the case when acting.

For this procedure, the arms reach out at shoulder level. Stretch the muscles of the shoulders sideways with the hands and fingers relaxed. At the same time, move the legs – which can pull and tie

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you down – up and out to the side.

By giving yourself the command to move muscles in opposite directions in order to break habitual patterns, you're asserting your will. The additional movement procedure is designed to unsettle the habits so the muscles become free to obey the actor, rather than the habits. We can't just tell our muscles to "be objective," but we can tell the arms to move and stretch wide, in a way you're not accustomed to, therefore breaking a habit. We ask the brain to make contact with unfamiliar areas, to relax those areas, to break habitual patterns, and to put your entire instrument within your control.

As soon as something is done which goes counter to the habit, the habit literally says, "The hell with you. What the hell are you going to do? I don't know what you want!" Don't worry about it. With the additional movement procedure, it's only a matter of time before the habit must obey you rather than the other way around. With this exercise, we provide the groundwork for the actor to be in charge.

If the actor gets out of control during the exercises, the teacher may give a simple physical command such as, "Lift up your right hand, clench the fist, lift the finger." Once the actor can do that, he's able to gain control over himself. If you're frightened during an exercise and can do the additional movement procedure, you're obeying your own commands.

The additional movement instruction is predicated on a simple scientific theory or principle related to the Pavlovian idea that matter and mind are one, not separate, and that there is no such thing as spirit without body.

Sense memory exercises

Editor's note: The sense memory exercises described below are in the specific sequence that Lee Strasberg developed as he added to Stanislavski's work. These segments are included in the first two hours of a class. The exercises start with routine daily activities, which require muscular movement and are non-emotional. They then progress to those that do not require muscular activity and instead focus attention on creating physical sensations such as sun, extreme cold, or a specific pain. The exercises then move on to more complex emotional work.

Lee Strasberg on sense memory

The senses hold the key to life and experience. Sense memory exercises train the actor to utilize all five senses and to respond as fully and as vividly to imaginary objects on stage as he's capable of doing with real objects in life. A lack of basic sense memory work often stops the actor short from developing further, and therefore being able to deal with the variety of problems which the actor faces and the theater presents to us. With these exercises, it's not the physical sequence of the actions that we're after. That can become external, which leads to imitation. The exercises test concentration and response, and serve as a foundation for the actor's work. We use the imaginary objects – a cup, a tree, the sky, a locket, a photograph, and even a human being – to awaken the mind and stimulate the imagination in order to make contact with sensory memory.

Ultimately, our exercises train the actor to re-create and re-live in his imagination any object or group of objects which when combined into a scene on stage, stimulate the desired experience called for in the performance. Let me make this very clear, Stanislavski said his system was to be used for moments of difficulty. The exercises are part of the training used in classes, in scenes, at home, and also in performance when needed. I often say don't look a gift horse in the mouth, meaning if the character you've built for the scene is working you don't need to add an exercise. When you're in trouble and things aren't working, then use what you've learned to create the proper reality. Either way you take risks, have courage, and let your truth come out.

Seduce the senses. Little by little they will come alive as we explore objects through the five senses, focusing on smell, sound, touch, taste and sight. It's important to separate the senses when exploring an object of concentration, because no one sense in itself can ever completely comprehend an object. That's illustrated by the age-old example of the blind men and the elephant, each one of which touches a different part of the elephant but makes the mistake of thinking that it's the whole elephant. One touches the nose and thinks the elephant is like the nose. Another touches the leg and thinks that it's like the leg. Somebody else touches the tail, etc. No one part is the total reality. Like the blind men, when we take a part of the reality for the entire thing we make a serious mistake.

At the same time, the senses are unequally developed in every human being and respond differently. Some senses are stronger. Even though all of our senses participate in the act of experience, some

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people experience through vision more than they do through hearing. Other people experience more through kinetic experience than either hearing, touching, or seeing. One of my students asked the question, “Since taste is my strongest sense, what should I do with it on the stage? Should I taste the bedspread?” If he can taste the bedspread and it means something to him, it’s one way of understanding, but it’s important to make an effort and use all the senses.

The exercises themselves aren’t necessarily done with the logic of the physical movements normally associated with the behavior related to that object, because then the exercise may become external and cause the muscles to pull ahead and imitate. When the exercise doesn’t work, ask, what am I not doing?

Experiencing what I call “locked sensations” is nothing to be frightened of or worried about. On the contrary, you have a whole reservoir of response to make use of. In the sense memory exercises, you may work toward one sensation and get the opposite, like working for heat and getting the shivers. This is “locked sensation.” One of the things that is locked wants to get in on the action. By sensitizing different areas of the body, we can overcome the drag of certain unconscious inhibitions or locked-up sensations without our need to define, discover, analyze, or to make a big fuss about them. It happens by itself.

Make a habit at the end of the day of asking yourself what sensory thing happened today that I would like to repeat. This makes you more observant and more able to re-create objects at will. But don’t push too hard to make it work. The energy shouldn’t be forced, but made use of. Never replace energy with effort. When you think you’re receiving a response, watch that you aren’t tensing. Tension takes away from everything that you do.

Before practicing a sense memory exercise, always do the relaxation exercise first and continue to check it throughout the exercise. When the exercise isn’t working, don’t change to a different one in midstream. If you get bored, tired, or frustrated during the exercise, go back to relaxation for a few minutes then return to the exercise and remember, always focus on working slowly and specifically. We’re after the sensory reality, not the action of the muscles.

There’s a caution. The tendency on the part of the actor is sometimes to place too much stress and reliance on his emotional response to the sense memory exercises. The emotional exercises work quickly, and that can be deceptive if the actor still can’t deal first with the senses.

When you use your imagination for unlocking the doors to all the

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senses, you become real, alive, vivid, and true. You will then have the belief, the faith, and the imagination to create the living reality that is demanded of the performer.

Sequence of sense memory exercises

Although Stanislavski never defined a logical sequence of the specific exercises, there was an implied sequence. He begins with relaxation, followed by concentration, action, and emotional memory. For our work, I have created a sequence that doesn't exist in Stanislavski. Our new procedures are based on his work but go further, not dealing simply with the creation of reality, but with the expressiveness of reality; I have defined the sequence of exercises much more precisely and clearly and have added a certain degree of clarity and definition to the basic procedures of Stanislavski, and for that matter, my own teacher Boleslavsky.

This new sequence of the exercises is related to a basic logic. We begin the sequence by exploring the real objects from our immediate environment, which can be practiced daily at home like the breakfast drink or looking in the mirror and can be checked and tested. In class, imaginary objects are used. We move on to more complex objects that are in the individual's past and not in his present environment which can't be checked. Eventually, we get to the point where we start to complicate the exercises. We've gone through the five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, smell, and we have begun overall sensations such as shower, bath and so forth. Once this work is going fairly well, we branch off to the more emotional work including personal objects and emotional memories.

The continuity and sequence of the exercises is not hard and fast and can't be done by rote. There's an individual approach for each actor, and a general sequence of the exercises which the teacher adjusts to each individual. Sensory work, for example, which deals with imaginary objects, takes longer to re-create and requires greater concentration than emotional memory. Very often if there's difficulty with the sensory work, we go immediately to the more emotionally charged personal objects that have a personal and emotional value built into them. The response to them works more immediately. While emotional memories work very magically, doing only emotional memories can train the actor in a very one-sided way in which the concern with what he's feeling becomes the major thing.

The teacher only changes the sequence, however, if there is

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something the actor can't do. It may include deliberate diversions using other procedures if there is a particular problem to deal with. Some individuals take a longer time to achieve a result; therefore the teacher stays with certain exercises. Some people go quicker, and then the teacher moves them ahead, but the teacher shouldn't challenge the actor. If the actor has difficulty with one of the senses, he should move on to another.

After completing the basic exercises, we complicate and amplify them by exploring more intense experiences which strengthen the actor's ability to maintain concentration on a number of tasks on the stage. We go and back and forth between the different exercises so there's an intensification of the experience. For the actor to be able to re-create a sense memory at will, we try to make him aware of what he's doing during the exercise.

We don't add words too soon to the exercises because we face the danger that the lines will become the major incentive, and that what the actor does will remain only illustrations of the lines. The lines should be part of the behavior of the character, not just an abstract set of words.

Breakfast drink

The first exercise deals with the actor's daily morning drink. Use whatever cup or glass you know well. This is practiced at home first with the real object and then with the imaginary. In class, we use only the imaginary. All the senses are contained in relation to this one object and therefore the concentration is not divided. With your eyes closed and sitting in the chair, use the five senses to explore what is real about the cup and its contents. Always be specific in your descriptions. Feel the weight, temperature, and texture. Smell the aroma. See the colors and shape of the cup. Taste the liquid as you feel it going past your lips into your mouth, throat, and stomach. Hear any sounds the liquid makes in the cup or as you swallow it. Your arms should be relaxed. Don't imitate what you did with the real object. Re-experience the sensations, not the physical imitation of remembered muscular behavior.

Mirror/make-up or shaving

The second exercise is also something that's done daily – looking in the mirror. For women, it's putting on make-up and combing their hair; for men, it's shaving. At home, practice with the real mirror

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and objects, then with the imaginary. This concentration exercise is done with the eyes open and sitting in the chair. Before you deal with any of the objects connected with shaving or make-up, concentrate on looking at yourself in the mirror for about five or ten minutes, trying to establish all your features. Observe yourself closely. Look at every feature from the neck up, including your hair. What do you like? What would you change? In this exercise, there's the additional aspect of seeing yourself in the mirror, which demonstrates interesting facets about the human being and tells us something about the actor. Some people can't see themselves physically, which means they'll have difficulty connecting with themselves emotionally. Sometimes extreme reactions occur. The actor touches upon something they aren't aware of that arouses locked-up feelings about their sense of themselves. We don't deal with it at this moment, but this gives us something to watch for and evaluate in the work.

After looking at yourself, explore each object through the five senses. Go through each sense slowly. Ask yourself, "What am I touching, smelling, seeing, hearing?" and so on. For example, without literally touching yourself, investigate how the make-up brush or razor feels against your skin and on each specific part of your face.

When doing the exercise in class, try to create the experience anew without just imitating what you practiced at home.

Three pieces of material

When the student has difficulty with the first two exercises, we move on to an exercise with three pieces of material. If the senses aren't functioning and only the muscles are working, the actor can't yet experience the other exercises. This exercise is only done with an actor who has a block.

At home the actor picks three pieces of material like silk, fur, or something nubby, so that the textures are differentiated. In class, imagine three pieces of material while sitting in the chair with the eyes closed. Try to get a sense of each piece of material. Do things you would not ordinarily do, such as float it through the air, put it over your face, smell it, picture the colors and the textures to make contact with it using all the senses. Repeat the same thing physically with each piece of material. Go from one to another. The physical action is the same, but the sensory experience, which we are trying to awaken, is different with each texture.

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This trains the actor who has difficulty experiencing sensory reality.

Putting on and taking off shoes and socks or stockings

This exercise is also given when there is difficulty with the first two. Every human being has a connection with this exercise, which is a simple daily activity and can be checked in class. It's different for everyone because of the kinetic senses, which are very strong and may be blocked. Take off or put on each imaginary object separately while sitting in the chair. Don't rush. Try to differentiate between muscular and sensory reality. Feel the air on the exposed part of your foot as you slowly take your sock off, and compare it with how it feels when your foot is covered. Ask yourself questions about the reality and be precise with your answers. As with every exercise, you can always return to relaxation then come back to the exercise.

When none of the previous exercises work, we may move on to an exercise which ordinarily we don't do until later on in the sequence, which is the work with a personal object which has some personal significant meaning for the actor.

Sunshine

Now we drift away from the physical exercises where the muscles play a great role, and work on sunshine, where there is nothing physical to do. For some people, there's difficulty with the muscles in the first and second exercises because the muscles are very well trained and can't stop themselves from imitation.

Breaking the hold of the muscular habit makes it possible for the actor to begin to experience real sensations. In the sunshine exercise, the teachers watch carefully so that people don't imitate muscular movement, but awaken the senses. Practice beforehand in the real sun. In class, you sit in the chair and create the imaginary sun with your eyes closed. Don't imitate the physical position you were in when you practiced with the real sun. Instead, imagine the sun where it was at the time you practiced. Go inch by inch, investigating, exploring, and re-creating the feeling of the sun on each separate part of the body. Compare and contrast how the sun affects specific areas of your body. How does it feel on one cheek as opposed to the other, on the top lip as opposed to the bottom? Each part of the body is capable of independent sensation. Get the feeling

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of the sun throughout the body, and try to keep it going. If you lose concentration, relax and try to get it back. Create realities of the sunshine and get a good hot sun going.

Sharp pain

If we've gotten some degree of reaction with sunshine, we move on to sharp pain, where again, muscles have a minimal role. With this exercise we're again dealing with the memory of sensation, not an object.

If the actor is working properly, we expect to see a strong reaction or expression to the remembered pain. Actors are often quite startled by their degree of response to this exercise. They become aware of the power of imagination in acting and develop faith in what they're doing.

During this exercise, we permit the actors to leave the chair and move. Pick a specific part of the body where you've experienced a sharp pain so the mind knows where to focus concentration. Now try to re-create that sensation. Let the pain spread throughout the whole body, not only the isolated area. This is challenging because, in life, we try to rid ourselves of pain, not re-live and prolong it. I warn them that it may work very powerfully and that they should take it easy and always relax.

We only assign the pain exercise if the student seems quite all right and in control. If a person is very sensitive, I sometimes skip pain and go right to personal objects. I come back to pain when I know that person is more in control.

Sharp taste and sharp smell

Both these exercises are done in the chair with the eyes closed, and practiced first at home. Experience any distinct sharp taste like lemon or vinegar. Be specific and explore how the taste feels in different parts of your mouth, on your teeth, in your throat, going down, in your stomach. See the lemon and also re-create the smell and the touch, although the main thing here is the taste.

With the sharp smell exercise, choose something strong like ammonia. Breathe in, trying to re-live it. Be clear about where you feel it – in your nose, throat, or chest. If you get a very strong response, relax, stay in control, and try to keep it going.

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Overall sensations

Experiencing the sensations involved in taking a shower, bath, steam bath, or sauna; of a specific weather condition such as feeling freezing cold, strong wind, or standing or walking in the rain; or of a high fever, being drunk, etc. are valuable in developing the senses. The overall sensation exercise enables the actor to discover constrictions, inhibitions, points of embarrassment, and concerns connected with the body.

The overall sensation must reach all areas. People usually “think” overall, but this is taking place only in their mind. Each area of the body experiences independent sensation and responds differently. Not literally touching yourself, go inch by inch, moving each part of the body separately so it becomes sensitive to sensation. Feel and then say to yourself each specific place where you are experiencing the overall sensation.

For example, begin the shower or bath overall exercise by undressing sensorially, not literally, but using the imagination. Get a sense of yourself naked. Getting in the bath or shower has a sequence. Put one foot in at a time. Where do you feel the water? Be precise. Each area of the body has different sensations, which you must be aware of simultaneously. Define it for yourself. Sensitize each area while other areas remain relaxed. Ultimately, we need a cumulative response.

Overall sensations may touch feelings, which aren't being permitted to come through because of the actor's attitude toward the body. If you feel embarrassed, that itself should be expressed. The exercise deals with what is locked, unresponsive, inhibited, and self-consciousness.

I always check at the end of this exercise to see how well it works. I say to the individual, “Walk towards me slowly and keep the exercise going and then look at me.” Invariably, many people can't look at me. They go through the same thing they would if they were naked by blushing and laughing.

Sometimes the exercise is only apparently working. When someone turns around and looks at me and nothing happens, that person may not be self-conscious and doesn't mind being watched. Some people love the feeling of nakedness in front of other people because within them is a confined desire of what I call “love,” not in the literal sense, but in the Freudian sense, meaning a reaching out, wanting to be part of, which is not literal or sexual, but broader.

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People that are very shy and have great difficulty making contact with others love to do this type of exercise. I draw the actor's attention to this by asking, "You somehow seem to like this?" They say, "Oh, yes." It's as if something is released in them, but I don't make this point. It's not a matter of analyzing. It simply permits a sensation to begin coming through, one which in many individuals is very strong but has been locked up or closed.

We do four or five overall sensation exercises. If you experience a tingling sensation, it's evidence that they're working.

Personal objects

In this exercise we explore our sensory responses to memories of a specific thing or person. The object may or may not be in your immediate environment, but once was, and is linked to some unusual experience or value. It may have been given to you by someone close to you who died, that killed themselves, that you loved and broke up with – or it may be the actual person that we consider as the object. Explore the chosen imaginary object through the five senses. What's its weight, shape, color, smell, taste and feel? Can it be heard?

However, don't push towards an emotional response to the object. When we think of a physical object, a place, or a human being that has meaning for us, we may become excited, angry, or despondent. If you become emotional, relax and keep doing the exercise. The personal object is always intended to accelerate the response of the individual. Built into the personal object is a greater degree of responsiveness, meaning, and experience; therefore it stimulates reactions more powerfully. Some people, however, although they react strongly and feel the emotion of the object, don't sense the object itself. If this happens, go slowly, be precise and deliberate.

Never stay with the same personal object if it doesn't work – if you don't experience the object with a sense of truth. The main thing is that the exercise engages your concentration, which gives you a sense of reality and conviction about that object. We do six or seven personal objects, and, when possible, more.

To intensify the response, we use other exercises like overall sensation. If the personal object exercise doesn't work and the actor hasn't responded, I jump to something that I rarely do at this stage, a private moment exercise to improve concentration. The human is the only living being that has the capacity to decide what to think

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about. That concentration empowers the actor to make contact with imaginary realities.

One of my memories is meeting Alfred Stieglitz, a great American artist and the founder of the art of photography, a man about my size with a very interesting face. When I first saw him, he was wearing a cape and it made a deep impression on me. All my life since then I wanted to wear a cape. You feel free in it, and there was something about it I liked. I wondered why. I discovered that it reminded me of a little black raincoat my parents bought me the week we were leaving for America from Poland. I remember putting that raincoat on and parading in front of my best friend's house. The next week we were gone. That raincoat is a personal object for me, one with special connection and significance.

Combinations of exercises

After we have covered all the basic senses of touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight in the various exercises, we begin to divide the concentration by working on more than one exercise at a time. This enables the actor to become more flexible and to do more than one thing at a time, which is always required when an actor is performing on stage. Combinations of two, three, four, or more of the exercises are used while adding speech, sound, and daily activities. The attention and concentration is literally divided as the actor harnesses the tremendous electrical energy that's in the brain. We add and combine the exercises to ensure that the brain is functioning well.

There are hundreds and thousands of variations and combinations of exercises. We build upon them by first combining the overall sensation with a personal object and adding sound – Ahhhhhh or Hah! – depending on the degree of response that seeks expression. We then add words from a monologue or song. The song can just be hummed without words. By adding the monologue or song, the actor works to express the reality he's creating. We practice these combinations of exercises six or seven times to break the habitual rhythm and verbal patterns of speech.

To that we then add daily activities. For example, making breakfast, folding laundry, getting dressed, brushing your teeth, or sweeping the floor. These are also done six or seven times in addition to the other exercises to see that the body can change positions and still maintain a connection with the sensory objects. Pay attention to the logical sequence of the daily activities, and add additional

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activities to concentrate on.

Eventually we go even further by adding a fifth sensory task, like the pain exercise or sunshine, while using the same monologue for both adjustments. The purpose of that is to see that the monologue doesn't retain its own verbal pattern or sequence regardless of what's added to it. The monologue should change. If it doesn't, you're up against a verbal pattern. In this case, we make the student sing the words to get away from that. Depending upon the individual, we tell the student to make any sound or use a song which is simple. If you've added a monologue to the exercise and the words go on continuously, move your body. Go easy into the words. Of course, the words you use have to have meaning. Gibberish at this point has no value. It doesn't test anything because the problem comes from the verbal pattern, and in gibberish, you don't deal with verbal patterns.

Sometimes when we give someone more than one exercise to work on, to their surprise and originally to mine, it becomes easier. We've siphoned off the energy into, for example, the personal object; therefore the overall sensation often works much more easily, freely, more vividly, and at the same time the other exercises are permitted to work.

There is an additional procedure which I sometimes use if there's a problem with expression. I ask students to make a deliberate sound that they think corresponds with what they're feeling. Not a word, but a sound. If they say, "I don't know what sound to make," it literally means there's an insufficient transmission of impulse into expression. They don't know what to do with their lips, which means they don't know how to express different kinds of feelings and thoughts, except verbally. If they can make a sound, they begin to shape the sound differently than habit instructs. It helps the muscles to express something for which there is not already a conditioned habit for expression. We found this, at times, to be quite useful.

Private moment exercise

While reading Stanislavski, I came across his discovery that "The problem of the actor is to learn to be private in public." It struck me that there should be an exercise that deals with that particular problem, so I made up the exercise, developing my own ideas from Stanislavski's phraseology. The private moment exercise came from my effort to see whether I could help the actor learn to be as private

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in public as he is in private. By private, we don't mean just being alone. People talk to themselves in private, dance, and behave in vivid ways, but only in private. It means doing things they'd have a great deal of difficulty telling, sharing, or doing with anybody observing them.

It's not the deed that's private. It's the significance to the individual that makes it private. There are whole areas of experience that many people who seem repressed or who have difficulty in responding, permit themselves to do in the private moment exercise.

Start with creating the place using the five senses. Bring in a few things to class from home to remind you of a particular place. It might just be a cushion that helps you believe more totally in the room. Now pick something that you would never do in front of anyone. If someone interrupted you and asked what you were doing you would say, "Oh, nothing at all."

Without losing the thread of the private moment, we eventually add all other exercises to it, overall sensations, personal objects, daily activities, monologues, or songs. You may even sing the monologue or add the animal characterization, not the "animal" but the animal characterization to it. Sometimes we start with the animal characterization and then add the private moment. It works slightly differently with different people.

One of the most difficult things to fight against in the theater is the idea of, "I want the audience to get it." The private moment exercise eliminates the presence of the public, shuts out the pull of the audience. A kind of ease is created. The actor must be willing to create that kind of separation from the pressure of the public. In the private moment there's no "them." It goes beyond ordinary concentration, creates a blanket, and the audience disappears. You feel like you can do whatever you want without being self-conscious. If you embarrass easily, the private moment works very powerfully, and I found some striking results for which I was completely unprepared. For example, I observed that in the private moment, we did things like speak and have soliloquies and carry on discussions with other people and ourselves. Before this, I thought of soliloquies as a dramaturgic device, as convention. I thought that people didn't soliloquize when alone, but I found that they did.

A private moment for me occurred when I acted out Nijinsky, who fascinates me. I studied ballet when I was young, and people told me I was good. I have the feeling that if I had really worked maybe I could have been like Nijinsky. When I act out Shylock or Hamlet, I may do things which would be very difficult for me to

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think and do here in class. Even if I did it here, I would act quite differently from the way in which I act in a private moment when I'm feeling unselfconscious about the result and am not concerned with making a point to the audience. I'm only concerned with what it's doing to me.

Never force or push for a result. The private moment is intended to remove a concern with the result. If it doesn't work, go back working through the senses.

If you aren't stimulated in class, it doesn't mean that you can't do it. Obviously you can do it because you do it in private. In order to really do what it is you choose to do, the actor must close himself in, to be private enough, in order to forget the audience sufficiently. A private moment exercise adds to your own security of being where you wish to be, doing what you want to do without concern for the audience.

It's no different than in painting. Rembrandt used light and shade, "chiaroscuro." It's Rembrandt's private moment, his own world. He sees everybody, just there and surrounded by nothing. When he was younger he had the desire to be rich, and he was enormously titillated with jewelry. He went bankrupt. In the early portraits of him, he sits there, drinking, which indicates that eventually he stopped caring about whether he was rich or not. But nonetheless, he never lost the strong sense of wealthy women in his work, with their flesh and their jewelry. It created an aura in his paintings that represents the private world of the painter.

We encourage the actor to use the private moment in combination with scene work, and to look for scenes in which the private moment can be used.

Emotional memory exercise

Editor's note: *The emotional memory exercise enables actors to access, re-create and re-live intense past experiences from their own lives at will through the use of sense memory and the exploration of objects and people connected with those past events. The goal, Lee believed, is to create and build characters with truthful, believable, and logical behavior.*

Lee Strasberg on emotional memory

Using emotional memory has stirred a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding based on ignorance. The soul of the character

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you're playing comes from your own emotions, but some actors question it because they become overly emotional. The exact opposite should happen. The actor should learn to control these emotions to use them on stage. The real problem is not that an actor may become hysterical, but that the actor may have difficulty feeling the same emotion fully again and again.

Re-living a specific traumatic or joyful emotional experience is the way to access a sequence of behavior and express emotions when certain scenes are particularly demanding. The emotional memory is the actor's weapon to create a complete reality on stage.

We all have moments when we can't convey what we feel. The feelings are there, but the expression of the emotions is blocked. With the emotional memory exercise, we help you to express them. The exercise feeds you. It's a motor. It awakens emotions which are then sent into the lines so they receive unusual intonational readings. If you have enough faith to permit the lines to come out organically as a result of the exercise, they will come out convincingly, rather than as a cliché, which is nothing more than the conventional reading of the lines. Although the way the lines are said may change each time you do them, if you use this exercise correctly, the basic emotional reality remains the same.

It's important to make a distinction. The exercise doesn't seek to capture the emotions that occurred during the remembered experience. If you have had a very happy experience in childhood and you go back to that experience, you may now weep or start to cry. You weep and cry at something that has been lost. How you're affected by that memory today becomes the emotional memory. To access at will the emotions you're having right now about the chosen memory – that is always the actor's work.

This approach is very reliable. I have checked it in long-run performances when people said the emotional memory worked for three or four months and was not working any more. I said, "Well, maybe it stopped, but let's sit down and do the exercise," and it worked just the same. That means the actor was anticipating the result. When you anticipate the result, the emotion can't be directly accessed.

Thus, the actor doesn't seek to remember the emotion. You have to make contact with the memory that prompted the emotion in the first place. Focus on the sensory details and objects that created the desired response. It can only be created indirectly. Then it's very reliable. It's the exercise that works most immediately, even before

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many other elements of the actor's craft can be fully used. Even when the exercise is not done properly, you might get the result you want the first or second time you do it, because it's fresh and new.

The actual occurrence you choose is nothing more than a set of physiological things that became activated at one moment in your past. I believe in what might be called the "gestalt." Nothing we do has value in itself unless it's part of the totality or context which gives it shape. In life, emotions don't appear in a pure form. In adventure, there is always fear or excitement.

Often when you re-live an emotional memory and use it in your work, it's one that has been sublimated, in the Freudian sense. When the emotion is released, the feelings remain, but the block is eliminated. It's freed. You feel as if you've been absolved. The therapeutic value in art is the living out of emotions that made you feel guilty, for example, or have been otherwise stifled. A young lady who had been doing an emotional memory exercise was blocked at a certain point. She said the experience had something to do with her father. I asked her if there was something more she could have done or said in the past at that moment? She couldn't answer. I encouraged her, "Say it. Say it!" Finally, she said, "I hope you die." You could see why she didn't say that both then and now, and why the emotion would be stifled. Anytime she felt that emotion, the sense of guilt for having expressed it was too much. All art is revelation.

I believe emotional memory is the key to unlocking the secret of creativity that is behind every artist's work, not just the actor's. A startling and correct description of the emotional memory is in Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* – Volume I of *Remembrance of Things Past*. Proust describes how the idea of his novel came to him as he was sitting, drinking tea and eating a madeleine cookie (what we consider the object). Some feeling was trying to percolate within him. He tried to think of it but couldn't. He leaned back (what we accomplish in our relaxation exercise) and he thought back to his childhood when he had first been given a madeleine by his aunt. Suddenly the memory came back to him, illustrating not only a classic description of the emotional memory, but the proper way of doing the exercise. In a sense, Proust's novel is one long sense and emotional memory. The artist is shaping, utilizing, and commenting not just on the emotional memory, but adding his own reaction to it in the present moment, creating the artistic relationship required in all art. There is no better description anywhere technically or otherwise than the one given by Proust.

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The verification of the emotional memory has been demonstrated by the great actors of the past like Polus, who in the fourth century BC played the part of Electra in Sophocles' play. It's said that the moment came when Polus, dressed in the garb of Electra, a female, must deliver a eulogy, a funeral oration, over the body of her dead brother Orestes. Polus brought onto the stage an urn containing the ashes of his recently deceased son in order to be able to play the scene with reality and conviction. While people thought he was acting, he was truly re-creating his own personal emotional reality on stage with the use and presence of an object.

Choosing the experience or event

The experiences we choose for emotional memory work must be decisive events that have conditioned us and were influential as our highest and most moving experiences – jealousies, loves, rages, hurts, or other once-in-a-lifetime exciting or traumatic moments. You also must select a past event with the strength of emotional response that is pertinent to the monologue or scene you're working on – which is a parallel reality.

Think of the outstanding things that have happened to you. What's the most intense experience that you've ever had in your life? Earlier experiences affect and condition the way in which our emotions behave. That usually starts in the first five or six years of life, so the older the experience, the better. We work with a seven-year limit. If a memory has lasted for seven years or more and is recaptured, it's permanently re-capturable.

When someone says they can't think of an emotional memory, you can be sure that they have a great deal but they are locked up. The human being is filled with many experiences, and none are lost. Rather they are held back by the shock or the trauma of the event; the human being doesn't like to repeat unpleasurable emotional experiences. When things are too painful, they're repressed. They don't want to re-live themselves, and rightly so. That's why, at its most obvious, life has a built-in adjustment. You faint. Life has built-in medical devices, and you're spared going through something. This is why we conveniently forget. One of my students, who claimed she couldn't remember anything, finally revealed that, in a fit of anger, she had thrown something at someone and almost killed him.

Sometimes when people think quickly and easily, they'll come up with an experience that wasn't critical in itself, but close to the true

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traumatic event. I then say, "Do you have something else?" They say, "Yes, I have something else, but I'm a little scared about it." We never push it. We take the thing that they're less afraid of. I prefer to deal with something less strong. Another student who couldn't think of an emotional memory finally remembered a trauma that happened when she was one year old. She used the event in the exercise, and after that, unfortunately, she left class. An exercise may act as therapy rather than a theatrical device. I don't get involved in therapy. I never push the student who says, "I'm a little uneasy about going into that area."

The significance of an experience also changes over time. Often a very pleasant emotional memory will change to an unpleasant one because it's over. Things that were sorrowful now seem laughable, and things that were laughable now seem sorrowful. Emotional memories may lose their power. Some are forgotten. On the other hand, events are sometimes remembered even more strongly than originally experienced. Often in the moment that it happened, you weren't able to express the feelings.

Don't use a recent event because we don't know whether our response to it will change. If something happened yesterday, today, or two years ago, it may work as an emotional memory. However, a month from now it may not work. Anything that has happened can be used, but its capacity to remain and to be used time and time again is not yet proven. In the same way, in the process of immunization, we don't use live viruses. We use dead viruses. The live virus might actually give you the very disease you're trying to get rid of. If the experience is only a few years old, incomplete, and still fresh, when you now do it, it may revive not just the memories of it, but the actuality of it. On the other hand, sometimes the experience hasn't left a strong enough reaction to be used as a conditioning element or motivation for your work. It hasn't yet become a memory and is still an ongoing reality.

The difference between the memory of emotion and emotional memory is that with the first you remember but nothing happens – just ordinary mental memory. With the second, it's a memory that works emotionally at the moment so that you re-experience it. Remember that as you reuse an emotional memory over and over again to make it applicable at any moment at your command, sometimes it won't work. This is partially because you anticipate the exact way you expect it to occur or make you feel. When you do that instead of re-living the sensory details that prompted the emotions, the emotional memory doesn't work.

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The actor's training demands the fullest, most vivid, and most expressive manifestations of thoughts, sensations, experience, or behavior. Our process of talking about it and expressing an emotional memory leads to new forms of expression that go beyond the habits and inhibitions of non-expression.

Performing the exercise

It's important to make clear how the emotional memory exercise is to be created and used. In a performance, you will put your response and impulses into the lines. However, in demonstrating the exercise in class, I ask the student to speak out so I can see if the exercise is being done properly.

You begin with relaxation. If there's difficulty in relaxing, there's difficulty in concentrating. Approach the exercise indirectly, through the senses. Don't simply retell the story or jump to a verbal characterization of it. Start the memory one to three minutes before the height of the event. Describe where you are, what you see, hear, touch, taste, smell. Experience the event kinetically, through the five senses. You're there in your mind's eye. Re-live sensations. What is the shape, size, form, texture, length, thickness, color of objects? Do you see the light in the room? There are different degrees of light. Do you see a reflection? What sensations do you feel in your body, and where? Is it hot or cold? Is there a smell in the room, and where do you smell it, in your nose, throat, or mouth? What's under your feet? Don't say, "It's a rug." We don't assign labels. A label wipes out the reality. Tell us if it's gritty, soft, slippery, or rough. Don't say, "I'm in a room." A label simply summarizes all the things which your senses give you.

You will be surprised that your memory retains much more than you give it credit for. How do you know it's wood? You see a color or you see a texture. We don't use generic words. We use sensory realities. Never mind if it makes sense. Is there anything on the wall, the ceiling? Don't get pushed towards the central emotional event too quickly. You need sensory memories to take you there. What you're wearing can be very important. You begin to connect with yourself. The approach is as precise as possible. Unless it's done the proper way, you'll have a problem.

It's important to remember that you can't work directly for emotion. That was Stanislavki's emphasis. Never try to remember the emotion. The less you worry about it, the better. That's the way we trap it. Sensory memories are the golden keys which lead the

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actor to recovering the emotions. If you don't re-create the sensory reality, you'll not access your emotional response.

To be in control of what you're re-creating, you need to have confidence in what you're describing; otherwise you'll describe it with some conventional word which will not give expression to your experience or sensation. Say, "I am hearing I am touching" Where does it lead you? Go in a sequence. If you move too quickly towards those emotional things and leave out what you're experiencing, the actor may often not fully respond. Don't rush over the object. Control it. Define it clearly. Force your attention on details in your descriptions. Make everything precise and definite. When you talk about yourself and you say "I am" That's when the exercise starts to work. Develop one or two of the objects which are the inciting factors. One day one object will work; another day another object will work. If you use just one object, you'll wear it out, so always have another object ready.

We never ask a person what happened in the remembered experience. We don't ask the individual to tell us the incident or the emotion. Through the actor's choice of objects to create the sensory reality, the emotional truths are evoked. We ask, "Where do you feel it?" "What part of your body?" We go through it very mechanically, very methodically. I ask you for descriptions; not for the sake of describing, but to make sure that your concentration is working precisely. We don't care about the story. We aren't interested in prying into your private affairs. By using generalities when you answer, you leave yourself open to general acting. You'll be re-creating this emotional memory for yourself while other things are going on in the scene.

We must be careful that the individual is ready to be subjected to these very emotionally powerful exercises. It's best that you do the exercise for the first time with a teacher who's there to relieve your fears or worries that you might not be in control. Anything that happens accidentally might not be helpful in learning how to use the exercise properly.

You should first observe the exercise being done by others so that you're able to do it properly. In addition, the exercise must be subjected to public pressure. If the actor says, "I've tried it at home and it doesn't work," then we have to take him through it in class. It would be best if we took you through all your emotional memories here, but there's no time.

If you're doing an emotional memory and at the same time you start to get frightened and worried – the equivalent of the feeling

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that you'll get hysterical – that's where the abstract /additional movement comes in. The abstract movement is of the first importance because if you're able to do the abstract/additional movement, you're in command. If you have difficulty, we'll help, but you must learn to do the exercise by yourself.

When drawing from emotional memory on stage, the actor must never lose control of himself. To break that rule is killing the character you're playing. Indulging means that you get caught up in the emotion and you forget to do other things for the scene. Therefore, in class, we give you other things to do, such as daily activities, abstract movement, etc., so you can't indulge yourself in unconscious emotional behavior.

The distinction between sense memory and emotional memory

I believe the emotions and the senses work exactly alike. There's only one difference. The emotion is sensation at a point of high intensity. Say something hurts you and you say, "I feel a little pain." Something hurts you sharply and you cry, you weep, you say, "Oh God, it was so terrible." What's the difference? There's no difference in the pain except to a certain degree. You say, "I like that person." When do you say, "I love that person?" When it's more than liking a person; it advances to a certain point and then you "love." Say you don't like a person. You can talk to him. You don't go over and pull his beard. At a certain point, however, you just don't dislike him – you hate him. What's the difference? It's a degree. That's difficult to understand, but because of my Russian experience with Stanislavski, I've been brought up with the dialectic element.

One of the basic elements in the dialectic philosophy is that at a certain point quantity turns into quality. You have money, fine, but nobody says you're rich. At a certain point, you become a millionaire. At that point it changes and you're treated differently. When you heat something, at first you don't sense it, and then it starts to boil. At the boiling point, that's emotion. It's the difference between heating, which is a sensation, and boiling, which is no more than heating to a high point. It's the same with fever. If you have a little fever, you don't become bothered. In fact, you can even go out. But when you have a fever of 103 or 104 degrees, you don't leave home. It becomes dangerous. At a certain point something changes to a more intense experience. That to me is emotion.

Animal exercise

The animal exercise is our basic foundation for characterizing a role physically. Using this exercise we can talk, think, move, and feel more naturally and humanly with an inner content, rather than arriving at the character with only an external mask. With someone who becomes easily hysterical or emotional, I sometimes assign the animal exercise, which helps the actor avoid emotion or self-consciousness in order to get a sense of himself without emotional or mental associations.

To create a character using the animal exercise, you must know the attitude you're seeking. You choose the characteristic, then pick an animal. If the character is ferocious or a predator, you might pick a bear or a gorilla. For a character who's suspicious or curious, you may want a cat. Then you study the animal. You go to the zoo. Get a *National Geographic*. Look in the neighborhood. With this exercise we copy the movements, manner and habits of the animal.

Don't begin initially by imitating the animal's normal position. Start by feeling each area of your body separately, standing up. Get a sense of the animal's limbs: How are the back and shoulders positioned? Make an effort to get a feeling of the animal's whole body. Then, let yourself go into the animal's position on the ground and begin to explore. We want the rhythm of the animal, the physical life. Where is its center of gravity?

Ask yourself, how is the animal different from me? For instance, an animal sits on its haunches differently than the human being, and its body moves as a unit. When it lies down, it decomposes. The animal's body is not tense and doesn't get involved with mental tension. Ask, what motivates it? The animal looks for food. What's its breathing like? An animal puts the tongue out for a specific reason. Move the tongue. It moves its tail. Do the eyes move independently? This is a discovery process.

You must do things the human body isn't accustomed to. Don't move the arms and legs by purely human energy. Make sure you know what to do with every part of the body. Where do you send the energy? Don't be afraid to fall, but fall with the animal weight, not the human weight. Now speak, trying to approximate the animal's sound.

Eventually, after working on the ground for many sessions, sometimes months, we stand the animal up as a human being and work on retaining the physical life and characteristics of the animal when creating a character. Pick details of the animal's behavior that will

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Lee Strasberg demonstrating an exercise in Bochum, W. Germany, 1978

fit what you want, and take just the elements you need. As soon as you can do this, take a monologue and speak it as the animal, retaining physical elements of the animal's gestures. Don't make an effort to be dramatic. It's a test of the actor's ability to maintain the animal exercise standing up as well as on the ground. When you stand the animal up and form a character, it's not the animal any more. Speak in your own, real, human voice, using the characteristics of the animal for the appropriate characterization.

In the ordinary course of the sequence of exercises, this exercise comes later, but we may also use it earlier when someone isn't responding to the other exercises or if there's difficulty making contact with the senses. For example, for people who have very strong physical conditioning in ballet and in dance, we find that at a certain point the breakthrough comes with the animal exercise. It has a strange effect on many people who have a very strong physical routine. It goes counter to their sense of beauty.

I had a student who got to a certain point in the work and she became blocked. She would literally give up. I tried different exercises but I couldn't break through. Then she did the animal exercise and somehow, by being external and not worried about her feelings or what she was thinking, she began to make contact with herself.

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The same thing happened with a young boy of 18 who was also blocked up and nothing was coming through. He did the animal exercise and it was the best commitment he had. By breaking away from the physical pattern that unconsciously you're confined in, by having to do things that you're not used to doing – such as growling – this exercise invariably leads to a new awareness of oneself.

Because most actors don't use the character approach, the animal exercise is largely unused in American theater and film. When you see some of our people perform, their characterizations are based partially on this foundation, which is why they create a different kind of character that is very subtly, clearly, and precisely evoked.

Song and dance exercise

No matter what the actor thinks he's doing, he often does no more than what his habits dictate. The song and dance exercise (which is not actually performing either a song or dance) is a remarkable vehicle for breaking habits.

The idea of the song and dance exercise came to me while teaching a class at Carnegie Hall. Several students couldn't do this particular exercise, and I realized that I was dealing with singers and dancers who were tied to rhythms and movements. Clichés had been trained into their voices and bodies, and they were tied to the sequence of the song or dance. So strongly are these habits linked and set that they work unconsciously, without deliberate intent. I needed to think up an exercise that demonstrated how tied the student was to habit, and that helped break the habitual patterns. This simple exercise stimulated in the actor a complete experience that I never would have anticipated.

During the first part of the exercise – what I call the song – the actor stands straight and at ease before the audience. I discovered that this very stance of facing the audience is what every actor essentially experiences, no matter where he is on the stage. Even when he's backstage, essentially he's facing the audience without any protection. That pressure dictates, interferes, and disrupts what he wants to do, and unconsciously forces the actor to respond to the audience, rather than do what he had planned.

With some people, the mere fact of standing there in front of an audience makes them feel like they want to run away or bury themselves. Others have a problem making eye contact and look over my head at something. I always say, "Is somebody sitting there that's not paying?" The whole point of the exercise is that nothing neces-

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sarily has to happen. You don't do any acting to impress the audience. When nothing is happening, you're at ease.

By standing still, the actor gets rid of involuntary nervous behavior and thus begins to let impulses come through. The nature of impulses – which are biochemical recurrences – is to express themselves. We're working with the law of physics and of nature, which says as water seeks its own level, so do impulses. With impulses, what's in the way is habit. We must get the habits out of the way through relaxation and sound. One purpose of the song and dance exercise is to become aware of what's happening to you emotionally and physically, and to permit it to happen. If this exercise is done well, there's no problem in expression.

The ultimate purpose of the exercise is to help students shed their strong habits which inhibit expression. The song and dance exercise doesn't have to be done at a certain period during the training, and can be done at the beginning, middle, or the end. It's immaterial. It just goes side by side with the sensory work and has a particularly powerful kind of resonance which permits us to deal with the basic problem of expression. In fact, for the teacher, this exercise is a diagnostic tool for evaluating the actor's problems.

Song

Stand still and face the audience with the feet hip-distance apart. When the feet are too wide apart I call it "the Atlas stance," like Atlas who braced himself and carried the whole world on his shoulders. Settle into a position and don't move from the neck down. All areas of the body should be quiet. Be at ease and relax to show that you can control yourself. Do away with involuntary movements, or what I call involuntary nervous expression. We have some awareness of what we do with our voice and with our speech, but we have literally no awareness of what we do with our hands or our faces.

Don't sway. Don't look down; if you do, you'll bury yourself. If you're staring up or at the back wall, it means you'd like to eliminate the audience. Be aware of tension. What happens to you when you stand there? Make contact with what you're feeling and experiencing. Do you feel weak? Do you want to run away, hit, yell, or scream? Are you excited? Is it a pleasant sensation? Would you like to embrace us? If you want to cry, do you know why? Is it fear or frustration? You must know what you're feeling. When you're afraid that what you're doing is wrong, it's already wrong. Don't settle for "I don't know" as your answer.

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Now choose a song that isn't complex. Get ready for the projection of tone by breathing even and easily. When the actor speaks without vibration, the tone is often dead. The vocal chords must vibrate. When you speak quietly in the theater but with vibration, you'll be heard because vibration and sound waves travel. Send the breath through the lungs, make the sound from the lungs instead of the throat, which is one of the most trained areas in the human being. If the vocal habits are strong, the physical habits of behavior and expression are even stronger.

Make eye contact with someone in the audience and loudly sing out each syllable of your song separately, giving each syllable an equal emphasis. Include the melody so that it doesn't come out in a monotone. For instance, using the song "Happy Birthday," you would begin with an elongated first syllable (haap ...) then continue with an elongated second syllable (... peee) and continue that for each syllable of the whole song. The length of each syllable should be the same as the long Ahhhh sound we make during the other exercises. Be conscious of taking the breath in and out so that it will begin to function as a foundation for tone, rather than using only the mouth and the verbal muscles. If sound is just through the mouth, it doesn't bring the whole body with it. Make a full sound from the lungs, which means that we literally breathe in, hold it, and send that breathe out into an even explosive sound. Stop and take a few breaths between each syllable, and don't rush from one to the next. Commit yourself to a good vibration, not to the words. Don't taper off or fade out at the end of a word. Be careful not to choke on the sound. If the sound is compulsive and continues on too long, it can be habitual. That means the actor doesn't know when to stop. If the sound is not committed, there can also be a problem in expression. If you laugh, keep the sounds going through the laughter. If you experience the sensation of pins and needles, it means something is being released, but not fully. Take additional breaths or you'll get dizzy.

The point of the exercise is that when you pick a song and then separate each syllable in the song, it shows that you have control over it, and that the habitual rhythm isn't the determining factor. Many people can't do it, and not because it's difficult. It's easy to do. But the pattern and the habit is so strongly set that they can't stop at "hap" and "peee" and "birth" and "day" and so on. They say, "hap-py" having to finish the word. Likewise, as soon as they say, "birth," they follow immediately with "day." They can't help it. They can't stop themselves.

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If something starts to happen and feelings arise during the exercise, usually the actor will try to contain it, thinking, “What the hell is this happening for? I’m supposed to just do this and here I feel like crying, or I feel like hitting someone, or I feel like embracing someone.” Relax and make contact with those feelings. And never say, “I don’t know what’s happening.” If the actor thinks this, there is only one legitimate response: “What’s the matter with me that I don’t know what’s happening?” You can’t let yourself off the hook. You must name the feeling. In this case, I won’t tell a student what I think the emotional impulse is. I insist he tells me what he thinks he’s feeling.

Dance

Now we add movement to the song, what I call the dance part. Establish a rhythm with your body and keep repeating it (jazz, shimmy, skip, jumping high, any repetitive movement). At the same time, unlike the elongated sound of the song exercise, make a short explosive staccato sound for each syllable of the words from the song you have chosen. “Hap! Pee! Birth! Day!” Stay with the same movement until the teacher gives you the command to change to another repetitive movement. Don’t think about how you’re moving. Make the sounds and the movement at the same time and let the whole body go.

Movement with sound exercise

Make a movement with the body that expresses a feeling, and don’t worry about what it is or how it looks. What sound best fits that movement? Add it. When you have an impulse, ask, is it fear, anger, embarrassment, or the desire to embrace someone? As discussed before, be aware of where you’re looking. Looking down is burying yourself; looking up, you’re hoping for God’s help. They’re involuntary nervous expressions.

Voice exercises

It’s usually assumed that because we emphasize the internal nature and the emotional experience of the actor, that we therefore pay little or no attention to the technical problems of voice and speech. We certainly do. We, however, don’t confuse that with acting. A person can have a very good singing voice and be a very poor singer

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artistically speaking. What irks me is actors that don't have the training or the skill to use their voice, and yet think that because their voice is loud, that that has anything to do with vocal skill and expression.

The great early twentieth-century European actor, Alexander Moissi, who became a protégé of Max Reinhardt, exemplifies the height of what can be done with the voice. There was a lot of negative reaction towards him because his German speech was softer, more Viennese, with a feminine kind of quality which in some circles was not quite Germanic enough. Reinhardt and the critics found his acting quite exciting. They thought it was more than just the straightforward Germanic kind of delivery, and that Moissi was a romantic actor with a beautiful face who could play leading parts. In his declamation of the poem, *November Wind*, recordings of which are still available, you can hear his fullness and vividness of tone, and his sense of rhythm. The sound retains the beauty of the words. He describes the fall wind and how it whips up, flips and stirs, and thunders. You can hear the moments when he makes his sounds with the rasps, the rolling of his r's and the way he can elongate a sound at will when he wishes. This is all deliberately done and with great commitment, concentration, and skill, and it can all be heard in his voice without even understanding the German language. It's an extraordinary example of what can be done with the voice. His voice is a fine instrument.

The actor's voice must be clear, responsive, and fully committed, in order to express emotion and deal with the essential problems of character, situation, and experience. We are all products of our environment. In my own case, I don't like the way my environment conditioned me to speak. You'll hear my Lower East Side accent with a little bit of something extra on top, even though I left the East Side many years ago. What you hear in my speech is very colloquial. I also occasionally use biblical, prophetic, and large fancy words. All of it comes from my background. I would like to speak like Churchill but without his deliberateness. In 1925, I appeared professionally for the first time at the Theater Guild as a young soldier in a play called *Processional* by John Howard Lawson. Phillip Loeb, the casting director, suggested I see the voice teacher, Lemuele Josephs, at the American Academy. Josephs said that my voice was good, and not to worry about the accent. He did say, however, that I had a tendency to apologize with my voice. The resonance in the voice can be restricted because of the kind of life we lead. I learned to become more declarative in my speech. His

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belief was that speech must be related to motivation, not pronunciation.

Voice exercise 1

Stand relaxed with your back and head against a wall. Your head and chin are angled upward slightly. Pick a spot on the opposite wall to where you'll project your voice. Look toward the spot that you picked, and using a loud voice with committed energy and a short explosive sound, begin to count slowly starting from one to about six. With each count, your head and the tone of your voice move downward. At the same time, try to press the back of your neck against the wall. As sound is made by breath entering the lungs – the voice then is a reed instrument. Fill the lungs with air and send it out, hitting the sound off the chosen spot on the back wall. Move the voice box, which dictates sound as it vibrates from the lungs, like bellows. Learn to send the breath from the diaphragm. You don't want the vocal effort in you throat.

Do the exercise with words after you've worked with numbers; practice this twice a day for five minutes. You'll feel and hear a difference in your voice. If the voice is pitched high, there's tension. Drop the voice and get darker resonances.

We are conditioned to control sound. This has value for social behavior but not on the stage. One of Stanislavski's actors spoke softly and had difficulty being heard. One day the company went on a picnic and suddenly, from the forest, they heard loud, full screams. Out came this actor screaming. A bear was chasing him.

Voice exercise 2

Put your hands at your chest with elbows bent and on a level with the shoulders. Collapse your chest by moving your elbows down and toward each other, then expand your chest and speak at the same time, moving your elbows up and back, expanding your chest. Speak words first, then phrases. Speak only on the expansion. Breathe in between. Then speak on both the expansion and contraction. This will make the lungs active.

Voice exercise 3

Take a speech and do it like a phony Shakespearean actor. Now move the body with the speech. Permit the body to form the sound,

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and don't worry about how it looks. Make a move with the body and allow the voice to follow the body movement.

Part 2

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Editor's note: Lee Strasberg's work is geared towards fulfilling the intentions and values expressed by the playwright. To accomplish this, Lee tells his students, the actor's ability to create characters and to inhabit those characters believably and honestly conveying a sense of truth is the most essential element of the craft of acting. During the second two hours of class, Lee has students working on characters and scenes. He guides his students to create imaginary realities and deliver the lines truthfully. The importance of acting out the given circumstances kinetically, logically, and "sensorially" – a word he often used even though it's not in the dictionary – is central to the work. He focuses on the problem of anticipation which removes the actor from the reality of the moment. As he explains, "improvisation" is the key to finding the logical real behavior of the character. The procedure of "speaking out" to help the actor deal with difficulties in scenes is also recorded in these segments. Lee's invaluable insights on how actors should deal with directors are also included.

Creating the character

The art of acting is, first, the creation of a character, not the reading of the line or the playing of the scene. Your goal is to characterize on a level that is completely convincing, and this work on the character is separate from the work on the play. The character comes alive if you believe in what you're doing.

Some actors create a character more intrinsically or intuitively, but it certainly can be learned through training. There are many questions you must ask yourself about the character you're creating. To search for the reality, ask yourself what the character would do in each situation – not what you would do. What's the

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character's state of mind and emotional involvement? How does he behave and move? How is he dressed? Is the character close to your own nature? If not, what's the difference? If there were no words in the scene or the other person wasn't there, what would the character be doing? What would the character be doing if the scene never happened? Look for the opposite within the character. If you play a good man, find out where he's bad. If you play a bad man, find out where he's good. When you play a thief, also look for the hero.

You must also create your character's relationship to the other characters in the scene. What you do is partially dictated by your scene partner, whom you should, however, not rely on. That's where craft comes in. You must be concerned with what you're doing in the scene and adjust to what your partner is doing.

It's important that the audience not be aware of your work as you try to come to grips with the character. If you break up or laugh out of character in a scene, allow yourself to laugh as the character. Come out and be at ease in the scene, and don't just go through the motions of what has to be done. Behave naturally and dramatically, and don't fiddle around on stage, which is involuntary nervous expression.

Another important procedure is to make your work personal. In *The Godfather II* I played my character quietly and simply. I'm obviously not a mafia figure, but I'm as smart as Hyman Roth. I think carefully, I run an organization, I plan things, and I'm as convinced about what I do as he is about what he does. I created this power, and when I said something as simple as "Come in, come in," the way I said it conveyed that power. I also related my own love of football to the character. There's only one difference – he can literally kill without feeling any compunction.

When a character is fully created, the audience can walk away and speak about that fascinating person that lives on separately from the actor. Actors should be capable of playing any kind of parts assigned to them, and do them very handsomely. As a young actor in my early twenties, I was very good at characterizing, and won a prize at the Settlement House competition given by Stuart Walker, who was the head of the Portmanteau Theater, which was part of the Little Theater movement of that time. I wrote him a note saying I would like to meet with him because I was thinking of becoming a professional. When I walked into his office, he looked at me and said, "But what part did you play?" I said, "I played the old Jew." He was startled. I was only a young man of 25.

Given circumstances

Off-stage preparation is necessary to bring the given circumstances of the play to life. It's what happens before the actor comes on the stage that motivates the actor's presence. This includes the actor's state of mind and emotional involvement, which are essential for that scene to occur at the time it does. Without justification and the actor's internal motivation to say a line, the end result is conventional, and we wind up with the stencil, the cliché, just an actor reading the line. Something must happen to stimulate the aliveness on stage. When the aliveness is fresh, it's real, and it breaks through the pattern of the lines.

Prepare by acting out the previous scene off stage by yourself, evoking a reality that sends you onto the stage with the proper motivation and behavior. Otherwise you'll only have the idea, won't behave logically, and will just act out the lines. Use the sense and emotional memory exercises that you've learned and practiced to create the specific physical or emotional reality when necessary. I emphasize that you work on this by yourself. You don't need your scene partner. Only occasionally will you meet a director who will insist on doing this kind of work with you.

To build a cumulative continuity through a scene, you must include the subtext; what's going on behind the lines, what's the character's need in the scene? Some people use the words "actions" and "intentions," which are thought to make the actor come out on stage. I stay away from these words because they give the actor too much a sense of the mechanical. We find a different logic which is often quite different from mechanical logic. The actor needs to create the sensory exercise or the emotional memory and keep it going throughout the scene as required. For example, if the scene demands that the character be shocked, you must prepare yourself on or off stage before the moment it's called for in the scene.

Creating imaginary realities with sense and emotional memory

The imaginary realities you create for the play must force the scene to happen. To do this, you must find the dramatic core of the scene and think of a parallel reality from your own life. To touch different bases of your own reality to become material for the scene, the memory you evoke doesn't have to be literally an equivalent event. Choose a definite, personal, and intense situation with a parallel

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need that is as strong for you as for your character. When you're making these choices, be clear and sure of your own personal reality. Each scene demands a certain degree of intensity, but don't invent colors to match the intensity needed for the scene. Ask yourself, what is the dramatic reality or the degree of intensity needed? Choose one or a combination of exercises with the same degree of intensity.

Being specific allows the actor to proceed with conviction and to produce the emotional reality that the scene demands. Supply the simple elements of the situation, accept its reality, and logically carry it out. We start by creating the sensory objects needed for the scene. Literal objects don't help us. Use sense memory to catch experience on the wing and to bring your mind, your emotions, and the situation alive. Create the event sensorially and convey the reality you wish to achieve. If you get lost in the scene, stay with one sensory thing, work slowly, and it will become real.

To me, your choice of realities for a scene demands imagination. For example, if the scene is at nighttime, investigate, what kind of nighttime is it? Is it moonless and quiet? Is it foggy and fearful, etc.? I sometimes use the term "long-distance mood" to describe the loneliness of a character. Interior plays have a sense of loneliness.

Effective use of the imagination is also the ability to conceive unfamiliar realities. 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. It's the ability to combine different realities that allows you to create a world or era that you may have never experienced. For instance, you may have to create sickness for a scene; there are different kinds of sicknesses and you can't possibly have had them all. However, you've had your own illnesses. On the basis of those illnesses, you become able to understand another type of sickness because some of the elements are the same. If you need to be feverish in the scene, you may need to add overall sensations which, imaginatively speaking, evoke being hot like being under the hot sun or in a hot bath. The same senses are at work. As long as I look hot and feel hot, I will be convincing.

The "Magic If" is a process used by Stanislavski in which the actors ask themselves, if I were in this situation, how would I behave? It can provide a strong compelling incentive which helps some actors achieve the reality of living the part on the stage. In a good actor, the "Magic If" will trigger off unconscious emotional memories. Therefore, in somebody who is sensitive and has the

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capacity to function without getting in his own way, it will permit him to rise to the scene on the basis of the “Magic If.” It doesn’t always work. That’s why Stanislavski believed you don’t just do the “Magic If.” You also must work on creating the situation by choosing objects of substitution and emotional memories which will tell you how to behave in the scene.

Real emotion continues after the scene is finished. When you commit yourself only physically, you often get what seems to be emotion, but isn’t. It’s what we call “general emotion,” which can be impressive and exciting. However when it’s over, the emotion is gone. That’s how you tell if it’s real. It doesn’t stop right away. It’s like a wave that comes in and then there’s a backwash. When a mechanical wave is made, there’s no backwash.

The truer, the stronger, the more intense and personal things are, the less the actor knows what to do with those feelings, and he may be inhibited by them. If you simply make sounds and move, you’re stirred, then things begin to happen and the actor finds expression which is vivid.

One example of using imagination to create other realities for art occurs in abstract painting. Abstract art is the most personal art, the most subjective. One must understand not the form, but what the artist is saying. The whole development of modern art was a movement to reduce things to the fact that we are nothing but molecules, to break things down to their basic meaning. Look at early Vincent Van Gogh and early Paul Klee. They evolve from complicated pieces to pieces that get to rock bottom. I was recently looking at a sculpture by Picasso. The way in which he achieved the result was flabbergasting. What I thought was a mechanical hat was made out of a little toy car. To see the connection and to be able to put it together the way he did is pure imagination. Many great modern artists are very capable of quite realistic figures; however outstanding modern artists refine their work until details are lost and only certain essential things come about. That’s imagination.

Words and lines

Words are often a lifeline the actor desperately tries to hold on to. Some actors believe that the words are the reality and that each word carries with it some intrinsic power and value. I don’t happen to share that view. We need real behavior on the stage. It’s the subtext – what’s going on behind the lines – that creates the situation and is the foundation of the scene, not the memorized words or

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the deeds. As Stanislavski pointed out, when actors just use words and say to themselves that the character is angry or the character is jealous, they mechanically indicate and imitate the behavior of people being angry or jealous.

We rarely have difficulty with memorization, but we mustn't adhere to the lines mechanically. Treating words like cued speeches with punctuation stops your thoughts, and is one of the worst things an actor can do. The speech is impeded. Stanislavski pointed out this problem in his wonderful phrase "the muscles of the tongue." The memorized lines held in these muscles habitually stop your thoughts because the mouth is the most trained area in a human being. The way in which you first memorize the lines literally remains fixed and is subject to the pull of the "muscles of the tongue," according to Stanislavski. When you say the first word the remainder of the line rushes to the actor automatically; so strong is the adherence to the memorized verbal pattern or sequence. The habits of speech which are set into those muscles can only be released by learning to relax them, as we do with some of our exercises.

To give words meaning, you must first know the reality, the thoughts, sensations, and experiences that the words stand for. If you don't understand the meaning of a line and why you say it, you may have missed the key to the scene. Once you realize what the author intends emotionally, your behavior will become clear and you can use your own remembered reality to color the lines with all the emotion you need at that moment.

Without preparing for a scene by working on the given circumstances and the subtext behind the words, you'll come into a scene only prepared to abide by the cue sequence, waiting for your partner to speak, and dealing with the lines as if they were the reality. When you imagine yourself as the character, also imagine that the character hasn't read the play; don't anticipate what will happen in the scene. Instead, prepare for what you're coming on the stage to achieve, usually with another character whose activity and continuity will collide and adjust to yours in the scene. Let the sense memory objects you're concentrating on dictate what you're doing – not the lines. When you add sensory and emotional memories to words, you learn to speak with your own thoughts to color the lines, bring meaning to them, and create new values that enrich the scene. It's the thought that makes the line, not the line that makes the thought.

If you don't pour your own feelings into the words and sense of

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what you mean at each moment into the lines, then you'll only have the author's general meaning and not your own. This is very difficult to achieve in any way other than using a personal experience. It's then that you create a reality which can be remembered and kept fresh and alive each time you say the lines.

We're not talking about a trained voice. The trained voice is an artificially induced way of delivery which should not be used for more than just voice strengthening, and is also not meant to make the voice sound emotional. When the voice training strengthens and frees the voice to do whatever you wish to do with it, that's right. Otherwise voice work can impinge on acting. It's the impulses, emotions, thoughts, and sensations that fuel the expressive voice.

If the actor is having difficulty being expressive, we overcome this by various procedures. In class, we try singing the lines or speaking them in gibberish to break the verbal pattern or habit of expression. If you sing or use gibberish, it comes out with an easier expressiveness and it relieves and releases the voice. When what we think and feel cannot quite come through and the voice is mechanical, by singing the words their meaning is released and goes into the lines. We don't speak just with words. The very effort to share that expression activates your body to become alive and responsive. As soon as you start to think, the movement of the actor changes and he becomes real.

No matter how fast you speak or if you speak in a dialect, you should still be clear and understood. Let your sense of the moment surface, and the brain will automatically remember what you need. When someone tells an emotional story, the voice rises naturally. Without the person being aware, the depth of feeling influences the voice. Using sense and emotional memory, the actor achieves the same results so that the lines become fresh and alive each time they're said. With the voice simply made free of cues and imitation, the speech is precise and clear.

To help avoid the strong verbal patterns of the lines memorized in the recording in the brain, don't speak the lines aloud in the beginning. This will also help you memorize the lines more easily when you are not worried about them. When I became an actor, I memorized my lines in the New York Public Library reading room where you had to be quiet. Therefore, I learned the lines and did not develop verbal habits. After that you can try working with the lines out loud at home during your regular daily activities, making sure not to give the words any particular emphasis.

You must also work to eliminate any habits of speech which may

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affect the way in which you say the lines. These include things such as speaking very softly, loudly, or monosyllabically, and looking down or shaking your head while talking. When looking down, you bury yourself and the lines. Shaking your head, which is very common, creates a fused image clouding your meaning. When the head shakes, the actor remembers each of the words that go with that motion. That's not necessary. It's the brain that does the thinking, not the head. Therefore the head doesn't have to keep wobbling.

One of the mistakes actors make in approaching Shakespeare and the classics is that they break up the phrases, and tear them apart from their continuity. The actor should continue the sense of the line until the end is reached and the point is made. You don't break up a musical sequence anywhere you wish.

On the other hand, when we approach words with an effort to be natural, we make naturalism itself into a manner. In the attempt to be natural, actors may plan to pause or stop at certain moments, whereas in life you're not aware in advance of the places where you pause or how you go from sentence to sentence. Often when we try to speak "naturally," we disregard the actual meaning and intention of the word. Instead of adding meaning, we give the audience the idea that we're just thinking.

The problem of working on Federico Garcia Lorca's plays, for instance, is that the people are almost invariably simple, peasant-like, with a folk quality. At the same time, the plays are basic universal dramas between men and women who represent the deepest feelings of any woman or man, not just of this woman or man. Yet the characters are not exalted beings or aristocrats who speak and behave differently. The language has to be poetic and yet simple. It's a problem for actors. In the effort to do the poetry they begin to do some kind of fancy over-the-top acting – or, as we call it, superficial, external acting. On the other hand, since the words cannot be changed and even in translation have a certain poetic value, actors then try to say them naturally and the result is we get neither the naturalness nor the poetry.

Lines are a complex that includes the situation, the event, the characters, how the scene is being staged, lighting, sound, costumes etc. But inherent in the lines are more than just the meanings or emotion. The words have beauty – an additional thing – which you must love to be effective in acting.

At the Actors Studio there was a revelatory production of *Romeo and Juliet*. The actress playing Juliet did a private moment before

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she came out on the balcony so that, when she appeared, she was completely in her own world. When she realized someone else was there, she got scared, ran off and then came back before she continued her speech. It gave the scene a dramatic urgency. Also the actor playing Romeo maintained the sense of danger that the character is actually experiencing by sneaking onto the family grounds to see Juliet. And when Juliet says the line about marriage, it's fresh because Romeo is portrayed as a boy in love, a boy who has risked his life for love and lust, not marriage. This kind of thoughtful interpretation of scenes was always happening at the Actors Studio because the actors didn't anticipate that they already knew the scene or the memorized line. This comes as a result of our approach to acting which focuses on what is happening in the scene, not just the words or lines.

Anticipation

Unconscious anticipation is the built-in occupational disease of the actor. The very fact that we know the scene is going to happen affects the way we approach the scene. You'll come in ready to abide by the cue sequence, waiting for what your partner is going to say, and dealing with the lines as if they were the reality. Instead, it's important to do the reverse. Don't anticipate what will happen in the scene. Instead, prepare off stage for what you're coming on stage to achieve.

To eliminate the inevitable anticipation, we need to relax and work for the values that we want to create. The spontaneity of improvisation, and the gibberish exercises that I learned from my teachers Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, are procedures to deal with the problem of anticipation. We need freshness and spontaneity in acting. The breaking-up of verbal patterns and habitual responses leads to a more truthful expression of reality.

The actor should never work for a finished product. As soon as he becomes more concerned with the end result rather than what he should be doing at that moment, the value he's working for is eliminated.

Speaking out

Speaking out is a procedure used both in rehearsal and in performance to get rid of impediments that stifle the actor. Our habits of non-expression come from situations in life where we don't speak

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out about what might be disturbing us. In class I have the actors speak out loud during the scene if there's a problem.

Some examples of speaking out are: I feel shocked; he startled me with something; I don't know what to do; I'm so concerned with the lines that my concentration is off; this isn't going well; I must really make contact; I'm angry at my scene partner; personal problems, go away; I'm here now and I've got to take hold of myself; I'm an actress and I just did a faux pas; I feel as if I'm drifting.

What is the precise difficulty, why is it happening, how do you feel, and what does it make you want to do? These are the questions which are answered out loud by the actor.

In performance, obviously, speaking out is done as an inner monologue. Whenever you encounter problems in a scene, break through the fabric of the play and speak out internally to yourself to make contact with what you're really doing and feeling. Speaking out must conclude with gaining control of the present moment and continuing the scene. When you do this, your inner life comes to the surface and your thoughts give the lines color.

Speaking out when you have a problem in a scene differs from using the character's narrative, which is when the actor speaks to himself as the character, describing what he is logically thinking and doing in the scene.

Improvisation

Improvisation is of inestimable importance during the training work and even more so during the process of production. For this work, we don't paraphrase the lines from the play. That has no value. If actors give me all "sound and fury" in a scene, only then do I sometimes allow them to paraphrase the lines as an exercise to see if they truly understand the meaning of the words.

The actual lines limit the actor with an unconscious sense of the expected results. To release the actor from any obligation to the text, we improvise scenes that are outside the play. We invent them. Improvising behavior in an imaginary scene without knowing the end results will expand the actor's thinking, helping to break habitual verbal patterns and to avoid the cliché or the obvious reading of lines in the actual scene.

In training, we use improvisation to force the actors to think and speak truthfully; otherwise they may be caught within the rigidity of the word from which they may never get loose. Without improvisation, the actor may resort to imitation and can't do his work

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fully. By starting with the behavior, not the words, the actors can then see whether the words are logical or not.

In the initial stages of work, the actor improvises to explore the subtext of the play and thus produces spontaneous behavior, bringing additional colors and reactions to a scene. I once gave a group of actors one minute to do an improvisation with the word “America.” One actress did an imitation of the Statue of Liberty and then, bringing her hand down, drank from a cocktail glass. Clifford Odets, who was also in the class, improvised that he was asleep, then waking up, rushed to the subway, and then getting to his office put his feet up on the desk with nothing to do. Thus, our use of improvisation in rehearsal takes the emphasis off the memorization while seeking a sense of the scene. In what he called “études,” Stanislavski used improvisation to discover the logical behavior for the scene without using the words of the scene. He observed that during the “études” the actors were relaxed and effective.

Improvisation is not just an exercise, however. It’s a procedure the actor uses in all of his acting, even when he is actually performing. It demands real thought, speech, and logic, which leads to discovering a true reaction for the character. While on stage, you have to think of what a scene illustrates, and use your imagination to create the realities others don’t see. If your behavior is only obvious or conventional, people won’t be moved. If you’ve discovered the logic of your character’s behavior through improvisation, the lines will be colored by real emotion. A certain part of every production thus remains improvisatory. We cannot change the author’s words, but what we think and feel goes into the words we say.

An example of the power of improvisation occurred during a rehearsal of the Group Theater’s first production which I co-directed with Cheryl Crawford of Paul Green’s play *House of Connelly*. In a scene, Morris Carnovsky, playing the part of the uncle, goes off stage and kills himself. After the shot, in every performance of this particular scene, the actors off stage improvised. The emotional reaction developed quite spontaneously with everyone backstage, building up like a cascade. People were crying and screaming as they then carried the dead body onto the stage. In that rehearsal, suddenly, the theater doorman rushed on the stage. Startled, he screamed, “What’s going on? Why doesn’t somebody do something? Morris Carnovsky has been shot.” As a result of our improvisation, it was so convincing that he thought Morris had really been shot. Improvisation allowed for the broader vision and more poetic

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sense of artistic values for which the Group Theater was known.

In the Group Theater, our training also occurred during production, and all the work was a result of improvisation. I advise actors to use improvisation when they are acting in a literary play written in a high-blown language to break that literary form of speech and avoid being mechanical and "hammy." The improvisational form is also used by some of our comedians, many of whom turn out to be very good actors. Forced to think on the stage, comedians have to be clever. No matter what is written for them, they improvise, which makes them think, speak, and behave non-rhetorically.

It's no surprise then that during the middle of the sixteenth century, the actor/comedians of the Commedia dell'arte were the first professionals who brought the idea and practice of improvisation into the theater. Their history is somewhat shrouded in darkness. Until the Commedia dell'arte, dialogue in plays had been written in a highly literary form of language and punctuation which forced the actor to abide by a certain rhythm. The professional comedians of the Commedia dell'arte spoke in their own dialects, which broke the literary shape and form of the spoken line. They had stock speeches, gags, and jokes, some of which were written down. However, when it came to a speech where someone had to be insulted, the actors didn't have to stick to their lines. The whole approach led to a greater sense of real speech and range of behavior on the stage.

When the influence of the Commedia dell'arte spread all throughout Europe, it was an enormous boost for the playwright and changed the whole approach to the theater and acting. For the first time the playwright could break away from the ornate intellectualized kind of delivery of the early modern plays, which were partially based on classic models that were Latin more than Greek. Playwrights began to write ordinary dialogue reflecting the way people spoke at the time. Speeches were memorized but much of it was like vaudeville with colloquial speech, dialects, and gags making the works of the Commedia dell'arte very difficult to translate.

Developments that took place in the theater at the time of Shakespeare and Molière are directly the result of the influx of the improvisation movement. In some of the Shakespearean illustrations of the early seventeenth century, actors were shown to be more alive, running, moving, and doing different kinds of things, which were the contribution of the Commedia dell'arte. The English comedians and the actors of this time became known all over

Europe, and traveled into Denmark and Germany where non-English speaking audiences were able to follow the logic of their performances.

Improvisation is difficult because it has to be done by every individual separately. We don't take enough time to do it in class. Sometimes we demonstrate it or talk about it in class, but then I tell you to do it for yourself when you work with your scene partner. Frankly, I don't know if you're doing it or not in your rehearsal. I do know that when we don't improvise, we're stuck; what we're doing is only an imitation of something.

Improvisation is the actor's real work. It stimulates the imagination and enables the actor to see possibilities inherent in a scene, to create and act out situations spontaneously, and to reveal what's happening behind the lines.

The problem of repetition

Emotionally, the problem of having to do the same thing over and over again makes acting a difficult profession. The challenge is repeatedly maintaining the level of your acting in each performance of the play.

First, try not to imitate what you or others did before. When you try to imitate someone else's great performance it's bad enough; at least there's some reason. However, if you only imitate yourself, there's absolutely no justification.

Great actors possess the "leap of the emotion" which they may come to spontaneously, but often they aren't able to repeat it at will. Some people say that the actor must experience the feeling only one time; after that, he doesn't have to experience it again, but only imitate the external behavior. In my opinion that isn't valid. For me, the greatest single modern performance of an actor was Jacob Ben-Ami in *Samson and Delilah*. He revealed the spiritual element of modern man and was magnificent in the part. More than one emotion came through in his performance. I also saw him in a production of *The Idiot*. I remember very vividly the scene when he opened the door to find a dead body and made a shriek, a kind of howl that went right through me.

Then I went to see him in Werfel's *Spiegelmensh* and he was unable to re-create the intensity that I had previously seen. This led me to become aware of the basic problem of inspiration, and that craft is required to reactivate the intensity at every performance to achieve what we need in the theater – consistency. Duse and Grasso

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sometimes weren't able to achieve fully what they wanted to do on the stage even though on a previous night they could. Duse had to call off a performance before the Czar because she felt she was not going to be able to act that night. When Gabriele d'Annunzio revealed everything about her in his book, "Il fuoco" (*The Flame of Life*), she couldn't go on the stage for many years. If she had craft, she could have used all those things consciously in her work.

I saw and understood the problem of needing reliable repetition, but what was the solution? I found Stanislavski's work, and there it was. It's what made me so enthusiastic about his approach. He had solutions to the actors' problems. I believe as Stanislavski, that after the actor experiences the emotion once, he will be capable of experiencing it again and again, every time the part is performed, rather than only imitating what was done previously. Why should we imitate something if we can create it? To do the same kind of thing again and again, the actor needs to re-create the stimulus that worked.

Although actors must accept that there will be ups and downs, and that each performance will be slightly different each time you do a scene, great actors find results unconsciously. The same occurs in the other arts when the process of craft is left to the unconscious. A painter doesn't need to know what stimulated him. If he feels blocked, he goes for a walk and then goes back to paint. If the actor is blocked, he uses sense memory to stimulate the called for emotional memory.

Working with the director

Don't ever entirely rely on the director; he can't control your thoughts or emotions. He controls the literal things like what you pick up in the scene and where you move on stage.

In our work, we encourage the actor to create independently of the director. This doesn't mean that you tell the director your ideas for the scene. You just do them. If you put it in words, the director may disagree theoretically. If you just do the scene in a way that is impressive and dramatically interesting and exciting, the director may say, "I think it's a little too much this way or that way." Then you adjust it. This is fine because the director's changes build on your logic.

In the old days, the individual stars worked out their own parts. No director told them what to do. When Edmund Kean, the great emotional genius came to London in 1812 and performed Shylock

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in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, he had no director. On the first day of the performance, he came to the theater wearing a black wig which was unheard of. To indicate he was a comic figure, Shylock always wore a red wig; it was part of the tradition. The management pleaded with him not to wear the black wig, claiming, "You'll be hooted off the stage and ruin the performance." It was a big success. The interpretation was his own, not given by a director. He had his whole part worked out.

Although directors today have great influence, the idea of our training is to give actors the necessary foundation to stand on their own legs. For obvious reasons, you can't insist to the director that the scene be done your way. On the other hand, the desire to do what the director wants must come from you, so the director's ideas fall on fertile ground, and the scene flowers and blossoms. For actors, an awareness and understanding of the director's demands and what he's after is of very great value in enlarging the scope of the actor's range and depth, so we encourage actors to come into the directors' classes at the Institute.

Much of the time, however, the actor is left to his own devices. When left high and dry in a part by a director, the actor must be able to fill that directorial void. I once asked a Shakespearean actor in an important production that had failed miserably, "What were you trying to do in the part?" He said, "Well, I'm not sure. I thought that with the director we'd get to know it." But the director was not able to give the actors what they needed to make the production a success. When the director truly helps, it's similar to what a conductor adds to the musician's knowledge of the piece the orchestra is playing. I am fond of quoting the phrase of Samson, who was the great teacher of Rachel, a remarkable actress who revolutionized the whole classic tradition. He said, "To her genius I added the necessary craft," by which he simply meant, I added something that would give her the ability to use her genius and talent.

Of course, working with any director can be a problem, even with Stanislavski. Don't think it was easy working with him. He was often dissatisfied with his work as the director and with the actors' work.

Part 3

SCENE CRITIQUES

Editor's note: Scene critiques provide fascinating glimpses of Lee Strasberg offering commentary to students at the Institute after they had performed a scene in class. This material demonstrates his uncanny ability to dissect and breakdown a scene and offer individual students his most compelling observations. Lee often addressed one moment in a scene, not a whole play – asked students what they were attempting in the scene and why. His purpose was to elicit what choices the actor made for the scene and whether he or she was successful in realizing that choice.

Lee also encouraged each individual actor to discover his or her obstacles to expression, and rarely failed to ignite the actor's imagination. Solutions arose through his questions, eliciting from actors new ideas and behavior and other possibilities of how the character and scene could be played. The questions Lee posed to actors are always probing and insightful, displaying his knowledge of human behavior. Readers don't have to know the characters and scenes of the individual plays or film scripts to appreciate the commentaries.

The critiques took place in front of the entire unit because Lee felt that all actors share the same problems to varying degrees, and that his comments would be instructive to everyone. To retain the primary focus on his observations and commentary, the student portion of the exchange is not included.

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof by Tennessee Williams

Maggie has physical freedom. Go further by touching different areas within yourself. People always have reasons for the things they do. Work for the elements of the character. She's vulgar, sexual, and coarse. Take off your stockings. Use sense memory to

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be more undressed. Make use of the private moment exercise for the freedom. Take your time. Maggie can't rest. She pushes and pushes. It can't be an easy ambiance. Who's going to get exhausted first, Maggie or Brick?

Tennessee's idea is the renewal of the race. If I have a baby, then I'll be somebody. Aristocrats all need a Maggie. Brick wanted to kill her when Skipper died. Brick is more intellectual than she is. Pride becomes a reason for dying. The scene needs good concentration.

Talk to Me Like the Rain by Tennessee Williams

The female character has not moved in a year. She's frozen in time. She's sitting there for a purpose. She's hungry, half awake, and half asleep. Improvise to see if you can have the thoughts of the character. The author is saying, "Wash me clean like the rain."

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

Blanche is a teacher. Know what your character does for a living. How does a teacher stand? There is fear and excitement throughout the scene. Make a constant investigation of things that frighten her. She's claustrophobic. She flutters. Look in the wrong places for the booze. She must have that drink. Drink it as if it were a life-saver. She's so distraught and looks ravaged. Everything she does is to contain herself and is fraught with danger. Tennessee is saying that sensitivity in our world is doomed. Bring the whole place alive. Her sister, Stella, is dirty and messy which is deeply disturbing to her.

The Seven Descents of Myrtle by Tennessee Williams

Myrtle has a sense of survival and vitality. She makes the best of the situation but it does hurt. She's going to love her new husband with all his flaws by seeing that he doesn't smoke. There's a sense of humor and she wants explanations; however, you can't have an argument with him. What a mess she's gotten herself into. Myrtle believes that she won't think terrible things about the people she loves. This is Tennessee's goodbye to Blanche and Alma. They're dead.

Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov

Helen is expecting Astrov. When you're expecting someone, do you sit down? Look out of the window. Thinking about the character is just the surface. The excitement is about something else, the subtext. When someone talks to oneself at home, it's a different voice. Don't give away the excitement. That's hidden. Don't hit the line when you're not talking to anybody. Give every line a value, with a reality. Trust yourself. The mind should have a lot of things to be concerned with. She's a simple person. The mind shouldn't travel too quickly to where the scene is going. Chekhov disliked theatrical things. You must be careful not to play the melodrama.

Chapter Two by Neil Simon

What is George writing? Is he satisfied with it? George is trying to help Jennie, but she doesn't need any help. Supply the simple elements of the reality, the sense of loss, of being alone. It's the little moments you have to watch. Be ready. Put the action before the word. Convey what you see, and do it for yourself. Be aware of technical things about handling certain types of dialogue.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? by Edward Albee

Martha is the daughter of the head of the university yet acts in a vulgar way. She speaks precisely, even though she's drunk. She resents and respects her husband George, and she has a basic dissatisfaction because he has no ambition. She stills loves her father and wants someone to be authoritative like him. She comes from an intellectual environment. George comes from the same background as she does. He's bored teaching at the university. The more he drinks, the more sober he becomes. He wants to help her. He's not above that. Albee is very precise with words.

The Owl and the Pussycat by Bill Manhoff

It's 2:00 am; don't answer the door. Waking up is a sensory reality. When Doris comes in, she checks out the place and thinks about where she's going to sleep. What are the sensory aspects of Mr. Sherman's apartment? What are the noises and smells? He becomes self-conscious when she comes in and covers himself up. He responds to her even though he thinks he shouldn't. He felt compelled to call

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the landlord because what she's doing is bad for society. He thinks he's doing the girl a favor. She's not a prostitute in the conventional sense and not an intellectual but she loves fancy words. He's intrigued by her and had been spying on her for weeks. Think of the metaphor of the wise old owl which is inquisitive and the cat which is sensual, impulsive, and lashes out.

I Am a Camera by Christopher Isherwood

Life is something Christopher observes but is not part of. That's why he's a "camera." A camera doesn't give feelings away or react. This is the playwright's comment. Christopher can't write and thinks he's a failure. There's nothing going on within him. Sally is constantly on the go like a bird that never stops flying. Everything with her is more. She lives life in a weird way. She can't control it. She'll be fooled once and then fooled again. Don't do anything that will settle you. Get up, sit down. Never wait for cues. She talks to herself.

An Incident at the Standish Arms by William Inge

The wealthy young woman behaves with great sophistication but there's sleaziness. She has so much physical need that she invites him up. Afterwards, stay in that mood or attitude. You must be undressed and putting on your clothes while coming back out on stage like a bat out of hell. Everything is dirty. Wipe your lips clean. She feels guilty because she liked it. You must make the lines of the play logical through your behavior.

Middle of the Night by Paddy Chayefsky

Betty is sitting on a fire escape. Work on the cold and the night. She's fleeing from somewhere and she doesn't know where she's going. Use a substitution of a person that incites an emotional reaction for you. George's ego is crushed. He doesn't want the divorce. He's a bandleader, so the rhythm keeps going. Pick out one little detail to get the rhythm. This gives the audience a sense of reality. When he puts the coat around her to keep her warm, it's like he's doing his Vegas act. It shows his authority. See what kind of mood she's in. He thinks he's got it made. The older man is a threat to him. Look and deal with how the character is not like you. She has difficulty with George but with the older man, she responds easily.

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There's no conflict. She always says no to George but then ends up making love to him. She feels herself giving way. She has a divided thing about him happening inside her.

The Rainmaker by N. Richard Nash

Lizzie is a spinsterish schoolteacher with a tomboyish nature. No man has ever broken through her resistance. She says nonchalantly, "Go ahead," knowing Starbuck is a con artist and seeing through him. Starbuck makes everything up, puts it together, convinces people and tries to bluff her. He needs to convince people he has a power over the rain. Even his name is made up. It's all a con. He's romancing her. Create nighttime in a barn. The two of them should come into the scene carrying the whole day that happened before. He's right. She has no dreams. We almost don't hear what he's saying. This develops into a real confrontation.

Barefoot in the Park by Neil Simon

Carrie is waiting for the furniture to arrive. Nothing in the apartment works, and she's trying to fix things. She's gruff and messy with paint on her face and wearing old jeans. It's cold in the apartment. There's a hole in the skylight and if she bustles around she could be warm. The new place has to be ready when he comes in. Paul comes home before she's ready, and the place is a wreck. She tries to divert him from noticing that there's no furniture. Carrie's subtext is, "I'm not a good wife." Put the dress on while he's on the phone. Dance like a moth around a flame. Be aware of how you look. Create a romantic atmosphere like their first night at the Plaza without having to worry about who's in the next room.

In the Boom Boom Room by David Rabe

Susan suffers a severe traumatic experience and therefore hates men. Susan's story must have a dramatic effect. She felt violated. The scene can't be easy and natural. It will have no focus. She expresses hatred for men in her dance. She thinks, "You want me; hell, you'll never get me." The other girls in the club don't know that she's a lesbian. She's different and this must be established. She's dealing with Chrissy, a strange girl who is so frightened and tormented that she must be careful about what she tells her. Chrissy is simple and highly sexed. She doesn't understand her own sex

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drives. Her father had raped her. Sex for her is both satisfying and frightening. She needs sexual gratification. What does being sexually attracted imply? People like her, and Susan watches her. This creates the tension. Susan relates to Chrissy as if Susan were a man. Susan's speech about her rape leads to Chrissy thinking she might want to shoot her own father. Chrissy is naive, talks to herself, and is a girl on the edge of a breakdown.

The Time of Your Life by William Saroyan

In *The Time of Your Life*, time seems to stand still, which is the basic rhythm and tempo of the scene. Every individual deserves the time of their life. There is a sense of ennui. Life is so dull and not going very well, but who knows what's better? The play suggests something is going on with Mary L. She drinks but she doesn't get drunk. Joe's a habitual drinker but also never loses control. He's the center of life in the bar, utterly unknown but very famous here. He has an authoritative bearing. He's talking, helping people and doing everything; she's doing nothing. It's not a pick-up, yet something has happened to Mary. We never know what it was, but she's in a world of her own. Life is turned around to another time and image. There is a sense of longing; a sense of mystery is created. She's fixed in space as if she's only a thought or an image. Her mind goes with the fantasy things he says. It's about something you missed and suddenly it's given to you on a silver platter. She goes away nourished and refreshed. The values of the play are in this scene where Joe supplies the time of her life.

Snowangel by Lewis John Carlino

Connie is asleep at 4:00 am when he knocks. She's very tired and doesn't answer in an alert manner. Create the darkness and the tiredness. She's a prostitute who can't refuse because, although she's the best of them, the others are younger. She hides herself from him, looking like a wreck after working all night. The girl is someone he doesn't want and who doesn't appeal to him. She's slovenly. The booze he brought is terrible, but she drinks it anyway. She has no sensitivity. She gets the dregs of men. He has a story within him, which he uses her to reveal and act out. He's desperate – he can't make love to a woman directly because she has to live up to what he's written in his journal.

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The Women by Claire Booth Luce

Mary is naive and sheltered and doesn't play around. She's very well brought up from a good family. She and Crystal, the woman her husband left her for, are from totally different backgrounds. The play is about confrontation between people of different backgrounds. Crystal pays less attention to Mary in the scene. She's half sorry for Mary. She thinks these rich people certainly are stupid. Crystal is down to earth. She's been around. This isn't an obvious confrontation.

The Only Game in Town by Frank Gilroy

Fran hasn't seen Joe in three months. She's been by herself and is angry. She looks like the Vegas type but isn't. Joe doesn't know whether to stay or go. Who knows who she belongs to? She's repaying him for a nice evening. He's also different, not being on the make. Behave like a woman who knows her way around. The only game in town for him is gambling and not marriage which is the only thing on her mind. Joe has another. They don't know each other that well. He wonders who keeps her. This is a different kind of girl. This makes the play.

Richard III: Lady Anne monologue, by William Shakespeare

As preparation for the scene ask what you would do without words. You must do things outside the emotional memory to maintain logic and life. Lady Anne is praying and performing a religious ceremony that has not happened before. She's all cried out. You must attend to the pallbearers. Lament, "Take care of the dead" in the words of the Bible. The casket is closed. Do a ceremonial ritual over it. You must have a reality to fit the scene. Are you tired? Set down your honorable and heavy load. Someone who has been killed that way can be called honorable.

Two for the Seesaw by William Gibson

Gittle sleeps around with anyone she likes. What's happening goes counter to the physical behavior. She knows that Jerry, the older guy, is not behaving properly; therefore she behaves differently. Every moment is for the moment. Both people are uneasy about something. She's vulgar, loose, sloppy yet very alive. Life comes, life

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goes. Gittle is a born loser. She has a simple quality and understands people. Make sure you know how she moves; after all she's a dancer and that quality must be created.

Private Lives by Noel Coward

The superficial veneer of Coward, the great snob, permeates the play. His world is one of manners. It's like learning sign language. Create the outside structure first. Amanda is completely assured of her position and beauty. Coward's characters are children being naughty. Make as little movement as possible, the minimum of what you need.

Uncommon Women and Others by Wendy Wasserstein

Rita tries to be shocking, like someone other than herself, like a man. She wishes she was the other girl in the scene ... in her boots so to speak and commit to that fully. She's acting out a fantasy, not facing her own life. Always approach the scene as if it didn't finish in the way it does. Rita presents a grown-up image as opposed to her childish image. She's scared because she has to go out into the world after college. Choose something you're confident in.

The Long Hot Summer by William Faulkner, Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank, Jr.

Clara, a schoolteacher, comes in looking for the gift. Why at this time of evening? She's impelled to come. You must reveal that. Come in to play the situation, not the scene. Ben makes advances towards her and breaks through her standoffishness. He has eyes for someone above his station, and he doesn't give a damn. Every time he does something outrageous, she's intrigued.

Kramer vs Kramer by Avery Corman and Robert Benton

Speak in a way to make contact with your partner. Ted is a sensitive and intelligent person. This scene is not a shouting match. Don't rush. At this moment, Joanna wants to get out of the marriage and be by herself. She's a little confused and smothered. You need good physical logic and behavior. You have enough life; don't put it on. When you're overacting you're saying to yourself that I am not doing enough so I have to do more. The fantasy reality connects

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with the actual reality. No lawyer can tell her what to do. Don't forget she has to make a good impression on the judge.

Jimmy Shine by Murray Schisgal

Rosie the prostitute really likes Jimmy. He's straightforward, real, and a different kind of a guy than she's used to. He paints and he's a little bit of an intellectual. She enjoys being with him. She loves him because his basic aspect is that he's really lonely and she doesn't expect anything from him. She likes the fact that he wants to talk to her. He's a strange and interesting character. Whenever she comes over, it's like an oasis for him. He's a stray dog that she likes because of what he represents. She's rushing because she has another appointment. Rosie still wants the money. He wants companionship more than anything else. When she leaves, he doesn't know what to do.

The Sea Change by Ernest Hemingway

Create an ambivalence of the young woman leaving her husband for another woman. She wants him to tell her she can go. The strange thing is she does love him although he's a male chauvinist. The love is tainted by what has happened. The young man may want her, but he doesn't need her. The male ego is involved. The very thing that needs to be created is not in the lines. Create a time when you were torn yourself between two things. You want one thing but you have to give up something. What do you feel when you find out she's going off with another women? He takes a male attitude, not just angry and disgusted but also intrigued.

The Little Foxes by Lillian Hellman

What is the basic relationship between the upper-class Regina and Horace in the scene? His presence is important. It trespasses upon the arrangement. This must be shown. People live in a house surrounded by servants. This must be done a certain way. Regina is a survivor. She holds the reins. The confrontation is not about the money. It's a life and death struggle between them. He's a weakling. She thinks, if he goes, he goes. It doesn't matter to her. She always hated him and doesn't trust him, and that gets under his skin. He'll try and get back at her somehow. This must be worked on or else the scene doesn't go. A sense of life must always be there. Regina has a zest for life like in *Hedda Gabler*. She eats crow.

Before Breakfast by Eugene O'Neill

The woman is an ordinary working girl that married a guy who's appealing and a little fancier than she is. She discovers the man is cheating on her but she won't give him a divorce because she's very attached to him. Alone she'd be nothing. She's thinking – another girl he can find, but a job, no. She's the one who works for a living, not him. She thought he had money. His father died and there was nothing. She keeps saying that he owes her because of how much she suffers. She takes a certain amount of enjoyment in staying with him even though she's miserable. The nagging happens every day. You must establish the ordinary daily life and activities, which becomes central to the scene, not the dramatic life. It's an everyday situation from which the author develops a dramatic scene. Have no expectation of anything else. Deal with the situation on a human basis, not a dramatic basis. Use simple logical behavior and create the reality. The major thing isn't the drinking. The drink is a daily thing. Don't be overly dramatic about it. Make it real, natural. She thinks, let the other woman get in trouble. It serves her right. The man is a Greenwich Village type who got caught by her. He lives on dreams. He's meek. He can't take her nagging anymore so he slits his throat to commit suicide. Unless the scene is played in a logical and human way it doesn't come off. O'Neill had tuberculosis and went to sea and the sea cured him. He had poetic aspirations and was a ladies' man. He saw something in this topic to develop. A very interesting play and a tour-de force inspired by Strindberg.

The Crisis by Paul Bourget and Andre Beaunier

A sophisticated French couple returns home from the opera. The crisis is over a mistress and the wife says, pay for me like you pay for your mistress. This is a high stratum of society and things are done in a sophisticated way. In the confrontation, don't just come in and accuse him. Analyze the relationship between the two people. Say how you feel to yourself, "I'm not certain, I'm uneasy." The wife must be madly in love with him. She wants to drive him mad. Make him eat crow. This is a physical love scene. These are two people married in a civilized society. Mistresses are part of the custom but not public. He had a mistress and kept up a certain pretense. How is that done? She gave him back the same treatment he gave her. He begins to fall in love with her again when he sees how other people appreciate her. Behave like you don't know if the

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scene will happen. Create pain and heartache, a sense of doing something to somebody. The less you worry about the scene, the more it will happen.

The Taming of the Shrew by William Shakespeare

Remember, Kate is aristocratic and in her own environment. She should hold her ground. She's a spitfire, but she's well brought up. Petruchio shouldn't be too difficult for her to handle. She contains herself, unlike the male actor. This tension makes for the dramatic color of the scene. With others, the word is enough but not for him. Kate is formal. Petruchio is insulting and on the attack. Don't use literal physical strength with her – the scene is not as physical as the actors performed it. Later on in the play there's a scene that becomes physical. This is what Stanislavski meant about physical action being the root of the lines, the source for the words. The dialogue in this scene and in many of Shakespeare's plays is very quickly spoken. The characters are trying to outsmart each other. As the scene goes on the characters become sharper. There's a sexual significance of the Shakespearean metaphors, rich with double entendre, that must be emphasized. Restate it for yourself in common vernacular. You should enjoy the fact that Shakespeare gives you a way of saying these things – a language that we don't have.

A Hatful of Rain by Michael Gazzo

Polo has a hangover. Not just any hangover. What kind of hangover is it? What degree? What intensity? When he got drunk last night it was because of his brother and his father – this is the culmination of the father bawling him out. The character doesn't know where he is going when he wakes up. He only half remembers what he did last night. This is a once-in-a-lifetime scene. What does the author mean when he writes, "Would you mind if I put my arms around you?" The characters are close to making love. It's a shock in the scene, a special situation. After all, this is her husband's brother. If you don't create the proper realities, the scene goes nowhere. Celia is just a working girl in love who thinks her husband is off with another woman. *A Hatful of Rain* is a good play to work on because there are a lot of daily activities – making coffee, doing the laundry – things that express the drama in simple physical ways.

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Miss Julie by August Strindberg

Julie is a noble woman trying to break away from society. I want to see the way she sees the future with Jean in this scene. The mood of the scene was not reflected in the acting. I had no sense that these characters came from having sex – no terror or excitement. Jean should come out with his shirt open and Julie should behave like she doesn't want Jean to go. Improvise to find the logical behavior for the scene. We have to see that something salacious has taken place. What has happened in the bedroom needs to be continued through the scene.

The Hustler by Walter Tevis

Eddie has sensitivity for the pool cue. He takes good care of it. You have to be a person with a particular skill. Say to yourself, this is me with certain adjustments. There wasn't a sufficient incentive for you to get the pool cue. Sarah thinks maybe he wants her to go with him, and maybe she should. She's been around the block. Sarah sleeps with another man and he's jealous. The drink is treated differently when you come in out of the rain.

Inferno (from *The Divine Comedy*) by Dante Alighieri

There's a problem of classical delivery with a narrative poem. You must know the meaning of the lines and look for the simple reality. At the gate of hell, what does Dante see? If it's nothing, let's see that. What serves as your point of concentration? Make us see what you see. If you move around too much you give away everything. Act the scene and let the words come out of that however they will. Dante's *Inferno* summarizes medieval life and the entire culture of the middle ages, even lyrical love poetry.

A Patriot for Me by John Osborne

Man behaves in strange ways. Why? Who is Alfred and where does he come from? He's half Jewish so he's not permitted in the imperial army; however, he's well liked by the officers. He could be dangerous. Every time he touches the countess, she burns. She's excited by unusual kinds of things like vulgarity.

The Country Girl by Clifford Odets

Georgie's line about an aching tooth should be resonant – her body aches – her soul aches. We have to fall in love with her. It's a different kind of behavior where people's lives are not their own. Everything she does is to bolster her alcoholic husband Frank's acting career. The character's mood pervades everything. Do a private moment for Georgie to give us a sense of her inner life's struggles before Bernie, the producer who is giving Frank a second chance, enters the scene.



Lee Strasberg's father, Baruch Strasberg. Strasberg family photo



Lee Strasberg's mother, Ida Strasberg. Strasberg family photo

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Paula Miller Strasberg and Lee Strasberg at the Stanislavski Centennial, Moscow 1963. Strasberg family photo



John Strasberg and his father, Lee Strasberg at the Actors Studio, c.1966.
Photo by Peter Basch, courtesy of Staley-Wise Gallery

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Lee Strasberg and his daughter Susan Strasberg, c. 1961. Strasberg family photo

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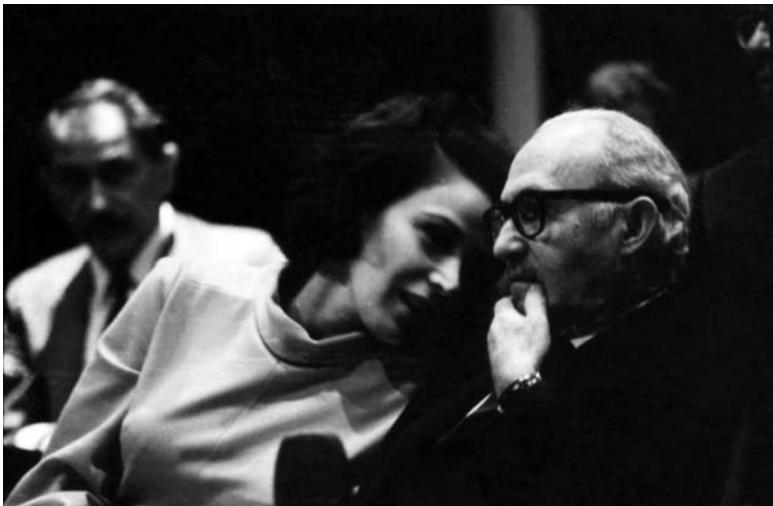


Lee Strasberg and Clifford Odets in Fire Island, c.1950. Strasberg family photo



Lee Strasberg holding his dog Cherie in Fire Island, 1967. Photo courtesy of Syeus Mottel

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Anna and Lee Strasberg at an Actors Studio session, c. 1968



Lee Strasberg in a bookstore in Japan, 1975. Strasberg family photo

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Lee Strasberg with his granddaughter Jennifer, daughter of Susan Strasberg, c.1968. Strasberg family photo



Lee Strasberg with sons, Adam and David, 1982. Photo courtesy of Ken Regan, Camera 5

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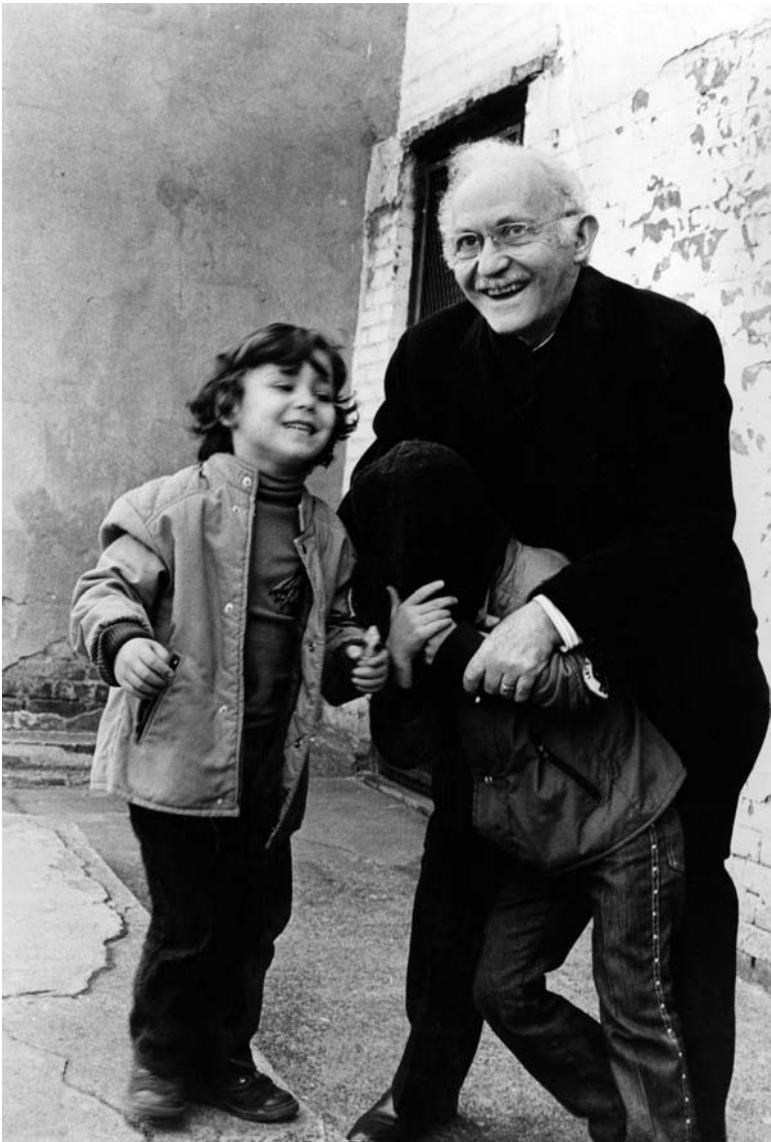


Anna and Lee Strasberg at Joe Allen's Restaurant, Los Angeles, 1980.
Strasberg family photo



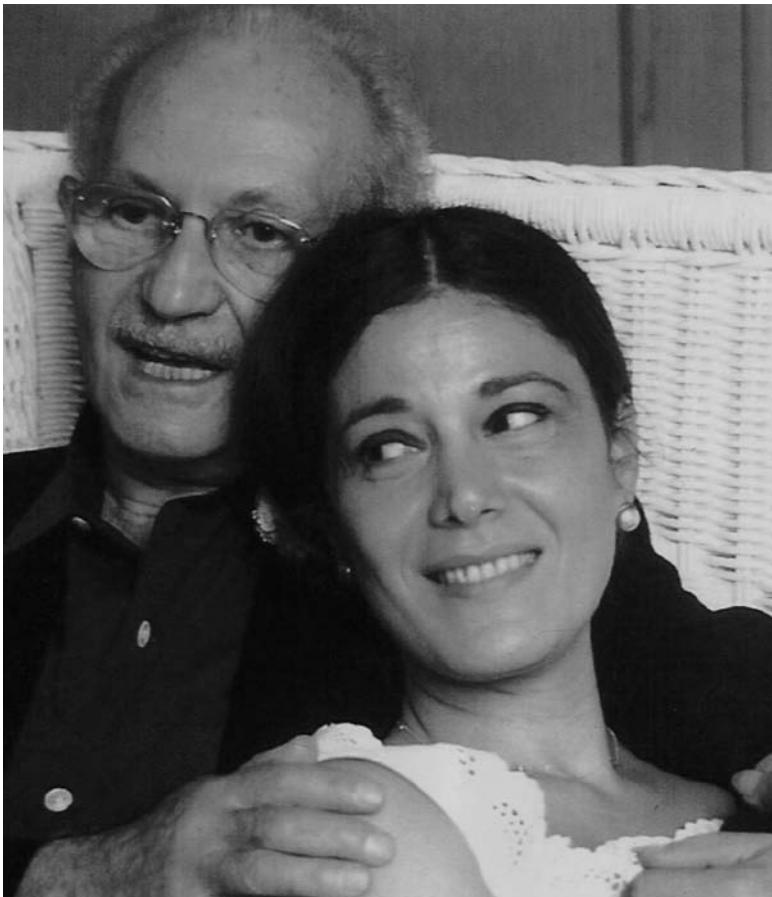
Lee Strasberg cooking at home in New York City, 1977. Photo courtesy of
Ken Regan, Camera 5

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Lee Strasberg with sons, David Lee and Adam in front of the Actors Studio, 1976

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Lee and Anna Strasberg at their home in Los Angeles, 1975. Photo courtesy of Elyse Lewin

Part 4

DIRECTING AND THE METHOD

Editor's note: *The Director's Unit provides Lee Strasberg's insights and techniques which will assist professional and student directors with identifying and achieving their vision, including suggestions about staging, working with actors, casting, set, lighting, sound, editing, rehearsal procedures, mass scenes, and working with the playwright. The material in this chapter derives from transcriptions of Lee's Director's Units taught in the New York and Los Angeles Institutes from 1975–82. In these classes, he lectures student directors; they present their scenes which Lee then critiques. The breadth of this material reflects his contention that the director must know more than anyone and is responsible for everything having to do with the production. The material presented here includes fascinating references to influential directors of the American and European theater and their masterpieces. Lee's passion for the theater resulted in his seeing many of the finest productions of the twentieth century during his lifetime. Voraciously, he absorbed theater criticism and history and studied the great directors including Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold, Reinhardt, and Belasco. Lee tells us that in order to function creatively the theater and film director must have a vision, reveal the event, and create the drama for the scene. Lee Strasberg's insights on how to work with the actors, how to get the actors to perform, and why the director, like a composer, must write a score for the play are the substance of this section.*

Introduction

When I started to direct in the theater, I had – as an actor – already acquired the Stanislavski System or what later became to be known as the Method. Although originally, I had no intention of directing, I eventually became very interested in what could be done with the

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actor and the Method from a directing point of view. In America in the 1920s we were privileged to see the best the theater world had achieved, and didn't have to go abroad to see the work of the Moscow Art Theater, Max Reinhardt, Eleanora Duse, Feyodor Chaliapin, and Mei Lan Fang, who was at the height of his talent. This was very fortunate for my own work. The material for directors I'll share with you includes references to the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, Eugene Vakhtangov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Max Reinhardt, David Belasco, John Ford, Elia Kazan, and others. During the 1930s, Orson Welles' Mercury Theater represented a great epoch in American and World Theater history, especially in his approach to the classics and Shakespeare. His was a Shakespearean approach to Elizabethan plays that I had never seen before. Little of it remains, which is the fault of the American environment that is not aware or appreciative of the achievements of its talent.

I feel a great responsibility to transmit and share with directors those experiences that were essential as a foundation for my work. While we've developed basic training for the actor, we haven't done the same for directors. I'll describe how I arrived at these principles theoretically from witnessing the work of extraordinary directors and as a result of my own directing experience to confirm or amplify my conclusions. These are the principles I encourage. Otherwise, the director may be satisfied with a production, but when the audience isn't, he won't know why.

I organized the units in directing to clarify my own ideas, apply the principles I evolved from the work of the masters and their productions, and to pass that on to my students. In the theater, the notable masterpieces of directing or acting aren't alive and can't be seen. In the other arts, the great masters continue to live in their work. The painter is able at the moment of creation to quietly, calmly, and coolly look at what he painted yesterday and can make a change. The writer corrects with words, like the great German poet Heine who may go back and deliberately put in a vulgar word to get his point across. The moment of creation and the moment of evaluation are at different points. In the theater, this isn't possible.

What makes a director great? The most important and outstanding directors – historically speaking and based on achievements – have come from the acting profession. It appears to be the best preparation for directing. It's very difficult for a director to go from one type of genre to another without having an acting background and the skills to play straight plays, comedies, etc. The directors Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold, Reinhardt, Copeau, and

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Jouvet had all been actors. And since they're actors, they understand the actor's problems; they can help the actors solve them and make the play live. The set may be great, everything may be terrific, but if the acting isn't strong, the play suffers.

While the best directors in the theater are from the acting profession, in the cinema that's not always so. This is because the technical problems of directing in cinema are so important; the necessity of being an actor isn't as strong.

In either medium, we come to grips with the director's problems by analysis. Unless the director thinks as a director and knows how to approach a production in this way, he will never achieve the result he has in mind. The director can never stop learning. Often we learn more from mistakes than from the productions that turned out well. From all my failures I've learned a great deal. I've seen great productions of second-rate plays and second-rate productions of first-rate plays. When I directed my second play professionally, a reviewer said, "Never has such a bad play moved an audience so much." I felt that I'd done my job. I couldn't completely overcome the faults of the play. It was a sad play and it got sadder and sadder. People were moved, but it wasn't successful. After a year or two of thinking it over, I came to some conclusions about how to correct those things that didn't work. When the same problem arose again, I knew what to do.

You'll find any book on directing limited to no more than that individual's own way of doing things, his own experience in directing. Even though we can learn much from studying, for example, Stanislavski's prompt books of *The Seagull* and *Othello*, just studying the work of one director seems to me an invalid approach. Nobody can speak of music and say, "This is what I do," without taking into consideration what all the great masters of music do. We look in the work of many directors, past and present, for what works and what doesn't.

Achieving your vision

It's the director who must write the score of the play or film. He reads the script differently. The director's job is to make events on stage illuminate the words, but not in a mechanical or simply physical way. The director doesn't just stage the physical reality; he supplies the heart of the event and creates a reality for the audience. He also knows what problems need to be solved. For example, how should the director treat the prologue in *Richard III*? In order to

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conceive of that scene, the director must know what he'll do in the whole play.

The director's vision for each scene is of primary value. What are the possibilities inherent in a scene, the dramatic behavior, the dramatic reality?

What's happening in the scene that must be explored. For example, in each of the [Harold] Clurman and [Elia] Kazan productions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the staging is similar, but in a distinctive way each director creates a different sense of inner reality. In one version, Blanche enters during the first act, she looks for a drink, finds one, secretly takes a sip, and then when Stella asks her if she wants a drink, she says, "Yes of course," as if she hadn't already taken one. In the other version, Blanche takes a drink but doesn't hide it, and when her sister asks her if she wants a drink, she says, "Yeah, sure, why not?" She isn't secretive, she's in distress. In the two versions of this scene, the staging is the same but the directors created a totally different kind of event.

At another time I had an opportunity to compare several versions of another play. In Moscow I saw two productions of Gorki's *Yegor Bulichev and Others* running simultaneously. I had already seen an avant-garde production of the play done in New York by the Artef Theater. They followed advanced theatrical ideas and I thought their work was OK but my opinion was that it was obviously a propaganda play.

One of the two productions in Moscow was at the Vakhtangov Theater starring Shukin, and the other was by the Moscow Art Theater (MAT) starring Leonidov. I saw the Vakhtangov Theater production first and liked it very much and wondered if I was mistaken about the play. I next went to see the MAT's highly praised production.

The audiences liked both productions, but the critics preferred Leonidov at the MAT. The acting was different but equally good in both productions. At the Vakhtangov Theater the script had come over to me. Shukin was wonderful but there was something different that made their production better than the MAT's. I then went back to the Vakhtangov Theater to see it again. Having a better knowledge of the play, it was the first time I realized and could appreciate what the director was doing.

The play is a symbolic story. The leading character, Yegor Bulichev, has an incurable disease and represents capitalism, which is also doomed to die. Leonidov was brilliant in the MAT production; however, he was dying for the entire three acts. Stanislavski

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commented that Leonidov had a special faculty where he would build on one thing and keep it going throughout the play. He held his stomach in pain as if he was dying for all three acts, until after a while you said to yourself, OK, die already.

The set in the MAT was brilliant, historic, and colorful. In the Vakhtangov Theater production, I hadn't even noticed the background. On seeing it a second time, I realized that it wasn't colorful or impressive but was a skeleton type of cross-section of a two-story house with a visible stairway leading to the second story. It was odd that I as a director who works very closely with scene designers had completely disregarded it. The Vakhtangov Theater production had a totally different vision of the set.

The play contains family arguments about religion with Bulichev's sister who is a nun, with his wife about the children, etc. At the MAT the arguments seemed constant and were made worse by the dying condition of Yegor Bulichev.

In the Vakhtangov Theater it started the same way. But why did I receive a different impression of it? It was because in the beginning of the play, Yegor Bulichev was not sick. He had reddish hair and a florid kind of complexion. He wanted to live. Symbolically, capitalism was still alive and slightly less close to dying. In the Vakhtangov Theater production the vision of the character was done totally differently. For the first part of the play you got the sense that he was a man that loved life. It invigorated the whole scene and the behavior that was taking place, including the arguments. This approach made the transition to his illness and dying more dramatic. The production had one of the most beautiful father and daughter scenes I've ever seen in my life. Despite not knowing the language it was clear that the daughter tried to warm her father with her hands and then her body when he was sick. The staging of it conveyed the sympathy of these two people and her need for love.

In another scene, Yegor Bulichev is going through his sister's possessions, including gold objects and embroidery. The sister is going to leave Moscow to go to a monastery. He's poking fun at her through his behavior by picking up her cross. It's not in the dialogue. It's done with the behavior supplied by the director.

During one of the arguments, Yegor Bulichev chases some family member off the stage and then starts to walk up the stairs and has an attack at the top. The moment is made highly theatrical. You're shocked because it's the first time you know this man is sick, and the attack isn't only believably well played, but he then actually rolls all the way down the stairs. It was in this production of *Yegor*

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Bulichev that I realized it is the director that shapes what happens in a scene and how that can change the entire play.

When Edward Gordon Craig, the great theoretician of the theater, approached *Hamlet*, in each scene there was a search for the truth and he then tried to do it. What truth is to be sought in the scene where the actors visit Hamlet? The actors, who were chroniclers of their time, come to Hamlet and represent the search for the truth. Although the actors were from an ordinary acting company, Craig had them dressed like strange imaginative beings from another world. You look at the costumes and say, this is very strange. It's from these actors that Hamlet gets the idea of writing a scene and playing it.

What would the character be doing if the scenes were not written? Ask yourself questions about each scene. Was it exaggerated? Was it too slow? By answering these questions, the director can change the nature of the play. Using imagination, the director interprets the inner drama of the events and conceives of ways to bring that to life.

Understanding the psychology of the audience is also the director's job. He has to predict how the audience is going to react. A director can go wrong if his memory is subjective, not objective. You may remember a piece of stage business as very funny and fail to see, even if it was done properly or convincingly, why an audience might find it pathetic. Ultimately, the audience tells you if you're right or wrong. Until then, you don't know what works or what doesn't.

When you envision the whole production, you try to make it as real as you can; you try make it as interesting as you can; you try to do your best; and you direct. Whatever has to be done, you do. That includes seeking valid criticism and objectively evaluating your work. A very important part of the director's attitude and capacity is the ability to differentiate between intention and achievement. We always question what we're working for and ask, "What are we trying to do?" Our work in the Director's Unit involves questioning directors about their intentions after we view their work. If we understand the director's intentions, we can use analysis and criticism to show how to achieve those goals in the best way possible.

Working with the actor

The director serves as a bridge between the writing and the actors. An essential part of the director's work is motivating the actor and drawing the actor's attention to the possibilities inherent in a scene.

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What has to be emphasized at a certain moment? You must encourage the actor to create logical behavior and evoke emotions that make the words come alive to create images of reality, not masks of reality.

It's important for directors to understand the actors' problems and what they may be experiencing. On the page it may look very easy as you explain what you want, yet it can be difficult when the actor has to carry out your direction. The director may be unaware of this basic problem and say, "Since I told you what to do, I don't understand why you can't do it. You're an actor." These directors aren't aware that certain things are more difficult mentally than they seem to be. It's one thing to explain how to do something and another thing for the actor to be able to do it. For example, I can criticize a great musician like Heifetz for his interpretation of a piece. I've heard a lot of music and have seen many different performances. There's only one problem. I myself don't play an instrument. The fact that I know the music doesn't make me able to play it. It might not be so easy for the director himself to do what he abstractly believes the actor should be doing.

A director makes a mistake, however, if he tells the actor to do things in the scene that are part of the director's imaginative reality; you're not really helping the actor because your vision of emotional reality is different but no more real than his. And it's the actor's that matters for the scene. For instance, you say something about a window; unless the actor's window is one from the actor's reality, the window won't stimulate the reaction the director desires. Only a reality that's the actor's reality – not mine, or yours, or the playwright's – can be relied on. Once it works, it can be relied on to work the majority of times, which is as much as we can expect. Even the other times it will work sufficiently to give the actor the basic reality that he needs even though it isn't the complete response.

At the Actors Studio, we were doing a play in which I encouraged the actors to work by themselves by staging it without a director. The play, which was considered one of worst plays by an outstanding playwright, still has, I believe, one of his best characters. I had certain ideas about how to stage the play, acting out certain moments instead of speaking about them. To my delight, the play has a very good chance of turning out to be one of the finest plays that playwright ever wrote. It's a complete surprise to me because we didn't expect the play to be so amusing and entertaining. What the actors brought to the stage was brilliant. We won't have a

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director come in and redirect the play as we usually do. I hope it will be a surprise and shock for the theater world.

Directly telling actors the results you expect or want leads to mechanical-like expression. Don't tell an actor to "act angry"; then the actor will "act." Tell the actor to "be" angry by using their own personal reality which actually stimulates anger. Directors must get the actors to become alive on the stage and really think, not make-believe think; really feel, not make-believe feel. Acting is much more three-dimensional than novel writing, except that novel writing has the basic ability to describe much more than most actors can do. Not that actors can't do this; actors can do all of that perfectly, but few actors are able to create that three-dimensional inner activity without knowing our work.

The actor also has a right to his own thoughts and ideas as long as he creates the values you want him to. Often the director has a tendency to think in abstract logic and to insist that the actor agree with him. Don't be concerned with being right. You can win the argument and lose the actor, and that's not good. If the actor does what you want, what do you care what he thinks? There are too many complaints and ego conflicts. It's not necessary to win unnecessary battles. Tell the actor that if he does what you want, he'll be better, and he'll eat out of the palm of your hand. Every actor wants to be better.

It's up to the director to recognize when an actor can contribute certain values to the play. I once understudied Edward G. Robinson in the part of a Jewish pedlar. I differed with his interpretation of the character and thought Robinson should've created a larger dimension for the part. The character, I felt, should speak not just as a Jewish pedlar but – in a more mythic sense – as a "wandering Jew." During the understudy rehearsal, I played the part my way, and the director agreed that it worked better.

Directors need to adjust their approach to the personality of the actor. When Joshua Logan did *Bus Stop* with Marilyn Monroe he asked me, "What's she like? How do you work with her?" He was very open to the suggestions that I made. Another director was the exact opposite. I tried to tell him for his own good that you can't approach Marilyn technically or mechanically. She's not that kind of an actress. She works our way. If you give her anything technical, you won't get what you want. If you just explain to her what you want emotionally, she'll give it to you. She's not a trained technical actress in your sense of the word. I told him, she's trained differently. He was rather annoyed with me, and acted as if I were

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pretending to tell him how to direct. As a result, they had terrible difficulty. She came off very well, and he, who should have come off equally well, didn't. He dealt with himself and her mechanically and technically.

The director's problem occurs when the actor can't free himself from all the things that happen by habit, and those affect the acting. They're deeply ingrained. It has nothing to do with the language; the actor, without the slightest awareness, has memorized all the punctuation marks of a script – where there's a period for the sentence, a comma, a semicolon, a dash. He's not aware of the habits and yet when you listen to him, you'll hear it in the lines. If you ask him how many sentences there are, he'll say he's not thinking of sentences. Yet his first approach to the lines is visual, and thus he starts to read it grammatically because that's the easiest way. It starts immediately and creates a record in the brain that can't be eliminated or wiped out. The extent to which that is ingrained in the actor from the very first moment, I myself marvel at. I can tell by what an actor's doing with a word that he couldn't possibly be saying it in that way, if he didn't know what he was going to say next.

To encourage the actor to find his own personal realities for a scene, have him relax and go through the scene just in his mind, not acting it out. In doing this, the actor doesn't keep literally to the sentence structure, but breaks through the words so the scene will reveal his thoughts. Otherwise it's only a grammatical sequence of the lines. That takes a great deal of pure experience, and I've been very fortunate in my life that I've had more experience than most directors in dealing with this problem. When the author wrote, he used various punctuation marks. When I'm speaking now I don't know where the periods are. That's the difference between grammatical periods and the periods the actor uses when carving a reaction from his own thoughts. Those are two different things.

Directors have different methods for getting what they want from an actor. I tried to observe how John Ford worked when I was in Hollywood but at that time unfortunately, he was ill, so I never did. Even though Ford cast his actors based on physical type and past performance, in his movies the actors are always better than they had been before or were after. I asked people who had worked with him, what does he tell an actor? They told me, he doesn't tell the actors anything; he just sets the camera up, etc. I couldn't get anything from anybody about anything special except from his talented editor, a young man and one of the brilliant editors on the lot at that time.

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The key to understanding Ford's talent was that he relieved the actor from any obligation to "act" by making things simple. Ford breaks the filming up with lots of cuts because he knows what he wants and he edits as he shoots providing the actors with simple directions. He also doesn't move his camera around so the actor doesn't have to worry about adjusting to it. His editor told me two stories which illustrate this in different ways.

First he told me a story about directing John Wayne:

In doing a scene with John Wayne, Ford would say, "John, come walking into the scene and open the gate on the fence." John asks, "Do you want me to do anything special?" Ford says, "No." John comes walking in. Ford says, "OK, cut." John says, "But I didn't open it." Ford says, "That will be in the next shot, don't worry."

He takes all the concern away from the actor. Literally, he will stop him just as his hand is on the gate and say "Cut." In a different shot, Ford says, "OK, now open it." John opens the gate and walks through. Ford says, "Cut." As a result, he gets the actor to move with such ease and with such a lack of pressure.

The other story illustrates how Ford discouraged the actors from judging their own performance. He told me about a scene in *How Green Was My Valley*, with Maureen O'Hara. The editor explained:

Ford was doing a close-up and she stopped in the middle of it. He said, "What is it, darling?" She said, "It's not going well." He said "OK, next shot." She asked why he was not doing her close up again. His answer was, "Obviously, you didn't want to do it; otherwise you wouldn't have stopped."

In this story, what Ford taught her was not to criticize herself. He was saying, "I'm the critic. You do what you do. If it's not right, I'll tell you. I don't want you to feel it's not right and jam yourself up." Ford took the critical faculty away from the actor; something that all of you who are actors know very well. He lets the actors be easy and doesn't push them, thus relieving the actor of any pressure. His actors then can be better, more natural, and more believable than

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they have been before. Everything is done very easily. These are some of the ways Ford achieved his marvelous results.

William Wyler directed very well in the early days, and I also wanted to know his secrets. When I asked people what he did, they said, he just keeps shooting film. I asked, "But what does he tell the actor?" They said, "He just says, 'Let's do it one more time.' He doesn't tell the actor anything bad. He shoots the scene again and again." All I could deduce was that he has an idea of what he wants when he sees it, but he doesn't know what to tell the actor. All he wants is for the actor not to "act." He doesn't know how to get that from the actor so he tires the actor out, literally. He does take after take until the actor says, "Goddamn it, I don't know what the hell you want me to do." He then says, "Let's do the scene again." The actor still doesn't know what he did in the scene that makes it good. My own interpretation is that he got the actor away from coming in to play the scene. He can't say, "Don't act." They'll stop acting. If you say "Do it less," the actor will still do the same thing, but less. So Wyler keeps shooting until after twenty takes the actor gets a little tired and is induced not to act. The pressure is taken off. But you could never tire an actor before a scene on the stage. What about the rest of the play? The screen permits that, the stage doesn't. The screen also allows the director to depict thinking in a way that's terrifically powerful if it's done well. Close-ups and medium shots can reveal inner expression that is rarely caught in words, but can be revealed through behavior. The trouble is that in many scenes people just sit and talk, and it comes from the mouth, not the mind. A director needs to inspire the actors to think like the characters and project this on the screen.

Casting

Casting is one of the first things a director does in production, and it's an essential part of the work. To choose an actor who can give you the psychological dramatic values to make the play real, believable, exciting, and dramatic, look for a type that has the right combination of physical and emotional qualities. The two elements make up perfect casting for actors to convey the characters as the playwright visualized them, and for the audience who has to accept an actor sufficiently for the role.

In some plays the physical type is an essential element of what happens, especially when you have a triangle. You can't have someone falling in love and the audience asking, "Why does he pick

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her? The other woman or man is much better.” The audience has to be able to accept what is said about a character, or if not much is said, they must accept how the other people on the stage react. Also, the conventional type will harm or ruin your play if the casting is too obvious.

In addition to an actor or actress fitting a physical type, they must fit the emotional temperament called for in the play. Casting based on physical type alone can also damage your play if the actor can’t produce the required emotional elements. For example, is the actress able to flare up? What if I annoy her? Will she get frightened, or will she become embarrassed? She might be a person who is not easy to embarrass. The director needs to know if the actor can produce the emotional and psychological values demanded by a character. Sometimes we cast against physical type if the actors have the ability to create the necessary conviction and reality the play demands. There are many actors and actresses who don’t fit the conventional movie star type at all yet can raise the roof with their acting on stage or in the movies.

To get a sense of the person’s psychological and emotional capacity when casting, I ask questions. “What do you like? What do you hate? What foods do you like?” I also ask questions that are seemingly harmless like, “What makes you think you’re an actress?” Or I may ask, “Is there anything that frightens you?” These questions have nothing to do with casting per se, but I know the emotional values that the part requires in the play, so I try to discover whether the actor has those values. If the actor has them, I know I can get them in performance.

I was once casting the part of a lunatic in a Shakespeare play, which was a very difficult part to cast. An actor came in, dressed all in brown, a stock actor, and I asked him if he read the part. He said yes, and that he liked it. I said, “You know the part calls for a lunatic,” and the man said, “Yes.” I asked him if he would mind reading, and he said, “No,” and began reading very stiffly. I told him to speak more naturally, but the man continued to read stiffly. To my amazement he turned out to be perfect for the role. The moral: you have to be careful when you’re casting. Some people may not seem right and others who seem right may have developed habits that are hard to break (but may even be right for certain parts). I came to the realization that I was always intrigued by the type – physical type – and second that I was equally concerned with the fact that the audience must accept the type on a psychological level. Can the actor portray that character convincingly?

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The director must be able to deal with problems the very first time the actor reads the part. It's like starting off the wrong way in a marriage. If you marry for the wrong reasons, you're licked. The problems will begin to creep into the relationship more and more, until it ultimately explodes because basic things were not accepted, confirmed, or shared. The problems have to be caught in the interview or audition. If they develop in rehearsal it's too late.

This point was confirmed for me when I took on a play after an initial cast had been chosen. I thought it would be OK until we started to read a scene in the play where the wife, who is a school teacher, and the husband, a farmer, meet with a mafia figure. In the scene, the mafia person asks the wife to dance with him, and even though she's supposed to be frightened of him, she accepts and they dance. I told the actress, "You're supposed to be frightened of him in this scene and you're not giving me that, so there's no scene. That's what the play is about. All of you are frightened." She said, "He's not doing anything to frighten me. You don't want me to act melodramatically." She had a point. He was not doing much. I said, "Bill, you're a mobster and the scene's supposed to be dramatic, not just a scene where you dance with her. She's supposed to be frightened of you, so frighten her." He said very logically, "I played a part like this for Belasco. You wouldn't want me to make it melodramatic and phony?" I said, "I just wanted to get that value in the scene."

Finally, I thought, if I can't get it from them, I'll have to get that value from the people sitting at the table, possibly from the husband. We sometimes say in the theater, you can't always get the desired value in the scene from everybody. If you get that value from one person, you'll have what's necessary for the play. If the husband's afraid of what's happening between his wife and the man, then I would get my emotional value. I described to the actor playing the husband what I wanted: "They're dancing, and you must be afraid of what's happening." He said, "Where does it say so in the script?" I explained, "It doesn't say that in the script but the scene demands that it be a frightening situation." He responded, "How can I be frightened if you don't give me lines for that? If I had the lines, there'd be no problem."

Now we have three people on the stage, none of whom were capable of giving the central value of the play. Two of them have to be frightened in the scene. One actor couldn't be frightened without words, and the actress couldn't play frightened unless the villain did something to frighten her. She was an intelligent actress yet incap-

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ble of creating those values by herself.

Through this experience, I realized what I look for when I cast. For this play, I would have made sure to cast the play with actors that could give me some of these basic emotional responses when I asked for it. I only needed one person to do it. If none of the people in the scene could give it to me, the play wouldn't have the power the playwright intended. It didn't receive terrible notices, but it came over like a *Saturday Evening Post* story with insufficient excitement. Even though they fit the parts physically, none of the actors cast in the play could do any of the things that had to be done. Imagine casting a fine singer in a part that calls for coloratura, and she can't do it, or casting in the part of Lady Macbeth someone who is very lyrical but can't create the dramatic value of that part.

When casting a play, I pay absolutely no attention to the audition reading itself. What a reading can tell you, though, is if a certain person saying those particular lines doesn't make sense; you see that the lines don't shape in his mouth. I also learn whether I can work with an actor. When casting an actor reading his part for the first time, I stop him and say, "No acting." If he says, "I know what you want," and goes back to the same way of doing it, I know I can't work with him. I don't care whether it's a good or a bad reading. If an actor has the physical and psychological elements that I need in the play, I'll make him act well. That's my job as the director.

I enjoy describing a reading with Dudley Diggs, a very good actor from the Irish Theater who was often in Theater Guild productions. I knew him as an actor and had seen him in many productions. I'd never seen him read before the first reading of a play with the Lunts called *The Goat Song* by Franz Velna. At first I thought he was illiterate; then I realized he could read the difficult words. He was coughing, huffing and puffing, and moving around in his chair. You had to look away or else you would laugh. He was such a good actor he couldn't just say the words easily and meaninglessly. When I'd seen him in productions he was so smooth, so easy and natural on the stage. In the play he could be Dudley Diggs acting believably, naturally and wonderfully well, but he couldn't do that at the reading. He was not yet doing a scene and didn't know where he was going to be and didn't want to be phony. That for me was the best sign that he was an actor. Actors say, "Do you want me to read?" I say, "What are you going to show me in the reading that I don't see when you talk to me? You are only going to show me your

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bad acting habits and I'm not interested in them."

Even if the actor looks the part and reads well, what's the point if the values that he brings to the play are the exact opposite of what's needed? In *The Fifth Column*, we had a tough part to cast of the Spanish colonel who was a communist and played an important role in the play. A television actor read excellently. Another actor who also had done television didn't read so well. All the people wanted the actor who read well. I said, "The reading was very good, but it was a reading, not an acting performance. I have to warn you that he's not going to do anything more than what you saw him do in this reading when he starts acting." That was an evaluation on my part that I couldn't prove in advance. Everybody disagreed, and he was cast. As I feared, he was unable to fulfill the character.

Another example of a casting problem in the same play involved Frances Farmer, who had joined the Group Theater. I needed a certain kind of a girl – a reporter but one who could turn heads with her good looks. I could find good looks but not good actors, and vice versa. I thought Frances would work well as the reporter. She agreed to read for me and I ended up casting her in the part. She gave a first reading that was perfect. At the second reading she asked me, "What do you want me to do?" I was stumped because she had done it perfectly the first time. Unfortunately, it turned out that she was unable to do the part, and the person we cast was good, but I knew it wouldn't be the same because she wasn't Frances Farmer and didn't possess her qualities. The audience couldn't have the same response. The type of actor helps motivate certain events on stage.

The director also has to see the potential for actors to do things that they personally haven't yet done. Otherwise you're casting only on the basis of the past, and asking the actors to repeat what you've seen them do before. In fact, because audiences often see stars as stars, not characters, sometimes we deliberately cast without stars.

I remember an actress whose career was ruined by being compared favorably to a successful and very fine American actress. After a production, critics said, "She's just like a young Jeanne Eagles." When this kind of comparison is made and similar comments are made about actors, it can kill their career rather than help them. As a result, this actress was cast in another play, but said to herself, "Well, I'm a young Jeanne Eagles so I'm as good as she is, and I don't have to study with anybody." Her first mistake was that when Jeanne Eagles was "young," she was not famous. Nobody

cared about her or knew who she was. She was just a young actress working to establish a career. When this actress appeared in the new show and received terrible notices, she was shocked. Since they raved about her and drew comparisons to Jeanne Eagles previously, how could she be bad in this part?

She wandered around after that. If she'd worked with me, it would've been difficult for her, but I think we could've helped her. She had talent, but little by little she dropped out of the theater. She wasn't a young Jeanne Eagles. She was a young actress who could have worked and gone wherever her own talent took her.

The set

Don't think of the set as a background, but as a platform on which to act, a world, in which the play can take place. It's the foundation or environment in which the actors can be real and motivated to act logically. Events happen because the set makes it possible. The director must make choices for the set which embody his ideas of the play.

As he visualizes the production, the director first works with the scene designer. The situation of the play logically arises out of the sets which should bring the situation or the event alive. This means the director must have knowledge about scene design; otherwise he's completely in the hands of the designer. Even if the designer is brilliant at what he does, problems occur if he is allowed to create his own pictorial vision rather than the dramatic vision which the director has conceived.

I'll share with you the extent to which a director may often be impeded if he can't properly convey his demands to the scene designer. This happened when I worked on a Maxwell Anderson play, *Night over Taos*, at the Group Theater. It was an interesting play when we read it. However, we felt it was rather static because it depended on poetic speech, which was not always dramatic. I thought that by bringing in some of the things that were described in the play and making them a part of the action, we could liven the whole thing up and make it active and dramatic. The people in the scene have just come back from a war in which they were defeated. The father had led the defeated army and is arguing with his son inside the house. Somebody comes into the house and says that outside they are rioting and throwing things. I decided to use that, and split the stage set and play the events inside the house simultaneously with events in the square outside. The father will have to be

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frightened by what's going on outside and deal with it in some way other than only purely verbally. We would have used the dual set again in the scenes when the people are dancing in the square at night while at the other half of the stage events were unfolding in the house.

When you meet with a scene designer you have to have a very clear idea of what you want. One of the great artists of the American theater and a scene designer whom I respected, Robert Edmund Jones, was hired as the designer for *Night over Taos*. Even though I was directing, at the play's first conference, Group Theater directors Cheryl Crawford and Harold Clurman also attended. I was a little shy with Jones, the master, but I explained my ideas about how the play needed to be amplified by the set, and that the set should be something that gave me an opportunity to play inside/outside. Jones listened and said, "Don't you think that this would be better?" and pulled from his pocket a sketch for the set. It was a beautiful set but I felt it was locked in. I couldn't do the inside/outside things I wanted to do. I said, "I like what you've done, but I must have the other thing." No one agreed with me. Everybody said Jones's set was beautiful. In fact, I still remember the first minute on the stage when the curtain went up; it was beautiful – a breathtaking and classic setting. However, the set didn't work. I used what I call, a "Reinhardt Noise" offstage of people coming and going. The audience heard this activity, but the stage was completely empty. I didn't believe in phony sounds on records, so we made all the sounds real. When we needed a riot, we created a riot, and when we needed the singing and dancing, we created it all off-stage. The audience heard the actors on stage refer to it, but they couldn't see it. It was very dramatic. After that the play went downhill. The set didn't stop me from doing what I wanted, but it stopped me from getting the value I needed for the play.

Any opportunity of the play working was forestalled because the play couldn't take place in this static environment. It was a respectable production, and it looked very nice in the photographs with the costumes. Nevertheless, it was a calamity. That taught me that a set was not just a background, no matter how beautiful it is. It also taught me the importance of demanding the set you need to create your vision.

Unfortunately, at that time I wasn't smart enough or experienced enough to know that. A year or two later, when looking through some photographs of Mexico by a great artist photographer, Paul Strand, I came across a photograph of the front of a church which

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made me realize that having a set with a church front on the side of the square open to a room would have created the inside/outside idea I had in mind for the Anderson play. By putting a few people in the room, I could have made it look overcrowded. We had a big wide-open stage, and, since I didn't have enough people to make the room crowded, I would have kept them in the doorway pushing in so it looked as if we had a lot of people. We had six people but by having them all in the doorway trying to push in, it would have given the impression of the throngs. Of course, now it was too late.

Another example of how a set is critical for drama occurred when I directed a rather minor play, *Skipper next to God*, written by a Dutch author, Jan Hartock. It was a good theme about Jewish refugees sequestered on a boat who weren't permitted off. It was a moving and simple play. In one of the scenes there's an argument between the captain of the boat, played by John Garfield, and his mate. The captain wanted to keep the people on the boat to protect them, and his mate didn't want to take a stand. I felt the argument was interesting, and we used the set to create drama.

For that scene I wanted the captain to look out at the ocean just as the mate comes in to have the argument with him. I told Boris Aronson, the great scene designer and artist, to create something so that the actor could step out of the room and give the sense of the ocean. He asked if I wanted the captain to walk off stage. I said, "No, because it all takes place where they are on the boat." He said he would think about it. What he did was very simple. At the edge of the scenery he put in a little piece of a railing that extended to the other part of the stage, which continued the sense of the boat off stage. All John Garfield did, wherever he was, was turn and look out, then step in front of the rail. It seemed as if he was watching the ocean. I did that to dramatize and heighten the whole scene theatrically. I also told the mate that when he comes in and sees the captain, he should, as simply as you might do in entering a room, follow the wall. It looked as if he was stealing up on the captain to attack him because of a previous argument. If I didn't have those areas on the stage, I would've been blocked. Had the set been the captain's stateroom with just a porthole window, we couldn't have created the sense of danger. Now it seemed perfectly logical for the mate to steal in and find the captain at the railing where he could easily have been thrown overboard. If the captain were in his room, that wouldn't be a threat. What could the mate do to him in his room? Hit him over the head? The argument took place with the

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impression that something physically would develop, and that the mate would push the captain overboard. Garfield standing there, threatened by the mate ready to subvert the captain's authority, was dramatic. People describe Mr. Garfield as a physical actor, which he was. However, it was the staging which made that scene possible. I simply had to find a way that would make that drama explicit to the public. All these kinds of staging devices are part of scene design.

I also needed Boris to give me a special place where the captain could deliver a soliloquy. I didn't want him walking around. The audience had to see his loneliness, his dramatic quality. In movies it would be a close-up. He created a place on the farthest extension on the stage for this event. It literally was almost on the forestage. We had a little light that was just set for the face and when he came towards that spot; it was if he was walking into the lap of the audience. I had my close-up. Whatever he looked at, whatever he thought, whatever he felt was clear. If he'd stayed within the frame, it wouldn't have been dramatic. You also see that in the great paintings. For instance in Titian or Rembrandt, a man can be facing the audience but his hand is reaching out so it seems to come out of the painting. There is another moment when the captain is left alone on the stage at the end of a scene and the lights are going down. I wanted complete darkness. Then I had Garfield light a match. That match was startling. To light a match in the dark, ah! These are the kinds of visual effects you can achieve on the stage, which is all part of scene design.

An example of the collaboration between a director and scene designer comes from my experience directing *Men in White* in 1933, a play with a medical theme. Our fine scene designer, Mordecai Gorelick, was influenced by the Brecht and Epic Theater ideas. We established the first operating room scene which demonstrated, in a poetic kind of fashion, the dedication of the operating room staff trying to save a life with priest-like religious intensity. Because it was so wonderfully and rhythmically done, people said it was like a ballet. Creating a ballet was the farthest from anything I wanted. But since we had achieved a sense of heightened reality by the way the actors held the instruments, the way the doctor put on his gloves, and the way the actors moved forward and back as if in a ritual – the whole thing was like a coronation or formal event. This gave it a ballet-like effect. It was a big hit and set the stage for the many television medical series which followed.

How we arrived at the set illustrates the connection between

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direction and scene design. Gorelick first brought in his design for the play with the set in the front and a basic scrim behind where you see people working. I asked, "Who's going to look at what's happening in front if you have action going on back there behind the scrim?" I wanted the hospital environment, but I wanted it to help the play, not to hurt the play. We finally settled. He had the shape and outline for a hospital with all its special colors. The doors on the electronic equipment were blue, the rest were brown. We had wide openings through which people could come on and off the stage. Within that, we built the library where people sat around a table which was especially designed to fit in. We had one scene that we struggled with, in which a young girl is dying. We have an older doctor who doesn't do the right thing for her. We have the parents who are pleading to have something done to help her. The young doctor comes in and fights with the older doctor. Gorelick insisted that we have the girl's bed in the midst of all this. I felt that didn't give me anything to work with. I wanted to dramatize the events and give the sense that this young girl was dying. Something was missing. It must be more dramatic, more interesting. It felt empty this way and looked cheap. I'm not going to bring a lot of people into this space because this is supposed to be a little room, and other people aren't hearing the argument between the two doctors.

I told him what I wanted was like a medieval castle that has to be stormed and knights are fighting. I didn't know what I was talking about, but I guess Gorelick did. He came back with an extraordinary design. He placed hospital screens at the four corners and within it placed higher screens above it. It looked exactly like the symbols of a medieval flag on a castle. When the doctors chased each other through the screens and argued, it created an interesting pattern. They couldn't go in a direct line. That was one of the best scenes in the play. It was successful because Mordecai Gorelick brought in a castle, a place surrounded and safeguarded. It was like a hive of some kind.

Vsevolod Meyerhold's sets were imaginatively theatrical but lost none of the realism. Every detail was life-like as in some of the paintings of Brueghel or Bosch, both imaginative painters, marvelously illuminating, exciting, colorful, and oddly dramatic. In Ostrovski's *The Forest*, Meyerhold creates several locations that are even more detailed than the work done at the Moscow Art Theater. There's a banquet, a love scene, roads, farm animals, birds, chicken coops, and a laundry. Every object was used, and there was no vacuum. At one point, a real pigeon was released to fly onto the

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stage. In one scene which was all talk, I couldn't understand what was happening because of the language, but it didn't matter because the behavior was so revealing. In the same play, the great comedian Illinski, who played the comic servant, came down a ramp which symbolized a road. He sat down and started fishing with an imaginary pole. Suddenly he gets a bite and reels it in, pulling and pulling, and at the end there's a fish. It wasn't realistic, but it was real.

To stage Gogol's comedy *The Inspector General* in a very confined and concentrated fashion, Meyerhold had to build a set that captured this period in Russia, where people were suspicious and frightened of each other and there was an authority that spied on everybody. Meyerhold created a solid background made out of wood, except it had many doors. At certain moments in the scene, the doors opened and people looked in. This created a strange grotesque atmosphere, done in a vivid and theatrical way, but the sense of being watched is real. By surrounding the stage with doors Meyerhold created two realities – inside and out. The play is marvelously visualized by means of these doors, and this is made possible by the set.

A director is always looking for ideas. In *The Forest* and *The Inspector General*, Meyerhold was influenced by the Japanese device of a *hanamichi*, a raised pathway on which the major actors make their appearances before they go on and off stage. He thought this idea could be well used in many plays, and in *The Forest* some of the major scenes are played on this path; the characters stopping there before they exit.

The set helps to make things possible. I give an example of people in a play that have to overhear someone else; the set should be able to take care of that possibility without melodrama. In the first act of Stanislavski's production of *The Seagull*, Pauline and Dr. Dorn come on stage and have a conversation before someone overhears them. This must look logical to the audience. Stanislavski used a bush to facilitate that. In this way the play begins to live believably, not just as a play. A set is the world in which you perform, not the background in front of which you perform.

I often use ideas from paintings for staging the beginning and end of scenes where there are a number of people and I have to create something interesting. For instance, in my production of *The Three Sisters*, there is a scene in the third act with all three sisters when Masha is confessing and Olga is horrified. The staging of that scene was suggested to me by a Chinese painting of a woman with a candle and another woman reaching out to her, pleading. That gave

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me the whole sense of the scene. I used a screen and played Olga behind it so that you saw her frightened eyes. She was separated from the two sisters. Masha was lying down and then sat up for her confession at Irina's feet as if she were confessing to a priest. It was a beautiful composition, but only part of it was mine. The rest was from that beautiful Chinese painting.

Brecht used Chinese-like paintings in the background for some of his sets to give a sense of place. It was beautifully done so that your imagination went wild with it. Once, he set a wedding scene with many people in a little room, and he pushed as many of them in as he could, so when the fat priest tried to get in he had to push the door in to enter. Everybody is pushed in like sausages. It's very amusing, interesting, poetic, and yet embodies a theatrical kind of vision which is real and believable. The people then come in with the wedding cake and can barely get in through the doors, and they have to hold the trays of cake above their heads. The cake moves on top of the trays, as it moves the people grab, grab, grab, until there's nothing left. They are like vultures and the whole cake is demolished. Some people can't get any cake and are milling around, which makes it very thrilling theatrically.

Plays of Strindberg have not fared well in the theater because they don't lend themselves to a purely realistic vision. Max Reinhardt did some interesting productions during the expressionist years. When he directed Ibsen's *Ghosts* in 1906 he called on the work of the great Nordic painter, Edward Munch, to design the set, which caught the quality of the vision of those kinds of plays. The director must somehow comprehend what the author is striving for, and try to get it both in the acting and in the production.

While teaching a director's unit at the American Theater wing, someone brought in an offbeat play, and I tried to describe to the student the way the director must get a vision of the set and build a world for this play. Later, I was at Clifford Odets' apartment and on the floor was a Paul Klee painting called *Between Heaven and Earth*. The quality I was trying to describe to the student was in the world that Klee created. Odets collected Klee and saw him as a great artist. I tried to appreciate him but never could until then. It seemed like magic and I was stirred by it.

A wonderful example from Stanislavski illustrates the value of involving the cast in the set design. In a dress rehearsal, he felt the play didn't move and something was off. He didn't know what it was. The acting, the set, and the directing seemed good. He decided on a rather strange and unusual procedure. The Moscow Art

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Theater has a large selection of furniture from different plays. Stanislavski told the property crew to set up a furniture market, like the one in Moscow, including the furniture that was already on the set. He then said to the actors, “You’re the family that lives in this place. Go into this ‘market’ and find the furniture you want.” They then arranged the furniture as they saw fit, and as a result everything took on new life. The furniture was theirs and therefore they sat and moved differently; they were at ease and the whole play took on a different aspect.

In the Method we go a step further. We permit you to bring to the set some things which are private to you; no one else knows this but you. Those things have value for actors and directors. They create a very necessary stimulus for the actor’s behavior demanded by the play, and directors should encourage it. If an actor has something on stage that’s private, the director might suggest that the actor look at it or touch it. The audience won’t know what’s happening. They’ll just see a very natural kind of behavior on the part of the actor. Stanislavski kept personal items hidden on stage. When a friend of his found a drawer on a stage set locked and asked why, Stanislavski explained, “That isn’t for the audience, it’s for me. I’ve put something private there and that helps me in the scene to believe in the play.”

Lighting

Lighting is part of the scenery, and in my work, we place a great emphasis on lighting. In the Group Theater we would light the stage late at night without the actors or crew, only the director and the lighting people. Lighting, like the set, can do a great deal to make certain realities possible and believable. For example, creating one sharp light or spot on the stage and semi-darkness on another can enable two people to be doing different things, and as a result the audience will accept that they aren’t attentive to each other or even in the same place. David Belasco’s lighting man, Louis Hartman, puttered around with lighting ideas like the traveling of the sun so that the sun rose and moved through the course of the scene and actually helped change the timing and mood of the play. He was an electrician, not a theoretician; he just tried things.

The best examples of scenery and lighting masters aren’t necessarily theater people. Directors will learn much about lighting and staging from studying the extraordinary compositions of the genius master painters. Develop your eye in that area. Goya, Rembrandt,

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and Giotto have wonderful things to teach us. Rembrandt sketches the same scene from different angles, trying out positioning and lighting. If you look at his engravings and see the first attempt, then the second, he sketches more than one version. Some of them have six versions. He begins to simmer or cut it down, until finally in the fifth attempt, it's dramatic. A series of essays by Gordon Craig, entitled *The Theater Advancing*, contain a few pages on composition in which he mentions painters that are valuable for theater directors, including Masaccio. Even though he's an excellent stager, I find Masaccio's paintings somewhat conventional and theatrical. Craig also suggests Carpaccio when working on Shakespeare. Carpaccio, to me, isn't what I think of as Shakespearean; nonetheless, there are interesting and exciting ideas for the theater in his work.

We need to be imaginatively creative with the lighting and plan well. In the old days, we directors could change the lighting. Today, once the lights are hooked up, the director is hooked up with them. Stagehands are needed, and they must be paid double time, so the problem of altering the lighting is an economic one. Is it worth it? Will it make a difference in the play? It might, but there's no guarantee.

Music

In the old days, music in the theater was used mostly during the intermissions to capture the flavor of the play, but not during the play itself. It was first with film that music was used during a production; in silent movies, a piano accompanied the film to emphasize the action. Today, we realize that the values to be achieved in a play can be created by music as well as lighting and set design.

In addition to establishing a mood and a time period, music is an ingredient in the play, often helping to create what's literally happening. It can establish a theatrical effect the play needs, and supply a reality that – if missing – weakens the play. That's the function of music theatrically, but it must be inherent in the situation on stage.

For example, sometimes music does what the actors can't do, or what the script itself isn't quite doing. Working first with lighting to indicate a feeling or mood, David Belasco accomplished this when directing a scene from *Shore Leave*, which has a girl in a small town waiting for a sailor who's coming off a boat to romance her. Before the sailor arrives, the transition toward evening takes about three minutes. It's most extraordinary directorially. There's no dialogue.

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The girl sings while dressing; she's bubbly and starts cooking. Little by little the lights start going down as the sun sets, transitioning from twilight to night. Through two back windows, the audience sees distant lights go off. People going past the windows say "Good-night" and "Have a nice evening." Time passing is conveyed. A short while later the audience hears a fiddle playing as if it were coming from a nearby inn. By the time this takes place, the audience is in the mood for romance. Light and sound together create something you may not get any other way.

Another example of how music can take the place of dialogue to convey a theatrical effect occurred when I was directing an unpublished play by an author who had died. It's a rather myth-like poetic play with simple people. The problem was with a scene in which the wife of a man dies. At the moment of her death, the husband closes her eyes and has one line. I felt the man should be able to say or do something more than what the author had provided. The author had died, the play had never been published, and dialogue could not be added. No matter how good the actor may be, there was not enough for him to do to make the scene work. I then had the idea that I would plant a moment earlier in the play when he's drunk and he's put to sleep by his wife. She cradles him in her arms and she sings him a lovely lullaby. When she dies, I had him sing the same lullaby. It worked marvelously and completely. I also used music for another moment in the play that hadn't been fully enough explored. I wanted a female character in the play to do something to change the attitude of a man who's antagonistic to her. I had nobody to write it, so if I could give her a dance or a song from her background or environment which appealed to him, she could begin to change his attitude towards her. In that sense music on the stage was part of the scene. It's not just the background.

Of course, there are many more functions music can supply for the theater. On the stage where you can't show all that is happening, the onstage and offstage music often becomes an indication of what the audience can't literally see any other way. For instance, when I was considering doing the play *Yellow Jack* by Sidney Howard and Paul de Kruif, about the discovery of the disease yellow fever, it needed livening up or else it might just come over as serious but not exciting. I was setting the play close to South America, in an American military establishment where yellow fever experiments with soldiers were taking place. It was either my idea or Harold Clurman's to accompany the ongoing action with military music, similar to that heard during battle. We wanted to take this civil

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incident, this ordinary human incident, and dramatize it so it became like a military attack. Trumpets in the background could very readily create that special effect. An example is found in the operas of Verdi. Even though there are no literal battles on stage, Verdi creates a marching effect with trumpets. When actors come back from battle, the marches created a sense of the offstage military struggle.

Many directors, Vakhtangov, for instance, feel that theater should not only be real, but should be heightened reality, which can be intensified by the use of music. The great German director Max Reinhardt worked musically in many plays, especially in plays of the past. The music became something that set the period as well as the rhythm for behavior. To heighten the effect, he created a basic rhythm so the actors would use ballet-like movements in scenes that were not theatrical. Goldoni's play *The Servant of Two Masters* was almost purely musically worked out. When the actors moved and walked, they had a ballet-like theatrical color to them. Not with the feet, but with the body and movements, working in one or another rhythm, each scene was established by the rhythm of the music.

Another example is in Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko's work. In *Carmen and Lysistrata*, Danchenko achieved things that have been forgotten even though his musical production studio was much better than Stanislavski's. In his operas, the actors moved with the rhythm demanded by the scene, and on stage the movement fused with music, emotionality, and with the situational elements.

On the other hand Meyerhold used a musical approach in a totally different and rather original way. When you look at the program of his production of *Camille*, there is something odd about it. Each of the scenes is musically characterized, adagio, etc. It was musical, meaning that Meyerhold thought of these scenes not only in terms of action, but in terms of a rhythmic kind of continuity and unity which help set the tone of the scene that it wouldn't otherwise have.

While music may set the rhythm of the scene or even be a "character" in a play within the confines of a theater, on-screen music doesn't need to play the same role. You can easily show crowds, night coming, time passing, or offstage action, so music is used more for mood.

Whether stage or film, however, directors shouldn't put music underneath a scene except to provide a rhythm that accents the

action. When music is simply an accompaniment, it sometimes may be intrusive.

The process of rehearsal

The process of rehearsal is close to the process of orchestration, in which each instrument has its own separately written part. In music, if you write a theme as a quartet, it would be orchestrated differently if Pablo Casals were the cellist than if you had an ordinary cellist. If there is a piano involved in the piece, it may also be done differently.

However, in the theater, coming to the rehearsal with an orchestration already prepared means that the process of rehearsal is no longer a creative one. The director may have been creative, but the actors are finished at the very moment they start. This was brilliantly illustrated in the work of the great Meyerhold. His productions were on an extraordinary level of imaginative achievement and genius, but the acting in the productions was often lacking.

The process of rehearsal is a creative one in which there is a logical sequence of stages which are of essential concern for the director as well as the actor, without which the director will not accomplish his vision. To achieve the proper stages of rehearsal, I developed a four-week rehearsal process based on the work of Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, and Meyerhold: Week 1: reading rehearsals; Week 2, blocking and memorizing lines; Week 3, line rehearsals and run throughs; and Week 4, dress rehearsal. During these four weeks, the director should make it clear to the actors that this time is for them, and that they're to do the work that the playwright and the director have already done on the production. If the producers want to see an early rehearsal, I tell them there is nothing to see yet. If they want to sit in, fine. However these rehearsals are for the actor.

The extent to how the actor performs is dependent on what has been done in those first rehearsals. Particularly important are the procedures done in the early stages. I always try to talk to the actors before the first rehearsal to make sure that they sufficiently agree with my point of view to the extent that they are willing to try it and commit themselves to do it. The process of motivating the actor is an essential part of the director's work. The director must draw the actor's attention to the possibilities inherent in the scene and what has to be emphasized at a certain moment.

If the actor has a mental idea, you must deal with it at that moment when he's not yet set, when he hasn't memorized his lines,

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isn't yet acting the part and when it's still just a mental idea that can be argued with and changed. I must make sure the actor can give me some of the values that I need for the character, and to do this I must transmit to the actor my vision. If he still can't give me those values, I'm going to have a losing battle. I'll win all the arguments, but I'll lose the war. He's not going to do what he may be capable of doing, and there's not enough time for me to train him during the actual process of rehearsal.

Without allowing for the actor's own contribution, the actor's work will be non-creative and nothing more than illustrative or an imitation of the director's instruction. The director may have already gone through the creative process and arrived at an idea of what he wants without knowing what the actor can bring to the part. It's important that the director permit the actors to go through the equivalent creative process and have the chance to catch up to him; otherwise the director may not understand why the actors aren't doing what he wants after he has already told them what he wants them to do. Furthermore, a creative actor may give the director additional values which the director had not thought of beforehand. The actor's incentives, motivations, and sensitivities may create values in addition to what was originally perceived by the director.

When directors realize that the actors aren't ready to do the scene, they have a right to stop and say, "Please, I know you may be nervous but you're not properly prepared. My direction is to do your preparation on the character and the scene before you start." I sometimes even pretend to look at my watch and I tell them to take the time they need. I don't really time them, but I make sure that they know they have the time to do the work which they may not otherwise take by themselves. When this happened in Group Theater rehearsals, the director would say, "Take a minute," before a scene began. The "take a minute" referred to making sure the actors concentrated on the preparation for the scene ahead in order to engage the emotional memory for that minute if required. If the actor practices the emotional memory exercise, it can take as little as a minute to re-create it.

In plays of a classic nature – that is, outside of our period or couched in words that aren't the ordinary language in which we speak – the first stages of rehearsal are even more decisive. The director must deal with this aspect of the play before you can ask the actor for his full commitment. Before the actor worries about the problems of the scene, the situation, and the characterization,

he should be able to speak the lines naturally. If the actor can't deal with the words at a time when there is no pressure, how can you expect him to deal with this at a later time when he's worrying about the acting or trying to remember his lines, which is already a handicap for an actor, especially with the classics.

The same basic stages should be followed in rehearsal for the cinema. The difference between film and theater is that in film the production schedule rarely allows four weeks for rehearsal before production begins. The work is done mainly on the script. There is rarely discussion sitting around the table reading the entire script, in which the material is theorized and discussed. Another difference is that the staging process takes place from the camera's point of view. However, the director in films has the opportunity to fix what the final production will be when he gets to the shooting and the editing.

I have seen many rehearsals where the actors don't know what to do. If the director doesn't provide this process, I advise actors to do it by themselves. It's a very valuable lesson for actors to experience and go through this rehearsal process working on their own.

Week 1: Reading rehearsals

Out of a four-week rehearsal period, five days are spent in what I call reading rehearsals, but we don't sit around the table and just discuss the play.

It's not wise at the beginning to give the actors too many theoretical ideas. The actor is coming fresh to the play, and you have to involve him with the work through active participation. Let the actors fall in love with the material. The first reading rehearsal can be very exciting and vivid, and is more important than most people conceive it to be. The actors, who won't begin memorization for another five days, are closest to being the audience and closer to responding spontaneously. Have the actor read the author's stage directions so that the imagination starts working immediately.

Since we are dealing with the human actor, psychological elements become involved, so I place great stress on that first reading. I liken it to the first time you meet someone who you fall in love with. It can make or break the relationship. It's a very important occasion and seriously affects your behavior from then on in. Some directors think of the first reading as their opportunity to demonstrate how brilliant a director they are. That unfortunately doesn't

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work – even when they are brilliant – because it doesn't motivate or inspire the actor.

It's important that directors not allow the actor to give a reading performance. If you let the actor "act" in this first stage, you're licked without even realizing it. They'll never get further than that. The actor is already giving you an indication of how the scene will be acted, which suggests that he already knows how the part should be done. The verbal pattern develops on this first occasion and is almost impossible to get rid of. To stop this from happening, I may say, "No acting, please." I tell them to just speak naturally and respond with a natural tone of voice. I tell them, "Don't read; talk." It can be achieved with great ease if the director knows how to work with the actors.

Furthermore, make sure that the actor doesn't abide by the punctuation in the script. You'll be shocked and surprised when you become aware of how that imprinting takes place the first time you look at the material, with every comma, exclamation point, and period. What the actor does with the voice remains in the mind. It's unconscious and interrupts the flow of the actor's speech and behavior. In the Group Theater we printed scripts without punctuation so actors felt free to stop whenever they wanted. A more natural and intense way of speaking began to develop. The Group Theater also eliminated stage directions for emotions in the scripts.

During the first reading, don't stop or interrupt the actors to explain the play. We look for the general idea and drift of what is happening, and ideas will generate spontaneity. I tell them, "Don't worry about the emotion because you don't know what the play means yet, so don't pretend to know." That's a good approach for the first reading. It means you won't be concerned with their acting. The actors can then be as natural and human as possible, and can make the material their own. When I directed *The Three Sisters*, I suggested to the actors what I was after. I felt that there was a fake Chekhovian tone that had developed, where the characters sat and brooded. It's known that Chekhov did not like that tone and he was against theatricality in the theater. He liked actors that seemed easy, spontaneous, and natural. I told the actors that I felt that Chekhov was trying to get to a tone which was expressive but not theatrical and we would aim for that in the production. I just left it at that.

In the second reading rehearsal, the director introduces the actors to his ideas about the emotional sense of the scene. If you, as director, are unsure of what is happening, just define the simple dramatic actions, events of the scene, and subtext for the actors. These are

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what I call units of action and behavior. I don't ask the actors to read in a particular way. We develop an idea of what the characters are really saying. Don't force it. Suggest something and let the actor think about it. Also in the second reading, the director introduces the idea of the set, but without suggesting he's worked out the entire staging of the production. Take your time. Things have to be absorbed.

In the third and fourth readings in this first week, all the units of action or "beats" are marked out. The actors know the given circumstances, their actions, and the motivations in their scenes. If something in the play has happened in a prior scene that they aren't aware of, tell them about it. Begin to have individual rehearsals with actors in the mornings if you sense there is a problem with their intensity or emotion. Use improvisation to discover behavior for the scene. Begin to create emotional values.

At the fifth reading, the actors have still not memorized their lines. They move around holding the script in their hands, making contact with their scene partners. After five days we have, in essence, an almost complete indication of what the production will ultimately be. The actor must listen and react to their scene partner so their work has some degree of spontaneity. If the actor's ideas are too set or the lines memorized, nothing that the scene partner does will have any meaning for them and there will be no spontaneity.

Week 2: Blocking and memorizing lines

During the second week of rehearsals, start blocking the actor's movements on stage in each scene. Blocking should take two or three days. In the process of blocking, when you want your actors visually to arrive at a certain place on the stage, a motivation for them to get there must be provided. The actor can't work just for position. The body doesn't obey in that way; he'll then feel he's a doing a mechanical thing. How do you motivate the actor into action? Directors know that specific physical things like sights or sounds may be needed to help an actor move in the needed direction. Give the actor different kinds of behavior without telling them exactly what you want. For example, say, "There will be a matchbox over there and some cigarettes. Go see if you want a cigarette." If the actor says, "I don't feel smoking is right for my character," say, "Fine, but just walk over there. If you don't feel like it, you won't smoke. I'm not telling you to smoke it."

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At this time the actors begin memorizing their lines. Once they have finished, there should be no scripts. Then, for the next few days, we don't act out the scenes. Using the partially memorized lines and the blocking we build the play scene by scene.

Week 3: Line rehearsals and run throughs

By the end of the second week or the beginning of the third week we begin to run through the entire play and memorize more lines so that by the end of the third week we can go through every act easily. Use improvisation as problems arise.

Then we start line rehearsals, in which the actors go through the play, continuing to memorize the lines, however without the actual performance. They easily go through their parts and don't try to work for the values. You'll be surprised at what that accomplishes. I continue to do individual work up to the last minute when I have difficulty with a certain actor on a problem. I say, "We don't have it yet so let's keep working until it's right."

Week 4: Dress rehearsal

By the fourth week the lines should be memorized. The last part of the week, do a run through. Make the point of the rehearsal definite. Don't stop the actors or worry about the acting or judge what is happening. Before the dress rehearsal, I take the time to have the actors walk around the set, work with the doors, handle the objects, come on and offstage, and time their actions. They have to get used to the "door knobs and the chairs." Every chair becomes an enemy to them. Every table is different than the way it was in the previous rehearsals. In rehearsals you have chairs, but now there may be a couch, and you sink into it. When you just had chairs, it was fine. Now you have a couch and you don't know what to do with it. People say, don't worry; you'll adjust by opening night. But it isn't easy and it takes time. The producers give the crew time to practice setting up, but no time for the actors.

The dress rehearsal is difficult for the actors, and it's usually a disaster. The director begins to see other things he could have done, so I have a piece of advice for directors: stay as far back in the theater as you can. It can be chaos. You think, "Why did I do this play? We've been rehearsing for four weeks. Was I kidding myself?" Just try to sit back and do nothing. Otherwise you can become crazy, and the actors will catch it from you.

After the dress rehearsal, everything may seem to fall apart. When everyone yells and screams, just smile and sit back. If you get a little annoyed, sit farther back. The production has to fall apart because the actors' concentration must at this moment go to other mechanical things, like using door knobs, opening windows, where to move to on stage, etc. If it doesn't fall apart, it may mean that the actor himself is being mechanical or external. Have the actors relax and use their craft to get familiar with the objects on the set, gain control of the situation, make their choices for the play definite, and get ready for opening night.

Opening nights

The opening night out of town is really a run-through with an audience for the first time to try out the values of the play. I watch the audience carefully. How will the play come across to them? What are they getting from it? Are they puzzled? I wanted to see if we made contact with the audience. If I didn't like the opening night performance, there was a good chance the audience didn't either. I'd watch them like a hawk in order to gauge my own reaction, think about the changes I would make, and then wait for the reviews to come out.

I hate opening nights. In the Group Theater official opening nights were calamitous events fraught with emotional and traumatic experiences. Our existence depended upon the success of the opening because it dictated the length of the run.

Group/mass scenes

To tell each individual what to do in a mass scene is almost impossible, so for mass or group scenes, I always use improvisations. Each individual actor should know their own reality. I direct them to work emotionally if they are actors that have their own emotional exercises. The director must give them a situation and set a particular problem to be worked on. In the Group Theater, we used this technique when we had mass scenes which never had more than fifteen people. I simply invented a situation which I thought would give me the values that I needed. You will get marvelous results.

If your actors don't work this way, or it's just not working, I use what I call the "Reinhardt Technique" of mass production in which you have a few actors that know what the play demands, and these

actors lead a group of other actors that may not even know the play. The one who knows acts and the other actors follow his lead. As directed, they yell when he yells, laugh when he laughs.

Directors work with amateur actors

The amateur theater historically speaking has been of enormous importance and responsible for many advances. Because it's not commercial theater, amateurs can take chances and do things the professional theater can't, and working with amateurs has taught me that the amateur can be as great as any of the greatest actors. They can do things I can't get professional actors to do, and they have qualities that professionals often never have. In essence, this is why, when I deal with young people who are amateurs, I never condescend to them. You may have professional actors who become so much "the actor" that they lose the very thing that amateurs have, which is their humanity.

The amateur has the advantage because he's not propelled by ordinary common motives. He's concerned and interested in what he's doing on stage whereas the professional actor can be less concerned with that. It's just a job. "How much does it pay, how many lines do I have, how many weeks? OK, I'm not doing anything, fine." I'm exaggerating slightly to make a point. However, great actors, either professional or amateur are great human beings in their vision, depth of experience, sensitivity and expressiveness.

My first experience as a director was with amateurs, the Students of Art and Drama at the Chrystie Street Settlement House on the Lower East Side. They weren't professionals, but they acted damn well, enough to make one playwright cry at his own play. This was one of the most accomplished theater people of all time, the great director Jacques Copeau, a seminal figure and a man who was responsible for the development of the modern French theater in the 1920s and 1930s. Because Copeau was in this country for the Theater Guild, I decided to do his play about his grandparents called *The House into Which We Are Born*, which he'd done professionally in his own theater. Harold Clurman brought him down one Friday night during rehearsal. At the end of the rehearsal we turned around and there were tears in Copeau's eyes. He was a theater man, and he was moved. He said to me very nicely, "You did this?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Very good, very good. We did it differently but yours is very good." In other words, even though it didn't have the professional touch, it was on a level that he could

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appreciate. I didn't tell him that we were amateurs. Usually playwrights don't sit at their own plays and cry. We may not have done it as well as he did; after all he knew the background, the environment, and we had amateur actors. But we did the best we could, and the best we could was enough to draw his tears.

I still feel one of the best productions I ever did was with young Settlement House amateurs when I directed *Esther* by Racine, the great French classic author, who I feel was a forerunner of Chekhov. With a Chekhovian quality and sensitivity, Racine wrote formal plays with nuns, priests, kings, and queens as the main characters. The play, set in Persia, would normally call for French affectations that were beyond my actors. However, I felt the play was human and if I showed it to a modern audience they would get that.

At first, I didn't quite know how I was going to make my actors play kings and queens with conviction and belief yet have the audience accept it. I decided that while the actors would have very great difficulty in creating kings and queens, they did know what priests and nuns were; they saw them in their environment. So we developed an improvisation in which they were priests and nuns telling stories to the children. I told them, when you tell stories, you don't just say, "Once upon a time there was a king." Unconsciously you choose a heightened approach depending on what kind of king you have. In this play, the characters are to have a grave solemn attitude so I also created for them a ritualistic kind of behavior like nuns and priests. For the queen, who comes out first, to say, "I am a great queen" is nonsensical. However, because the audience has the same respect for a nun as we would for a queen, as a result of our improvisation, she came out like a nun. She carried her crown in her hand and she turned towards the audience in a religious way, bowed for them then put the crown on as if to say I am now going to play the queen. The actors worked very hard, and played it beautifully. The play was very alive. The whole semi-religious atmosphere was so well done, not by costumes, but in the attitude of the actors, that the East Side audience, who knew little about Racine and less about classic French drama, was completely captivated.

For theatrical effects, I used some of Vakhtangov's ideas, and the play was beautifully designed. It was copied after the style of Vakhtangov's production of *The Dybbuk*. I had letters on top also saying "Esther" in quite nice lettering so it gave a kind of legendary and theatrical aspect to it. Even though the tone was solemn, I wanted very colorful theatrical costumes, cubist in a way. The set

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was a triangle, and we were able to get theatrical effects using music. I found an environment and a foundation out of which that play could come.

To help the actors describe the burning of their country and their sorrow that they would never see the place again, I asked if there was a song, or some kind of semi-declarative device we could use. The actor playing the king, Sandy Meisner, suggested as a model, a chant from *Samson and Delilah*. In the scene the characters went into a chant, and it worked beautifully. It was one of my best productions, and it was with amateurs.

Innovation was all done by amateurs, not by professionals. In the old days, the amateur theater came from people who said, "The hell with that. We don't care about their sensibilities. The commercial theater, they don't know what drama is. We will revive plays of old in a new form, a new manner." Now, we don't have amateur theater. What is called amateur theater now is nothing but a reflection of the commercial theater and their aim is to have the same kind of success as the commercial theater.

We don't all have that extraordinary kind of imagination like Vakhtangov possessed, but even as amateurs if we go towards a play and try to find the problems inherent in or outside the production, creative solutions can be found.

Directors work with playwrights

Too often the engagement between the director and author becomes an argument as to a play's meaning. I don't believe that's valid. The play's meaning is the writer's choice and I believe that you have to trust the playwright. No director should try to change the basic meaning of the writer's work. If the director doesn't agree, then he shouldn't do the play. What a director does have an obligation and right to do is help the writer make his point in a way that's as clear, interesting, exciting, colorful, theatrical, and enjoyable as it can be without changing the play.

What is there about the theatrical nature of the great productions which singled them out from others? It's not just the play itself. Outstanding individual actors and directors opened our eyes to what can be accomplished. Without straying from the author's intention, the director creates the production. For example, sometimes the director is able to identify a touching moment that the author had not conceived and thus not emphasized in the play. Sometimes a director may see an entirely new direction for a play

without any changes to the script. A dramatic example is Chekhov's *The Seagull*, which Chekhov claimed was written as a comedy. When, in its first production at the Moscow Art Theater, it was done as a comedy, it was a flop, even though it had great actors in it, including Vera Komissarzhevskaya, the Duse of Russia. The next year it was done as a tragedy, Chekhov didn't like it, yet it was a success.

The director may also need the author to add lines to flesh out an aspect of the play. If the playwright doesn't want to add dialogue, I still need to work with him to expand the event on stage so his point still comes across. The scene and situation he has created already exists for the plot, but the director is aware of the entire situation – or what I call, the event. The plot is only the plot, the thing that leads one thing to the other while in the meantime there are lots of other things going on that are often decisive as to whether the plot comes across convincingly or only melodramatically.

For instance, writers can put in speeches and forget to connect them to the action. I remember one example vividly because it was one of our deepest disappointments at the Group Theater. The writing in Clifford Odets' *Paradise Lost* was brilliant. Outstanding playwrights like Elmer Rice and Sidney Howard used to stand at the back of the theater again and again to listen to the wonderful speeches. The play died and I didn't know why. I thought the writing was like Chekhov, so why didn't it come over to the audience like Chekhov? I realized, however, that while the speeches were brilliant in the manner of Walt Whitman's speeches about America, in *Paradise Lost*, the speeches were made but didn't contribute to the drama. The speech must in some way move the plot forward. The soliloquies in *Hamlet*, for example, all contribute to the drama and never seem just placed in the scene for no reason. They're wonderful, engaging, and exciting in themselves, but they move the play forward, and that's true with all the soliloquies in Shakespeare. To achieve a greater response from the audience, speeches must give expression to what is happening in the play. Without that, it's not dramatic.

When the author of a play I am directing says he's a little worried about technical demands and how they will be handled, I say, "You write; I'll worry." The playwright isn't expected to know how the events will be staged. The playwright writes, and the director sees how to best convey the meaning, conviction, beauty, and the reality of that play.

Directing in the cinema

The situation in the cinema is different. There we ask the question, who's the author, the screenwriter or the director? It's a generally accepted fact that the writer of a film is not the writer, but the director who has creatively done something with the screenplay that achieves more than what appears in the initial writer's script. The stamp of the director is more predominant in the result than that of the writer. Film directors are very well known while, unfortunately, screenwriters are not. In fact, we usually fail to acknowledge the work of the writers and their value in film.

Odets described the difference in writing for the screen and writing for the stage this way. On the stage if someone falls in love, it has to be logical. Not on the screen. On screen, time and space don't have the literal reality of the stage. If an actor has to move across the stage it takes a certain amount of time to get there. Not on the screen. The in-between time is eliminated. People think of the screen as being more real than the stage, which isn't so. On stage, we need the proper embodiment of the reality of a character to motivate the play. On screen, we rely on the star.

In a film each scene has to have a purpose. The audience is not interested in what will happen later in the screenplay. The scene needs to hold our attention in and of itself as well as contribute to the sequence. Every scene must be sufficiently self-explanatory to sustain our interest.

Lee Strasberg on great directors

Eugene Vakhtangov

Every director should make an effort to gain some knowledge of the work of Eugene Vakhtangov, who might have become the greatest director of all time had he not died at the age of 38, in 1922.

From a technical point of view, Vakhtangov, who was Stanislavski's greatest pupil and interpreter, used Stanislavski's procedures more intensely than Stanislavski. For example, no one has used improvisation with the superb ingenuity of Vakhtangov. His way of setting then solving a problem was on a genius level. In *Vakhtangov on the Art of the Stage* by Gorchakov, the imaginative-ness of Vakhtangov's approach is demonstrated. He created subplots and made up relationships with people. "What was I like and

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when was I like that" was the Vakhtangov principle. He wanted actors to use their own realities. Not even Stanislavski had as great an inventiveness in this area.

Insisting on formal training to create emotion and reality, Vakhtangov made valuable contributions to theatricality, and, according to Elia Kazan, wrote the best work on directing. Two great productions that are known in the history of the theater and are highly appreciated by theater people all over the world are *The Dybbuk* which Vakhtangov directed with the Hebrew Habima Theater and *Princess Turandot*.

In S. Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, Vakhtangov's theatrical imagination was also stimulated by an interest in Meyerhold. In that play, the actors used hand gestures. Whenever they spoke about God, they raised their hands up toward the sky, lifting everything and creating a sense of ecstasy. The lifted hands played a great role in creating the sense of the soul aspiring towards God in which the hands go one way, but the body goes the other. What Vakhtangov was using was Meyerhold's principle of opposition, something he also got from Stanislavski. The living image of opposition creates a dynamic visual image.

For *Princess Turandot*, the eighteenth-century Italian play by Carlo Gozzi which had a Chinese theme, Vakhtangov developed a unique performance which satisfied both the people who wanted reality and at the same time the people who wanted theatricality. Why did he decide to do this particular play? In 1922, a few years after the Russian Revolution during a period of great strife and great difficulty in Russia, Vakhtangov wanted the audience uplifted. But how could this provincial company perform a fancy play from another era believably? In order to direct a play just after the Russian Revolution written by an Italian in the eighteenth century about China in Russian, and make it come alive for a contemporary audience, Vakhtangov had to create a new approach.

He built a subtext under the play. Before the play began, he had the actors come out on stage in evening dress and introduce themselves to the audience saying they are going to perform the play. Then Vakhtangov didn't have them go offstage and come back with ornate costumes developed by a costumer. Instead, he had the actors make their costumes out of whatever was on stage. The actor playing the old man picked out a mop with long strings which he put on for his beard. The actor playing the prince found a Turkish hat with a tassel as part of his costume. Before your eyes he became a prince and the production took on an improvised feeling so that

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the audience was particularly aware that the actors were only actors who then have to become the characters.

I disagreed with Vakhtangov's idea that when you're in the theater you need to be reminded you're in a theater. The world we build in a play is much wider than an ordinary vision. The extent to which reality can be created on stage depends upon what is necessary for each production, but in this case, the production was a great success.

To prompt the audience to experience great zest and inspiration and to be stimulated by what the actors were doing, Vakhtangov also used extensive color and fantasy in the production. Vakhtangov wanted a *Commedia dell'arte* sense of inventiveness, so as part of the improvisation scene, three *Commedia dell' arte* characters dressed in costume stood around and cracked jokes. Each night they improvised and made remarks about who happened to be in the theater or about the state of the world, so that the audience was actually present as the theater troupe prepared for the play, amazingly combining theatricality and reality. Vakhtangov kept the theatricality of the play while building the subtext underneath without losing necessary reality and conviction.

That was not enough for Vakhtangov, though. Because the play could still be very phony with set speeches and melodramatic action, he, in the casting, capitalized on the existing relationships between the actors. During *Princess Turandot*, it so happened that the actress playing Adela, the villainess, actually was in love with the leading man playing the prince. However, the prince liked the actress who played opposite him, to whom he had to make love. In real life, this caused the actress playing the villainess – who also told Vakhtangov she could play the heroine's part better – to fume. Vakhtangov didn't want the villainess to be just theatrical, and when it was time for her speech, she had a real motivation for saying those phony lines. The emotion was real, and motivated the theatrical behavior and the melodramatic speeches that the characters had to embody on the stage. Stanislavski was worried that Vakhtangov was going too far in his insistence on a certain kind of emotional reality, but the public loved the play because it gave them something that they didn't have in life.

Unfortunately, Vakhtangov was dying when he worked on the play and didn't see it performed. The actors knew Vakhtangov was dying and it gave the production a spirit, a kind of life and flair which kept the play fresh and alive.

Vsevolod Meyerhold

In my opinion the Russian Vsevolod Meyerhold is the epitome of a director. Among the great directors, I consider him the genius whose work was socially and dramatically evocative.

In his productions, every detail was as real as in some of the paintings of Brueghel or Bosch, both imaginative painters. In Ostrovski's play, *The Forest*, if you look closely, there's nothing imaginative about it. You have Spanish soldiers collecting taxes from the little village in Switzerland and other ordinary domestic kinds of things. Meyerhold put it all together and it became marvelously illuminating, exciting, imaginative, colorful, and oddly dramatic. I saw that production in Moscow in 1934, and it led to me to appreciate how a director brings the meaning and reality of the words and the behavior alive.

Meyerhold never did anything for the sake of drama, but for the drama inherent in the play. In *The Forest*, there's a scene usually played with two servants sitting on a bench. The stage is full of life and all kinds of things, birds, laundry, and so on. Rather than playing the scene on the bench, Meyerhold found a better object. He had the actors sit on a seesaw to help create what he wanted from the scene.

One of Meyerhold's last great productions, which I was fortunate to have seen in rehearsal, was Dumas' *The Lady of the Camellias*. One scene established the ritzy Stork Club environment in which Camille, poured into a red silk dress, enters and the party starts. The party was the most extraordinary evocation of an historical period that I've ever seen in my life. It was made up of very quick moments – the latest song and dance, someone recited poetry. When Camille sang, it was like a dash of cold water and she was dying. She talked about her fear of death. In ten minutes you got a whole sense of the environment, and it was incredible.

At another rehearsal after it had opened, I watched while Meyerhold acted out all the parts in the first act to show the actors specifically what he wanted from them. Because he was a fine actor, he was wonderful, doing all the mechanical things he told the actors to do but which, when they did them, seemed awkward and wooden. It was well done when he did it.

A genius can be imitated; however, you may not wind up with the same results. The productions of Stanislavski and Reinhardt can be imitated, and if you're good you can wind up with similar results. With Meyerhold, imitating won't produce the things he winds up

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with. There's no way we can train you to do that. We can only stimulate you to do that.

People didn't go to his productions for the acting. Although his productions were on an unusual level of genius in terms of imagination and achievement, often the acting was not at the same level. The gambling scene in Dumas' *Lady of the Camellias* when Armand wins the money was well done, except for one problem. The other characters at the table were just sitting around doing nothing. I was shocked, and at the end of the performance, I asked Meyerhold's young assistant why the characters weren't doing anything. He looked at me and said that Meyerhold works very hard to make you look at the place where you should look. If you look at the wrong place, it's your fault. It wasn't a satisfactory answer. I asked Meyerhold if he wanted the actors to be more alive in the play. He said, "Yes, but they're bad actors."

Meyerhold had a special training for actors that he called biomechanics which contained his acting rules. He himself, however believed these to not be fully developed. Maybe that's why the actors were as weak as they were in some of his productions. Although he had some outstanding actors like the great comic actor Igor Illinski, Erast Garin, and Zinaida Raikh, his other actors were just OK. The work he did with them wasn't impressive and seemed inadequate training for acting. He had certain principles of working with the actor that I felt were not conducive to inspiring the proper results. It was my feeling that if I took his actors and worked with them, I could get them to do what Meyerhold wanted.

David Belasco

Belasco had a gift with actors that was as great as Stanislavski's. However, while Stanislavski refined and defined a whole methodology, Belasco had no theoretical or methodological base. He simply inspired wonderful performances out of his actors. He would work as long and hard as necessary with them, sometimes even for a year. Lenore Ulric was brilliant under Belasco's direction playing a somnambulist, a sleepwalker, which is not a simple or easy thing to do.

When she stopped working with him, her career declined. She had one failure after another, and her acting was no longer good. When I worked with her in a play, I found out why. In the first reading, she read very well. After the rehearsal was over she asked if I liked what she did. I said "Yes," and I made no further comment

because her work was good. Then she asked if I wanted her to do it differently, which to me is like a red flag to a bull. I said, "Try it." Well, she did it very differently with crying and weeping. Then I realized her greatness came from her being told what to do. She had the ability to follow direction.

After the reading, I dismissed some of the people and worked with others. Even though I was not working with her, when I looked around about three hours later Lenore was still sitting in the corner. I walked over and asked, "What are you still doing here?" I will never forget the way she looked at me like a little child and she said, "You didn't dismiss me." Belasco embodied that kind of comprehensive and attentive training for her.

If she were directed badly, she acted badly. When she had a better director who recognized her extraordinary instrument and had her do better things, she was marvelous. That's why, when Belasco worked for a long time with her on a part, she was great.

It isn't widely known that Belasco was an extraordinary director. Fortunately I saw some of his work and therefore speak out of experience. As I said earlier, Belasco's staging in *Shore Leave* was brilliant. The particular scene without words still lingers in my memory only because the simple things that he did were so effective in establishing a whole atmosphere. We already talked about Belasco's use of music in this scene; however, the atmosphere was not described in the script, and without that, the actor could do very little to bring the scene to life. Belasco's staging, including use of lights, having people passing by, windows through which an inn is visible in the background, and the music, created a whole sense of the mood and environment. By the time it went from dusk to night the audience was in a romantic mood, and that's when the lover enters.

In another production of Belasco's he has a cat walk across the stage every night exactly at the same time. He did this by keeping the cat in a cage all day without feeding it. Then during the show he placed its food on the other side of the stage and when the cat was released it walked right across the stage to where the food was.

Lee Strasberg on film directors

The cinema is the director's medium in so far as he can make or break anything that either the writer or the actor accomplishes. By editing, the process of shooting, and the way in which he directs the production, a film director can completely destroy the values built

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into the script by a sensitive writer. He can make a performance that as such never existed and he can ruin a performance that did exist.

It was film directors like Eisenstein, Griffith, and others who discovered and used the innovative cinematic techniques which expanded the medium from the simple literal movement of little pictures to become what it is today. The storytelling and visual technique in the Japanese narrative scrolls, as a moving medium, helped to discover new ways of making movies using close-ups, traveling shots, camera angles, editing and more.

There are elements demonstrated in eleventh through thirteenth-century Japanese art which contain all the basic principles of what we today call the movies. The director Serge Eisenstein wrote an article on the relationship of Japanese art and the cinematographic principle which he based on Japanese poetry and engravings. However, Eisenstein did not comment on the art of the Japanese narrative scrolls, which are the essence of painted storytelling. The art form literally contains dramatic imagery and sequential storytelling. Japanese scrolls, which are kept in families and aren't well known, resemble complete little movies that unroll like a Bible. In actuality, all of what we need in the movies is included, such as fade-ins, close-ups, dissolves, mass scenes – in fact, entire 'MGM' productions.

In re-watching Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather I and II*, I was amazed at the fact that there was not one moment that was not alive and active, with something happening in the background or people walking in front of the camera. This is different from the way we normally stage television or movie scenes with two people sitting and talking. For example, in a simple scene between two of the brothers sitting and talking, people are walking back and forth, waiters are walking around, and there is music, etc. I remember thinking, what's all this activity for, and what will the director do with it?

As it turned out the constant motion created a marvelous sense counter to the simple reality of the scene, which otherwise would have seemed plotted and less believable. That was done in many scenes to such an extent that I literally was amazed because this isn't prevalent in American movies. In a scene if a line is being said and suddenly somebody walks in front of the shot and blocks the actors face we say cut. In *The Godfather*, Coppola worked differently.

Film and stage director Elia Kazan, who is in the category of

Belasco, was actually one of the first to use some of the devices Coppola later used in *The Godfather*. In a scene from *On the Waterfront*, Marlon Brando and Eva Marie Saint are talking while walking and the camera is moving in front of them. Suddenly, Marlon leaned out of the shot to pick up a glove that Eva Marie had dropped; he came back into the shot with the glove, and then walked on. I doubt that it was rehearsed. Every other director would have said cut, you're out of the frame, you can lean down but I don't want to lose your face otherwise it's a bad cut. However, not Kazan, and the result was completely believable. Kazan worked wonderfully with actors. He said what he loved about Marlon was that if you approached him with an idea for his character, he would say, "Let me think about it," and he'd come back with his own interpretation of what Kazan had suggested. Brando never imitated Kazan.

The directing that Kazan brought to the American cinema has changed acting all over the world and affected the dimensions of the world cinema and theater. He introduced the Actors Studio's Method actors who came to renown initially through his productions.

Avant-garde directors

I find myself often in strong critical disagreement with most of the avant-garde directors. Even though I appreciate their talent, I sometimes feel it's misplaced. There's a difference between a creative director who works with the problems of the play and comes to his own conclusions about how to convey them, and a director who works from his own devices, doing what he thinks will be clever or interesting. While I may enjoy what I see, I have concerns about its value.

In the first place, the theater is art for the masses. It's not for the elite and never was. Unfortunately, the avant-garde attitude can immediately distance the production from the people. The tendency is to shape the play to the director rather than bringing the director's talent to bear on the play. I take exception to doing theatrical things which in themselves have no relationship to the scene. This can be at the expense of a play, and when this happens, the values of the play are skewed. I find myself saying, even though it may be creative and interesting to watch, why did the director do this play? He should write his own play. An example was an avant-garde production of *Hamlet* with experimental techniques that would have meaning only for an audience who already knew the play. If people

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come to see *Hamlet* who didn't know the play, and you gave them some strange *Hamlet* which depends on knowing the original, they may not know what you're doing.

I'm interested in a director's ideas – good, bad, or indifferent. But for the audience who is coming to see the play, an avant-garde interpretation can be irresponsible from a certain point of view. It's like taking Beethoven and playing it like Stravinsky. In that case, play Stravinsky.

Sometimes a director with abstract ideas won't work with the reality of the play. If you choose an abstraction and then do other things that aren't particularly emblematic, significant, or illustrative, the play may not come across to the audience. For example, in an avant-garde production I saw of *The Cherry Orchard*, the values were not Chekhovian. The director wanted to make the moment when Lopatkin – the successful vulgar drunk whose father was a serf on the estate – tells the family that he bought the cherry orchard so emphatically that he had the actor fling furniture all over the very highly designed set. Lopatkin's desire to make contact with a class higher than himself is not at all conveyed by that behavior. What you have instead is a barbaric value, suggesting this man wants to destroy the place. When the Moscow Art Theater did it, Lopatkin was drunk and asking for sympathy; he wanted the family to understand that he had bought the estate and orchard to save it. He was going to make a good place out of it; people were going to live there, and so on. He doesn't mean to destroy it. That's the Chekhovian value.

Furthermore, at the end of this version of *The Cherry Orchard*, when the family is leaving, the avant-garde director has Madame Ranevsky skipping around to show her excitement. I don't know what that was supposed to show. Maybe the actress herself was a good actress, but she couldn't convey the emotions of leaving the cherry orchard. Having her skipping around the stage choreographically is not the Chekhovian value. It's something the director was doing to show off. I don't mind what they do with the play, if the values are Chekhovian.

In another instant in the same production a bookcase was on stage, but it was never used. Its intended function is a wonderful Chekhovian device when Gayev the brother speaks to the bookcase's history as part of the family estate. The director either cut that speech or it was said to the world at large so it was meaningless.

Directing dance

It's my belief that dance is very much a theatrical art. When you dance by yourself, fine, but when you dance in units, where you stage things, it's essentially a stage art, a dramatic art. You're either telling the story or building some kind of event. Therefore, some of the things that are involved in directing are of value in choreography. The director can take an abstract theme, and by his knowledge of choreography and dance somehow make it visible and enjoyable to people who aren't equally aware of the abstract nature of the piece.

In the great period of Diaghilev's Russian ballet, that was his great contribution. It was not the dance per se, it was the dance as a theatrical medium, as a dramatic event with a dramatic core. The set, the costumes, and everything were not there simply to supply a beautiful exterior. They were there as part of the dramatic action and they helped towards that to such an extent that they actually stimulated theater activity not the other way around. From Diaghilev, the theater gained a great deal of insight.

Unfortunately, I didn't see the Russian ballet. It's known that their dancers, Pavlova, Nijinsky, Mortkin, Bohm, and others had this tremendous dramatic verve. Many of the directors have tried re-creating the Russian ballets but they re-create only the external aspects. They get the sets, the costumes, the lighting and they follow the choreography, but they don't follow the real spirit of the production. They have forgotten the dramatic core.

When those productions are seen today, they often seem rather old-fashioned and people may say, what was the entire hullabaloo about? But Nijinsky had a dramatic quality in him that must have been amazing. He could give the sense in his leaps and bounds of standing still in space before he came down. Obviously, there was more than just technical dance involved. In looking at his photographs you see a figure with a burning dramatic quality which enabled him to create a sense of the character, not just of the dance. What a director deals with in dance can be of help to anyone in the theater and the other arts who is creating a whole situation and sequence of events.

Books on directing

Most of the books on directing are on an academic level. I have no objection to that except that the authors consider the work they've

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done at their college or university as a standard of excellence.

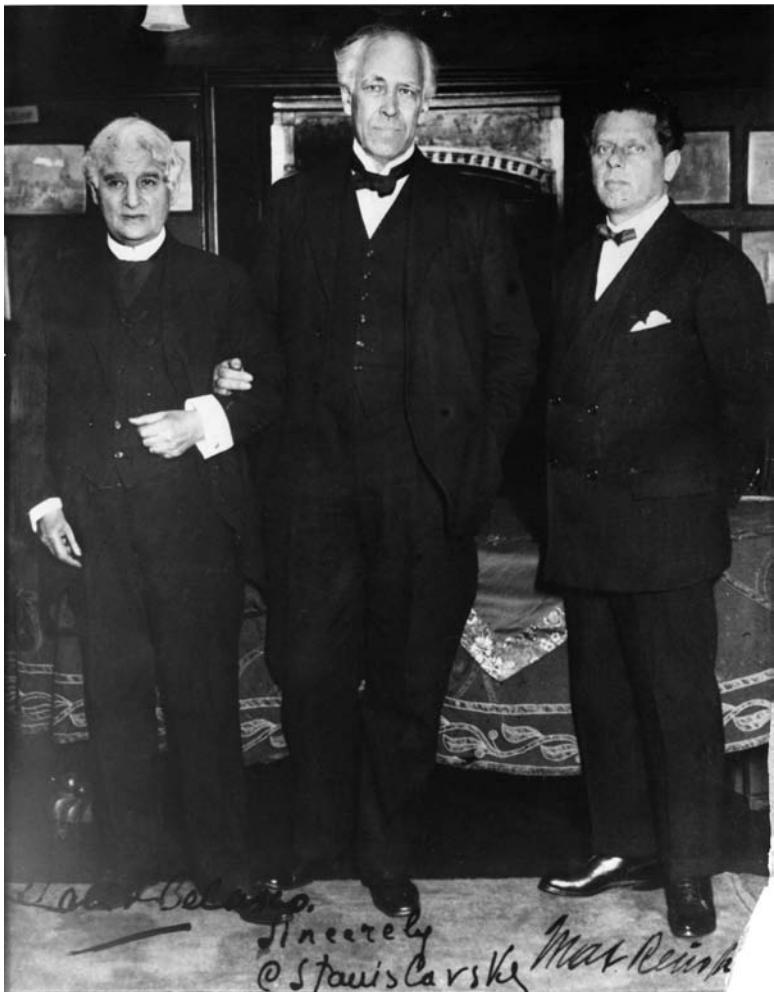
I can recommend a terrific book by Group Theater director Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years*. It contains wonderful descriptions of theater activity and conveys a marvelous sense of that period. It's extraordinary and written with such quality that you almost feel a part of it. Another good book is Boris Zakhava's *Vakhtangov and his Studio*, which came out in 1926. Zakhava includes important material and discussions between Stanislavski, Vladimir-Nemirovich Danchenko, co-founder of the Moscow Art Theater, and Vakhtangov. They are brilliant descriptions of their work which give a true picture of what people did and said.

I might also point out some periodicals. In France, a lot of interesting research is being done on directing. They've published five volumes of the contributions from symposia on theater productions which are extraordinarily well illustrated. In this country, *Theater Quarterly* started to describe interesting outstanding productions of the modern theater. I also recommend the Harvard 47 Workshop-one-act plays.

Another useful tool for the director is the director's notes. It would be very helpful for example to study Gordon Craig's association with Stanislavski in the famous production of *Hamlet* that was done at the Moscow Art Theater. I think it's worth analyzing the various steps and stages and the differences between two men who were so important in the history of the theater as Craig and Stanislavski. Also worth reviewing are the notes and the excellent prompt books for Stanislavski and Max Reinhardt.

Although the Meyerhold material would be the best to study, it's not available.

DIRECTING AND THE METHOD



Three great directors, David Belasco, Konstantin Stanislavski, and Max Reinhardt

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Eugene Vakhtangov, Russian actor and director (1883–1922)

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Gorki's *Yegor Bulichev and Others* at the Vakhtangov Theater, 1932



Vsevolod Meyerhold, Russian actor and director (1874–1940)

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Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of Ostrovksii's *The Forest*, 1924



Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of Dumas' *The Lady of the Camellias*, 1933

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Alexander Kirkland and J. Edward Bromberg in the Group Theater's Pulitzer Prize winning production of Sidney Kingsley's *Men in White*, directed by Lee Strasberg, 1933. Photo courtesy of Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

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SKIPPER NEXT TO GOD



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Skipper Next to God playbill, starring John Garfield, directed by Lee Strasberg, 1948. PLAYBILL® Used by permission.

DIRECTING AND THE METHOD

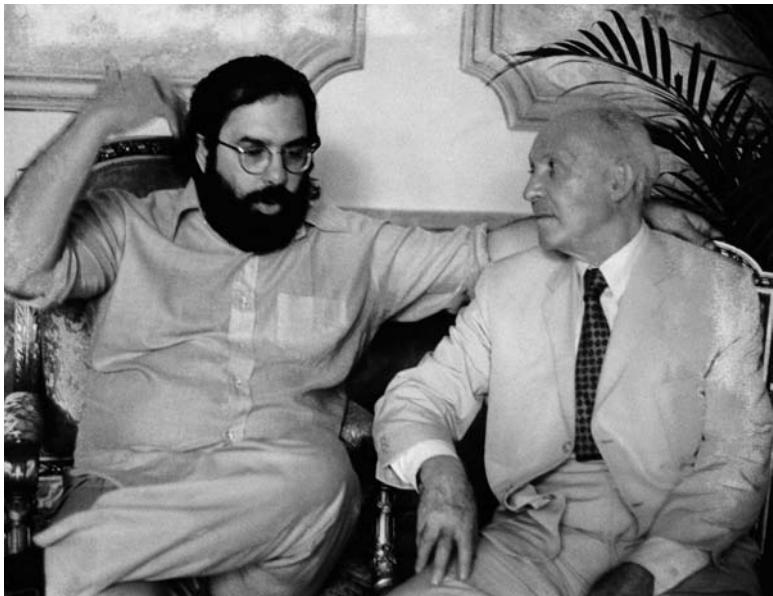


Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, Actors Studio production, directed by Lee Strasberg, 1964



Kim Stanley as Masha in Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, Actors Studio production directed by Lee Strasberg, 1964

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Francis Ford Coppola and Lee Strasberg, on location of *The Godfather Part II*, 1974



Elia Kazan and Lee Strasberg at the Strasberg apartment, NYC c. 1981.
Photo courtesy of Alon Reininger.

Part Five

LEE STRASBERG ON SHAKESPEARE AND STANISLAVSKI

Editor's note: *Shakespeare and Stanislavski are combined because Lee drew upon their work incessantly in his classes. On Shakespeare's plays, he said, "They are translated into practically every language on earth and are considered to be the outstanding dramatic achievement in any age, in any period, in any epoch." Lee constantly ruminated about Stanislavski's thinking and methods. During his classes and lectures, he relentlessly shared his knowledge and ideas about Stanislavski's accomplishments and mistakes.*

Shakespeare

Although the plays of Shakespeare are brilliant, they're also a hazard for the actor. We first hinder ourselves by viewing Shakespeare, not as another playwright, but as the greatest dramatist ever in our field. Because the belief exists that playing a contemporary part is one thing and playing Shakespeare is another, a whole theory of acting emerged for classic plays which focuses on external behavior and rhetorical delivery. If we listen to half a dozen different actors deliver Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech, you will notice how closely they resemble each other. The voice goes up at some point; the voice goes down at some other point. The same adjective is emphasized. The acting becomes more about doing "Shakespeare" than about creating a simple character. If you try to fake the lines without comprehension, it doesn't work.

An emphasis on the external, verbal, and rhetorical elements of Shakespeare is the commonly accepted one, but can lead to the impression that the actor is just talking without understanding the character. An actor may be very skillful while missing the emotional content of Hamlet's speech. What precisely do the words mean? What are you talking about when you say "to be or not to

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be,” for example? In fact, the external approach stresses the rhetorical word so literally that even highly regarded directors might instruct their actors to “Just speak the words,” suggesting that it’s the words that contain everything you need to do.

Once we rid ourselves of the idea that something is special in the work of Shakespeare, we’ll then approach it with open eyes and be more willing to accept it as natural. Yes, the objects, manners, and language are different, but emotional realities remain the same. In any material where there is depth, an intensity of experience and behavior, or where there is a flow of intellect into words, as there is in Shakespeare and Chekhov, the actor must have an understanding of human behavior and the skill to find the content. It’s all in the way you approach the words. If you embark on speaking the lines without comprehending them, you’re lost. There is so much to be understood in Shakespeare, so it’s important to comprehend the words clearly on the first reading, which lays the foundation for the actor; you must work very hard to correct any problems of understanding right away. In any play, the language and the deeper meaning of the words is the problem. As Shakespeare himself said in Act III, Hamlet’s advice to the players, “to hold as ’twere, the mirror up to nature.”

Much has been made of the fact that either you’re classical/rhetorical or you’re realistic/natural, but I doubt that there’s ever been a great actor who exemplified only the external approach. In Britain and other countries, the greatest Shakespearean performers have been the ones that have not gone in for the purely rhetorical. While the more external the actor’s skill is, the more even his performances may be, however there is less chance the actor will attain those high moments of inspiration which seem to single out the great performer. Using the Method’s internal/emotional approach for acting in Shakespeare’s plays, actors rise to the part by a process of spontaneity of inspiration which we all recognize. The greater the actor is, the more his performances will vary. Their great performances, when moments of inspiration strike, are not repeated when they’re less inspired. It’s our training which enables actors to re-create and repeat these emotions reliably when needed.

In the critic Belinsky’s essay in which he compares two different actors’ approach to Hamlet, he described how the actor that used the emotional approach performed it eighteen times, and it was great every time but always different. If you can’t repeat the intensity of your performance, there’s something wrong with your

technique. You cannot always perform 100 percent, but you should be able to perform the part successfully way more often than not.

British actors like Peter O'Toole, Albert Finney, and Alan Bates broke away from the classical/rhetorical approach and have been influenced by the Method to use emotional elements of the actor's work and yet retain the classic gesture and the ability to speak the lines with great ease. Although they've been criticized on that score, they've managed to be accepted as great Shakespearean performers.

We start by asking what's the simple content, not what's the great Shakespearean content. Perhaps the great Shakespearean content is only the simple content. When we apply the same kind of meaningful and logical approach to Shakespeare that we do with other plays we may find out, not that we can necessarily play it, because we still may not be skillful or able enough, but that we can certainly understand it.

It's not simply Shakespeare's reputation that offers obstacles to actors. Wonderful and impressive as they are, Shakespeare's words can also handicap rather than aid us. How should all actors handle the archaic structure, the iambic pentameter, and the language in Shakespeare? This is an issue in all languages. When you read Shakespeare's work in German, he's very clear; it lends itself to German translation because of the basic Anglo-Saxon foundations of the language. However, the German actors don't say it's not challenging for them. On the contrary, they think exactly as we do. "Oh, Shakespeare! That is a problem and challenge for us too." The French actor, also, doesn't say, "We have no problems with Shakespeare's language." On the contrary, they say, "It's more difficult for us. You at least have the English language. We don't even have that and therefore we're missing the central part of the Shakespearean contribution."

The language is an issue the actor has to surmount. Actors often have great difficulty with Shakespeare because they are immediately dragged into a theatrical kind of way of delivering the speeches. As done today in the theater, the complete *Hamlet* takes about four hours to perform. Although we don't know how those speeches were delivered in Shakespearean times, we have to deduce that Shakespeare's words weren't intended to be delivered formally or in the polite proper British English we think of as Shakespearean. In Shakespeare's day, the delivery of the words was not mouthed, stressing the poetry of the declamatory delivery of today, but as expressed in Shakespeare's own words in Act III, Hamlet says,

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“Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue.” From various historical sources one is led to believe that a complete *Hamlet* took Shakespeare’s actors between two and three hours at the most. There wasn’t the time for it to have been presented rhetorically; it had to be delivered very fully, vividly, and actively by the actors.

The language of the plays is the natural speech for all Shakespeare’s characters, not just the educated and elite. Language was vivid in all sections of society, and Shakespeare places exciting words in the mouths of all his characters; he could count on his audience to appreciate all his lines where, in his marvelous descriptiveness, there was nothing that was ever left general. He never says, “a sea.” He would say “a roaring sea.” The sea is always active with him. Everything he does in that sense carries activity and concreteness. It’s not just “from whose bourn,” but, “from whose bourn where no traveler returns … puzzles the will.” “Puzzles” is a strange word to use. Everything that he does with the words implies a definite kind of action. In Shakespeare’s time men died on the battlefield and they also wrote poetry. It was not effete. At the same time, one Shakespearean scholar said that the Shakespearean language is closer to what you would hear on the Bowery, where drunks get drunk, curse, brawl and bawl each other out. Some of Shakespeare’s language had vulgar implications in Elizabethan times, and the banter could even get raunchier. Actors can go even further because the parts were all played by men. It was very vaudeville. For instance, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, once the actor makes a choice that “Kate” is the rude term for a woman, he can use this to endow the word with meaning throughout the scene. The vernacular of the young people today is very similar to the young people in Elizabethan times.

So it’s important not to treat Shakespeare’s words like holy words. The “O” should be a sound that you make in everyday life. This also applies to punctuation. Before I became aware of and was influenced by Stanislavski, I went to a traditional dramatic school where you studied the rudiments – ballet, voice, and Shakespeare. To prepare the speech of Cassius for my class, I referred to a book which dealt with Elizabethan Shakespearean punctuation, which suggested that modern punctuation is totally different from Shakespearean punctuation. The Elizabethan language was much closer to spoken speech. The first thing I did to prepare for my speech was to cut out all the punctuation marks. My teacher was very laudatory because I delivered the speech as it was written and

as Shakespeare suggested, "trippingly." I was rather startled and surprised because I too, like you, thought, where do I come to do Shakespeare? I was one of the best in that play, without having a British accent, just my New York East Side accent with its intonation and color. Then I played the comic part in Sheridan's *The Rivals*. I lost my fear of doing the Restoration plays and of Shakespeare. I had not yet gained any security in my own skill, but at least I lost my fear of that material.

By breaking away from the punctuation that interrupts the flow of speech, I accidentally came across an approach to Shakespeare which worked. In England, two of the greatest Shakespearean performers speaking historically, David Garrick and Edmund Kean, were criticized because they broke the Shakespearean line. They didn't perform the speeches in the proper beat, and yet they succeeded in creating the greatest Shakespearean images.

To maintain the verbal continuity of the play, which in Shakespeare is so crucial, the actor must be aware of the possible danger when we interrupt the lines. Words in a classical play are as continuous as music in a musical score, and shouldn't be stopped unless there is good reason for it. Otherwise the play gets pulled apart. Even Stanislavski fell into error when he directed a production of *Othello* with a scene in which Desdemona is waiting for Othello to come off a returning ship. Stanislavski wanted to use this moment to fill in the reality, so he had counselors waiting with Desdemona and freight being loaded off as it might be done in reality. But it backfired because, as a result, before Othello could say his speech, he had to greet all of the counselors. The director doesn't want to break the flow of the language or chance missing any lines.

It's also important for today's directors to know that in Shakespeare's time, there was much more of a natural connection between the audience and the play. Several creative directors have demonstrated that it's much better if Shakespeare's soliloquies are spoken directly to the audience. Brecht's actor played the prologue as a deliberate kind of assault on the public in order to make them respond and be active, for example, as in Hamlet's speech, "To be or not to be." Instead of going into a kind of moody tone, Brecht's actor came out accusatorially, pointing a finger at the audience, "To be or not to be that is the question," suggesting that it's just as important for all the members of the audience. In this approach, Hamlet is asking, what about all of you? Isn't this a problem for you too? Do you think it's so easy for me? What would you do in this situation? Exciting and dramatic, the speech acts like a dash of

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cold water. The audience is startled. While the audience is aware it's a speech, the actor is expressing something that this character in this moment feels, acts, and says. In a strange way the audience becomes active and responds.

When the actor who performs the prologue in *Henry V*, for example, says, "Oh for a muse of fire," to introduce the play, it's much better if it's spoken directly to the people in the audience rather than to an inanimate audience. The actor feels he's not just delivering a prologue but instead, the character and the playwright are choosing to tell you what he wishes to say about the play. When you make contact with the audience, they become a partner. The public is there and has to be treated as such. They may answer, and if they do, what's so terrible?

Shakespeare's plays are usually studied out of the context of the life of the author, the characters, and the environment inhabited by the characters. In addition to working with Shakespeare's language, an actor about to do Shakespeare has to prepare by studying the types of experiences which classical plays deal with; these were more varied, colorful, unfamiliar, and more diverse than our contemporary experiences. In Shakespeare, the additional contributing factors, which are distant from us, such as language, mannerisms, and customs, make us think that there is something special about it. How do you eat in a classic play? How do you sit? Dance? We take these things for granted when we deal with contemporary plays, but in classic plays they become an immense problem. In Shakespearean times, singing, playing instruments, and dancing were very highly developed in the general population. Most of the madrigals, the four and five-part voices, were sung by amateurs who showed a high degree of skill in the development of the singing. At the same time, it was an extremely violent period. Richard Burbage, who originated many of Shakespeare's roles, had a rough pockmarked face, like a prizefighter. The actors got into real fights. Ben Jonson got into an argument once in a play and was stabbed.

That he was also a working actor is one thing that sets Shakespeare apart. The extent to which his professional dramaturgic capacities and achievement, and the degree to which his plays are filled with elements that are derived from an acting incentive and an acting vision, has never been completely recognized or appreciated. He was not only a playwright who started as an actor, but, unlike other playwrights of his day, was a member of a theater company. He began to rewrite plays and finally wrote and acted only for that

company. When we think of Shakespeare as an actor first, we have to look at him with fresh eyes.

A book, I do not recall the name of, best addressing this point was written not by a Shakespearean scholar, but by a member of the law faculty at one of the European universities around 1916, who wrote it in his effort to debunk the theories of those people who felt that Shakespeare was not the writer of his plays, but that it was someone else of much greater culture, intellect and literary skill.

One of those whom theorists named as the real Shakespeare was Francis Bacon, one of the outstanding cultural figures of that time. In an effort to combat that claim, the lawyer simply collected all the passages in which Shakespeare dealt with theater, human behavior, and how actors should behave. As he points out, Shakespeare is the only author in whom you find literal speeches about the differences between good acting and bad acting. In *Hamlet* you find Hamlet's advice to the players and speeches about the difficulty they are having with the young children's companies that have become a fad. The lawyer also offers other proof that the plays were written by a down-to-earth man of the theater. He talks about the actor who, when he comes on the stage, listens to the echo underneath his own feet on the floor. Shakespeare, he points out, embodied in himself all the traits, pain, and the sufferings of the actor. In *As You Like It*, he wrote, "All the world's a stage, the men and women merely players, they have their exits and their entrances." Shakespeare was an actor like me or Max Reinhardt, who played small character parts. He suffered like all small actors wanting to play the great parts, and wrote about the actor who comes on the stage playing a small part and realizes that the audience is waiting for him to get off the stage so that they can then listen to the "great" actor. Only an actor could say that as simply and as well as Shakespeare, who was also not ashamed or afraid to say it. Shakespeare is not our contemporary, but Shakespeare is our universal actor.

Sometimes it's useful to make the play personal by finding a logical reason in Shakespeare's biography for his having written it. *The Tempest* is a play which has always been difficult for the actor to approach. When it does come off well, it's because of its pageantry, big production, and details, and can be very enjoyable entertainment. It was Shakespeare's last play and his abilities were fading. There was the assumption that he was going through a crisis of some kind at the end of his life similar to a nervous breakdown; otherwise he could never have written *Lear*. No one else has captured madness so well. I have come to see *The Tempest* as a play he

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wrote to, in effect, say his goodbyes. I sat through a production of it, and I thought, what is this all about? Since this was Shakespeare's last play, what might have motivated him to write a play like this? I put myself into Shakespeare's possible mood, thinking, what am I going to write now, my farewell to the people? I have to tell them that I no longer have the magic powers I once possessed. I can no longer do the things that I did before. I must pass it on to younger people. They'll follow in my footsteps and take up my spirit and my creativity. I must also tell the audience that they don't understand what a terrible burden they are to us playwrights.

Suddenly the whole play fell into a logical perspective, taking on a meaning and continuity based on the fact that here is the story of a man who has ill-used people and his magic powers. The last speech then became overwhelmingly moving to me. This is not Prospero but Shakespeare saying, "We now must take leave," and he sends off Ariel saying, "seek out others." He passes on his magic wand and his own creativity to others.

For the first time the play made sense to me. Even if this interpretation is not correct, it would help me direct that production. Maybe the audience wouldn't even grasp what had motivated my direction, but I'm sure that creating the character in light of what I imagined to be a true and real experience rather than some vague literate and poetic experience would make it richer. The audience would be made to share that Shakespeare, not Prospero, is saying goodbye and abdicating his spirit. I came to this interpretation because I was trying to make simple sense out of the theatrical story.

Stanislavski

Konstantin Stanislavski was the greatest reformer in the world of acting, and his theories changed the life of twentieth-century theater. With his empirical and practical understanding of the theater, Stanislavski identified problems of the actor which had not been addressed until then, and he attempted to solve them. The resulting training work and the development of an inner craft are the great discoveries of this genius, and his approach eventually evolved into the Stanislavski System and the Method. Although we have improved on his procedures and found solutions for problems that Stanislavski had not yet solved, the directors who followed him, including myself, stand on his shoulders. There would've been no Lee Strasberg if there hadn't been a Stanislavski.

When I first saw Stanislavski's work with the Moscow Art

Theater (MAT) right after the Russian Revolution during the 1923–24 seasons in New York, I recognized his genius and felt responsible to carry on his work. Demonstrating their work in America was a dream for the MAT. There was a strong Russian-speaking settlement in New York City who appreciated their work, they had a sense of being among their own, and also they were appearing on the American stage.

In the MAT productions of plays by Chekhov, Gorki, Dostoevski, and Hamsun, there was an unusual level of achievement from an ensemble; one that I doubt can ever be equaled. Within any theater company, there are usually two stars, but in the Moscow Art Theater there were ten, including Stanislavski. All their great actors and even the lesser players had the charisma of stars and were equally real; most were at the top of their talent and creativity. In particular, it was Stanislavski's direction of the Chekhovian plays for the MAT that represented what I call the "Stanislavski contribution." What the Moscow Art Theater under Stanislavski was able to do with lesser talents was remarkable. This indicated to me that he had identified something which could help actors with a wide range of talent and ability. And he did. He discovered how to tap the inner life of the actor and apply that to the craft of acting.

In these productions, he approached a scene – not focusing on lines and theatrics – but based on the inner emotional logic of the characters. He claimed it wasn't the words the actors spoke, but their entire behavior which made the scene come alive. Working from this premise, Stanislavski originated the basic elements of our training – relaxation, concentration, sense memory and emotional memory – which he identified as going "from the conscious" to "the super conscious." For the first time, we had an acting technique which focused on the actor's emotional resources. In this early work, these exercises were the reservoir with which Stanislavski approached the stage, dealing with the actor in two parts, the work on the actor himself and the work on the text.

The actor, Stanislavski theorized, must be a complete human being, not just a complete actor. Believing that the life the actor leads must be part of the art he creates, Stanislavski emphasized that an actor's work on himself as a person as well as an artist was essential. For example, Stanislavski felt the theater must express an ethical attitude toward life. He wouldn't permit anyone, not just the actors, to smoke in the theater or wear a hat. Respect for others meant respect for yourself. Fundamental to the actor's work, Stanislavski claimed, is the sense of truth.

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For the actor who sensed that what he was doing wasn't real or true enough, Stanislavski supplied the technique by which great and lesser actors could work using their own sense of truth. He did this by insisting physical behavior must be in relation to the psychological and the unconscious. Today in my own work, I start with Stanislavski's original premise that there are things within human beings called the unconscious and subconscious which we can use for acting. More importantly, the use of emotional memory in acting can be traced to Stanislavski's early work. His term for making contact with yourself was the "self-feeling of the actor."

Stanislavski was only partially successful in solving the problems of the actor, however. He often failed to grasp the wider significance of his own discoveries. And that's often where he made the mistake. That's what happened with Knut Hamsun's *The Drama of Life*, which the Moscow Art Theater did in 1910. The set was very modernistic and interesting and gave us a strange sense of mystery, but the actors weren't dynamic because they were concentrating internally. While the emotional approach has been the inspiration for our work, Stanislavski had not yet understood its application for the stage, and the actors conveyed a static inner focus and set up the basic criticism of Stanislavski's work that the acting was too internal. Stanislavski was criticized for "psychologizing," and the critics were right.

It was his students and followers that have solved the problems he identified but couldn't solve. Neither Vakhtangov nor the Group Theater made the same mistakes. Not because we were smarter; we were just later so we could draw on Stanislavski's ideas that worked and learn from his failures.

Key to our work today was the basic discovery of the emotional memory in 1906 by Stanislavski. He was led to it by the French psychologist Théodule Ribot, who coined the phrase and whose *The Psychology of Emotions* addressed the concept of affective memory, which includes sense memory and emotional memory. Stanislavski went further than Ribot. Awakening the actors' imagination, Stanislavski said, depends on the ability to stimulate the emotional memory. His approach worked by appealing to the emotional memory and all re-creative processes so the actor approached his work by living and re-living, not imitating. My own definition of emotional memory is based on the works of Stanislavski and my teacher, Richard Boleslavsky. I then added to it from my own reading and knowledge.

Stanislavski first raised the question, "What is inspiration?" He

discovered that what happened at those moments when the actor was most creative was that their senses and memory functioned properly. He asked if there was a way to control it and feed the creative mood or spirit. Could the actor deliberately recall emotions and bring them alive at will? He said emotions can't be directly turned on or stimulated, but can only be reached indirectly through sense memory, a theory upon which we have built our system today.

However, Stanislavski didn't know how to use emotional memory. He claimed there needed be an exact correlation between the remembered experience and the type of behavior necessary for the scene. That's where Stanislavski went wrong. As we've shown there needs be no relationship whatsoever between your emotional memory and the dramatic event in the scene for the emotional memory to work for the actor. Vakhtangov and I made that distinction.

Stanislavski also claimed that the emotional memory was unreliable. It was for him because he used it inexactly, vaguely. He came at it intuitively so when it worked, it worked well, but it didn't work every time. In the last few years I have been going over Stanislavski's work, and realised he didn't use it precisely, the way we do, and with us it works consistently so that it will represent real experience.

It's very clear to me that Stanislavski held on to the terminology and presence of emotional memory. He obviously possessed the ability to do the emotional memory and understood how it worked because, as it has been described, Stanislavski's students were flabbergasted by his demonstrations. However, he didn't define it as an exercise as did some of the people who taught at his studio, especially Sulergitsky, whose contribution in this area should be better known. I feel Sulergitsky had a great deal to do with systematizing Stanislavski's work and handing it on to the students.

We have also built on, for example, Stanislavski's original desire to solve the issues of habitual behavior and tension for the actor. At seventeen, when Stanislavski made his first appearance on the stage, he wrote his earliest notes about acting and tension. As a practitioner, not purely a theoretician, much of what Stanislavski brought to directing came from his personal experience as an actor. He struggled with his mannerisms – what he called the 'stencils of life' – and described his great difficulty getting rid of them. However, Stanislavski seemed only aware of these mannerisms as "clichés," not habits that were entrenched obstacles to expression. In our

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work, we have come to recognize that all existing personal habits have deep roots and that the basic habitual behavior of the human being leads to the habitual behavior of the actor. Even though Stanislavski didn't go far enough in his solution, it's the techniques he developed as a director to eliminate clichés that we have expanded to remove the problem of habits, customs, and mannerisms which impel the actor.

Despite the fact that there isn't a single mention of the word in any of the literature by or about Stanislavski, he is still credited with introducing improvisation. It was inherent in everything that Stanislavski did. He developed a particular and deep aversion to memorizing lines, and by utilizing the process of improvisation, he believed that "the life of the day" or logical behavior would be found. In Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* there are improvisations, but the term he used was "études." Because he doesn't use the specific term improvisation, or offer any explicit articulation of this theory or its use in any of his books, I was worried that I was making assumptions, especially because in his later theories he focused on physical actions. I don't mind, however, if I've made it up, because improvisation works.

The concept we use today of imaginary objects as a concentration-enhancing exercise was also clearly part of Stanislavski's philosophies and training near the end of his life. Stanislavski may not have been sufficiently aware of the connection between the sensory nature of the work and psychological processes, but he did exercises with imaginary objects every day, and statements from people who worked with Stanislavski said he used the words "objects in air."

Although he failed to see all the subtleties of the problems, we owe Stanislavski a further debt for his approach to creating characters. He raised basic questions to help the actor create a character, including "Who am I?" "Where am I?" "What am I doing here?" and "What are the conditions or circumstances that existed before I started doing this?" The purpose of asking these questions was to help the actor experience the life of the character, and to bring that awareness on stage, what Stanislavski called "living through." He challenged the actor with the question, "What would you do or feel if you were the character and how would you behave?"

This approach, however, like some of his techniques, was limited in its effectiveness. This technique would work if the content was relevant to the actor's life and the actor had shared what the characters in those plays had experienced. If the content was not

relevant to the actor's life and the actor had never experienced the attitudes in the play, the actor's behavior was often not appropriate to the play. In effect, he failed to understand the significance of his own procedures for creating a "day in the life" for a character. For example, to prepare for a part one time, Stanislavski decided to lock himself up in a dungeon. He played his character in a very grandiose way and the director had told him, "No, this is a man who is broken down like in the Cervantes novel, *Don Quixote*." Stanislavski anticipated that something would happen in the dungeon to help him create this character, and he told the caretaker, "No matter what I do, don't open the door and let me out." What happened was very different from what he expected. He got very cold and frightened, and there were rats running around. He started to beat on the door to get the caretaker to open it, but he didn't come. Stanislavski was unaware of all the sensory possibilities for the part inherent in that experience, therefore he concluded it was a failure. Actually my interpretation is the exact opposite. The experience was a great success, but he didn't know how to utilize it, and he was criticized for acting that was too subjective and internal, more related to the actor than the character.

Stanislavski's great pupil Eugene Vakhtangov saw the flaw in his mentor's approach, and didn't make the same mistake. Vakhtangov knew the question isn't "What you would do if you were the character?" It must be, "What would the character do?" Stanislavski didn't take the step which was developed by Vakhtangov and which we employ in our work – the idea of substitution. Stanislavski used substitution himself, but not deliberately. He wasn't aware of the difference between a reality and a substituted reality which has no relation to the scene, but which, for the actor, creates the event.

Dissatisfied with many of his plays, Stanislavski himself admitted that his procedures only worked in about half of them. He acknowledged that. Stanislavski clearly stated in *My Life in Art*, he was not at the end of his quests to solve the problems of the actor and knew there was more work to be done. He was still searching, and ultimately continued to look in the wrong direction – away from his early emotional approach.

One of his dissatisfactions was with the rehearsal process, which he called "rehearsal around the table," in which the actors sit around and talk about the play during rehearsal. He said, the actors talk and talk and talk, and when it's all over they get up and they act just as badly as they did before. He knew something was wrong and said, "Let's stop talking, and let us act." Obviously, he didn't

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want to direct by instructing actors to just “act” so he called it “action.” It’s illustrated in the film I show, where he tries to demonstrate this, the actors sit around and talk and he talks about “action” and you don’t see a thing being done.

Stanislavski eventually responded to the criticisms of his emotional theories and rejection by his pupil Vakhtangov, by abandoning the very theories and techniques that revolutionized the Moscow Art Theater. Seeking a way to prevent the actor from getting too involved and too emotional, Stanislavski now focused on the impersonal with his “Theory of Physical Actions.” Contrary to his earlier discoveries, Stanislavski theorized that if we just act out what happens at each moment, which is what Stanislavski called the “action of the scene,” and we do it well, we may then get to the play. However, this approach failed, and rightly so. One or two parts may have been successful, but the plays as such were not. *Othello* didn’t work. Stanislavski’s final play, *Tartuffe*, was not the success that they hoped it would be. As a result of his just concentrating on only the physical choices made for the scene, Stanislavski’s work on the stage sometimes became static or immobile. The scenes became slow, a wrong mood was created, and the audience did not really know what was going on.

In an effort to counter the wrong impression that the physical alone can lead to expressiveness, in his later work, Stanislavski eventually came to label action as “psycho-physical.” Based on Pavlovian theory about the connection between mind and body, Stanislavski’s “Theory of Psycho-Physical Actions” was intended to create emotional behavior from physical actions. However, Pavlovian theory is not the duality that Stanislavski thought; it’s the dialectic, a unity of opposites. His approach still didn’t work because he put too much emphasis on the actions alone, and this led to imitative behavior. His performance in Strindberg’s *Enemy of the People* was a crucial example. It was first given in 1900 and then again in 1905. In the 1905 production he became dissatisfied with his performance. His gestures were copied from people that he had observed, and as the performance went on, he began to imitate and repeat the behavior, and it became empty. He went away from the theater asking, “What happened? Where did I go wrong? I thought this was one of my best performances. Why years later when I’m a better actor are my performances worse?” When he first created the role, it was real, but after a while it became imitation and nothing more than tricks on the stage.

Stanislavski acknowledged that his work with the classics was

unsuccessful, but he didn't know why. We do. When he abandoned his pursuit of the natural, the personal, the internal, and changed his focus to the physical approach, he gave up those wonderful things he found deep within the actor with his original exercises, and led the actors away from the emotional sides of themselves.

Had Stanislavski continued to pursue his emotional approach, however, I doubt that he was theoretically able or had the necessary knowledge deriving from psychology to come to useful conclusions. His thinking was still unclear. For this reason, Stanislavski's books are confusing and I don't recommend them at the beginning of training. After you've become more experienced with the Method, they're wonderful. They contain all the problems that actors face in the theater, but Stanislavski's conclusions or answers may not be the most clearly phrased or precisely defined. *An Actor Prepares*, which represents his cumulative thinking and has never been revised, came out a year before he died and is important for understanding the actor's work.

Unfortunately, Stanislavski's greatest discoveries which he first abandoned were also abandoned by the theater associated with his name. During my visit to the Moscow Art Theater in 1971 and 1973, I was shocked by the very ordinary and conventional acting being achieved in Stanislavski's name. Stanislavski would have been disappointed to see the actors just being "actors" rather than great human beings. There was not a sign of what we call sense memory or emotional memory in the performances. After Stanislavski died, the Moscow Art Theater stopped using the training applied by Stanislavski because his later reliance on physical behavior which emphasized the physical over emotional had led to the disintegration of MAT performances. Their efforts to correct this went so far as to bring in someone from the outside to become the director of the Moscow Art Theater. Whatever remained of Stanislavski's System were just verbal reminiscences which the actors described but which hadn't the slightest pertinence or relation to their work and what Stanislavski was after.

The realization that the legacy of Stanislavski in his own Moscow Art Theater was completely destroyed after his death with barely a vestige remaining was a great shock to me. This was also a very powerful experience which made me realize that the Method – to which my name has become connected – could also be lost in the same way that much of Stanislavski's System was. I became very concerned that people who have experience and a practical understanding of our training should serve as a foundation and a basis to

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carry on the work.

One misconception is that Stanislavski was a bad actor, so he invented the Method to learn how to act himself and to teach other poor actors. How absurd. That's a complete misunderstanding of Stanislavski's contribution to solving the basic problems of acting, which have always existed – long before Stanislavski. Stanislavski's original discoveries of inner craft for the Moscow Art Theater are fundamental for the actor and director in any age, in any play. Although there were directors who were greater, the contributions of Stanislavski are above and beyond everything in the 2000-year-old existence of theater.

I've been working with these issues for 55 years – more years than Stanislavski – and have built my own system on his discoveries. To the great Russian director, the theater was like a church. I like to think of the theater as a place where the actors are the priests for the audience.



Edmund Kean, English actor (1787–1833) as Shakespeare's characters (Clockwise from top left; Luke, Othello, Iago, Richard, Hamlet, Shylock) at the Drury Lane Theater

LEE STRASBERG ON SHAKESPEARE AND STANISLAVSKI



John Barrymore, American actor (1882–1942) as Hamlet, 1922

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Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* at the Moscow Art Theater, directed by Konstantin Stanislavski, 1899. Stanislavski as Astrov at far left



Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* at the Moscow Art Theater directed by Konstantin Stanislavski, 1901. Stanislavski as Vershinin

LEE STRASBERG ON SHAKESPEARE AND STANISLAVSKI



Lee Strasberg at the Stanislavski Centennial, Moscow, 1963

Part 6

LEE STRASBERG ON THE THEATER, ACTING, AND ACTORS

Editor's note: A pastiche of theater history and vignettes from the stage were used as educational points of departure in Lee Strasberg's work to drive home his ideas with flair about things to be aware of, understand, try, or avoid. Taken from the taped sessions of his classes and seminars, these anecdotes and points of interest provided context which better enabled the actors to appreciate individual acting styles and skills. Interestingly, Lee points out the degree to which the great actors had used these techniques naturally or unconsciously even before his formalization of the procedures. By these examples, actors are empowered to learn and apply Lee's work in the refinement of their own instrument.

The origin of the Method

England is the country in which the Method as such originated. Wordsworth's famous phrase, "Poetry takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" is a statement which defines this approach to acting. The great eighteenth-century English actors, David Garrick, Edmund Kean, and Sarah Siddons are the epitome of the Method. Their acting contained the same kind of elements which embodied the English art of that period. For instance, David Garrick appears on the stage at the same time that Samuel Richardson originates the realistic novel. In an engraving of Mrs. Siddons, you see in her face what we call inspiration. She's carried away, and the face is filled with emotion. No painter could possibly paint that face if he hadn't seen it. The engraver's interpretation depicts the degree of reality involved and the style of the emotional thrust.

On the other hand, Edmund Kean commanded the adoration of the greatest English Romantic writers including Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Coleridge. Coleridge characterized it precisely when he

said, “Seeing Kean act is like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning.” Keats said he would like to do in poetry what Kean did in acting. Byron and Shelley wrote for Kean, knowing they weren’t writing for an ordinary player but for a genius actor who was able to summon up nature’s thunder and lightning which comes from “the true voice of feeling.” It’s said that when, as Hamlet, Kean picked up the skull of Yorick, tears would come to his eyes because he’d think of his uncle who first taught him Shakespeare. That is the Method. Lightning doesn’t come just at the moment it flashes. It builds up before it flashes and rumbles afterwards. In fact, legend claims that when Edmund Kean would get angry on the stage, the other actors were literally frightened, some to the point of forgetting their lines.

Historical controversy over Method acting

The debate about what we now call the Method arose before Stanislavski. It began in England in 1890 in a discussion between the English approach represented by the actor Henry Irving and the critic William Archer, both of whom espoused an emotional approach and the value of experience; at the same time, Coquelin, the French actor who wrote several essays on acting, advocated the French point of view which is understood to be anti-emotional, believing in the value of demonstration. That goes throughout the history of the theater right up to Duse and Bernhardt. Shaw wrote a brilliant essay which defines exactly that, saying that “Bernhardt was a great actress but Duse creates the inner life of the character.”

Coquelin was a fine actor but not unfortunately a great actor. Beerbohm said, “He can give pleasure but he doesn’t move us. Therefore his theory of art misses the point.” Coquelin watched himself carefully in life when he became angry and jealous. Then calmly and coolly on stage, he imitated the way in which he behaved at that moment. In eighteenth-century France, this approach was at the heart of an interesting confrontation between two famous actresses who were members of the Comédie Française: Clairon (1723–1803) and Dumesnil (1713–1803). Clairon said the secret of acting comes from heaven, and when the time strikes you, you’ll be OK. Her contemporary, Dumesnil, believed that the actor creates the character and what the audience is applauding is not the Medea or Cleopatra but the act of playing Cleopatra and Medea. Clairon said about Dumesnil, “When she’s great, she’s great, but what

happens when she's not? Then she starts acting?" Clairon responded that she'd rather be "good all the time." She was willing to settle for a more external type of acting which doesn't mean empty. It's real but a more external way of suggesting reality without relying on the spurt of inspiration. One is for effect and the other is for a reality which presents a human being.

The origin of the Method in American theater

Although it existed for less than ten years, in the 1930s the Group Theater was the experimental laboratory where a close-knit group of actors, directors, and writers developed an approach derived from the work of Stanislavski that became the Method. We printed scripts without punctuation so actors felt free to stop when they wanted, encouraging spontaneity, and we eliminated the stage direction for emotions. For all of our productions, we utilized improvisation, and a more natural and intense way of speaking began to evolve. It was very effective.

Although it was quite modern and abstract in its compositional form, the Group Theater productions were done with such reality and conviction that, based on the brilliance of the acting, they were often confused with realistic theater. However, our sets and even some of the compositions were not purely realistic; they just projected a sense of reality. It tended towards a poetic kind of realism, or if you wish, a theatrical kind of realism. Harold Clurman claimed that I was not a realist; that I was really poetic in my approach to theater. I like to think of myself as a poetic realist.

One thing I pride myself on is that the directors that have come from the Group Theater, including Kazan, Clurman, and Lewis, all have different styles. As colleagues we shared technical knowledge, experience, and judgments, trying to not argue about taste but sharing insights about craft. By the seventh year we had evolved and some of the Group's productions based on this new approach such as that of Odets' *Golden Boy* were regarded on the same level as the Moscow Art Theater.

The Group Theater proved the work could be done separate from Stanislavski and Vakhtangov. *Johnny Johnson*, done by the Group Theater, was the first real musical play, and in fact it inspired Richard Rodgers to do *Oklahoma!*

Edmund Kean

When Kean first appeared in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in the part of Shylock, he was just a young man from the provinces and the theater was half empty. The next night the house was full because Hazlitt wrote a review which shared his excitement about the performance but commented on the hoarseness of Kean's voice, which he attributed to a cold. Hazlitt saw the play again two weeks later, and in a new review said, "I have to apologize. The hoarseness in his voice was not from a cold but was his natural voice moved by emotion." When you see an engraving of Kean as Shylock, the sharpness, the vividness, and fanaticism in his face is so strange it gives me the willies. This same effect can be seen in some of Rembrandt's work, such as the drunken Noah's face.

William Macready

Macready, a fine actor, wrote in his notebooks in the 1850's that the acting profession was not an honorable or respectable one, but nonetheless he was stuck with it. It was a way of making money. He was a respectable person and an intellectual, but he felt a bit demeaned by being an actor; this is a constant emphasis in his notebooks until it becomes boring. Meanwhile, Macready was the first one to do all the parts of Shakespeare. He was an actor that hated acting, and he made every effort to get out of it; obviously, however, he was not successful anywhere else, so he constantly had to act. And yet because of that, he approached it from an intellectual point of view. Unfortunately in the English theater they lump all the actors together, often missing the special quality of each of them. As a result the various actors have not been sufficiently characterized. With Macready, there's a question of whether he was a great actor because he didn't have those flares of temperament which usually distinguish a great actor.

Edwin Booth

Once when playing Hamlet, Booth caught a flash of the image of his daughter as Ophelia and it scared him. He got carried away by it, and he said his performance went to pieces. He couldn't give a performance that night because the emotion threw him. Another Booth anecdote comes from his performance in *Richard III* when he came on stage in one of the high moments and he accidentally

stumbled and fell flat on the floor. He waited for the audience to laugh, not knowing what was going to happen or what he should do. The audience didn't laugh. On the contrary, suddenly the audience started to applaud. He thought someone else had come on stage. However, they were applauding him. He decided, in that case he had better go on with the performance. The next day there was a big headline in the papers, "Booth with a new interpretation of Richard." The critics, instead of realizing Booth had tripped, interpreted it as a prophecy of Richard's downfall. Booth is said to have commented, "You see what idiots critics are!"

Henry Irving

Henry Irving's wife felt that the theater was a demeaning profession. She felt very strongly that it was not a respectable career, and as it goes on one occasion when they were riding home in a carriage, made that very plain to him. When she started in on this subject he stopped the carriage, opened the door, got down and never saw her again. That was his way of dealing with that problem. Later of course he became a Sir and was the first actor to be knighted. What she felt at that time, one can only imagine. Henry Irving was an actor/manager and tried to put the actor on a socially equal level with any other member of society; therefore he gave readings in cathedrals and did parts that befitted a cathedral setting. For those readings, there were special copies made up, huge folios with large print. I have one in a huge red leather-bound book.

The Italians: Tommaso Salvini and Giovanni Grasso

Italian actors have been the greatest in the world because of a special characteristic that they possess; they commit themselves more fully than any other actors to the emotional experience that demands completely letting go. Letting go doesn't mean being rambunctious or chaotic. The degree of experience and the extent of the greatness that the Italian actors were able to bring to the stage is astonishing. People were not used to the intensity of Salvini, Duse, and Grasso. They were able to give their entire full commitment to a part without worrying where it would go or if it went a bit differently each time. Therefore, their commitment was full. When they died, they died, and when they killed, they killed to such an extent that the audience actually was scared.

When audiences saw Italy's celebrated nineteenth-century actor,

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Tommaso Salvini, the intensity of the emotional and physiological experience was on such a level that people said, this isn't acting. It's too real, not in the naturalistic or psychological sense, but in a physiological reality. But it was acting. Salvini was Stanislavski's favorite actor. Stanislavski was 19 years old when he saw Salvini act in Moscow in 1882. In Salvini, Stanislavski saw the ideal of the actor. When asked what the main requirement in an actor is, Salvini said, "Voice, voice, and more voice." On that basis, opera singers should be the greatest actors. He may have worked very hard on his voice and felt that is what one had to work for. Perhaps Salvini was unaware of how his other talents contributed to his genius.

Although I never saw Salvini, I was fortunate to have seen the great Giovanni Grasso who was very close to Salvini and copied his interpretations. The choices and details in Grasso's *Othello* are Salvini's, who took three hours to get into character for each performance. There is a book by an American called *Salvini's Othello* which describes scene by scene what he did in the play. I thought Grasso had created the part on his own. After I read the book, I realized he was using Salvini's techniques. Grasso was not a great intellectual actor, yet he created characters with the same degree of emotional intensity that Salvini had.

With Grasso there was a degree of physical and emotional experience which challenged belief. You obviously knew it was acting because there was an actor on stage performing, but you could not imagine how he did what he did. Backstage he was corpulent and he embraced everybody smiling. He was short and rounded with no voice and he had asthma. In a fight scene in which Grasso was playing the part of an idiot with a handkerchief tied around his head as if he had a toothache, he suddenly whips out a knife and moves like an animal. Although he may have been fat, he was nonetheless marvelously agile.

When Grasso did the death scene in *Othello*, I held on to my seat, thinking a man is really dying there. When he killed himself and collapsed on one side of the stage, the audience started to applaud because they thought that was the end. Someone on the stage motioned that the play was not over yet, and Grasso pulled himself across the stage to say his last lines. I wanted to yell, save him, do something! There's a man dying. On the subway going home I couldn't speak because I'd just seen a man die. At the end of *La Morte Civile* when Grasso's character commits suicide by swallowing a pill, I wasn't sure whether he really swallowed it or if he was

acting. It was so real I thought maybe he'd taken his own asthma pills. If you take pills and try to swallow, sometimes a residue remains on the tongue. I will never forget Grasso trying to get that residue off his tongue. It was so real; you wanted to run on stage to save him. Yet when the curtain went up, there he was sitting, pale, but alive. I thought, how could he do that?

Eleanora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt

Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse represent two opposing approaches to the art of acting. The work of Duse, Stanislavski, and the Method is intended to lead the actor towards the ability to live on the stage, not only to perform. Bernhardt's acting represents an approach to acting which we call the external approach.

Duse was a wonderful actress but it was not until the brilliant Italian tragedienne began to explore and study the natural gestures in Greek sculpture that her work began to deepen. When in Ibsen's *Ghosts* as Mrs. Alving, Duse said the word "ghosts," she made a gesture that suggested her past rose up and reality struck. I call it "cobwebs" when memories come up, and you try to fight out of the past.

When Duse died on stage as a character, there was a choice. In the death scene at the end of the play *Cosi Sia, Thy Will Be Done*, which I saw her in, she drags herself up to a mountaintop altar to pray to the Madonna, promising that if the child got well she would give up her sinful life. As she prays, the life goes out of her. It was as if she just expired. Death is the absence of life and that's what she created.

Although Duse was dissatisfied with her performances in the movies because of the newness of the medium, there is another perfect psychological gesture in the film *Cenere* when Duse runs to a wall and pounds on it in desperation after being told that the son she abandoned had come back. She opens the door and he's there and she has to face him. She's embarrassed and covers her face, unable to look at him. Her hands are almost helpless and she bows before him in a strange gesture of humility. That is a perfect psychological gesture which has come out of some deep awareness. In another scene when she bends down toward the water in a stream, it literally seems as if the water's running into her, forming a continuity which was extraordinary. People who see Duse in *Cenere* are overwhelmed. They ask me, having seen her perform, if she was she really like that. I say, "Yes, even better."

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The descriptions of Duse in Gabriele d'Annunzio's book are marvelous. He describes her extraordinary faculty. He says, when she walked with her hounds, she was a hound. When she stood opposite a tree, she was a tree. She didn't try to do it.

George Bernard Shaw wrote a brilliant dramatic essay about the famous confrontation between Duse and Bernhardt when both appeared in productions of Hermann Sudermann's play *Magda*, being done simultaneously in London. In the play, Magda returns to her family after becoming a woman of the world and a successful opera singer, and encounters a former lover who abandoned her. Shaw describes that, as they spoke, a deep blush spread across Duse's face, even though she didn't use the trick of bending down to cause the blush. Puzzled by how she created the emotional intensity of that moment, Shaw said that she just started to blush and "the blush seemed to come from within." When Duse was acting, Shaw concluded, you feel rather than observe.

When describing Bernhardt's performance as *Magda*, Shaw focused on Bernhardt's beauty, saying that she was brilliant personally and that her performance was "clever." However, Shaw felt Bernhardt's own nature, character, and behavior were substituted for the character's, which was nothing like hers.

The respective fans of each of the actresses actually battled in the theater, with hisses, catcalls, and applause. I would like to see something like that happen today. It would be very curious to see whether it would provoke the same type and kind of response. Based on audience reaction it was accepted that Duse was the victor. Shaw's essay and description still stands as an analysis of acting clearly contrasting the nature and the character of the internal and external approaches to acting.

It's commonly assumed that because I say Bernhardt was external she must be bad. It has taken me a long time to realize that, with her skill and brilliance, her performances must have been startling. When I look at the photographs of Bernhardt, I imagine the volatile dynamic quality, texture, and electrifying effect in the voice of a young Barbra Streisand when she first appeared on the stage. Bernhardt's gestures were natural, wonderful, easy, full, and vivid. Rather than a golden high-pitched voice, Bernhardt had a darker, almost a masculine voice. It was called "a silver voice." On some of her recordings, it's impressive but external.

One recording of her has renditions of the classic aria tirades, as they are sometimes called, like the famous death scene in Racine's *Phèdre*, where in a strange way her power builds with compelling

excitement, giving the sense of an emotional quality. I call it “general emotion” but nonetheless it’s terrifically exciting. When I put this volatile, easy, natural quality with her red hair, marvelous slimness, and vitality of the body there is a kind of electricity which still comes through in her voice even though the recording is from 1923.

Anton Chekhov

Chekhov’s dramaturgy opened a whole new phase for playwrights with its emphasis on character and environment. Chekhov goes deeply into the hearts, souls, and reality of the people he creates. He wants his characters to suffer like human beings, and he never sees the characters as crazy. There’s always logic in how they behave, and it’s the behavior, not the words, that throws light on what the characters will do.

The Moscow Art Theater came up with certain principles of directing as a result of performing Chekhov’s plays: a scene is not made up of words, but of inner logic, and the entire emotional behavior of the character makes the scene. Scenes are human studies which can seem plotless and which don’t necessarily drive the play forward. In the small towns of Chekhov’s plays, the people don’t behave like actors. They speak simply. How would the characters behave in this little town? They talk, they have tea, and they sing songs. When it’s simple and human, then we get the sense that something real is happening.

During a rehearsal for the Moscow Art Theater production of *The Three Sisters*, a telegram arrived from Chekhov concerning a long speech of André, the brother. Chekhov had revised the entire speech down to just “What is a wife?” He knew the audience would gather the rest of it by how the actor said it.

In approaching Chekhov, the actor’s tone must be as normal, natural, and as simple as possible – never theatrical. Chekhov didn’t like overacting, which is part of the reason why his favorites were character actors. In *The Seagull*, Nina is enamored of the older playwright, Trigorin. There’s a scene where she says something enthusiastic to him regarding his position in the world. Then he describes what it’s like to be a successful writer who’s not as successful as other writers. He leaves. End of scene. Then he returns and says, “The Madame has changed her mind. We’re staying.” The play catapults forward. Chekhov uses these kinds of dramatic devises all the time demonstrating the way life is. Chekhov creates

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situations and events for the audience to clearly define the simple reality of what's happening.

Ironically, Chekhov was a simple individual with an extraordinary way about him, and yet could not express himself personally to other people. When actors asked him what was wrong, even though he was an intellectual, he couldn't answer them. Once he was dissatisfied with the performance of Stanislavski as Trigorin in *The Seagull*. When Stanislavski asked him why, all Chekhov could say was, "You don't understand, Trigorin wears torn shoes." With this statement Chekhov was critiquing Stanislavki's projection of Trigorin as a dandy. Early in his career, Stanislavski fancied himself romantically, and thus believed the successful writer would dress well to be impressive and to have Nina fall in love with him and not the younger Treplev. With his comment on the shoes, Chekhov meant that Trigorin is just a writer and suffers like a real human being. It's not the way that Trigorin dressed that excited Nina. It was the fact that he's Trigorin, a famous novelist."

Michael Chekhov

Michael Chekhov and Vakhtangov were young actors and just developing as artists in the Studio at The Moscow Art Theater where they roomed together. They worked out an exercise in which each day they would say, "You have this bottle; How many interesting ways can you think of opening it? Not just 'open' the bottle, but how many 'interesting' ways can you open it?" The one who thought up the most interesting way was absolved from cleaning the room that day. It was not just doing it, they were interested in the choice.

Michael Chekhov's sensitivity was of a Dostoevskian kind. Chekhov, the nephew of the playwright, felt that the actor acts, not only naturally and truthfully but also in some instances, tries to find the best gesture. He called it "Psychological Gesture," which is Chekhov's contribution to acting methodology. There is value in the psychological gesture but in the rest I don't agree with him. I don't believe he understood Stanislavski's work thoroughly. Stanislavski and Vakhtangov said the same thing about Chekhov, that he was very subjective about his views and at times his acting was too hysterical. Stanislavski thought he needed technique. Chekhov developed his own procedures to deal with his problems.

Emil Jannings

Emil Jannings, a Reinhardt-trained actor who in 1928 received the first Academy Award for Best Actor in two different movies (*The Way of All Flesh* and *The Last Command*) was the first to consciously demonstrate that great acting could be brought to the screen in *The Last Laugh* (1924). He had an edge on the stage which he then showed us he was capable of expressing on film in a purely character performance. It's still one of the outstanding performances ever given on stage or screen.

In *The Blue Angel*, the acting of Marlene Dietrich and Emil Jannings created memorable characters who assumed an existence aside from the actor. Although there was nothing explicit in it, *The Blue Angel* was full of sex. It was a representation of sex that was truer than an explicit depiction. Earthy, clear, and precise, it has stood the test of time. This work established that the cinema can make use of actors and that what can be accomplished is much the same as acting in the theater.

John Barrymore

John Barrymore's performances in *Richard III* and *Hamlet* were two of the great theatrical events in the American theater. His was the most romantic of images with his famous Barrymore profile and cavalier, Don Juan quality. On top of that he had the aristocratic quality of the well-born. Well spoken and intellectual, his voice had a deep sardonic quality.

He started out as a comedian but developed a great range. He was wonderful in the modern European classics such as Tolstoy's *The Living Corpse (Redemption)*. In *Justice*, a play by John Galsworthy, he played a prisoner with a shaven head and gave a very interesting performance which established him as a dramatic actor.

His friend, the playwright Edward Sheldon, convinced him to pursue the classics, which Barrymore had always desired to do because of his family background and their connections in the theater. Barrymore's performance in his screen test for *Hamlet* was electrifying and gives a good sense of what I remember in the original performance. In preparation for the part, he spent a year working purely on the dialogue and his use of a completely American language. It was meant to be in a classic medium, sounding clear and unlocalized without any of the aping of the British

mannerisms or intonations. I saw him in it twice on stage and they were electrifying performances. There was a moment in the last scene of *Hamlet* when he leapt across the stage towards the king. It was one of the most exciting things I have ever seen on the stage. It was not done with the voice. It was done with the body. He played Richard III as a villain. The brow was low and ape-like and the face was made longer, which created a villainous image.

Barrymore made wonderful recordings of whole portions of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III*, which are very interesting and helpful for actors to listen to.

Louise Brooks

Kenneth Tynan commented that Louise Brooks' art is "so pure that it becomes invisible." She achieved the life of the properly motivated character because she played herself, and didn't care what was thought of her. She conveyed her presence based on the commitment to whatever she was doing; in effect she said, "Here I am; make what you will of me." Louise never made the audience come to her; instead, the audience felt like they were spying on an unrehearsed reality.

In the film *Pandora's Box*, the director, (G. W.) Pabst, used concrete phrases like "dumb blonde," "defenseless," or "vulnerable" to get emotional responses from her. Louise used the emotional memory of when she had been molested when she was nine years old. In person, it's said, she talked about the things that fed her. In her work, however, nothing was verbal. Everything is translated into physical life. She was lusty, *zaftig*, and had unusual sensitivity.

Paul Muni

With Paul Muni, we are in a different realm. The first thing I saw Muni do was a 101-year-old lecherous count. It seemed that his bones could not move. It took him a long time to sit in a chair. When a girl came in and sat on his lap, he couldn't hold her. When she got off and he tried to stand, he couldn't get his legs back. It was superb. I still remember it as vividly as I remember Duse. He was a young man when he played these character parts.

A few years before we did the Actors Studio production of *The Three Sisters*, Cheryl Crawford and I decided we wanted Paul Muni for the part of Colonel Vershinin. I thought he would be incredible.

For one thing, he'd seen the production at the Moscow Art Theater and understood it. However, he said he had a little difficulty visualizing the billboard, "Paul Muni in *The Three Sisters*." He therefore refused to play it.

Bertolt Brecht

The Brecht experience is one of the major theatrical achievements during my lifetime since the great days of Meyerhold and Stanislavski. His work is of enormous benefit and stimulus for all people who are interested in the classics.

The language itself is very clear and the images created are extremely vivid. What is quite down to earth becomes a poetic image such as "from the dark forests I come." I recall a Brecht song, *Anna Elle*, with a beautiful melody that still haunts me today. The song is about two people sitting under a tree making love, and as the man kisses the woman, a cloud passes through the sky. Many years pass and he has forgotten the woman he kissed under the tree but he remembers the cloud that passed over. That's Brecht. The reality is very real and ordinary. The poetry is beautiful because it's not just in the words.

Brecht is associated with alienation, so actors mistakenly speak his lines as if they had no meaning, believing that to represent alienation. Of course, that isn't Brecht at all. He had the most precise sense of words, and he wanted the actors to be emotional about unconventional things, like money rather than sex, for example.

Brecht's colloquial images are good for speaking in the original language yet are difficult to translate into English, where the images can seem phony. His language in German is close to one of the great German poets, Heine, whose clear poetry contains words so simple that any child can memorize and repeat them. In the simple German which Heine uses, it becomes a beautiful sound and everything that is poetry. In Brecht, the sound and rhythm is so simple that it becomes a real problem for the actor to behave believably human and at the same time convey the vitality that makes it poetic. I watched Brecht's rehearsals and he always fought against a theatrical tone.

The idea of Epic Realism in the Brechtian sense is very confused, and people mistake it for being unreal. They think if it's unreal it's "epic." Brecht called it "Epic Realism" not "Epic Theater." What is real is only the essential, the essence of that moment and character, not the minor details of the character.

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I demonstrate the meaning of “epic” by giving the example of the painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware. Realistically, it’s cold out and he should be bundled up, hunched over against the wind, and slightly seasick. But historically it can’t be that way. George Washington was doing a very courageous thing. The painter has the wind blowing, as he stands there upright. This is an historical picture depicted in paintings and sculptures. The artist picks the historic moment, not just the realistic moment. Epic is the way the crossing is portrayed in the picture, not the way you might have seen it when it actually took place.

Kim Stanley

Kim Stanley is a marvelous actress, who was able to do everything I wanted her to. In *The Three Sisters*, Kim as Masha had a deep intense quality. One of the most extraordinary moments in the play is the scene when Masha is looking for Vershinin, and he comes to say goodbye to her. Suddenly she flies into his arms and at that moment it’s difficult for him to let her go. She’s holding on to him for dear life and at the same time his face becomes filled with tears and you see the reality of what happens between them. It was extraordinary.

Patricia Neal

One of the best Juliets I have ever seen was, unfortunately, not in public but at the Actors Studio. That was Patricia Neal before her illness. She had always wanted to do the part, but she felt no one would ever consider her for Juliet. The Actors Studio was the only place, she felt, that she would have a chance to perform it, and she did it.

Some time after that, Patricia Neal had a series of massive strokes that completely blocked out her memory. She had an extraordinary will. For two years her husband and twenty or thirty people read her the encyclopedia and worked with her to re-learn everything. She worked ten hours a day exercising the brain, which is the greatest power machine in the world. This work created new tracings to bring the brain alive, to reawaken it, and thus she was able to function. I’m not a mystic, but computers can’t correct themselves like the brain. Patricia was afraid she wouldn’t remember or recognize anyone. I remember her smile when she came into the Studio, and I walked towards her and she knew who I was. She sat there looking

around realizing that she was home, that she knew where she was. All hadn't been lost.

These are the possibilities we are dealing with and for that, all we need is your will. The will is the one thing that is not trained in our present educational system. The mind is, the memory is. The will? No.

Recognition of talent in the theater

We have talent today but it's misused and distorted. In the old days an actor played a part throughout his lifetime. Great parts call for great understanding and intensity of experience. In my production of *The Three Sisters* some of the actors' performances became enriched like wine that is permitted to stand and mature to become more valuable. It's already the wine that it will be later, but it will only become usable in a few years. For example, with Kim Stanley in the early work you saw greatness, but it was not yet developed. It's like the great Rembrandt when he was young. In some of the arts the early works are terribly inspiring because they play with a flair that sometimes they lose later. In a general way, artists mature and begin to work with greater ease, eliminating certain mannerisms. You can see the complete fusion of intention and execution. That is what makes for greatness.

Today, the greater the actor, the less chance they have to develop. The circumstances are just completely against it, unless the actor fights very hard. We have more talent in America, but do less with it because there isn't a broad range of acting opportunities on which actors can work, learn, and refine their craft. One reason for this is that talent is remunerated, but not really appreciated in our country. We like to run after celebrities in the street, and that characterizes our appreciation of talent. Our actors are very well recognized in society, yet when an actor speaks up, they're told to stay out of politics. Why should an actor stay out of politics? You mean it's OK if a manufacturer of chewing gum speaks about politics, but an actor, no? In that sense, there's a limited and rather negative constrained environment around us.

The star is paid well and therefore in a certain way appreciated much more than any single element in the cinema. I doubt whether any director earns as much as a well-known actor except those that produce and direct their own shows. For example, David Belasco was a director equal to Reinhardt and Stanislavski if not superior, but his achievement was definitely inferior to both of them. This is

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because he had no supportive environment around him like Reinhardt, who in contrast had a theater and company with a staff of literate people who encouraged him. He had the support to revive Buchner's play, *Danton's Death* which had not been revived for a hundred years. Reinhardt also did some of the other equally old expressionist plays. He did four or five different versions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* because he had people around him who said the play could be interpreted this way or another way. He was a visionary theater person who faced the challenge, saying for example, let me do a baroque semi-realistic version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with real trees. It was a great sensation.

In England, the appreciation of talent comes in the recognition of their role in society, such as with Sir Lawrence Olivier. You would be surprised how important that is to many theater or cinema artists. Hitchcock was devastated when he wasn't knighted. It was during the war, and Hitchcock felt that he was doing as much as anybody else even though he'd settled in America. After news came through that he wasn't knighted, he cared less about what he did. He did television and occasionally did something a little different, but the heart went out of it. By the end of his life, when he was knighted, he was old; then he didn't need it and it had no value. That form of recognition means something to the English actor.

European theater is built on a repertory basis. In the space of one month you may see the entire work of a master director. In that same period in America, you may not see the work of any of our top people. Not even if you came here for a year would you see a body of work like that or come away with any awareness of what the American theater is. Our organizational system doesn't permit it. In Germany, in a month's time, you can see a different production every night in the same theater. You get to observe that theater and to become aware of its nature and character.

Appreciation and recognition are two different things. The actor's actual contribution both in the past and today tends to be downgraded. When I began to examine historically those films that suggest the possibilities of what acting can be in movies, I was amazed and startled to discover how many of the outstanding performances in movies were created by actors that came from the theater. Long before the Method, it was proved and demonstrated that whatever technique you used to act in the theater medium was completely applicable to the cinema medium. This was true even when the medium demanded a kind of acting as in the early German Expressionist movies, such as [*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*]; which

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featured great theater people including Max Reinhardt, Verda Krauss, Emil Jannings, and Paul Wegner.

Poetry

Poetry is an expression of more intense feeling and experience. In poetry, imagery is used to make you more aware of something that – were it simply told to you – wouldn't move you as much. The first thing to do when you read a poem is to stop acting. Catch the deep inner quality of the poem. The first signs of humanity are transmitted when the way you speak reflects thinking and feeling.

In the history of poetry and expressiveness, the great Romantic poets Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley and Byron among others returned to what Wordsworth called the “true voice of feeling,” which is not speaking in formal poetic language. Poetic expression is not just a pure formal device but real expressions of feeling and living which must be conveyed by the reading of the poem.

When you read a poem just for the sake of reading it, you'll get nowhere. If you begin to connect with a particular meaning at each moment of the poem, something comes into your tone and expression which adds to the shape and the outline of the poem. In this way, an approach can be born so that it isn't just a matter of reciting it.

I draw students out and ask them questions about the meaning of the poem and what fascinated them about it. I also ask what they felt about the poem and the words. If you like it then there is something about it that you understand. However, if you can't convey the poem's meaning, something about it may not obey your experience and knowledge. Everybody has experiences, but to read a poem well you must possess what every human being possesses, but to an extent, more.

Go into the words and say the poem with a clear sense of what you mean at each moment. Putting the poem in your own words will unconsciously do what is needed to make the voice come alive. Make sense and be clear about what you're saying at each moment and get that kind of feeling into the words. If you don't do that, then the poem only gives us the author's general meaning and not your own.

If you say, “I love this poem about horror and cruelty,” something will come through. If you just recite the poem about horror and cruelty, without acknowledging that's what you love about it, neither you nor the poem are alive and it will be no more than the

thing you read on the page. It must be what you see in the poem; right, wrong, or indifferent. When you permit that to come out, then it means that your instrument is responsive to the impulses that you created.

As with poetry, singing is a way of speaking and feeling more intensely. When do you sing? The time when you sing is when you feel more, not less. You can feel good or bad and have no particular words for it, so you don't speak, but you want to express something, so you hum or sing and give the moment that value.

Before you begin to speak the lines of a poem, first actually say the words "I remember" to yourself. By simply putting in "I remember" instead of just starting to recite it, something happens to the poem. As an actor you embody the poem, and when you say it, there won't be the mechanical recitation which comes only from the mouth.

Acting: cinema vs stage

Actors have to watch out for casual unconscious habitual movements when acting for the cinema. The slightest gesture is hugely magnified. When you curl the lip or raise the eyebrow everyone may think you're great. However, on the stage these things may not even be noticeable.

When I worked in Hollywood conducting screen tests, I remember a very good actress who came in to be tested. We discussed what work she'd done. She'd just been tested by David Selznick and it hadn't turned out well. I noticed that her mouth was a bit slanted and that she spoke out of the side of it, which in and of itself is nothing terrible for the stage and would not be noticed. However, on the screen that slight facial characteristic, which was an eighth of an inch, would be greatly magnified and noticeable, perhaps to the point of distraction.

In the cinema, since the scenes are filmed out of context and many takes are shot, technique and craft are even more essential and our work pays off quickly for actors. Otherwise, frankly, there is less difference between acting for the stage and acting for the cinema than is commonly thought.

This is contrary to the British and generally European belief that there is a basic difference between acting for the movies and acting for the theater. The British and European approach to acting training is essentially in a classic manner. The emphasis on rhetoric works even less well in the cinema. The images on screen are close

and reveal flaws which are otherwise hidden in a classic stage performance where rhetoric, costuming, and the distance of the audience from the actor help shield their discovery.

Dramaturgic problems are different in the movies than in theater because the theater is more literal and more imaginative than the screen in many ways. There's a difference in the spontaneity of the audience. The people are the camera, which is the beauty of the stage. The actor makes love to the audience through the play.

Courage in the theater

Courage in the theater is something you live up to and face with the involvement of your entire self. It's the kind of courage which can withstand failure and continue. It's as simple as this. Laurence Olivier was becoming one of the reigning stars of movies as well as theater. He did *Rebecca* and several other successful films and then decided to stage *Romeo and Juliet* with his wife Vivien Leigh. Thinking the play could not be anything but a surefire hit, he was so keen on the project that he borrowed money and put it into the production. It was a calamity and didn't even run. What would any normal, honest actor do? Say, "The hell with the theater. I tried it, they don't like it. I will be a movie star, who cares?"

Not Olivier. He went back to work in the theater. The war came and he traveled with the Old Vic in his own and distant countries, lifting the spirits of the people. He had that courage, yes. He even went one step further. At a party, he overheard someone saying that "Olivier can play any part in Shakespeare except Othello or Lear." Two weeks later it's announced that Olivier is going to play Othello. That takes ego, but it also takes courage. When you have so many things that you can do and someone says there's something you can't, you say, "Well, I'm going to tempt fate." That kind of explicit courage is what I am referring to in Olivier. Allied with talent, that's something which achieves a great deal.

Not everything Olivier acted in worked well, but to do all the parts that he's done and to remain with the theater when he could have gone to Hollywood takes courage, and the kind of courage most of the people today don't seem to possess.

Courage doesn't come from simply doing everything you dream of doing, whether it's good, bad, or indifferent. That often shows an unprofessional rather than a professional attitude.

Tennessee Williams was a brilliant writer and he gave me great courage. He had an extraordinary kind of sensitivity. In *The Seven*

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Descents of Myrtle, his clearest play, he dealt with the dilemmas of life. Something strange takes place which is beyond our understanding. In the midst of death, life goes on, savoring the water on the tongue like the fountain of youth. Life conquers. Tennessee had the courage to see people that he knew not with fear but with love.

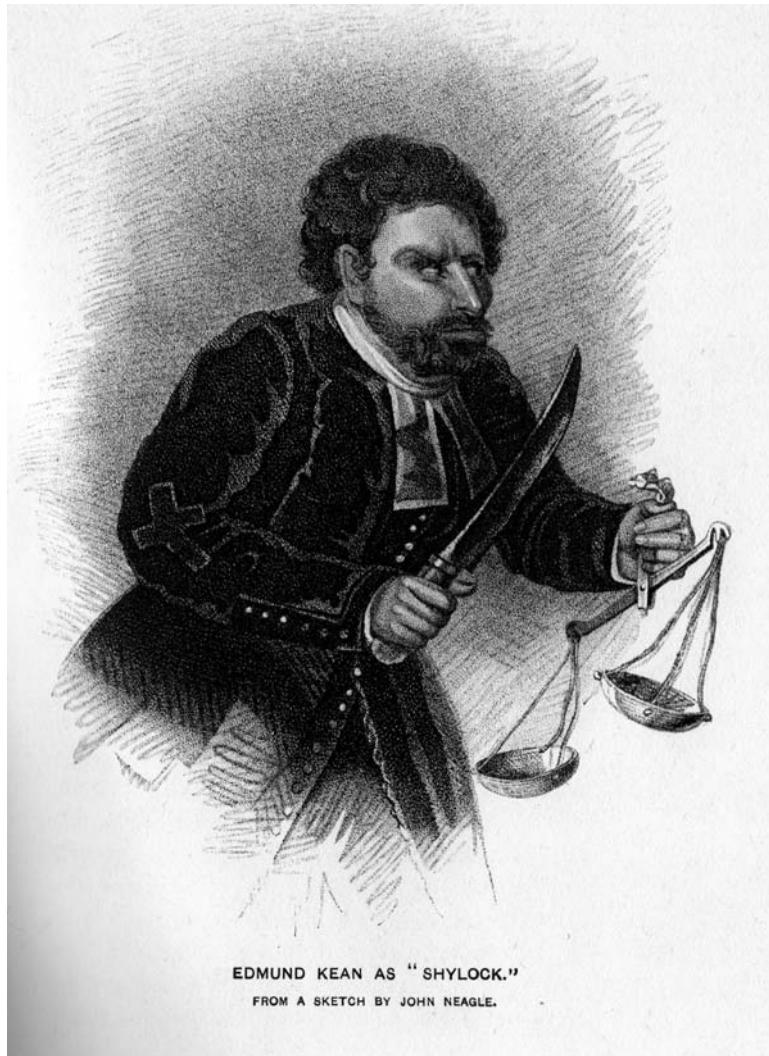
There was a very positive response when I directed *The Three Sisters* some years ago at the Actors Studio in New York. The critics said it was a courageous thing for me to do because, as the spokesman for the Method, I put my own reputation on the line. I didn't think of it that way. In retrospect, to have realized that I was putting my reputation on the line, and to have still done the play, that would have taken courage. I had a foolhardy courage because that didn't occur to me. I thought if the direction was bad, I'd be slapped.

I also don't know if I would've done *The Godfather [Part II]* if it had occurred to me that the audience would be judging me especially – after all, it's Lee Strasberg. Afterwards, when the reactions were positive, then I thought to myself, what would have happened if it hadn't worked out? I was just testing myself to see whether my acting on the screen would be worth doing. This was my first screen role and at the time people were offering me parts in other films.

In fact, in *The Godfather*, I made no provision for my film credit in my contract. They were having problems with the credits because the cast was so large. When I was asked how I would like to be billed, I said, I don't want billing at all. When the good publicity started coming out they said they had to do something, and so I told them to put it at the end.

I would like to take the credit for some degree of courage. I think in a certain way I have a peculiar kind of courage but maybe not the kind of courage that could have withstood more failure than I've had up to this point in my life. I just don't know. That could be difficult for me, in all honesty. In the final analysis, to continue after a failure – that takes an enormous amount of courage.

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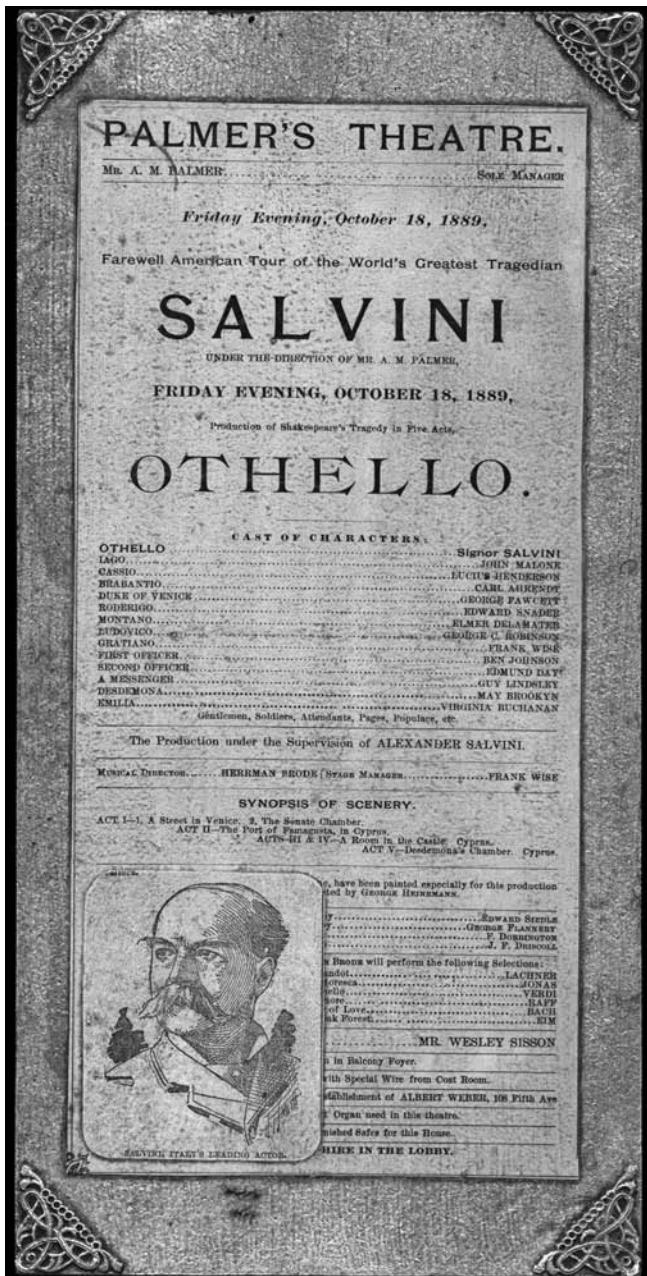


EDMUND KEAN AS "SHYLOCK."

FROM A SKETCH BY JOHN NEAGLE.

Edmund Kean, English Actor (1789–1833), as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*

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Othello playbill, starring Tommaso Salvini, Italian actor (1829–1915)

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Eleanora Duse, Italian actress (1858–1924). Photo courtesy of Lebrecht Music & Arts

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GIOVANNI GRASSO

Giovanni Grasso, Italian actor (1873–1930). Photo courtesy of Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

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Anton Chekhov, Russian dramatist (1860–1904). Courtesy of Lebrecht Authors

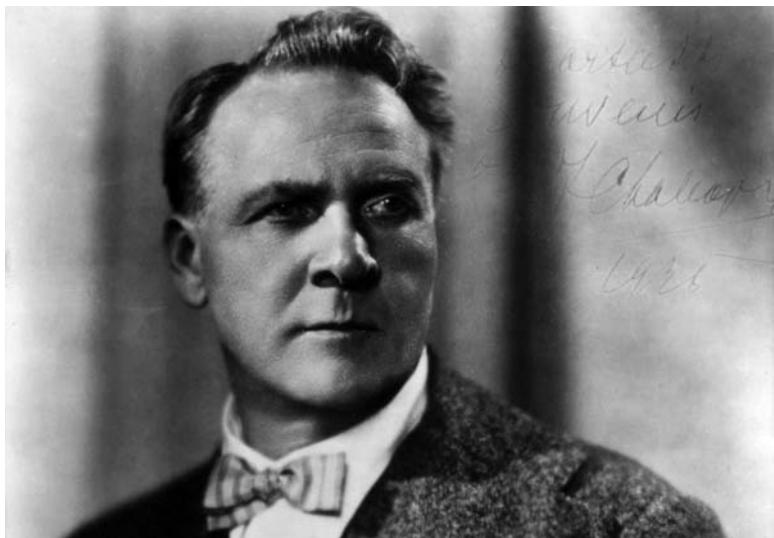


Maria Ouspenskaya in Hans Weirs-Jenissen's *The Witch*, 1926. Lee Strasberg's teacher at the American Laboratory Theater. Photo courtesy of Maurice Goldberg

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Lee Strasberg as the pedlar in *Green Grow the Lilacs*, Garrick Theater, NY, 1931. Photo courtesy of Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



Feodor Chaliapin, Russian opera singer (1869–1942)

LEE STRASBERG ON THE THEATER, ACTING, AND ACTORS



Edward Gordon Craig, English director and designer (1872–1966)

THE LEE STRASBERG NOTES



Cheryl Crawford, Lee Strasberg, and Harold Clurman, founders of the Group Theater, 1931

bertold brecht
225 West 69th Street
New York City

Dear Mr. Strasberg,

Unfortunately we had to cease rehearsals on the "Massnahme" for political reasons. It is a great pity, because I had the impression that we worked very well together. In general it was not very easy for me to express what I thought necessary for saving the theatre here from bourgeois drug traffic and emotions racket. The few rehearsals with you and your group have at ~~least~~ least shown me that a revolutionary pedagogic theatre is possible here too.

I owe you many thanks and I beg you to express my thanks to the ~~xxxxx~~ actors too.

Yours,

Bertold Brecht

22.1.36

Bertolt Brecht letter to Lee Strasberg – letter dated January 27, 1936. Courtesy of the Brecht Estate

LEE STRASBERG ON THE THEATER, ACTING, AND ACTORS



Cheryl Crawford and Lee Strasberg at the announcement of the Actors Studio Theater, 1962. Photo courtesy of Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



On the set of *Going in Style*, directed by Martin Brest, starring George Burns, Art Carney, and Lee Strasberg, 1979. Photo courtesy of Ken Regan, Camera 5

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