# EMBODIED COGNITION, ACTING AND STANISLAVSKY: A NEUROSCIENTIFIC LENS ON STANISLAVSKY'S CONCEPTS OF EMOTIONS, PHYSICAL ACTION, IMAGINATION AND THE WILL

BY JOELLE RÉ ARP-DUNHAM

(Under the Direction of David Z. Saltz)

## ABSTRACT

While debates about the acting process raged from the eighteenth century onwards, there were few systematic, repeatable training programs developed in the west by the dawn of the twentieth century. The person often credited with first trying to develop a repeatable system for "truthful" acting is the Moscow Art Theatre director and acting teacher Constantin Stanislavsky. His dedication to developing a system for actor training and rehearsals that would serve the actor when inspiration failed has had a profound impact on contemporary American-European acting training programs. His approach continues to affect actors today, even though mired in controversy, translation issues, cultural misunderstandings, and changes to "Stanislavsky's System," and perceptions of it, over time.

This study demythologizes four concepts that are key to Stanislavsky's system — emotion, physical actions, imagination, and the Will — and relates them to current understandings of human behavioral cognitive science. Stanislavsky drew on the science of his

time, and likewise, this dissertation explores the relationship between Stanislavsky's central ideas and the science of our own day. Specifically, it investigates ways in which current research in behavioral cognitive science corroborates Stanislavsky's work, contradicts it, adds to it, and suggests adjustments to it.

This project has important implications both for scholarship and practice, giving performance scholars a richer and more precise understanding of Stanislavsky's work, while allowing teachers and directors to zero in on the techniques that are most likely to help them achieve their goals and to exclude those that are superfluous or even detrimental.

INDEX WORDS: The System, Stanislavsky, acting, emotion, goal-directed action, imagination, the Will, Will-Feeling, the Magic If, Method of Physical Actions, Active Analysis, embodiment, cognitive science, neuroscience, behavioral physiology, embodied mind, mirror neuron systems, simulation theory, objective vs. goal vs. task vs. problem, supertask and throughaction, brain's workspace, neuroimaging (fMRI), mental apparatus, inner psychological drives, stage intimacy, raising the stakes..

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# DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this work to my dear family: Rich, who is my partner in all things and constant encourager; Chelsea, who helps me understand and be a better person every day and Rob who helps her; Richy, who brings light and kindness to our world; my wonderful parents who were always my biggest fans; and my sisters for shaping who I am. You all are my heart.

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# INTRODUCTION

*(Holding up Stanislavski's two books) there's the bible, An Actor Prepares and Building a Character*.

—Robert Lewis[1]

*Like the Bible, Stanislavsky's basic texts on acting can be quoted to any purpose*.

—Lee Strasberg[2]

## Overview of Objectives and Significance of Study

While debates about the acting process raged from the eighteenth century onwards, there were few systematic, repeatable training programs developed in the west by the dawn of the twentieth century. In the mid-nineteenth century, François Delsarte (1811-1871) developed a method of training called "Applied Aesthetics" that offered an extensive codification of physical and vocal gestures; this method became the basis of most formal actor training in Europe and the US through the end of the nineteenth century but essentially died out as various forms of realism

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[1]Robert Lewis, *Method—or Madness?* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1958), 7.

[2] Lee Strasberg and Evangeline Morphos, *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1987), 42.

became more dominant.[3] In the early twentieth-century, methods developed by Jacques Copeau became extremely influential in France and formed the basis of a small number of important training programs in England and the United States.[4]

The person often credited with first trying to develop a repeatable system for "truthful" acting (often mis-categorized as "realistic") is the Moscow Art Theatre director and acting teacher Constantin Stanislavsky. His dedication to developing a system for actor training and rehearsals that would serve the actor when inspiration failed has had a profound impact on contemporary American-European acting training programs. As Ben Spatz points out, Stanislavsky's work should be considered "a body of research" into the acting process that caused a "paradigm shift" rather than a finished ultimate technique for all actors in all situations.[5] Despite this, it can still be argued that most contemporary Western acting theories developed in some relationship to Stanislavsky's ideas (whether for or against). His approach continues to affect actors today despite controversy, translation issues, cultural misunderstandings, and changes in "Stanislavsky's System" over time. Theatre scholar-artist Jonathan Pitches suggests that "both American and Soviet images of Stanislavsky are now seen with skepticism and treated

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[3] E.T. Kirby, "The Delsarte Method: 3 Frontiers of Actor Training," *The Drama Review: TDR* 16, no. 2 (1972): 55-69.

[4] Copeau's methods did reach England and to a much lesser extent America mostly thanks to his nephew, Michel Saint-Denis, but have not had the kind of reach or world-wide influence of Stanislavsky.

[5] Ben Spatz, "Stanislavsky's Threshold: Tracking a Historical Paradigm Shift in Acting," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 93-94.

as reductive myths that need demythologizing."[6]

Stanislavsky never meant for his system to become dogma. He felt it should change as the needs of society and productions changed and preferred a lower case "s" in the word rather than a fixed "System." As some of his methods morphed over his career, Stanislavsky's "systems" may be more even more accurate. For many, however, a "Stanislavsky System" has morphed into use as a primitive introduction to acting or as a series of outdated rules not useful for serious study. This dissertation will "demythologize" four of these concepts that are key to Stanislavsky's system — emotion, physical actions, imagination, and the Will — and relate them to current understandings of human behavioral cognitive science.[7]

Stanislavsky drew on the science of his time. Behaviorists Ivan Mikhailovich Sechenov and Ivan Pavlov, the French psychologist Théodule Ribot and American philosopher and psychologist William James all influenced Stanislavsky's thinking and practice.[8] Joseph Roach, in *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, and Jonathan Pitches, in *Science and*

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[6] Jonathan Pitches and Stefan Aquilina, *Stanislavsky in the World: The System and Its Transformations Across Continents* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), 8.

[7] Because of the two common versions of the word "will" frequently used in this chapter are easily confused, I follow Sean Spence's lead in capitalizing Will when I am referring to the complex process at issue in this dissertation, and use the lower case will for the common phrase indicating an intended action (as in "I will explain this shortly."). I retain the original author's capitalizing in a direct quote.

[8] Rose Whyman, "The Actor's Second Nature: Stanislavski and William James," *New Theatre Quarterly,* 23(2), (2007): 115-123.

*the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting*, argue that Stanislavsky's theories are closely related to the science of his day.[9] This dissertation will explore the relationship between Stanislavsky's central ideas and the science of our own day. Specifically, it will investigate ways in which current research in behavioral cognitive science corroborates Stanislavsky's work, contradicts it, adds to it, and suggests adjustments to it.

Most current performance theories that use cognitive science take a broad view of cognition and the acting process. Concepts such as 4E cognition (embodied, embedded, extended and enacted cognition), distributed cognition, and enactivism, are being explored in relationship to theatre and performance by some of the most respected researchers in our field. This study touches upon many of these concepts in addition to empirical studies of more narrow, falsifiable explanations of biological processes in attempt to elucidate Stanislavsky's major concepts, and highlight differences in the way both scholars and practitioners have interpreted them.

This project has important implications both for scholarship and practice, giving performance scholars a richer and more precise understanding of Stanislavsky's work, while allowing teachers and directors to zero in on the techniques that are most likely to help them achieve their goals and to exclude those that are superfluous or even detrimental.

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[9] Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985) and Jonathan Pitches, *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (London: Routledge, 2006), 195-217.

**Literature Review**

In his editorial introduction to a special issue in *Theatre Journal* on "Performance and Cognition," David Z. Saltz points to David Bordwell and Nöel Carroll's influential 1996 anthology of essays, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, as the "watershed moment" in the disillusionment with "grand theory."[10] Instead of one giant, all-encompassing theory that can explain everything, they called for a more systematic interrogation of each individual process involved in performance and audience response. Saltz credits Richard Schechner with bringing a "moratorium on theory" to the theatre community in a speech in 2006, a full ten years later. Schechner advocated a "more empirical, descriptive approach to performance research and analysis."[11] The special issue contained Bruce McConachie's provocative essay "Falsifiable Theories for Theatre and Performance Studies," which called for greater emphasis on scientific research in the world of theatre.[12] Since then, many theatre theorists have begun exploring narrative structures, audience response and performance through a cognitive lens.

The first book-length study devoted to using cognitive science to better understand the actor's process was theatre director, actor and theorist Rhonda Blair's 2008 *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience.* Blair suggests that "since acting grows out of our biological being, what we are learning about memory and imagination, and the way emotion,

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[10] David Saltz, "Editorial Comment: Performance and Cognition," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 59, no. 4 (2007): ix.

[11] Ibid., x.

[12] Bruce McConachie, "Falsifiable Theories for Theatre and Performance Studies," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 59, no. 4 (2007): 553-577.

reason, and physicality are ultimately inseparable in the brain's structure and function, has significant implications for how we understand what happens when we act."[13] She posits that to truly comprehend the work of an actor, we must understand underlying human physiology, and argues that "artificial binaries such as science vs. art, thinking vs. feeling, and reason vs. emotion" are mistaken and must work together to form a complete understanding.[14] Always stressing the integration of mind and body as one entity, Blair reconsiders American acting training, particularly Stanislavsky-based systems, through a cognitive science lens. Cognitive linguistics and various theories of mind are especially integral to her analysis of memory, emotion and imagination in the acting process.

Another treatment of acting through a cognitive science lens that also stresses the inseparability of mind and body in what he calls "bodymind," comes from Rick Kemp in his book *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells us about Performance*.[15] He draws heavily from embodiment theories and cognitive linguistics as he emphases the use of imagination in the creation of metaphor. "In one way, theatre is the supreme expression of this because we experience the actor and the character simultaneously -- a living, embodied metaphor."[16]

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[13] Rhonda Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience* (London: Routledge, 2008), xii.

[14] Ibid., 5.

[15] Rick Kemp, *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells us about Performance* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[16] Ibid., 109.

John Lutterbie's *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance* deftly centers on dynamic systems theory as a basis for understanding the actor in performance.[17] After briefly surveying many of the divergent acting methodologies commonly used in western acting styles, Lutterbie narrows them down to the most common aspects among them to discover the significant similarities. From there he attempts to find a global acting process based around a dynamic score that is always changing and adjusting in the moment of performance.

Phillip Zarrilli employed a similar dynamic concept with his chapter "An Enactive Approach to Acting and Embodiment" in his 2009 book *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski.*[18]

Amy Cook's *Shakespearian Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance Through Cognitive Science* draws heavily on cognitive linguistics and embodied cognition to study the text in performance.[19] She argues that in theatre "meaning comes from the transaction between storyteller and audience."[20] For Cook, the story is created in the interplay

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[17]John Lutterbie, *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[18] Philip Zarrilli, "An Enactive Approach to Acting and Embodiment," *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach after Stanislavski* (London: Routledge, 2009), 41-60.

[19] Amy Cook, *Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance Through Cognitive Science* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 153.

[20] Ibid.

("neuroplay") between actor, spectator and other theatrical elements rather than in only the story or character themselves.

Blair and Cook come together as editors of *Theatre Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies.*[21] This collection of essays focuses on the intersection of the three broad categories in the subtitle dealing with cognition and embodiment. The inclusion of ways in which practitioners use the findings in rehearsals and performance fully rounds out the discourse.

Dissertation Abstracts lists several dissertations that are working or have recently worked on theatrical theories from a cognitive perspective. Each of them is either in progress or as yet unpublished, but the abstracts indicate that none have a Stanislavskian acting focus.[22]

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[21] Rhonda Blair and Amy Cook, eds., *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[22] The closest one is Neal Utterback's dissertation "Stagehands: Gestures and the Embodied Actor," Indiana University, 2014. Scott Harman's dissertation in progress, "Methods, Not 'The Method': An Analysis and Differentiation of the Theories of Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner Using Concepts from the Cognitive Sciences," University of Wisconsin-Madison, is also investigating acting with cognitive science but has no focus on Stanislavsky or the four main concepts I am examining. The only other dissertation using cognitive science as a central tool is David Bisaha's in progress "Developing the Modern Scene Design Process: Cognition and the New Stagecraft," University of Pittsburgh, which has no focus on acting.

My project springs from Blair and Lutterbie's studies most directly, although neither of them focus specifically on Stanislavsky. While each of their studies covers a broad range of acting principles, my dissertation focuses intently on only four central Stanislavskian principles: emotion, physical action, imagination, and the Will. In addition, it drills down to the basic elements of cognitive science as scientists theorize them today — occasionally in opposition to each other — to explore the fundamental nature of each Stanislavskian concept, and then expand to draw from various cognitive disciplines as needed. Importantly, it attempts to follow Blair and Lutterbie's lead in avoiding a reductionist account of simple biology creating the art of acting. Instead, by better understanding the ways in which bodies work in each of these four areas, actors may more specifically focus their attention during rehearsals and performances with the techniques that help give the results desired. This dissertation follows Blair's investigation into "the kind of work begun by Stanislavsky and major Stanislavsky-influenced acting masters" by "increasing our appreciation for how prescient their work was, while shedding the misapprehensions of their various methods."[23] In addition, Stanislavsky's concept of the Will isn't explored explicitly in depth in any of the studies using cognitive science to date, although it is, explicitly or implicitly, an element of almost every major Western acting technique. It is clearly important to the practice of acting, though the concept has proven very difficult to define with clarity and precision. This study will unpack the concept by looking to Stanislavsky and varying philosophical debates to define it and then examine the cognitive science and neuroscience of what Will is and how it can work for the actor.

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[23] Blair, *The Actor, Image and Action*, xiii.

**Methodology**

In an observation that is applicable to cognitive theories of theatre but refers to the state of film cognitivism, Robert Stam stresses that cognitive film analysis is not a unified theory but rather group of "small-scale theories."[24] With this in mind, I apply "small-scale" principals from neuroscience (the study of the anatomy and physiology of neural tissue and the relationships that act as functional circuits) and cognitive science (the study of the mind and its processes which includes neuroscience, but also psychology, artificial intelligence, philosophy, linguistics and anthropology) to Stanislavsky's treatment of emotion, imagination and the Will as deployed in service to a goal-directed action. "4E cognition" (embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended) has recently been an influential way to frame this work.[25]

To uncover Stanislavsky's understanding of emotion, physical actions, imagination and the Will, I researched multiple translations and commentaries, primarily relying on Jean Benedetti's translation, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, and Sharon Carnicke's analysis,

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[24] Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 237.

[25] Stanislavsky's conception of the mind certainly reflects the 4E view of an embodied brain inseparable from the body, and resonates with an embedded conception of the mind (the object of attention), but it does not include the concept of the extended environment as Stanislavsky generally focused more on individual actions than environmental influences. The enactive approach to cognition seems to be the most contrary to Stanislavsky's understanding of cognition, however, in that it purports a denial of internal representational states while Stanislavsky considered representation as a primary drive.

*Stanislavsky in Focus*. In addition, I refer to Stanislavsky's autobiography *My Life in Art*, and several biographies, including Jean Benedetti's *Stanislavski: His Life and Art.* Writings concerning Stanislavsky as teacher/director were also consulted, such as Moscow Art Theatre actor Vasily Osipovich Toporkov's *Stanislavsky in Rehearsal: The Final Years,* Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko's *My Life in the Russian Theatre,* and Sonia Moore's and Rose Whyman's various writings. Bella Merlin, Andrew White, Richard Brestoff, Mel Gordon and Robert Gordon also offered additional insight in their contextualizing within different acting traditions.

While I did not conduct my own double-blind, falsifiable, scientific experiments, I did analyze and use the scientific literature to justify the four crucial Stanislavskian concepts as key for both behavioral neuroscientists and Stanislavsky. For example, I researched theories of how emotions (biological responses to stimuli) manifest themselves into feelings (mental representations of those responses) through different brain structures and different chemical reactions which are dependent on the type of emotion being felt.[26] Comparing this biological understanding to Stanislavsky's idea of "emotion memory" helps us glean a better idea of the

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[26] These definitions of emotion as biological responses to stimuli and feelings as mental representations of those responses stem from the work of Antonio Damasio and R.J. Dolan. I will use this definition when speaking of current scientific trends. Stanislavsky and many other theorists and practitioners conflate the two. I will keep their words as translated in the sources cited. See Antonio R Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*, (Orlando: Harcourt, 2003), 1-43 and R. J. Dolan, "Emotion, Cognition, and Behavior," *Science* 298, no. 5596 (2002): 1191.

fruitfulness of the concept and its practices. In addition, I looked to both historical definitions of Will and current neuroscientific research into what we might call "Will." The outline of chapters details the specific scientific research on which I drew for each concept.

To avoid confusion caused by Stanislavsky's altering ideas and techniques throughout his long career, I refer to four periods in Stanislavsky's development, each of which highlights a different aspect of his thought and work processes. The first period lasted from his childhood discovery of the work of an actor until the creation of The Moscow Publicly Accessible Art Theater in 1898 (or The Moscow Art and Popular Theatre). The second period continues until Stanislavsky's artistic existential crisis in 1906. He went to Finland to grieve and begin work to discover a system for actors to more reliably create truth on stage. This begins his third period of development. The fourth and final period has a more fluid start date as he gradually began to rely less on emotion memory, more on action and eventually on an Active Analysis, which is discussed in detail in chapter two. It was firmly in place by the time Stella Adler )1901-1992) made her pilgrimage to study with Stanislavsky in 1934 when he told her, "I search in the given circumstances never the feelings." [27]

**Outline**

The dissertation is organized by the four key acting concepts of emotion, physical actions, imagination, and the Will.

Chapter 1, "Emotion," begins with common understandings and misconceptions about how emotion is described in Stanislavsky's acting texts and translations. Importantly, this

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[27] David Garfield, *A Player's Place: The Story of The Actor's Studio* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1980), 33.

chapter helps to answer the age-old question as to whether acted emotions are "real" emotions or not, by positing that they are indeed *real*, but not the *same*.[28] The chapter then delves deeply into current neurobiological research, to examine the process of emotion and its biological relation to purposeful action and control. Finally, I tie these concepts together as a reinforcement of Stanislavsky's claim of the necessity for indirect methods to lure the actor's emotion, while broadening the techniques available to still act effectively even when the desired emotion doesn't manifest.

In Chapter 2, "Physical Actions and Embodiment," I examine how Stanislavsky used the term commonly translated as "Method of Physical Actions" and his later, different (but related) term "Active Analysis" and the case for alternative associated translations for "objective," such as "task," and "problem."[29] I make the argument that Stanislavsky always cared about the actor's pursuit of action but became more and more assured of its centrality in the acting process over the years. Looking deeply into the biological basis of human perception and comprehension of goal-directed action and the almost automatic physical responses to another person's action, constitutes the remainder of this chapter. I conclude that Stanislavsky's focus on action is central

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[28] Neuroscientists Antonio Damasio and Gil B. Carvalho differentiate: "Feelings are mental experiences of body states, which arise as the brain interprets emotions, themselves physical states arising from the body's responses to external stimuli." Antonio Damasio and Gil B. Carvalho, "The Nature of Feelings: Evolutionary and Neurobiological Origins," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience,* 14 (2013): 143-152.

[29] Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 2nd ed. (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2003), 86, 149-177, 229, 232.

for actors to reduce their cognitive load so that they can play concrete, actionable verbs while dynamically interacting with their scene partners and following the through−line of the play, action by action.

The third chapter, "Imagination," examines the ways in which each of these Stanislavskian-based methods relies on actors' mental constructions of images, sounds, scents, textures, tastes of things not physically present, or present but with a different (usually lesser) material value. I suggest that imagination may be the link between all the disparate brain functions actors must use in performance. Memory works hand in hand with what Stanislavsky calls "the given circumstances" to excite the imagination of the actor, so I discuss how memory can be harnessed to increase the vividness and specificity of imagination. This chapter includes a discussion of how imagination can trigger emotion and how extended mind (the theory that our intellect can reach beyond the boundaries of the body and include the objects and space around a person) can be affected by imagination and goal-directed action. I conclude that an actor responding to their partner, imagining the circumstances in the holodeck of their mind, along with the suppression of the self-identity and living-through the "I am" of character identity can create the experiencing of the role in performance.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of my dissertation is Chapter 4, "The Will." Although ignored for some time in cognitive science circles, the Will has once again recently become a rich area for scientific exploration as imaging techniques and other scientific gains can be utilized in new and exciting ways. In a broad sense, the Will is the cognitive process that gets one from desire to action or "the faculty in virtue of which we have the power to choose and to

act."[30] This is the missing link between having a desire or need (even a borrowed one) and committing an action. One may desire something but not have the Will to attain it. Finding ways to strengthen our Will to achieve a goal is of utmost importance to the actor.

Stanislavsky spoke of an actor's "mental apparatus" consisting of three "indivisible" "inner psychological drives" or "generals": the mind, the Will and feeling, and later refining them to representation, appraisal and "will-feeling." The first two of these mental apparatuses are both parts of the intellect; we imagine something as a representation and then we appraise its validity and value. The intellect, for Stanislavsky and his contemporaries, usually includes the processes of imagining, comparing, reasoning, and choosing in a rational manner and is often synonymous with the mind. But the Will is much more complicated. At one point, Stanislavsky loosely defined Will as "wants" but usually uses it more akin to the *volition for action* that stems from desire.[31] In addition to closely examining the way Stanislavsky uses the concept of the "Will" both in his writings and in practice, I examine philosophers and scientists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who also wrote about the Will. After investigating Stanislavsky's use of the term, I look to the way recent cognitive scientists define the Will and relate that concept to desire, intention, and action.

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[30] Laura W. Ekstrom, "Volition and the Will," *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action,* eds. Timothy O'Connor and Constantine Sandis (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 101.

[31] Konstantin Stanislavski and Jean Benedetti, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, trans. and ed. Jean Benedetti (London: Routledge, 2008), 281.

## Conclusion

Understanding how bodies work can help actors, directors and teachers focus and refine their processes and practices. This dissertation unpacks four central components of human function and how they are embodied as part of the acting experience. Emotion, action, imagination, and the Will were central concepts for Stanislavsky and remain central for actors today.

**Timeline of Significant Events in Stanislavsky's Career**

1863 Konstantin Sergeievich Alekseev was born

1877 1st public acting performance at his family estate

1885 Began using the stage name Stanislavsky

1887 Founded the Society of Art and Literature

1889 Married Marya Petrovna Perevozchikova (Lilina)

1890 Saw the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's Players' work in Moscow

1897 Formed what became the Moscow Art Theatre with Nemirovich-Danchenko

1898 The Moscow Art Theatre opened with a performance of Tolstoy's *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich*

This ends the first period of his work, the amateur phase, and begins what I call the second period of Stanislavsky's work, his early professional phase.

1898 Opened *The Seagull* at the MAT

1900Théodule Ribot's *Psychologie des Sentiments* (1896) was published in Russian

1904 Symbolist Valery Bryussov attacked the MAT for naturalism

1904 Chekhov dies

1905 1st Russian Revolution

1906 Meyerhold was brought back to the MAT to experiment with symbolism in a new studio

1906 1st MAT foreign tour

The second period of Stanislavsky's work ends with Stanislavsky's artistic existential crisis in and start of developing a system for actors. This begins his third period of development.

1906 Vacationed in Finland and began to formulate principles for a system.

1908 First writes about the term "affective memory" (*affectivnaia pamiat'*)

1909 The success of his *A Month in the Country* using his new methods led to their adoption for the entire MAT

1912 Formed the First Studio under the supervision of Leopold Sulerzhitski.

1916 Formed the Second Studio

1917 Russian Revolution

1918 Formed the Opera Studio Theatre

1919-1922 Russian civil war

1920 Formed the Third Studio

1921 Formed the Fourth Studio

1923 MAT toured America

1924 *My Life in Art* was published in the US

1924 USSR created

1924 Changed the First Studio into the Second Moscow Art Theatre under the direction of Michael Chekhov, and reorganized the Third Studio as the Vakhtangov Theatre

1926 Revised Russian *My Life in Art* is published

1928 Suffered a heart attack and no longer performs on stage

The fourth and final period of Stanislavsky's work has a more fluid start date as he gradually began to rely less on emotion memory, more on action and eventually on an Active Analysis. These last explorations seem to begin in earnest around this time.

1929 Stalin took control of the Soviet Union

1929 began work on An American version of *An Actor's Work* with Elizabeth Hapgood

1931 appears to have been working on the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis

1935 Creates Opera-Dramatic Studio

1938 Died in Moscow

1938 *An Actor Prepares* was published in the US

1948 *Building a Character* was published in USSR

1950 *Building a Character* was published in US

1961 C*reating a Role* was published in US

# CHAPTER 1

# EMOTION

*Pushkin says: "Truth of the passions, feelings that seem true in the supposed circumstances, that is what our intellect requires of a dramatist." For my part I will add that this is precisely what our intellect requires of an actor.*

—Constantin Stanislavsky as Tortsov the Teacher[32]

*The discussion of the basic artistic principle of real vs. simulated feeling, however, has been going on for some time; it's just that our language about it has now become a little different.*

—Actor's Studio Co-Founder, Bobby Lewis[33]

## Introduction

One of the most misunderstood and misattributed aspects of the Stanislavsky system is how an actor creates and experiences emotion. Robert (Bobby) Lewis's (1909-1997) *Method — or Madness*? exemplifies the twentieth century controversies surrounding actors' emotions. Lewis describes the way Lee Strasberg's (1901-19820 American Method grows out of and

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[32] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 52.

[33] Robert Lewis, *Method or Madness?* (New York: Samuel French, 1958), 96.

deviates from Stanislavsky's system. He critiques Strasberg's "fetishization" of emotion, instead prescribing a more Stanislavskian view. "The technique of producing emotion should be related to the whole problem of acting and the complete demands of the play, and not become a fetish used for its own sake," Lewis stresses. "We would also have more beautiful, considerate feeling and less 'squeezed-out,' self-centered emotion."[34] Lewis's contemporary Stella Adler taught: "we don't need your emotion; we need the text."[35]

Is there a set Stanislavsky system that's "hogwash" and cannot be practiced or are the misunderstanding, misattributions and misnomers between the Method, the system and other American practitioners causing confusion? Despite the changing methods he uses to entice it in actors, the continuing centrality of emotion to Stanislavsky throughout his career is key. This chapter examines what Stanislavsky said about emotion at various points in his many years of practice and research, and what influenced his approach to the subject. It untangles the controversies created by the Stanislavskian principles' transmission west and the transposition of Stanislavsky's ideas by his protégés and others. It then clarifies and puts to the test the systems' claims and ambiguities regarding emotions by looking to current empirical research in the way humans experience emotion. By concentrating on the bodily changes during an emotion and how they are registered as feelings, we may be able to refine our understanding of emotion and better understand and assess Stanislavsky's techniques to "lure" emotion from an actor. It will also tackle the age-old question as to whether acted emotions are "real" emotions or something else

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[34] Ibid., 84.

[35] Stella Adler quoted in Foster Hirsch, *A Method to Their Madness – The History of the Actors' Studio* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1984), 214.

entirely; that "something else," I posit, are what Stanislavsky calls "analogous emotions." Neuroscience suggests a thin line between "first-time" and "analogous emotions," blurring the distinction of emotions as either "real" or "fake."

**Influences**

Stanislavsky thought of the actor as a creative force in the construction of a role.[36] It wasn't actors' jobs simply to fulfill the playwright's words but rather to contribute to the story as artists in their own right. A character was a creation partially from the playwright and partially from the actor. But since the character must be filtered through the actor, the actor's body is the physical material of that creation. "The actor creates the life of the human spirit of the role from his own living soul," Stanislavsky insists, "and incarnates it in his own living body. It has no other material for the creation of a role."[37] "Truthful" emotion was at the center of the "life of the human spirit." For him, this "truth" on stage is created through organic, genuine emotional and feeling-state responses from the actor, as that actor is pursuing real goals on stage. Theatricalism could be as truthful as realism for Stanislavsky, as long as there were genuine human experiences expressed on stage.

As an amateur actor, Stanislavsky understood the divide between what an actor feels on stage and what an audience may perceive during a performance. He realized that just because he felt great emotion during a performance didn't mean his performance had the desired effect on

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[36] Konstantin Sergeievich Alexeiev was his given name; Stanislavsky was used as his stage name, to protect his wealthy family's reputation.

[37] K.S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii,* 8 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1954-1961) and *Sobranie sochinenii,* 7 vols. II (1989), 293 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 111.

the audience. This disconnect helped him begin to search for a way for the actor to consistently deliver a strong performance that truly affected spectators. This pursuit led him to study the great actors of his day. Glikeriya Fedotova (1846-1925), a student of the renowned Maly actor Mikhail Shchepkin (1788-1863), took Stanislavsky on as a pupil. She stressed the importance of preparation and training, and, against the common acting style of the time, to "look your partner straight in the eyes, read his thoughts in his eyes, and reply to him in accordance with the expression of his eyes and face."[38] In other words, read your acting partner's emotions and respond accordingly. "Veracity" in acting was a common theme amongst theatre reformers of the era. The earlier 19th century playwright and poet Alexander Pushkin stressed that "the truth concerning the passions, verisimilitude in the feelings experienced in the given circumstances, that is what our intelligence demands of a dramatist."[39]

Shchepkin too, was striving for a way for actors to find an inherent truth on stage, asserting that one must "really have to live" on stage, rather than "pretend" to live.[40] What this living on stage meant, Stanislavsky intended to figure out (as I will discuss in chapter 3).

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[38] K.S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii,* 8 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1954-1961) and *Sobranie sochinenii*, 7 vols. II (1989), 293 in Sharon Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998): 111.

[39] Alexander Pushkin, "Sobranie Sochinenii" VI (Moscow: 1976), 318, as quoted in Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavsky: His Life and Art* (London: Methuen Drama, 1999), 15.

[40] Mikhail Shchepkin, (Moscow, 1984), 199-200, as quoted in Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art* (London: Methuen Drama, 2006), 16.

Stanislavsky researched, experimented with, and analyzed the acting process, not afraid to try new techniques. As a result, he started an amateur theatre company, the Society of Art and Literature in 1888. In one memorable event, he was struggling with the titular role in *The Miserly Knight*, so he decided he needed to live the real circumstances of the character. He arranged to spend a few hours locked up in a friend's dungeon trying to get the feel of its claustrophobic, frightening atmosphere. He ended up getting a cold and found the exercise pointless; the emotions he desired were never stirred. For Stanislavsky, this experiment reinforced the idea that "lived experience does not transfer to the stage unless mediated by a creative, or re-creative, process."[41]

After literary manager and director Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858-1943) and Stanislavsky's famous 1897 eighteen-hour meeting in which they created what became the Moscow Art Theater, Stanislavsky continued searching for answers: "The task of our generation [is] to liberate art from outmoded tradition, from tired cliché to give greater freedom to imagination and creative ability. That is the only way to save art."[42] Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko pledged "to create the first rational, moral public theater and it is to this lofty aim we dedicate our lives." Stanislavsky saw this search for truth in theatre as a way to expose truth in life; it became his moral obligation and life-long passion and led him to the pursuit of truthful emotions on stage. This began Stanislavsky's professional career and the second phase of his development with the acting process.

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[41] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 29.

[42] K.S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii,* 7 vols. II (1989), 114-117 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 55.

As a director, he was impressed with the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's (1826-1914) Players' work. They had toured Moscow in the spring of 1890 to much acclaim. The Meininger Hoftheatertruppe ("Meiningen Court Theatre Troupe" 1866-1890) productions seemed to have coherent and encompassing concepts, with everything from the sound design to the crowd scenes contributing to the whole of the production.[43] Renowned Stanislavsky scholar Jean Benedetti claims that this was predicate to Stanislavsky putting "the dramatic meaning in the staging itself."[44] Stanislavsky stressed "Until now we have worked with the process of *external, visible, corporeal communication* on stage… but there exists another more important aspect: *internal, invisible, spiritual communication*."[45] Truth in art required internal truth in the actor first, and he wanted to find a way to consistently create it.

One way to save the art of theatre and reach the truth of the human condition was to have actors living their parts on stage with truthful emotion. What that meant was another search altogether and has led to perhaps the greatest misconceptions about Stanislavsky's systems, including the false notion he was only interested in realism, that he only focused on emotion as affective memory during his time at the Moscow Art Theatre, and that he invented affective memory exercises such as the "private moment" (a Strasberg creation). Benedetti says that during the second phase of his development (in 1898) Stanislavsky was still looking to find

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[43] Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art,* trans. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008), 113-116.

[44] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art,* 44.

[45] K.S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii,* 7 vols. II (1989), 338 in Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus,* 144. Author's italics.

characters "from the outside in, to establish a sequence of actions in the hope that they would stimulate the right mood and emotion."[46]

Nemirovich-Danchenko and Stanislavsky's first four productions in the Moscow Art Theatre were received with little praise. The fifth production, the realistically-styled *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov, saved the company from artistic and financial disaster, catapulting it into fame. Naturalistic sound effects and radical staging (having backs of actors to the audience, etc.) excited audiences and the ensemble alike. It also began a fruitful relationship with Anton Chekhov that contributed to the mistaken notion that the Art Theatre, and Stanislavsky in particular, only created realistic productions.[47] This perception was exacerbated when they toured these early productions to the United States in 1923, even after they'd been out of the performance rotation for many years. Americans loved realism at that time, and the style soon became synonymous with Stanislavsky.

Eventually, Stanislavsky rejected overt realism, and especially naturalism, as distracting: "The external realism of the production of the *Power of Darkness* (1902) revealed the absence of inner justification and those of us who were acting in it. The stage was taken over by things, objects, banal outward events…which crushed the inner meaning of the play and characters."[48]

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[46] Ibid, 111.

[47] Ibid., 340, 344. Stanislavsky directed fantasies such as *The Bluebird* and *The Snow Maiden* as well as what he called symbolist and/or impressionistic drama of Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Hamsun, Hauptmann and others.

[48] K.S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii,* I. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1954-1961), 261 in Benedetti, *His Life and Art*, 127.

The "inner meaning of the play and characters" was of the upmost importance to Stanislavsky. His writings stress the essential nature of emotion in any style as "the line of feelings":

> Perhaps in our art there exists only one correct path — the line of the intuition of feelings! And out of it grow unconsciously the outer and inner images, their form, the idea and the technique of the role. The line of intuition at times absorbs into itself all the other lines, and grasps all the spiritual and physical contents of the role and the play.[49]

A "line" in Stanislavsky's terminology can be thought of "like a thread with separate beads," whether used in conjunction with feelings, action or experiencing.[50] "The line of intuition" reflected his friend and colleague Leo Tolstoy's insistence that good art transmits emotion from the artist to the audience.[51] This is precisely what Stanislavsky asks of the actor. "An actor who is also a creative artist," he writes, "experiences everything felt by the character of his part." And when this actor is at the height of his powers, "every spectator recognizes in him the better parts of himself, suffering and weeping, rejoicing and laughing, and taking part with all his heart in the life of the character in the play."[52]

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[49] Stanislavski, *My Life in Art,* 406-407.

[50] Burnet M. Hobgood, "Central Conceptions in Stanislavski's System," *Educational Theatre Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1973), 157.

[51] R. I. G. Hughes, "Tolstoy, Stanislavski, and the Art of Acting," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* Vol. 51, No. 1 (1993), 39.

[52] Konstantin Stanislavski, *Stanislavski and the Art of the Stage*, 2nd ed., trans. and ed. David Magarshack (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 121.

Stanislavsky said, "in the theatre, knowing is feeling."[53] He repeatedly points to "feelings" or "emotion" (he uses the terms interchangeably) throughout his works.[54] "In our language to understand means to feel."[55] He expands, "Feelings, are the things we know, meetings, experiences we've had, memories, everything that is contained in our intellectual, affective, visual, aural, muscular, and other kinds of recall. That is why it is so important for an actor to regularly restock his mind."[56] Carnicke points out that the Russian noun Stanislavsky used, *chuvstva*, doesn't only mean the English "emotion" as we commonly use it. In Russian it has a broader meaning that encompasses physical sensations as well as emotional "feelings." Carnicke translates its verb, *chuvstsosat,* with several alternatives: "to feel," "to have a sensation," "to be aware of," and "to understand."[57] Stanislavsky chooses this word purposely to encompass these multiple layers. Carnicke stresses that his idea of "feelings" encompasses physical, emotional and intellectual processes at the same time; when he wanted to specify physical effects, he uses the term "sensation" (*oshchushchenie*).[58] These multiple, complex ideas of emotion were important, and the use of affective memory was just one tool to achieve them.

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[53] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, xxiv.

[54] David Krasner, "Stanislavsky's System, Sense-Emotion, Memory, and Physical Action/Active Analysis," ed. R. Andrew White, *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavsky* (London: Routledge, 2014): 205.

[55] Stanislavsky, *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage*, 17.

[56] Krasner, "Stanislavski System, Sense," 205.

[57] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 139.

[58] Ibid.

One of the central controversies among acting theorists and practitioners is Stanislavsky's use of "affective memory," also known as "effective memory," "sense memory," "memory of emotion" and "emotional memory." Each of these terms have been attributed to Stanislavsky's system interchangeably by various people at various times causing additional confusion. Benedetti identifies Stanislavsky's first written mention of the term "affective memory" (*affectivnaia pamiat'*) on May 5, 1908, early in the development of a system: "I am making daily experiments on myself and others and have come up with some interesting results. What fascinates me most is the rhythm of feelings, the development of affective memory and the psycho-physiology of the creative process."[59]

Stanislavsky reported that just two months after this letter he serendipitously heard about the scientific concept of "affective emotion and memory" from a man in Hamburg Germany, who recommended several books by French experimental psychologist Théodule Ribot (1839-1916).[60] Ribot studied the involuntary processes behind feelings, memory, personality and the Will, that caused dysfunction and pathologies and connected "all states of feeling with biological conditions."[61] *Les Maladies de la Mémoire* and *Les Maladies de la Volonté*, which were first published in Russian in 1900, were of particular interest.[62] Stanislavsky was especially

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[59] K.S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii* VII, 386, in Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 184. From letter to V.W. Kotliarevskaia.

[60] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art,* 185.

[61] Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu, "Stanislavski and French Theater: Selected Affinities," in *Stanislavsky in the World,* 70; Roach, *The Player's Passion*, 192.

[62] Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavsky: His Life and Art,* 185.

influenced by three of Ribot's concepts. The first two, the ideas of "reviviscence" or "experiencing" (*perezhivanie*), and that of the Will, will be discussed in detail in other chapters of this dissertation.[63] The third concept, however, relates more directly to emotions: affective memory (*affectivnaia pamiat'*). Stanislavsky assistant, Richard Boleslavsky, explains his understanding of Ribot's concept of affective memory:

> According to his [Ribot's] terminology, the affective memory is the ability of the human organism to retain imperceptibly for man different psychological shocks and emotions and to live them all over again in case of an identical repetition of outer physical occurrences. *For instance,* while returning home with a bunch of freshly gathered lilies of the valley, a girl finds out about the tragic death of her beloved fiancée. The very moment she was hearing the news she was inhaling the aroma of these flowers. Many years have passed since then. She was married and has lived in perfect happiness, – but each time she smelled the scent of lilies of the valley she would become nervously excited just as she was the time of tragedy, without even being conscious of the fact. More than that, unconscious tears were coming to her eyes at the mere sight of these flowers. Later on this became so much of a habit that it remained with her until the end of her days.[64]

Ribot claims that "concrete" recollection of emotions involve the "total psychological being" while "abstract memories" do not.[65] For him, concrete memories are felt in the body, not

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[63] Autant-Mathieu, "Stanislavski and French Theater," 70.

[64] Richard Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons,* ed. Rhonda Blair (London: Routledge, 2010), 114.

[65] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 132.

merely in the mind. "Emotion which does not vibrate to the whole body is nothing but a purely intellectual state," it is an "abstract memory of feeling [that] is only a sign, a simulacrum, a substitute for the real occurrence, an intellectualized state added to the purely intellectual element of the impression, and nothing more."[66]

While Stanislavsky did not adopt the terms "concrete" and "abstract" emotions, he did distinguish among types of emotion similarly. He suggests that primary feelings (*pervichnyi*) are what are experienced the first time we have an emotional event. Strong emotion memory can reproduce these primary feelings as concrete memories. These "spontaneous, strong, highly colored" re-experiences rarely happen and when they do, he says, "it's annoying: we do not control moments of primary experience: they control us."[67] For him, secondary (*povtornyi*) emotions are much easier to control and can therefore be useful to the actor. Carnicke explains:

> These "more accessible," repeatable feelings "prompt our memory of emotion," and create the illusion of first time experiences, not their reality. Memory safely filters and controls emotion, maintaining artistic distance between the actor and the event portrayed. It is the 'crucible,' Stanislavsky writes, in which emotion is transformed into art. When

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[66] Théodule-Armand Ribot, *The Psychology of the Emotions, 2nd Ed*, The Contemporary Science Series (London: Walter Scott Publishing Co, 1911): 163,161. Ribot wrote that affective memory was the process by which humans recall previously experienced emotions by drawing upon the specific physical sensations that accompanied a memory from their past. His studies demonstrated that few people could easily evoke a concrete affective memory, as evidenced by the fact that women choose to have more than one child.

[67] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 134.

> asked by his Russian editor to clarify various aspects of the System, he explained that affective memory 'washes feelings clean of all that is superfluous. It results in the quintessence of all similar feelings," and hence, "it is stronger than genuine real-life feeling."[68]

Stronger here does not mean more intense, but more aesthetically pleasing. While primary emotions lead to hysteria, secondary emotions can be shaped to suit the needs of the story and therefore reach the audience in a stronger fashion. "Restraint is the prime quality of the good actor," Stanislavsky says.[69] This artistic use of real emotion ties back to Stanislavsky's concept of truthful living on stage:

> All actors without exception need to feed the mind according to the laws of nature, to preserve what they have acquired through their intellectual, affective or muscular memory, rework the material in their artistic imagination, engender artistic characters with the inner life that that implies and embody them naturally according to the laws that are known and natural to all.[70]

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[68] K.S. Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii* (1989) 185-291 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 134-135.

[69] Constantin Stanislavski and Pavel Rumyantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera,* trans. and ed. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1975): 125.

[70] Konstantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art,* trans. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008), 353.

The concept of an "artistic imagination" will be explored in more detail in chapter 3, but the point that the intellect and emotions must be manipulated in order to produce an artistic creation is key. Since primary emotions are uncontrollable, they cannot be manipulated; instead, secondary emotions must be employed.

These manipulations occur by recalling the memory of an already experienced emotion. Primary emotions can occur during a performance, but they are rare and spontaneous events. The following passage from *An Actor's Work* clarifies the difficulty of relying on primary emotions on stage. Stanislavsky looks to his literary alter ego, Tortsov, an acting teacher for answers. His student and the narrator, Kostya (Nazvanov in the Russian version), nervously asks if "spur-of-the-moment feelings are undesirable?" The answer is clear:

> "On the contrary, they're highly desirable," said Tortsov to calm me. "They are direct, strong, vivid but they don't occur onstage in the way you imagine, that is, for long periods, or for an entire act. They burst through here and there, but only as discreet moments. In that sense they are desirable in the highest degree and I welcome them with all my heart. May they visit us more often and intensify the truth of our emotions, which we prize more than anything in performance."

Once again, the value placed on "real emotions" as a signifier of truth on stage is emphasized. He continues:

> "Because they are unexpected, first-time feelings provide an irresistible stimulus for an actor. One word of warning. We aren't masters of spur-of-the-moment experiences, they master us. And so all we can do is leave it to nature, and say to ourselves, if spontaneous

feelings do arise, then let them appear when they are needed, lest they run counter to the play and the role."[71]

Since these primary emotions are uncontrollable, they can lead to inartistic actions on stage; in this case inartistic actions are those that do not support the narrative or the character. Tortsov's student is despondent at this:

"That means we are powerless when it comes to the subconscious and inspiration," I cried in a horrified voice. "Is our acting, our technique merely reduced to first-time feelings?" "They are rare not only onstage but in life itself," said Tortsov to console me. "We have the repeated, the recurrent feelings which our Emotion Memory prompts. Learn, first and foremost, to use them. They are more accessible to us."[72]

Stanislavsky preferred the term "emotion memory" writing in *An Actor's Work*, "formerly, following Ribot, we called it 'affective memory.'"[73] This "formerly" implies that at some point during his third working phase he stepped away to some degree from Ribot's description of what appeared to be inartistic, uncontrollable affective memory.

Stanislavsky believed that emotion memory was helpful because as humans, actors all have the capacity to remember the physical experiences of sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste with "sensory recall." Carnicke points out that Stanislavsky stressed the encompassing meaning of sensory recall as a part of emotion memory by using the Russian word for "feelings or

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[71] Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 208.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 197.

senses," "*chuvstva*," as another side of the coin to affective memory (*affectivnaia pamiat'*).[74] Stanislavsky wants actors to work on sharpening their abilities to remember and recall through these senses.

How Stanislavsky proposes that an actor should go about developing and using memory of emotion is less clear than his definition of what emotion is. "Once you can grow pale or blush at the memory of something that you have experienced," Stanislavsky explains, "once you are frightened to think about something unhappy that you lived through long ago, you have a memory for *chuvstva* (feelings, senses) or a memory for emotion" (the resulting response from remembering).[75] It is important for actors to experience primary emotions in their real lives so that they can draw from them as secondary, artistic emotions on stage, so he encouraged actors to explore other art forms, stories, and history to enhance their stores and create "living memoirs."[76]

As illustration Tortsov has his students perform an acting exercise in which he says they are to imagine what they would do if there was a madman trying to break into the room. The students jump up, yell, blockade the door, etc. Later he asks them to do it again. This time they repeat the physical movements by once again jumping up, yelling, and blockading the door, but with no inner connection; they are just going through the exterior actions without recalling any of the remembered emotion. Tortsov says they need more than "muscle memory" and the outer

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[74] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 133.

[75] K.S. Stanislavskii, Sobranie Sochinenii, II (1989), 281 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 133.

[76] Sergei Tcherkasski and Сергей Черкасский, "The System Becomes the Method: Stanislavsky—Boleslavsky—Strasberg," *Stanislavski Studies*, no. 1 (2013): 97-98.

senses to recreate an event, it needs "the sixth affective sense."[77] He explains, "Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced."[78] Stanislavsky clarified that what was needed was:

> The coincidence of emotion memories with the sensations called for by the part. The analogy which results from this coincidence draws the actor closer to the person he is portraying. At such times a creative artist feels his own life in the life of his part and the life of his part identical with his personal life. This identification results in a miraculous metamorphosis.[79]

Importantly, these analogous feelings can come from imagination, stories about other people, museums, art, etc. as well as from one's own life.[80] Analogous feelings implies that the emotions are similar between actor and character but not the same. It also correlates to the primary (first time) and secondary (second time) emotions that are similar but not the same. Tortsov explains:

> As you know, onstage, we live emotion memories of the real world. At moments they seem like real life. Losing oneself in the role totally, continuously, having an unwavering belief in what is happening can occur, but only rarely. We know individual, more or less

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[77] K.S. Stanislavskii, Sobranie Sochinenii, II (1989), 276-279 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 133.

[78] Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares,* 168.

[79] Ibid., 285.

[80] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 129.

lengthy moments of such a state. The rest of the time, the true and true-seeming, the believable and the likely alternate.[81]

This "unwavering belief" that rarely occurs is the primary emotion. For Stanislavsky, there is another, secondary and more likely "true" emotion: the one that is analogous to the character's emotion but true or "real" for the actor. True-seeming, believable and other such emotions oscillate with the two "true" emotions in most performances. The analogous, secondary emotions are the ideal for artistic performance as they can be lured and controlled.

Although Stanislavsky felt that there was an artistic truth in secondary emotion, he understood that accessing those emotions is not an easy task for the actor. An actor cannot rely on chance to recall emotions, so a way to reliably invoke them was needed. Indeed, since actors can't Will themselves to feel emotions they must "lure" them through indirect means. Experiments in the First Studio (founded in 1909), during the third phase of Stanislavsky's career, were devoted to developing a repeatable method for luring affective memory. Much of his early writings discuss these luring techniques. Carnicke explains that "Anything that triggers the actor's imagination or entices the subconscious out of hiding can be considered a "lure."[82]

Stanislavsky suggests several ways to lure these emotions. The ideal is when emotions arise on their own as the actor is actively trying to solve a problem in the given circumstances of the play. When this doesn't work for an actor, however, Stanislavsky stresses that there are additional tools that can help draw out (not create) the appropriate emotion. Tortsov elaborates:

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[81] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work,* 327

[82] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 176.

> "Artistic feeling, like the woodfowl, scares easily and it hides in the deep recesses of our mind. If our feelings will not come out into the open there is no way to ambush them. In that case we have to rely on a decoy. These decoys are precisely those stimuli to Emotion Memory and recurrent feelings which we have been talking about all this time to lure them out. Each successive stage brought out a new decoy (or stimulus) for our Emotion Memory and recurrent feelings. In fact, the magic 'if', the Given Circumstances, our imagination, the Bits and Tasks, the objects of attention, the truth and belief in inner and outer actions, provided us with the appropriate decoys (stimuli). … Decoys are the most powerful means at our disposal when it comes to working in the area of our psychotechnique…. The actor must be able to respond directly to the decoys (stimuli) and master them, as a virtuoso does a keyboard…. You must know which stimulates what, what the right bait is to get a bite."[83]

Another reliable lure is rhythm. Stanislavsky often talked of how opera singers are given a great gift with their music. "The composing is everything: the rhythm for your feelings, the right intimations for each word, and melody which is the pattern of your emotions."[84] The music allows him to describe how the rhythm can help shape emotions, letting the actor know when to restrain them and when to let them break through.[85]

Nemirovich-Danchenko, who often had serious artistic and management disagreements with Stanislavsky, also regarded luring emotion as key for acting. A draft of his 1910 letter to

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[83] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 225.

[84] Stanislavsky, *Stanislavsky on Opera*, 81-82.

[85] Ibid., 125.

Stanislavsky states:

> I try to draw conclusions from practical work. And there I get nearer to you. For example when I succeeded in establishing the actors what I call 'the inner image' which is the emotional stage of *pure water* which is completely directionless and yet at the same time is extremely precise in a given role, when I have achieved that, when I see that the actor has been infected or charged up by this image.… *Then* this theory is incredibly all-embracing. So all-embracing that even for those with little stage experience rehearsals go quickly and securely. But the stimulation of that emotion is the most important and without it one should not rehearse at all.… What emerges with particular clarity is the fact that one should not take a single step without emotionally experiencing the inner image.[86]

The concept of the "inner image" will be discussed in more detail later, but here it is roughly the whole through-line of the play, including visual images, emotions and actions.

David Krasner, reflecting the dual Russian meaning of "emotion," offers additional clues as to how one can lure it. He suggests that "the pathway to emotion is always through the senses: the sensors act as stimulants to the emotion. The stimulants excite the actor, make them want to communicate something, do something physical — to act." During rehearsals actors will choose specific "stimulants" or lures, that will provoke desired action in themselves.[87] These decoys or lures are part of the system's psycho-technique. The difficult thing, Stanislavsky cautions, is that actors:

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[86] Jean Benedetti, ed., *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters* (New York: Rutledge, 1991), 289.

[87] Krasner, "Stanislavski System, Sense," 225.

> must know which stimulates what, what the right bait is to get a bite. You have to be a gardener, so to speak, of your own heart, one who knows what grows from which seeds. You must not reject any subject, any stimulus to your Emotion Memory... personal impressions, feelings, experiences. These we obtain from the real world and from our imagination, from our recollections, from books, from science and learning, from traveling, from museums and, most important of all, from our relationships with other people.[88]

As memory theory would suggest, using one's own store of memories means that each one is changed simply by being recalled in different circumstances from their first incarnation. Stanislavsky stresses that for actors' "mental hygiene" it would be dangerous to be otherwise. Actors are not asked to hallucinate given circumstances, only to ask, "what would I do if I were in this situation?"—a technique known as "the magic if." For the madman exercise, if an actor really thought there was a deranged individual trying to break in and threaten them, the actor would be in a true state of fear. An actor, who is not truly in danger, could have identification with a character by immersing in "analogous psychological emotional states." Part of the emotion is the same, and part of the emotion is different. The line of intuition can be thought of as the line of feeling through the play for the actor that is analogous to the line of feeling through the play for the character; in other words, the actor feels similar (analogous) emotions to the character as they progress through the play's events. As Irina Levin and Igor Levin point out, these emotions do not belong to separate, imaginary characters created by the playwright, but to

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[88] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 225 – 226.

the actors themselves.[89] They are real emotions for that actor.

Stanislavsky said such real emotion could be harmful to the actor's mental health. An episode in *An Actor's Work* illustrates this point. Tortsov asks a student named Darya (Dymkova) to perform an étude in which she must hold and protect an imaginary child. Kostya discloses to the reader that a rumor had been circulated that Darya's own baby had recently died. Darya's performance was so moving that Kostya assumed the story was true. After the étude, Tortsov asked her to perform it again, but this time it lacked the physical specificity and the emotional impact. He asked her to do it again with the adjustment that the imaginary child had just died. Kostya was mortified and confessed to the teacher about the rumor. Tortsov was horrified and ran up to the stage to stop her, but she had completed the étude before he could stop her.[90]

This unusual story about the overlap between primary and secondary emotions illustrates that affective memory can be a strong tool, but care must be taken. Despite common lore to the contrary, Stanislavsky used affective memory cautiously in the First Studio. He was concerned for actors' "mental hygiene." Stanislavsky told Joshua Logan, "We never ask anyone to practice my method in public."[91] As Carnicke notes, "In fact, Stanislavsky worried that the personal

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[89] Irina Levin and Igor Levin, *The Stanislavski Secret: Not a System, Not a Method but a Way of Thinking* (Colorado Springs: Meriwether publishing LTD, 2002), 50.

[90] Stanislavsky, *An Actor at Work,* 340-341 and K.S. Stanislavskii, Sobranie Sochinenii, II (1989), 450-454 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 130.

[91] Joshua Logan, *Josh: My Upside Down, In and Out Life* (New York: Delacorte, 1976), 53 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 129-130.

associations could threaten the actor's focus on the play, and confuse acting with self-expression, a criticism often leveled at the First Studio's actors as well as those of the Method."[92] Stanislavsky's close assistant Leopold Sulerzhitsky was likely responsible for some of this criticism at the First Studio as well, since he stressed the use of affective memory much more than Stanislavsky.

As a young actor, I had an experience that demonstrated the difference between controllable and uncontrollable emotion. I was playing a young woman crying at her father's gravesite, just a few months after my own father's unexpected death. I was having trouble emotionally connecting to the moment until one night in rehearsal I allowed myself to imagine I was at my own father's grave. The emotion came flooding out in a real and visceral way, so much so that everyone was silenced. Problematically, no one understood anything I was saying, nor could I continue the scene without a break. The emotion was real and primary, but inartistic. After that experience I stayed in the imaginary world of the play where I could control my secondary emotions properly.

Carnicke asked contemporary Russian colleagues about their use of affective memory at the Moscow Art Theatre today, and reports that they consider it important, but relate it to exercises in concentration, relaxation, imagination, and communication. "The Russians even relate affective memory to analysis of the play… In short, Russians see emotion inextricably entangled with the whole development of the actor."[93]

Western, especially American, theatre artists and scholars have witnessed much more

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[92] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 129.

[93] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 125.

controversy over Stanislavsky's use of emotion. Stanislavsky's system and the American Method as taught by Lee Strasberg are often conflated in both the popular imagination and even in the minds of some theatre practitioners, especially in regard to concepts surrounding emotion of the actor.

Scholars such as Sharon Carnicke, Jean Benedetti, Richard Hornby and David Krasner have explained in great detail the complicated reasons and conversions of history that led to these common misconceptions. I will highlight a few of these.

Stanislavsky liked to practice theatre, not write. He struggled for years trying to string together various notes and musing on his experimental findings. Eventually, needing money, he reached out to American Elizabeth Hapgood (1894-1974) to help translate his ideas into English. He gave her considerable and exclusive editing rights, and she helped shape his ideas into the classic books *An Actor Prepares* (1938), *Building a Character* (1950) and *Creating a Role* (1961). Stanislavsky had intended for *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character* to be two parts of one book, with the first part focusing on the inner workings of the actor in the classroom, and the second combining the inner work with the outer work of performance. Since the second book was released twelve years after the first, a false impression that Stanislavsky only cared about the inner work was created in the West. Today, scholars point out many problems with the Hapgood's translation, including the use of alternate terms, cutting out clarifying examples, and simply not understanding the work. Carnicke also suggests that Hapgood's translations of Stanislavsky's multi-layered verb *chuvstsosat* (physical sensations as well as emotional feelings) "privilege emotional layers in the word, supporting Americanization of the system."[94]

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[94] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 133.

More complete editions were published in Russian, but they were also problematic. The Communist government made sure that their star theatre director's works adhered to their policy of social realism by cutting out many of Stanislavsky's less tangible ideas. Anything deemed mystic was redacted, so yoga influences such as prana rays, muscle release and communication were eliminated, and the Method of Physical Actions (discussed in the next chapter) was promoted.

The full "Americanization" of Stanislavsky's use of affective memory was also influenced by Stanislavskian protégées, initially at the First Studio. Stanislavsky created the studio in 1912 to research and develop a system for acting in a private, experimental atmosphere. He chose trained actors who were still naive enough to be flexible in technique.[95] The First Studio's founding members included Yevgeny Vakhtangov (1883-1922), Michael Chekhov (1891-1955), Richard Boleslavsky (1889-1937), and Maria Ouspenskaya (1876-1949), all of whom would exert a considerable influence on the subsequent history of Western theatre.[96] Stanislavsky's close personal assistant since 1905, Leopold Sulerzhitsky (nicknamed "Suler" by Maxim Gorky), was appointed to lead the studio. Influenced by yoga as well as Ribot, he emphasized relaxation, concentration of attention, imagination, communication, and especially emotion memory.

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[95] Rebecca B. Gauss, *Lear's Daughters: The Studios of the Moscow Art Theatre 1905-1927*, American University Studies, Series XXVI, Theatre Arts: Vol. 29 (New York: P. Lang, 1999): 34 and Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 209.

[96] Gauss, *Lear's Daughters,* 32 and Benedetti, *Stanislavski*: *His Life and Art*, 210.

Eventually Suler's students Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya (who had both been directed by Stanislavsky) immigrated to the United States. When the Moscow Art Theatre toured America, it employed Boleslavsky as an actor and as Stanislavsky's assistant. Boleslavsky took advantage of his new-found fame and, along with Ouspenskaya, convinced some art patrons to fund the American Laboratory Theatre. Ouspenskaya would work with the actors in the lab while he predominantly lectured. They claimed to be teaching "Stanislavsky's System," and they did promote many of his methods, but with their own spin. Sulerzhitsky had encouraged affective memory at the First Studio much more than Stanislavsky, and now Boleslavsky would push the practice even further. Rhonda Blair argues that with his lectures and then book *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, "more than any other person, Polish actor, director, and teacher Richard Boleslavsky … is responsible for the initial dissemination of the teachings of Stanislavski in the United States."[97]

Boleslavsky considered memory of emotion to be one of the cornerstones of acting and devoted more time to it in his lectures than to any other single topic.[98] For him it is "one of the most important factors of our art. The actor can use it in order to reproduce in himself all kind of feelings and fill his stage creations with the 'life of the human spirit.'"[99] Boleslavsky instructs actors to decide intellectually what the proper emotion for a character is, then search their memory for a similar emotion. He suggests the actor "may use all kinds of means in order to bring that feeling to life, starting with the actual lines of the author and finishing with

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[97] Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, ix.

[98] Ibid., 117.

[99] Ibid., 115.

experiments from his own life, recollections from books and finally using his own imagination."[100]

Boleslavsky describes memory of emotion as helpful for developing inner characterization. Actors should look for examples of objects and experiences to help find the right feeling for a role if they cannot find it in themselves by combining ""*similar*' affective memories and the '*imagination*.'"[101] "You take a feeling which you have never experienced, from the outside through your eyes and you try exteriorly to copy that characterization." This characterization refers to the physical properties surrounding the event, such as the sky color and shape of the clouds and the hills. This way, "you won't realize it, but the sadness will come."[102] If actors work in this way, Boleslavsky asserts, they should be able to play any part effectively.[103] He insists that "Everyone can find something in his own life he can use. When I cannot find something separately, I would try to make a mosaic of different pieces."[104] Boleslavsky is clear that these emotion memories are to be used as a rehearsal tool, not in performance. Like Stanislavsky, he felt that the feelings naturally brought up in the actor during the moment of performance (whether primary or secondary) must be the only feelings in the

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[100] Ibid., 117.

[101] Ibid., 119.

[102] Ibid., 160.

[103] Richard Boleslavsky, "Lecture Four B" in Margueritte Bryan Brault, "The Theory and Practice of Actor Training at the American Laboratory Theatre" (Master's Thesis, The University of Arizona, 1979), 164-166.

[104] Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, 133.

actor's consciousness. Ouspenskaya agreed: "You must work on the five sense realities until they become second nature to you. If you try to learn to establish the five senses at rehearsals and performances, it will be too late. You will be remembering to remember, and you will not be free to create character, emotion or action."[105]

If emotions don't come naturally to the actor just from playing actions in the given circumstances, Boleslavsky says the actor must have emotions stored and "remember them." Once recalled the actor needs to keep them available to be used "for every purpose." They are not, however, every day, common emotions, Boleslavsky declares, but rather "the memory which is not common, but which exists just the same and is called affective memory, memory of feeling, memory of emotions, etc." According to Margueritte Bryan Brault, "Although affective memory… is the more commonly used term, Boleslavsky prefers memory of feeling as being more descriptive of what the phenomenon is."[106] Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya's pronounced accents caused some of their students to hear "effective memory" rather than "affective memory," and "beats" instead of "bits" or "bites" probably leading to two of the common mistranslations.[107]

Although Boleslavsky spent a great deal of time talking about how to use memory of emotion, Ouspenskaya rarely discussed it. According to many of her students, most of her

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[105] Maria Ouspenskaya, "Notes on Acting with Maria Ouspenskaya," in *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, ed. Rhonda Blair (London: Routledge, 2010), 190.

[106] Brault, "The Theory and Practice," 134.

[107] Blair, *Acting: The First Six Lessons,* 189.

classes dealt with exercises or études concerning dramatic action.[108] Stella Adler insisted that while she attended classes, Boleslavsky "emphasized" emotion memory but "Ouspenskaya never touched it."[109] Another American Laboratory Theatre actor, Gretchen Comegys, said she did remember a little work with it in the classroom: "When we went into improvisation, it was the moments when we began to look for, in our past, something that would bring up the emotion that the character we were working on needed."[110] Comegys also recalled that they had spent considerable time doing "sense memory" work, suggesting a clear differentiation between emotion memory and sense memory, unlike the Russian training. "The most important thing," she said, "in the sensory exercises was concentration. With deep concentration we listened, we looked, and we felt."[111] They would then try to recreate as many of the sensations as possible in their imaginations.[112]

Stella Adler never subscribed to the practice of emotion memory and suggested it was not healthy for the actor. She stressed that the Moscow Art Theatre stopped its use as "it made the

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[108] Stella Adler Interview by Brault. New York City, May 18, 1977 [taped]; Gretchen Comegys (Daly) Interviews by writer. Tucson, October 1975 to June 1977 [taped]; Francis Fergusson interviews by Brault. Kingston, New Jersey, May 15 to May 26, 1977 [taped].; Ronald A Willis. "The American Laboratory Theatre, 1923-1930." Diss. University of Iowa, 1968: 322-24 in Brault, "The Theory and Practice," 75.

[109] Adler, interview in Brault, "The Theory and Practice," 74.

[110] Comegys, interview in Brault, "The Theory and Practice," 74.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Fergusson interview in Brault, "The Theory and Practice," 73.

actors hysterical."[113] The actors' emotion was uncontrollable and therefore useless as art. This discrepancy in approach to emotion would become another piece of the American confusion as Stella Adler and Lee Strasberg came to an impasse over the use of affective memory while they were in the Group Theatre. Strasberg had studied at the American Lab Theatre, too, but only in the lecture hall. He rarely, if ever, worked with Ouspenskaya, so Boleslavsky's stress on emotion memory became his main take away from the lab. Strasberg went much further with the idea of affective memory than even Boleslavsky did. He wrote that finding the Stanislavskian "bead" of emotion became "the task I was to devote myself to in establishing the Method."[114]

Adler felt Strasberg's use of affective memory went too deep into the actor's psyche and was "not conducive to good emotional health."[115] In 1934 Adler had the opportunity to study with Stanislavsky directly, and she returned to report that he rarely used Emotion Memory any more. She summed up the core of what Stanislavsky taught her: "I search in the given circumstances never the feelings. If I try and do the psychological, I force the action. We must attack the psychological from the point of view of the physical life so as not to disturb the feeling.… In each psychological action there is some physical element. Search for the line, in terms of the action, not feeling."[116] Adler was surprised to hear that Stanislavsky only used affective memory as a last resort since it was key to Strasberg's Method.[117]

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[113] Adler interview in Brault, "The Theory and Practice," 101.

[114] Strasberg, *A Dream of Passion,* 60.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Garfield, *A Player's Place,* 33.

[117] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art,* 351.

Strasberg's extreme use of affective memory and naturalistic acting became the central, most well-known aspect of the American Method in popular culture. "The Method" changed the face of American acting, especially in film. It also became erroneously synonymous with Stanislavsky's system in many people's minds. The Method eventually felt a great deal of pushback. For example, Richard Hornby, author of *The End of Acting: A Radical View* (1992), contends that "Strasberg's emotion memory can be seen partly as a cause, but even more as a result, of decline of the American theater."[118] Many theatre practitioners today distance themselves from the Method in fear of being labeled naturalistic or over-emotional. Since Stanislavsky's use of emotion memory is often conflated with Strasberg's and misunderstood, this part of his system is often neglected. A recent survey of professional British actors of multiple ages and backgrounds demonstrated that for most, Stanislavsky's system has a negative connotation; they still associate Stanislavsky primarily with his early work and affective memory, and often conflate his approach with Strasberg's.[119] Current neurobiology may be able to shed light on the differences and relative effectiveness of Stanislavsky and Strasberg's approaches to eliciting emotion.

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[118] Richard Hornby, *The End of Acting: A Radical View* (New York: Applause Books, 1992): 184.

[119] "Teaching Stanislavski: An investigation into how Stanislavski is taught to students in the UK." A research project initiated by SCUDD (the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments) in conjunction with PALATINE (the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Dance, Drama and Music) and funded by a PALATINE Development Award. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/teaching-stanislavski.pdf.

THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF EMOTION

**Approaches to Emotion**

Emotions are highly complex, variable and socially influenced products of systems throughout the body. They do not reside in, nor are they produced by, one specific area of the brain. Emotions are often obvious when we experience them in ourselves and see them in others, yet, they are difficult to define in objectively scientific terms.[120] The English word "emotion" was first used in 1660 to describe psychological phenomena that created an excited state of mind and behavior.[121] Reflecting a strong intellectual bias still seen in many quarters today, emotions were thought to be "lower order" functions of the subcortical regions, while "higher order" cognitive reasoning resided in the cortex. But as Matthew A. Scult and Ahmad R. Hariri point out, "emerging research, however, encourages the reconceptualization of both cognitive and emotional processing as arising from highly distributed and dynamic interactions across neural

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[120] David J. Anderson and Ralph Adolphs, "A Framework for Studying Emotions across Species" *Cell* (2014): 187. As I will rely heavily on this study, it is worth pointing out that Anderson and Adolphs are well-respected and influential in emotion studies as exemplified by Antonio Damasio, one of the foremost scientists in the field, calls their book "indispensable" in the review "Emotional Beings," *New Scientist*, Vol. 239, Issue 3192 (2018): 43.

[121] Joseph E. LeDoux and Stefan G. Hofmann, "The Subjective Experience of Emotion: A Fearful View," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2018): 67 and Michael R. Trimble, *The Intentional Brain: Motion, Emotion, and the Development of Modern Neuropsychiatry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 27.

networks."[122] Emotions are also key for maintaining behaviors that control the physical systems needed for survival.

Joseph E. LeDoux and Stefan G. Hofmann outline four broad approaches to the study of emotions. The first is the "Neuro-Darwinian Approach." Darwin believed that emotions are innate "states of mind" inherited from generation to generation. Paul Ekman's influential "basic emotion theory" fits in with this view. He posits that emotions are not just similar phenomenon on a scale of intensity or valence (pleasantness vs. unpleasantness), but rather distinct events that help humans with "fundamental life tasks."[123] He suggests that "affective phenomena" include "moods and emotional traits."[124] The second approach is a Neuro-Jamesian one, based on William James's well-known argument that people react to a stimulus physically first, then they register what that response in a type of feedback after the event. (e.g. I see the bear. I run. I realize I am frightened.)[125] The Neuro-Behaviorist Approach argues that emotions are a subjective body state measurable by science, and that verbal self-report is based on a "folk psychological" construct, and therefore less important.[126] The behaviorist and James's closely related theories were highly influential for Stanislavsky and his contemporaries. The behaviorist

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[122] Matthew A. Scult and Ahmad R Hariri, "A Brief Introduction to the Neurogenetics of Cognition-Emotion Interactions," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2018): 50.

[123] Paul Ekman, "Basic Emotions," *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion,* Eds. Tim Dalgleish and Michael J. Power (Chichester, England: Wiley, 1999), 45-46.

[124] Ibid., 48.

[125] LeDoux and Hofmann, "The Subjective Experience of Emotion," 68.

[126] Ibid., 68-69.

approach coincided nicely with the official social realist party line, too, as it eschewed psychological or spiritual explanations. For them, humans respond as animals in a direct stimulus-response reaction; thinking only takes place after an action.

The fourth approach, one on which Joseph LeDoux and Stefan Hofmann most rely, is a Neuro-Cognitive one that emerges from higher-order reasoning. They explain:

> Recent theorizing has emphasized that emotional experiences are cognitive constructions based on conceptualizations of situations or higher-order states that emerge as a result of the cognitive integration in working memory of diverse sources of information from within the brain and body. Both of these positions reject the idea that emotional experiences arise from subcortical circuits (views of the Neuro-Darwinian and Neuro-Jamesian approaches) and also reject the idea that the subjective experience is a non-scientific construct (Neuro-Behaviorist approach).[127]

LeDoux and Hofmann elaborate that this higher-order approach depends on a network model of cognition for both cognitive and emotional processes. My dissertation will pull primarily from this last approach as it relies more strongly on subject reporting of the feelings associated with an emotional response than the others. LeDoux and Hoffman argue that if the other approaches were correct, by simply dampening amygdala activity (through drugs or other means) or stopping fearful behavior, the subjective experience (feelings) would weaken. Studies show that this is not the case. It seems to me that higher order processes must affect the conscious experience of emotion as feelings.[128]

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[127] Ibid., 69.

[128] Ibid., 70.

**Emotion Frameworks**

Influential scientists such as Antonio Damasio and R. J. Dolan differentiate between "emotions," which can be thought of as the biological responses to stimuli, and "feelings," which refer to the "mental representations" of our interoceptive reactions to the physiological changes known as somatic components (such as changes in heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, sweating and "butterflies" in the stomach).[129] It is important to note that we only need to have an urge for a behavior, not necessarily complete it, to feel an emotion. Dolan points out several unique and important qualities of emotions in humans:

> First, unlike most psychological states, emotions are embodied and manifest in uniquely recognizable, and stereotyped, behavioral patterns of facial expression, comportment, and autonomic arousal. Second, they are less susceptible to our intentions than other psychological states insofar as they are often triggered.… Finally, and most importantly, emotions are less encapsulated than other psychological states as evident in their global effects on virtually all aspects of cognition.[130]

We can see physical aspects of another person (embodied) and recognize their facial, bodily and vocal patterns as specific emotions. Although there is some debate, most scientists believe that there are some universal emotions that can be recognized by most neuro-typical

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[129] Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza, 1-45* and R. J. Dolan. "Emotion, Cognition, and Behavior." *Science* 298, no. 5596 (2002): 1191.

[130] Dolan, "Emotion, Cognition, and Behavior," 1191.

people.[131] These tend to be emotions of fright and anger in particular, which makes sense from an evolutionary point of view, as they are used to protect the body which allows for the continued survival of the species. If not universal, it is clear that many emotions are easily recognizable by people within the same cultural influences. Delsarte's codified Applied Aesthetics based on what he and many actors of his day perceived to be these universals, exploited this tendency. Stanislavsky was fighting against the clichéd acting that ensued.

Dolan's second point, that emotions are difficult to control and are usually initiated by a trigger rather than by a choice, is one of the key problems Stanislavsky researched. It is difficult to find an effective "trigger" (or as Stanislavsky would say a "lure" or "decoy") to induce the desired emotion, and when they do begin, emotions are difficult to control. As I wrote earlier, this was one of the key problems Stanislavsky was investigating when he began his system. Dolan's third quality of emotion is also key for the actor: since emotion influences our cognition and physicality so much, how can actors still express an artistic goal through or sometimes, despite, the emotion? Stanislavsky suggested the differences between "primary" and "secondary" emotions were key: the former stemming from a first-time event and the latter a remembered emotion. How are they different according to cognitive science?

David J. Anderson and Ralph Adolphs suggest a "Framework for Studying Emotions across Species" that can account for "emotion states [that] exhibit certain general functional and adaptive properties that apply across any specific human emotions like fear or anger, as well as

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[131] See Paul Ekman, *The Face of Man: Expressions of Universal Emotions in a New Guinea Village* (New York: Garland STPM Press, 1980).

across phylogeny" (the evolutionary developmental aspects of organisms).[132] They propose that "emotion primitives" are the "evolutionary building blocks of emotion, which are shared across" different emotions, and among different species.[133] The resulting species-typical behaviors associated with the emotions may be drastically different, however. Primates that have developed extensive higher-order cortex will have additional pathways and processes leading to differing behaviors, but the core of the emotion is the same according to this view. They define emotion as:

> an internal, central (as in central nervous system) state, which is triggered by specific stimuli (extrinsic or intrinsic to the organism). This state is encoded by the activity of particular neural circuits that give rise, in a causal sense, to externally observable behaviors, as well as to associated cognitive, somatic, and physiological responses.[134]

Animals other than humans may have these central emotion states but may not have conscious awareness of them. Humans, however, give voice to the proprioceptive experiences as "feelings."

Emotions differ from simple stimuli reactions in that they last beyond the presence of the stimuli and can be described in measures of valence and intensity. Valence refers to a pleasant or unpleasant feeling (joy is high valence, while rage is low valence), and intensity describes the level of arousal (annoyance versus fury).[135] Anderson and Adolphs suggest that these qualities

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[132] Anderson and Adolphs, "A Framework," 187.

[133] Ibid., 188.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid., 192.

"can be thought of as evolutionary building blocks of emotion, or emotion 'primitives.'''[136] For them, neither human behavior nor the experiencing of a feeling are "part of the emotion state but instead should be viewed as consequences of it (and can be pieces of evidence for it)."[137] Their theory differs from many emotion models that require a line of cause and effect of factors to reach the awareness of feeling states, whether it be James's approach with somatic effects and behavior triggering feelings or a Neuro-Darwinian approach that separates each individual emotion into a completely different process. For Anderson and Adolphs the central emotion state or "primitive" causes "multiple parallel responses."[138] Observable behavior, cognitive changes, somatic responses all happen at the same time in response to the emotion primitive. This process is the most plausible to me in that it is faster and does not need a chronological and physical ladder model to work; multiple pathways can be triggered at the same time. It also reinforces the possibility of the presence of analogous emotions for an actor as a spontaneous, personal emotion/feeling and a planned, narrative driven emotion/feeling may overlap the same emotion primitive, but travel in different pathways (even with similar feeling expressions). In this light, primary and secondary may stem from the same emotion primitives. For instance, the fear primitive triggered in response to an oncoming car in my path (Stanislavsky's primary emotion) may be the same fear primitive triggered when I act out the story at a safe distance afterward (Stanislavsky's secondary emotion); although the primitive fear central emotion state may be the same, the subsequent pathway of each may be different as my mind factors in immediacy of

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[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid., 197.

[138] Ibid., 189.

threat, environment and other factors.

Anderson and Adolphs also discuss a unique characteristic of human emotion stimuli. Unlike most other animals, humans have the ability to develop emotion states not only from external stimuli like a predator, but also from internal ones. *Memories of past events or imaginings of future ones can cause emotion primitives to ignite within us*.[139] This may be the primary reason humans can act with emotional depth and why secondary emotions (or memories of emotions) can occur. Our emotions, memories and imaginings are engaged every minute in performance; even when a character is supposed to have a flat, robotic nature, the actor must deal with any emotions that naturally arise. Emotions are always in play, whether we purposely raise them in our "Memory of Emotions" or they arise unconsciously on their own.

Most emotion theories agree that a feedback loop is involved in the emotion process.[140] Whether from a series of responses or from a central emotion primitive, the expressed behaviors serve in turn as a stimulus for additional or more intense emotion states (e.g. I feel butterflies in my stomach and realize I am nervous, so my blood pressure jumps, and I start to shake). This feedback loop working in conjunction with an emotion primitive allows an actor to start from any one of the parallel responses−more likely with several of them—causing the feedback loop to serve as a stimulus to an emotional primitive and then to enhanced responses. For instance, if

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[139] Ibid., 197.

[140] See Anderson and Adolphs, "A Framework," 195; A.D. Craig, "Interoception and Emotion: A Neuroanatomical Perspective," *Handbook of Emotions*, Third Edition, eds. M. Lewis, J.M. Haviland-Jones, and L. Feldman Barrett (New York: Guilford Press, 2008): 272–288; and Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza.*

my character is required to be angry, I could start by tensing my facial, neck and shoulder muscles, breathing in deeply and holding, intensifying my gaze, clenching my fists, and adopting an aggressive stance. My cognition would be engaged in playing the action required by the plot, which would also feed back into my emotions. All these elements would also influence my voice as I speak the lines of the play, once again reinforcing the emotion.

This process would account for the "outside-in" acting model in which an actor starts with the physicality of a character hoping an appropriate emotion will be triggered as needed; if the emotion is not created in the actor, proponents of this method believe it may still suggest the emotion to the audience. Pavel Rumyantsev, an assistant to Stanislavsky on a wide range of operas in the 1920s, took extensive notes. He reports:

> Stanislavski also reminded us that in seeking to express truthful feelings on the stage an actor can begin with his internal state and externalize his emotions or act in the reverse order, from external to internal emotions. 'If the music does not immediately suggest to you the right rhythm for your feelings then express them first externally while seeking a justifiable basis for them and that will create for you the inner emotion you need. If you accomplish your physical objective you will find that the reflex effect of this will be to stir your inner feelings.'[141]

Stanislavsky was a practical director hoping to give tools to actors, not a guru demanding strict adherence to a code. Evidence suggests that Stanislavsky also studied the works of neurophysiologist Ivan M. Sechenov (1829-1905), who insisted that "internal experiences and

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[141] Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*,312.

their physical expression are unbreakably united."[142] If they are united one should be able to enter the state from either external or internal means.

Several of today's most popular acting techniques exploit this model as well. I was able to attend a workshop on the Alba Technique developed by psychologist and psychophysiologist Susana Bloch and popularized for actors in the 1990s and 2000s. Her book *Alba Emoting: A Scientific Method for Emotion* claims to give "the capacity to regulate our emotions in a simple physical way, without mental intervention."[143] She was involved with scientific studies that found "that specific emotional feelings were linked to specific patterns of breathing, facial expression, degree of muscular tension, and postural attitudes."[144] They claim that the "'Emotional Effector Patterns' of sadness, joy, anger, fear, sexuality [eroticism], and tenderness" are the "same for all human beings, independent of their cultural origins, physical characteristics or geographical locations" and are "biological, non-psychological and non-historical."[145] While there is debate as to whether these "basic" emotions are entirely biological or at least in part

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[142] Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of an Actor* (New York: Penguin Books, 1960, 1984), 17.

[143] Susana Bloch, *Alba Emoting: A Scientific Method for Emotional Induction,* Eds. Patricia Angelin and Elizabeth Townsend (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2015).

[144] Susana Bloch, "ALBA Emoting: A Psychophysiological Technique to Help Actors Create and Control Real Emotions" *Theatre Topics* 3, no. 2 (1993): 124.

[145] Pedro Sándor, "Prologue," in *Alba Emoting: A Scientific Method for Emotional Induction,* eds. Patricia Angelin and Elizabeth Townsend (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2015), 10.

culturally determined, the narrowness of the six categories of emotion can be helpful for actors.[146]

Bloch and her team discovered groups of particular respiratory and muscular facial and postural patterns that "initiate the corresponding subjective activation (feeling), presumably by a feedback mechanism."[147] They believe that by physically manipulating the body into the outward manifestations of one of the patterns, the feedback mechanism can act as a lure to spark an actor's emotion. Importantly, the feedback loop may not always work, but as long as the audience sees the outward manifestations and grasps the correct emotion it is successful. The actor's feelings are desired but not essential. During the workshop in which I participated, I did find my feelings reflect the emotion at hand most of the time. As the instructor adjusted some of my physicality (my angry face kept shifting slightly to sad) my emotions responded in kind. Although I wouldn't want my attention diverted to such outward physical manipulations during a performance, I can see how it is a useful training and rehearsal tool. I think Stanislavsky would

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[146] For more in-depth discussion of the controversies see Joseph LeDoux, "A Neuroscientist's Perspective on Debates about the Nature of Emotion," *Emotion Review* 4, no. 4 (2012): 375–379; Alessia Celeghin, Matteo Diano, Arianna Bagnis, Marco Viola, and Marco Tamietto, "Basic Emotions in Human Neuroscience: Neuroimaging and Beyond," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017) and Isaac Wiegman, "What Basic Emotions Really Are: Encapsulated or Integrated?" *Philsci Archive* (2016).

[147] Susana Bloch, Pedro Orthous, and Guy Santibáñez-H, "Effector Patterns of Basic Emotions: A Psychophysiological Method for Training Actors," *Journal of Social Biological Structure,* 10 (1987): 1.

agree. Tortsov said that the "best way to stimulate experiences of any kind is to hide your non-existent feelings from others. The truth of your adaptations and physical actions reminds you of non-existent feelings as you hide them, and they spring alive as you recall them."[148] In other words, if you don't feel it, act like you are feeling it and try to hide the emotion. The action itself will then likely lure the feeling.

There are many examples in which Stanislavsky approaches a role from the outside in throughout his third developmental period. In March of 1913 he described a difficult time finding the right approach to his character in *The Imaginary Invalid*. After trying and discarding a completely external visual approach, then psychological means, and finally just playing a bourgeois, he says that, "During subsequent attempts things came together by chance, i.e. the psychological side experienced earlier merged with the external image I discovered quite separately. A character is sometimes formed psychologically, i.e. from the inner image of the role, but other times it is discovered through purely external exploration."[149] Benedetti notes that this idea that the internal and external work in an integrated fashion was an early shift in the system, as students had previously been taught that physical action was always a reflection of a psychological truth. This move away from the purely psychological did not immediately get into the official version of the system.[150] In his 1928 direction of the opera *Boris Godunov,* Stanislavsky counseled, "don't force your emotions, but proceed along physical lines. Act as

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[148] Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 652.

[149] KS archive number 927 in Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 216.

[150] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 216.

though the place were infested with rats, with demons. If you do this correctly the feelings will come along of their own accord."[151]

Many of Stanislavsky's students also incorporated this principle into their own teaching, at least in part. Michael Chekhov's Psychological Gesture, Imaginary Body and Centering processes move the body into a pre-determined shape allowing feeling to follow. He suggests that we are "transforming the outer thing into the inner life, and changing the inner life and the outer event."[152] Stanislavsky-based actor-trainer Bella Merlin says this "continuum between inner and outer — body and emotion — is the crux of psychophysical coordination."[153] Stanislavsky himself loved to use old photos, make-up, costumes and other physical characteristics to help feed his imagination and emotion throughout his career.

In the early 1990s Antonio Damasio proposed that a somatic marker framework accounted for a similar body loop between emotions and decision making.[154] This influential hypothesis claims that during regulatory processes certain somatosensory markers (a.k.a. interoceptive signals) arise that influence reasoning, draw from memory and express themselves as emotions. Ledoux also draws from Damasio's idea of "as if loops" when he posits that

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[151] Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 333

[152] Michael Chekhov, *Lessons for the Professional Actor* (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1992), 81.

[153] Bella Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky: The Psycho-Physical Approach to Actor Training* (London: Nick Hern Books Limited, 2001, 2013), 28.

[154] Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*: *Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (London: Vintage, 2006).

feelings are influenced by imagined bodily feedback. For instance, an individual may imagine that their heart is racing, and then go on to manifest/experience a full-fledged panic attack.[155]

For Damasio, there are two different types of inducers that trigger somatic states. Primary inducers are sensory stimuli that automatically elicit a somatic response either instinctively or through learning. Secondary inducers are memories or imaginations of one of the primary inducers that bring on a somatic state. Actors take advantage of both types of inducers. Stanislavsky's emotion memory clearly resonates with both of these definitions. Primary inducers create the primary emotions of a first-time experience. Secondary emotions are created by secondary inducers and can be manipulated into artistic expressions. In addition to the temporal difference between reaction time to a primary versus secondary inducer, different areas of the brain are indicated for each. The amygdala is activated from primary inducers whereas the ventromedial prefrontal cortex is important for secondary induction. This information supports Stanislavsky's assertion that artistic emotions are different from primary ones, and that only these secondary ones are controllable. Both primary and secondary emotions have overlap in their emotional primitives, however, so they are like two streams with separate origins that meet in the middle as a river, and then diverge into two streams again.

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[155] Joseph E. LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 296.

Tasha Poppa and Antoine Bechara have recently proposed an "update" to the somatic marker hypothesis that provides additional supportive evidence.[156] They suggest "that visceral processes mediated by afferent vagus nerve signaling participate in shaping high-order cognition by influencing activity of brainstem-level neurotransmitter systems involved in learning, memory, and motivation and valuation."[157] The vagus nerve, also called the tenth cranial nerve, is essential for parasympathetic control of the heart, lungs, and digestive tract. Rather than the spinal cord, the vagus nerve is likely the pathway by which we feel "butterflies" in our stomach when nervous and take a deep inhale when startled. The vagus nerve adjusts neurotransmitters such as norepinephrine, serotonin, acetylcholine and dopamine, all of which are needed for high level cognition including memory, action, reward and emotion regulation, all leading to goal-directed behavior.[158] Since these chemicals modify neural structures, they influence emotions and behavior.[159] For instance, low levels of serotonin are associated with depression and anxiety, but also with other negative emotions such as fear, shame, and anger. The neuromodulators

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[156] Tasha Poppa and Antoine Bechara, "The Somatic Marker Hypothesis: Revisiting the Role of the 'Body-Loop' in Decision-Making," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2018): 61.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., 63.

[159] Othalia Larue, Pierre Poirier, and Roger Nkambou, "The Emergence of (Artificial) Emotions from Cognitive and Neurological Processes," *Biologically Inspired Cognitive Architectures* 4 (2013): 61.

dopamine and norepinephrine allow for further distinction between the emotions in both valence and intensity.[160]

Interoceptive processes are also shaped by learning and attention, and influence predictions for future actions and emotions.[161] An important note for actors is that interoception can be trained. Meditation, mindfulness, yoga and other mind-body practices can all increase attention and awareness of bodily processes, leading to better control of the body and its emotions. Stanislavsky's yoga-influenced focus on muscle relaxation, breathing and other bodily functions and his attention to sharpening sensory memory reflect this notion and will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Another key quality of emotion states relevant for actors is that an emotion created by one stimulus can carry over to a new context and "influence subsequent responses to different stimuli."[162] This finding also supports Stanislavsky's idea of emotion memory, in that an actor may be able to induce a desired emotion from a stimulus unrelated to the story at hand but with an analogous feeling and let it affect the actor's action in the story context.

**Emotion Regulation**

Emotion regulation refers to the ability to upregulate and to downregulate the intensity of an emotional reaction. Upregulating is when a person intentionally intensifies their emotions, as

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[160] Ibid., 61-62.

[161] Norman Farb, Jennifer J Daubenmier, Cynthia J. Price, Tim Gard, Catherine Kerr, Barney Dunn, Anne Carolyn Klein, Martin P Paulus, and Wolf E. Mehling, "Interoception, Contemplative Practice, and Health," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol 6 (2015): 2.

[162] Anderson and Adolphs, "A Framework," 193.

when they are psyching themselves up for an athletic match or, more to our purposes, when they are trying to cry on stage. Downregulating is the intentional reduction of an emotion. When a driver cuts us off on the freeway and we withhold giving them a one-finger salute, we have likely downregulated our angry state. While an actor may be upregulating the emotions appropriate to the script, they may also be downregulating emotions associated with their own nervousness or reaction to a brilliant (or awful) acting choice.

D. W. Frank and team's meta-analysis of emotion regulation found that distinctly separate brain regions are responsible for each process so that emotion regulation is "direction-dependent."[163] They report that the amygdala decreased activity when subjects consciously downregulated (e.g. when asked to reinterpret a sad photo in a more positive manner). This process seems to work in conjunction with the parahippocampal gyrus (and other areas), which is key for episodic memory. Important to my argument is that "decreased activity in this area…suggests that downregulation processes may involve preventing the continued maintenance of the emotional stimuli in working memory."[164] This suggests that one way we can downregulate is by shifting attention away from a stimulus, dropping it from our short-term memory, increasing activity in attention and motor planning areas allowing other things to occupy our focus. Stanislavsky suggested that when actors get stage-fright they should pull their

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[163] D. W. Frank, M. Dewitta, M. Hudgens-Haneyb, D.J. Schaefferb, B.H. Ball, N.F. Schwarzb, A.A. Husseina, L.M. Smarta, and D. Sabatinelli, "Emotion Regulation: Quantitative Meta-analysis of Functional Activation and Deactivation," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 45 (2014): 202–211.

[164] Ibid., 206-207.

focus in to the smallest circle of attention and focus on a nearby object in the present. This action pulls concentration away from themselves and the audience, and puts it back on the story at hand, reducing stage fright and/or overacting for audience reaction. This feeling of *public solitude* is essential for downregulating actor emotion so character emotion may emerge.[165]

Zotev and team discuss the widely held theory that there are different networks for voluntary and automatic emotional regulation processes. The prefrontal cortex is thought to work inversely to the amygdala in conscious downregulating; as activation in the prefrontal cortex rises, activity in the amygdala lessens (again differentiating between primary and secondary emotions). When healthy subjects used real-time fMRI neurofeedback their left amygdala and six regions of the prefrontal cortex were highly activated.[166] Importantly, activation of the amygdala grew stronger as the experiment went on, indicating a learning process. The subjects also grew less reliant on the external cues of the fMRI and learned to willfully upregulate without it at all. The control group did not show the same increases in upregulation skill as the experiment group. This and other experiments have shown that it is possible for people to willfully increase amygdala activity for both down and up regulation but simple repetition of stimuli does not have that effect.[167] While these experiments are designed to help people improve their mental states, one can see how actors could learn to manipulate their emotion states with

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[165] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work,* 98-100.

[166] Vadim Zotev, Raquel Phillips, Kymberly D. Young, Wayne C. Drevets, and Jerzy Bodurka, "Prefrontal Control of the Amygdala during Real-Time FMRI Neurofeedback Training of Emotion Regulation," *Plos One* 8, no. 11 (2013): 1.

[167] Ibid.

the same technology. Until this technology is available, actors must use other feedback cues to control their regulation of emotions, such as meditation, memory of emotion, and attention exercises.

Memory is also implicated in emotion regulation. The parahippocampal gyrus is the part of the regulation networks that seems to store emotionally laden stimuli in working memory along with associated emotional memories.[168] Its activation indicates that current emotional states are likely dependent on memory of past events. Since memory can store events that happened to us directly, events that happened to others and those events we imagine, one can see that memory is key to emotions. This finding suggests that Stanislavsky's instruction for actors to experience life, art, literature and other realms to expand their horizons would help emotions as well as imagination.

Frank and team also assert that the supplementary motor cortex, responsible for planning movement, is also activated during emotion regulation. This is likely due to its responsibility to get the body to move in response to stimuli, either to engage or disengage from the emotional stimulus, and/or to mirror the emotional face and body gestures of the emotion target, even if imagined.[169] This emotional mimicry will be discussed in greater detail shortly. For now, the key point is that the supplementary motor cortex is active when a person automatically prepares to respond to external stimuli and when they consciously choose to create the appearance of an emotional cue (for instance if they laugh on cue without automatically stimulated mirth). For actors who sometimes respond automatically to the cues during a performance and at other times

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[168] Frank et al., "Emotion Regulation," 207.

[169] Ibid., 208.

must consciously choose the physical reactions, this overlap reinforces the sameness of the actions.

**Specific Emotion Paths**

This section will discuss some of the distinct emotion pathways of varying emotions both in their differences and similarities. Tettamanti and team surmise that the different pathways for emotions have "clear adaptive significance: as salient stimuli are detected, additional perceptual and attentional resources are allocated in order to process these stimuli more deeply."[170] These activations give the flexibility to address shifting needs. They examined fear, disgust, happiness and sadness by inducing the emotions with relevant film clips in order to distinguish some of the differences. While many brain regions were activated in all four emotion states as part of emotion primitives (most notably the right amygdala), fear, disgust and happiness all had additional specific neural networks activated.[171] Surprisingly, sadness did not. Fear displayed the greatest activations in motor preparation areas, presumably to ready the body for action in response to a threat. Disgust activated the insula, the basal ganglia and the somatosensory cortex

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[170] Marco Tettamanti, Elena Rognoni, Riccardo Cafiero, Tommaso Costa, Dario Galati, and Daniela Perani, "Distinct Pathways of Neural Coupling for Different Basic Emotions," *NeuroImage* 59 (2012): 1804.

[171] Ibid., 1809. In all four emotion states the following overlapping activations were (compared to Neutral): the right amygdala, the right supramarginal gyrus, the right postcentral gyrus, the left inferior and middle temporal gyri, the left fusiform gyrus, and, bilaterally, the superior parietal lobules and the inferior occipital gyri. In addition, parts of the right cerebellum were also activated.

in particular, which are implicated in perception and recognition of disgusting stimuli.[172] Happiness is considered a complex process with a large network of activations, including those involved with reasoning and appraisal of their own and other people's mental states. Both fear and disgust showed a feedback loop back to the amygdala, while happiness did not. Sadness displayed no additional networks from the other three emotions; it only reflected the common emotion primitive of the others. Other studies do suggest that sadness has a much slower onset, however, and increases more gradually.[173]

Recall that valence refers to a pleasant or unpleasant feeling (joy is high valence, while rage is low valence), and intensity describes the level of arousal (annoyance versus fury).[174] The feeling of fear has a low valence rating (we don't like it) and a high intensity level (we are ready to act). Looking back to Tortsov's madman exercise, then, if an actor thought there really were a dangerously insane person trying to get in, true fear would have taken over and they would have experienced its extreme negative valence and high intensity. As Stanislavsky stressed, this would be unhealthy and unethical. Instead, akin to watching an enjoyable horror film, the valence is

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[172] Ibid., 1814.

[173] P. R. Goldin, Hutcherson, C.A., Ochsner, K.N., Glover, G.H., Gabrieli, J.D., Gross, J.J., "The Neural Bases of Amusement and Sadness: A Comparison of Block Contrast and Subject-Specific Emotion Intensity Regression Approaches," *NeuroImage* 27 (2005): 33.

[174] Ibid., 192.

positive.[175] Ask most actors: they will tell you that it is fun to act like you are in danger. It is clearly a different, "secondary" emotion from true fear, mediated by the pre-frontal cortex.

If you ask an actor what the most difficult aspect of emotions is for them, the answer is likely to be the need to cry on cue. Human emotional crying is incredibly complex — and is therefore not studied extensively.[176] Lauren M. Bylsma, Asmir Gračanin and J.J.M. Vingerhoets, who have one of the few extensive studies of crying, confess that "investigation of the specific neural circuits supporting emotional, tearful crying in humans is still in its infancy."[177] Crying includes circuits involved with vocalizations, tear production, facial musculature, subjective feelings, emotion regulation, and social behaviors. Vocalizations with crying are stronger in childhood, while the complex feeling of "being moved to tears" generally only occurs with maturity. Consistent with previous studies, Bylsma, Gračanin and Vingerhoets surmise that the primary purpose of crying is to promote social bonding.[178]

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[175] See Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," *Movies and Methods: Volume II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 196-220, originally published in 1979; and Noël Carroll, "The Nature of Horror," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (1987): 51-59.

[176] Lauren M Bylsma, Asmir Gračanin, and Ad J J M Vingerhoets, "The Neurobiology of Human Crying," *Clinical Autonomic Research: Official Journal of The Clinical Autonomic Research Society* (2018): 1.

[177] Ibid., 8.

[178] Ibid., 2, 9.

Tears are produced in two separate duct systems. Lacrimal glands produce emotional and reflexive tears (such as from an onion or a puff of air). Basal tears are produced in the accessory lacrimal glands under the eyelids and lubricate our eyes as we blink. Biochemists have found that emotional tears contain significantly more protein, potassium, manganese than other tears. They are also filled with various hormones such prolactin and adrenocorticotropin (ACTH), which is produced under stress.[179] Excess manganese is often found in brains of people who are depressed, and higher levels of prolactin are found in women (a chemical linked to breastfeeding). Lacrimal glands are controlled primarily by parasympathetic nerves, which connect directly to several areas of the brain through a brain stem hub called the lacrimal nuclei.[180]

Just before someone begins to cry emotional tears, both the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems are activated. For those people who develop tears and actually start crying, the parasympathetic activity remains much more active than it does for those who don't break into actual tears. Sympathetic activity calms quickly after the tears begin, however. Bylsma and team suggest this effect may be due to the slowing of respiratory rate in criers.[181] After crying, both sympathetic and parasympathetic systems generally return to a normal baseline. Some scientists believe the crying may help restore homeostasis by relieving some of

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[179] Chip Walter, "Why Do We Cry?" *Scientific American Mind* 17, no. 6 (2006): 44.

[180] Bylsma et al., "The Neurobiology of Human Crying," 3-4.

[181] Ibid., 5.

the stress and negative feelings by this parasympathetic action as well as arouse sympathetic feelings in others.[182]

The neural circuits of emotional crying are understandably complex as each aspect has its own network (e.g. vocalizations have one and face muscles another), but they are all a part of the central autonomic network (CAN). Bylsma and team explain: "The CAN is involved in visceromotor, neuroendocrine, complex motor, and pain-modulating control mechanisms essential for the maintenance of homeostasis, emotional expression, and responses to stress, and, as such, it is crucial for adaptation and survival."[183] There is clearly a great deal of brain stem involvement (indicating an early evolutionary development) as babies who are born without most of their cerebrum are still able to cry. Two chemicals, serotonin and testosterone, part of the CAN's neuroendocrine system, play an interesting role in the ability to cry. In animal studies, increasing serotonin levels in the brain reduces distress vocalizations during crying, and the calming effect they have in humans seems to reduce the intensity of emotional reactions, including crying. Alcohol, on the other hand, decreases the "crying threshold" for humans, allowing them to cry more easily. Although prolactin may contribute a slight positive force, testosterone is likely to play a strong inhibitory role for crying, suggesting a reason that women generally cry more often than men.[184] While one would not suggest drinking alcohol or stopping anti-depressants to cry more easily, the effect of these substances on emotions should be noted.

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[182] Ibid., 6.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid., 9; Bylsma et al. also report that on average women cry 4-5 times per month while men cry 0-1 times per month.

Of additional note for actors is the discovery that "authentic" (spontaneous) emotional expressions that originate in these subcortical areas are generally, as Bylsma and colleagues note, "more synchronized, smooth, and symmetrical relative to voluntary 'fake' expressions, which typically are less smooth and have more variable dynamics. Voluntary control of vocalizations requires the forebrain, in particular, the mediofrontal cortex…and the motor cortex."[185] While it seems plausible that some actors may be able to externally mimic crying and other deep-brained emotions effectively, a spectator may perceive a subconscious difference between that and spontaneously generated tears. It may be worth studying authentic emotions more carefully in the classroom (if "authenticity" is a goal). Stanislavsky said that emotions in performance are not "real" emotions, meaning that they are not spontaneously generated and that the reasons for the tears are not the actor's own. Stanislavsky's assertion, however, that the emotions expressed can be "analogous" to a character's emotion, while not real in the sense mentioned above, may still be genuinely experienced by the actor. If the emotion primitives are the same, then they can both be "real" but follow different pathways after diverging from their common primitive; in the case of crying, perhaps these differing pathways account for the slight difference between first time (primary) crying and acted (secondary) crying.

The lines between "real" or primary emotion and "acted" or secondary emotions are thin; the controllability of secondary emotions is a key difference. In order for an emotion to be controlled, the actor must be able to have the proprioception abilities to feel the secondary emotion, understand how it is reflected in the body and change it if necessary. Lauri Nummenmaa and her team created body maps of typical sensations noticed by people while

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[185] Ibid., 7.

experiencing various emotions. Perception of these bodily emotions likely causes the conscious experience of feelings.[186] Stanislavsky agreed with Salvini's understanding of a mental duality on stage. He quotes: "While I act, I live a double life, I laugh and cry, and still I analyze my tears and my laughter, in order that they can affect more strongly the hearts of those I want to touch." He continues the thought, insisting that the "dividing of oneself does not interfere with inspiration. On the contrary, one helps the other." He finally concludes, "I have two wills on stage, not one."[187] Carnicke points out that "even more tellingly, he uses hyphens to yoke the 'human being' with the 'actor' (*chelovek-akter*) and the 'actor' with the 'character' (*artisto-rol*) typographically connecting the experience of the performing actor with that of the person and role."[188]

Bruce McConachie suggests that David Saltz's argument fits well with cognitive theories.[189] Saltz convincingly makes the argument that fiction in theatre acts as "a cognitive template" that helps a spectator mentally structure and understand the "reality on stage" as

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[186] Lauri Nummenmaa, Enrico Glerean, Riitta Hari, and Jari K. Hietanen, "Bodily Maps of Emotions," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no. 2 (2014): 646.

[187] K.S. Stanislavskii, Sobranie Sochinenii, I (1990), 150 and V, part 2 (1993), 379; Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion*, 214 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 119. Carnicke notes: "Joseph Roach in *The Player's Passion…* uses this passage as translated in *Building a Character* to support his contention that Stanislavski agrees with Diderot," 205-206.

[188] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 119.

[189] McConachie, "Falsifiable Theories," 553-577.

"infiction."[190] He affirms Stanislavsky idea of "living truthfully" on stage as a character as "the actual embodiment of alternative structures of reality."[191] The engagement for the spectator with the action on stage (infiction) allows the spectator to see what McConachie calls a cognitive blend and what Stanislavsky calls the "actor-character" (artisto-rol).[192] This infiction reality is especially important for the communication of emotions to the audience and to fellow actors within the infiction. So emotions experienced by actors within the infiction framework may have the same emotion primitives activated as the actor does at other times, but each would have a different subsequent neural pathway as analogous emotions.

**Communication of Emotions**

Although I've primarily been discussing what actors experience as emotion while performing, it must be noted that the spectator experience and the actor experience overlap. After all, an actor is usually reacting to another person on stage. As mentioned earlier, Stanislavsky wrote: "Until now, we've worked with the process of external, visible, corporeal communication on stage, but there exists another more important aspect*: internal, indivisible, spiritual*

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[190] David Saltz, "Infiction and Outfiction: The Role of Fiction in Theatrical Performance," Eds. David Krasner and David Z. Saltz, *Theater: Theory/Text/Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 203.

[191] Ibid., 218.

[192] For a thorough description of Cognitive Blend Theory see Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

*communication*."[193] Both of these aspects point toward "communication" as the key. Stanislavsky reported that sometimes he felt that he had a wonderful experience on stage, but Nemirovitch-Danchenko would berate him for a poor performance.[194] His feelings (among other things) were not communicating to the audience. I will address communication in more depth in Chapter 3, but two aspects of it — mirroring systems and empathy — need special mention here.

As previously discussed, Stanislavsky says there are multiple ways to lure an emotion, but the "most important of all, [are] from our relationships with other people.[195] Actors are in relationship with other actors on stage. During infiction moments of a performance, the actor-character (*artisto-rol*) is in relationship with another actor-character. When I am acting, the fictional elements of my scene partner's character are perceived through my vision and audition, my body is also reacting as a real human perceiving another real human body. This section deals with the latter.

The human body is set from birth as an imitating machine. Even young infants will automatically imitate their care-giver's actions such as sticking out a tongue. If we are somewhat empathic people, we will catch ourselves mirroring the facial and body gestures of those with whom we are conversing. Scientists believe this sensorimotor simulation tendency allows for better understanding and a feeling of connection between people. Human mirroring systems are a

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[193] K.S. Stanislavskii, Sobranie Sochinenii II (1989), 338 in Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus,* 144.

[194] Maria Ouspenskaya, "Notes on Acting with Maria Ouspenskaya," 204-205.

[195] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 225 – 226.

major factor in how this imitation tendency works. Stanislavsky instructs, "we must study other people, and get as close to them emotionally as we can, until sympathy for them is transformed into feelings of our own."[196] This type of empathy can be considered a type of postural or facial empathy.[197]

Bruce McConachie points out that Vittorio Gallese and his co-workers have identified the mirror system as "the basis of social cognition" and that they "have strong evidence that it is spectators who mirror the motor actions of those they watch on stage; cognitive imitation is a crucial part of spectatorship."[198] Although residing within the infiction, the actor is also a spectator.

For someone watching or listening to someone else do an activity (the stimulus), their own mental mirroring systems respond. Rizzolatti and team explain:

> [A]n action is understood when its observation causes the motor system of the observer to "resonate." So, when we observe a hand grasping an apple, the same population of neurons that control the execution of grasping movements becomes active in the

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[196] Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares,* 190.

[197] C. Daniel Batson, "These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy,* ed. Jean Decety and William Ickes (Cambridge: MIT Press Scholarship, 2013), 4-5.

[198] McConachie, "Falsifiable Theories," 564.

observer's motor areas…. In other words, we understand an action because the motor representation of that action is activated in our brain.[199]

Not only are the viewer's areas of the brain involved in movement activated, they also activate neurons in areas that are responsible for a *physical sensation of feeling the movement of another person*.[200]

Other neuron systems seem to be "anti-mirror," or control systems that enable us to recognize that the movement or emotion is not in our own body when watching it in another person. This theory would indicate that when we see someone do an action, our brain perceives the information as if we were doing it, but we ultimately know that we are not. This mirroring includes the musculature and other expressions of emotions. When we see and hear the signs of an emotion, our corresponding mirroring systems simulate the same emotional patterns in our own bodies. Our control systems moderate the extent of the effect, producing empathy: "the

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[199] Giacomo Rizzolatti, Leonardo Fogssai and Vittorio Gallese, "Neurophysiological Mechanisms Underlying the Understanding and Imitation of Action," *Neuroscience*, Vol. 2 (September 2001): 661.

[200] Sourya Acharya and Samarth Shukla, "Mirror Neurons: Enigma of the Metaphysical Modular Brain," *Journal of Natural Science, Biology, and* Medicine 3.2 (2012): 118–124 and V. Gazzola and C., Keysers, "The Observation and Execution of Actions Share Motor and Somatosensory Voxels in all Tested Subjects: Single-Subject Analyses of Unsmoothed fMRI Data," *Cereb Cortex* 19(6) (2009) :1239-1255. My italics.

process of sharing feelings, regardless of valence (positive/negative), but with the explicit knowledge that the other person is the origin of this emotion."[201]

Research has shown that a large number of brain regions are activated when emotional mirroring occurs, not just motor areas.[202] Emotions are closely linked to and overlap with memory centers. Just as we use our own memories when we experience an emotional feeling, our memory centers are also activated when we see someone else experience an emotion. These physical simulations help us understand what someone else is going through on our own emotional level, without having to construct a mental justification of their situation. This mentalizing, referred to as Theory of Mind (ToM), is considered an aspect of cognitive empathy, where one "puts themselves in the shoes" of another person. The process yields more "abstract, propositional knowledge about the other's mental state" using reasoning and inference.[203] ToM is a rehearsal process for intellectual analysis; simulation occurs during performance.

This simulation may occur naturally as an actor-character interacts with another actor-character; if it does not, then purposely simulating may cause the feedback loop to stimulate the emotion in the actor. Gallese and Caruana suggest that "emotional states are relational properties

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[201] Katrin Preckel, Philipp Kanske, and Tania Singer, "On the Interaction of Social Affect and Cognition: Empathy, Compassion and Theory of Mind," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2018): 1.

[202] Vittorio Gallese, and Fausto Caruana, "Embodied Simulation: Beyond the Expression/Experience Dualism of Emotions," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 6 (2016): 397.

[203] Preckel, Kanske, and Singer, "On the Interaction of Social Affect and Cognition," 1.

of an individual within a given social context more than inaccessible intrinsic psychological properties of a subject."[204] Humans are social creatures and as actors, our emotions are intimately tied to those onstage with us.

Scientific research also supports Stanislavsky and his students' observations (and the Alba Technique) that when actors moves their bodies into the physical position of an emotion, a feedback loop can stimulate the emotion in them. Adrienne Wood and team demonstrate that when a subject simulates a viewed facial expression, "they partially activate the corresponding emotional state in themselves, which provides a basis for inferring the underlying emotion of the expresser."[205] An actor watches their scene partner and in addition to the infiction information, they have an intrinsic physical simulation reaction. If this view is one of suffering, for example, then a core network including the anterior insula and the anterior middle cingulate cortex, responsible for their own perceived sense of suffering, is activated.[206]

The complementary concept of empathic concern, also called compassion, is a "social emotion elicited by witnessing the suffering of others and is rather associated with feelings of concern and warmth, linked to the motivation to help."[207] Compassionate concern activates reward circuits, while empathy does not; we feel good when we act compassionately towards

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[204] Gallese and Caruana, "Embodied Simulation," 397.

[205] Adrienne Wood, Magdalena Rychlowska, Sebastian Korb, and Paula Niedenthal, "Review: Fashioning the Face: Sensorimotor Simulation Contributes to Facial Expression Recognition," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20 (2016): 227.

[206] Preckel, Kanske, and Singer, "On the Interaction of Social Affect and Cognition," 1.

[207] Ibid.

someone. On the other hand, one may feel empathic distress if sharing suffering of another too deeply. This leads not only to pain but in everyday (non-theatrical) situations, it tends to make the person suffering empathic distress less likely to help the other suffering person or other anti-social reactions. Compassion counteracts this negative aspect with positive emotions, thereby acting as a regulation strategy. Reappraisal is a cognitive strategy that helps reduce negative affect by activating a "fronto-parietal network associated with cognitive control and attention regulation."[208] Counseling often offers patients ways to reappraise situations.

**Conclusion: Emotions and the System**

All of these socio-affective and socio-cognitive strategies work together in most healthy adults, but we often favor one or another. Actors should be proficient with all of these. It is important for an actor's "mental hygiene" — to borrow a Stanislavskian phrase — that actors avoid the empathic distress of feeling another's (including their own character's) pain without the separation and positive feelings associated with compassion or reappraisal. I went to a staged intimacy training workshop in which after each intimate exercise the facilitators asked us to continually bring the physical touch out of the personal and into a professional distance.[209] They suggested that at the end of intimate work, the actors should verbally reframe the experience (e.g. by reciting "Our characters are in love. We are actors in a scene") to distance their emotions from the characters' emotions and help avoid some of the actor bleed-over emotions (often romances) so common in productions. This reappraising can help alleviate any empathic distress

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[208] Ibid., 4.

[209] At ATHE, Boston, August 2018 with Chelsea Pace from Theatrical Intimacy Education.

and create a healthy compassion instead. Many practitioners have found this type of purposeful distancing to be helpful after any emotionally intensive work.

Boleslavsky stressed the importance of "spiritual communication" that relied on "spiritual concentration." This "ability to say to any of your feelings:" he stressed, "'stop, and fill my entire being!' This faculty can be developed and trained as much as one can train the human body, — and this training is the main problem of the creative school of acting."[210] Empathy can be trained and compassion-based meditation can alter the "function and structure of key empathetic brain regions such as increasing the thickness in the anterior insula."[211] Training has been shown scientifically to increase the emotion capabilities of empathy; it is not hard to see how Stanislavsky's instruction to increase emotional capacity through purposely increasing affective exposure and practice may be doing the same thing.

Sharon Carnicke insists that "If there is, indeed, one piece of advice that Stanislavsky consistently offers in regard to emotion, it is his insistence on broadening one's knowledge as a way to expand one's store of affective memory."[212] Throughout all phases of his career, Stanislavsky thought emotion was central for the actor. He searched most directly for ways in which to lure it during his third stage, however, while he was first developing the system. By his last phase, he still felt emotion was important but had concluded that it is a difficult thing to go after directly. Instead, a focus on action was key.

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[210] Boleslavsky, "Lecture 13", in Brault, "The Theory and Practice," 105.

[211] Abigail A. Marsh, "The Neuroscience of Empathy," *Current Opinions in Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2018): 112.

[212] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 129.

# CHAPTER 2

# PHYSICAL ACTION

*The objects of imitation are men in action* and *on actions again all success or failure depends.*

−Aristotle [213]

## Introduction

Many acting books and companies place the concept of action at the center of their approaches. From Ruth Zaporah's improvisational based Action Theater, to Robert Benedetti's popular *Action!: Acting for Film and Television,* to the practical *Actions: The Actor's Thesaurus* by Marina Caldarone, action remains key to theatre for many current teachers and practitioners.

Stanislavsky placed great emphasis on action, especially in his later years. His descriptions and definitions of the concept, however, are incomplete and often vague. As I discussed in the Introduction, Stanislavsky himself did not document his thoughts about acting as they evolved during the final phase of his life. Following the publication of his books he moved from a primary emphasis on emotion to the Method of Physical Actions and finally to what he called Active Analysis. His later thinking was mostly recorded by actors and assistants who worked on projects with him. The way Stanislavsky describes actions in these accounts is

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[213] Aristotle, "Poetics, Section 1," trans. S. H. Butcher, ed. Daniel C. Stevenson, *The Internet Classics Archive,* http://classics.mit.edu//Aristotle/poetics.html.

sometimes intellectual or descriptive rather than bodily oriented. The current trend of contemporary Stanislavskian teachers tends to mimic this apparently intellectual, rather than physical, approach, instructing students to compose lists of "action verbs" that may never be physicalized in the body. This chapter closely examines Stanislavsky's final approach to acting, Active Analysis, as a rehearsal and teaching tool in the context of that research.

**Stanislavsky's Goal-Directed Action**

For all the emphasis Stanislavsky placed on emotion in his early work, he always stressed the importance of action. After a successful opening of Moscow Art Theatre's 1910 production of *The Brother's Karamazov*, Nemirovich−Danchenko was excited by the "revolution" of a writer's theatre taking over. He wrote to Stanislavsky, as if it was a given for the two of them, that "the theatre that was demanded above all was action, movement," but "Chekhov put an end to that."[214] Action as central to drama was clearly a topic of discussion. As Benedetti has convincingly argued in several publications, this was a period of great distrust and disagreement between the two men. The series of letters after this production were a time of new attempts to meld their working methods into a unified system. Nemirovich−Danchenko says that "the corrective I have introduced into your theory plays an important role in all this," but he conceded to Stanislavsky his basic system of "dividing the scenes into units, into *wishes*, then on to

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[214] Nemirovich−Danchenko, "Letter 318, October 1910," in *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters*, ed. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 1991), 284. Nemirovich-Danchenko went on, however, to say that the new dramatic forms have revolutionized what theatre means and that action as movement is no longer necessary. This was one of the many discrepancies between their understandings.

feelings."[215] These "wishes" imply an action to achieve them. Dramaturg and Moscow Art Theatre employee Vladimir Volkenstein (1883-1974) wrote a monograph on Stanislavsky in 1922 that placed significant emphasis on his use of physical action in the system.[216] In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavsky instructs the actor, "when you are called upon to experience tragedy do not think about your emotions at all. Think about what you have to *do."*[217] As Carnicke points out, most practitioners use contradictory techniques if they lead to a good result on stage; Stanislavsky "was master of embracing apparently contradictory ideas when it suited his purposes. He saw the conflict in asserting both that emotion is the constant of acting and that acting cannot be viewed as separate from structural form in action."[218] This "structural form in action" became the action−centered base of his methods. Indeed, its focus is what distinguishes dramatic arts (e.g. theatre, film, and certain forms of dance) from other art forms: they can all convey emotion, but only performance embodies real, physical action.[219]

In *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary,* Stanislavsky refers back to Aristotle (385 -323 BC) with his instruction:

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[215] Ibid., "Letter 317: Nemirovich-Danchenko to Lilina (Stanislavsky's wife), September 9, 1910," 284. Italics in original.

[216] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 268.

[217] Constantin Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, ed. Elizabeth Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1948), 151.

[218] Carnicke. *Stanislavsky in Focus,*162.

[219] Ibid., 147.

> Acting is action. *The basis of theatre is doing, dynamism*. The word 'drama' itself in ancient Greek means 'an action being performed.' In Latin the corresponding word is *actio*, and the root of this same word has passed into our vocabulary, 'action', 'actor,' 'act'. So, drama is an action we can see being performed, and, when he comes on, the actor becomes an agent in that action.[220]

As Carnicke observes, "Dynamism" (*aktivnost)* is "the state of being in action, which, in Stanislavsky's eyes is the proper state for the actor in performance."[221] Stanislavsky's verb choice clarifies his meaning of the word action. Carnicke explains that he rejected the common Russian word *igrat',* which roughly means "to play" or more specifically a theatricalized "to playact" and instead chooses *deistvovat'* derived from the Russian word for "action" *deistvie.* Rather than "to play" as pretense, the actor is "to do" as the Greek *dran* (which became "drama") implies.[222] The crucial aspect of *deistvie* is that it "suggests purposeful action aimed at solving a specific problem."[223] He further clarifies his meaning when he suggests that *opening a door* in itself is not an action in his sense. But "opening a door in order to find out if an intruder stands outside is *deistvie*."[224] This action, expressed by an active verb, is both " 'mental'/'inner' (*vnutrennee)* and 'physical'/'outer' (*fizicheskoe/vneshnee).*" By contrast, Nemirovich−Danchenko defines action simply as outer activity. Conversely, Bobby Lewis emphasized that

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[220] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary,* 40. (Italics in original.)

[221] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 172.

[222] Ibid., 88, 169.

[223] Ibid., 89.

[224] Ibid.

for the Group Theatre, "it means *inner* action – not physical action."[225] Neither of these men acknowledged the complexity of Stanislavsky's meaning of action.

This emphasis on "to do" led to one of the system's most recognizable aspects: the magic if (*Magicheskoe esli by)*.[226] An actor should ask "What would I do if I found myself in this circumstance?"[227] Jean Benedetti points out that Stanislavsky used this method early in his work, calling it "here, today, now… 'What would you do, as a private individual, if such and such happened?"[228] Stanislavsky's rehearsal notes from his 1906 production of *Woe from Wit* vividly explains the idea:

> "What would I be like, how would I feel, if this were May 31?" That is one way of putting the question, there is a second way, "what would I do if this were May 31?" Please see the difference between the two? It is of enormous importance. You must ask the kinds of questions that lead to dynamic action.[229]

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[225] Lewis, *Method--or Madness?.* 29.

[226] Ibid., 176.

[227] Carnicke points out the difference between this question and the American Method's version. Lee Strasberg "adopted what he thought to be Evgeny Vakhtangov's modification: 'What would motivate me, the actor, to behave in the way that the character does?' This question allows the actor to replace the play's circumstance with a personal one (called a 'substitution')." Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 176.

[228] Benedetti, *Stanislavsky: His Life and Art*, 313.

[229] KS archive number 1306 in Benedetti, *His Life in Art*, 224.

Further evidence of Stanislavsky's emphasis on action comes from his protégé Boleslavsky in his lectures about the system. Boleslavsky explained that if we look at each of us as human souls, we see that:

> all life is action: When you are born, the very first moment you start to act; you start to do something. [For] every human being no matter if it is simply an embryo or a developed human being, action is the first symptom of life. What would you say is the foundation we can build on in our creation of a human soul? Do you not think it is the action of acting?[230]

**The System and Action**

Although Stanislavsky counseled that "on stage it is necessary to act, either outwardly or inwardly," the system began to describe how an actor may use action as more than just a series of movements.[231] His concept of action must always come from attempts to solve a problem. Carnicke makes a strong case for translating Stanislavsky's term *zadacha* as "problem" rather than, as most American followers of Stanislavsky do, "objective." She points out that *zadacha* is most often used in everyday speech as "problem" or "task."[232] Hapgood's translation, however, chose to translate it as "objective," a word that induces the actor to search for an elusive goal as outcome rather than solving a problem in a more tangible matter, creating an "impulse toward action."[233] Stanislavsky himself suggests the analogy between the character's *zadacha* and

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[230] Brault, "The Theory and Practice of Actor Training," 103.

[231] Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, 37.

[232] Benedetti prefers to use "task."

[233] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 87-88.

solving a math problem, to which "the solution lies in the action."[234] Carnicke stresses that "taken together, the concepts of 'problem' (*zadacha*) and 'action' (*deistvie*) comprise the heart of Stanislavsky's system. Therefore, drawing a distinction between the two is important. By defining a problem, which originates in the circumstances of the play, the actor logically discovers his or her action."[235] Lee Strasburg even used the terms "problem" and "task" rather than "objective" as he derived the concepts from "his teachers" (Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya, both of whom had worked directly with Stanislavsky) rather than Hapgood's books.[236]

For Stanislavsky, the action that solves a problem of the play as a whole is the through-action or through-task (*skvoznoe deistvie:* literally "end-to-end action"). It is the overall, unifying action of the play. Each character also has their own through-action (or through-task) that unifies their actions. In *An Actor's Work* Tortsov explains:

> Everything that happens in a play, all its individual Tasks, major or minor, all the actor's creative ideas and actions, which are analogous to the role, strive to fulfil the play's Supertask. Their common link with it, and the sway it holds over everything that happens in the play, is so great that even the most trivial detail, if it is irrelevant to the Supertask, becomes harmful, superfluous, drawing one's attention away from the essential meaning of the work.[237]

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[234] Ibid.

[235] Ibid., 88.

[236] Ibid., 65.

[237] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 307.

So, the actor examines the given circumstances as found in the text. These circumstances define a problem that must be solved through the playing of actions. Actors must then choose actions for individual moments or "bits" of the play that work towards solving the problem or super-task. Together, these actions form the through-task (or through-action) that lead to the super-task. These actions help define the structure of the play as each new action defines a new unit of the through-task — or "beat" in common American usage.[238] The logic of the through-action was essential for Stanislavsky. When he directed opera for instance, if he didn't feel the libretto's text added up to correct action for main characters, he would change it.[239]

The concept moved to America in much the same form. In a draft of *An Actor Works on a Role,* Stanislavsky used an anatomical metaphor to explain the structure of a play. The roles were the "skeleton and structure," with "arteries, nerves, pulse."[240] Both Boleslavsky and then The Group Theatre adapted the term "spine," popularizing it in America.[241] Boleslavsky's lecture entitled "Species and Beats" discussed the importance of both the spine of the play and the spine of the character.[242] "You open your window in the morning, you eat breakfast, etc., but at the same time are you not also driving toward some goal?... Let us call this the "spine" or backbone.

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[238] Carnicke explains that the term "beat" likely came from the accents of émigré teachers who described it as "bits" of the play "strung together like beads." Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 171.

[239] Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 352.

[240] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 159.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Ibid., 181.

It is your wish."[243] So for Boleslavsky, "every time there is a new or different action there is a new or different beat, and a part should be so divided that every beat follows closely every other one, until you have a perfect chain that you go through in the performance of a part."[244] This "chain" is the super-task.

**Method of Physical Actions**

The system needed a way to organize and prioritize action. "Instead of feelings, which are elusive and unreliable," Stanislavsky explained, "I turn to easy physical actions."[245] In 1929 Stanislavsky wrote:

> the objective is as follows: let the actor answer me with a clear conscious as to what he will be doing physically; that is, how he will act within the given circumstances, that have been created by the playwright, or the director, or the actor himself in his imagination. When these physical actions become clearly defined, it will only remain for the actor to physically perform them. Note that I am saying — physically perform, and not emote, because with correct physical action, emotion will be born of its own accord.[246]

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[243] Brault, "The Theory and Practice of Actor Training," 166-167. The Group Theatre adapted the term "spine" and popularized it in America.

[244] Ibid., 125.

[245]Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 512.

[246] Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (Collected Works in Eight Volumes), vol. 4, (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1954-1961), 267 in Levin, *The Stanislavski Secret*, 10-11.

Concentrating on action would also rid actors of what he thought was creativity-inhibiting table work, or, as Benedetti aptly summarizes: "Their minds were so stuffed that their bodies could not move."[247] Irina and Igor Levin assert that Stanislavsky began to formally call this process the Method of Physical Actions in 1935. David Krasner makes a strong case for Stanislavsky's early experiments with what became the Method of Physical Action as far back as 1906.[248] Although used in the 1929-1930 production plan for *Othello,* Jean Benedetti points out in the Introduction to the Levins' book *The Stanislavsky Secret,* "Stanislavsky never wrote down his final formulation of the 'system' and the Method of Physical Action."[249] Joseph Roach's influential *A Players Passion* claims that "Stanislavski regarded the method of physical actions as the culmination of his life's work. It rests on the now familiar principle that every thought and feeling is connected to a physical action, that mind is merely the subjective aspect of an objective process called body."[250] Sonya Moore's writings greatly influenced Western understandings of the Method of Physical Actions as well. She said, "Stanislavski attributed a vital role to the method of physical actions after he discovered that a physical action is the key to an actor's emotions."[251] Moore explain the concept of physical action as "the whole complex inner life of

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[247] Benedetti, *Stanislavsky: His Life and Art*, 355.

[248] Krasner, "Stanislavsky's System, Sense-Emotion," 199.

[249] Jean Benedetti, "Introduction," in Levin, *The Stanislavsky Secret,* 1.

[250] Roach, *The Player's Passion*, 213.

[251] Sonia Moore, "The Method of Physical Actions," *The Tulane Drama Review*, no. 4 (1965): 93.

moods, desires, reactions, feelings [that are] expressed through a simple physical action."[252] These physical actions will be the "bait" for the actor's emotion. For her, even the spoken word served as a physical action. She claimed that all the elements of Stanislavsky's system were "grouped together around the physical action to help *its* truthful execution."[253] When asked how an actor should use the Method of Physical Actions during rehearsals Moore replies at length:

> Students must be taught awareness of the psycho-physical process of an action. Any exercises have value if students understand their purpose: to become aware of the laws of nature through which we function. They must learn to fulfill the psycho-physical action. In rehearsing a play, an actor must know that an action is his means of building a character; he must be capable of selecting physical actions that express the character and will involve his inner life. [254]

As David Krasner points out, Moore and Roach's analysis is based partly on Vasily Toporkov's (1889-1970) *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*.[255] Toporkov reports that in the final years of his teaching, Stanislavsky instructed, "Do not speak to me about feeling. We cannot set feeling; we can only set physical action."[256] In fact, Toporkov claims that it must start the rehearsal process: "First of

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[252] Ibid., 91.

[253] Ibid., 92 (italics in original).

[254] Ibid., 92- 93.

[255] Krasner, "Stanislavski System, Sense," 208.

[256] Vasiliĭ Osipovich Toporkov and Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 160.

all, you must establish the logical sequence of your physical actions."[257] These writings seem to emphasize the priority of the actor's physical movement, *rather than* the inner motivations of the actor.

**Active Analysis**

Stanislavsky wrote a letter to his son in December of 1935:

> I'm setting a new device (*priem*) in motion now, a new approach to the role. It involves reading the play today, and tomorrow rehearsing it on stage. What can we rehearse? A great deal. A character comes in, greets everybody, sits down, tells of events that have just taken place, expresses a series of thoughts. Everyone can act this, guided by their own life experience. So, let them act. And so, we break the whole play, episode by episode, into physical actions. When this is done exactly, correctly, so that it feels true and it inspires our belief in what is happening on stage, then we can say that the line of the life of the human body has been created. This is no small thing, but half the role.[258]

Although Stanislavsky refers to this as a "new method," he had been experimenting with the use of improvisation in rehearsal for many years. In 1905 — during the second phase of Stanislavsky's work and before the First Studio was created — Stanislavsky, influenced by Meyerhold's ideas, began using improvisation when working on *The Drama of Life,* much to Nemirovich-Danchenko's displeasure. "Under the influence of Meyerhold's absurd blabberings about the need to rehearse as the spirit moves, you suddenly felt the desire to exploit a method

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[257] Ibid., 161.

[258] Konstantin Stanislavsky, "Letter 332, Stanislavsky to I. K. Alekseev, Dec.1935," SS, VIII (1961), 421 – 422 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 154.

you claim to have been 'dreaming about for a long time.'…What pleased you most was the fact that there was no need for discussions, for analysis, for psychology."[259] These ideas eventually led to what has come to be known as Active Analysis. Russian stage director Georgii Tovstonogov claims that the "Method of Active Analysis is in my opinion the most perfect method for with the actor, the crowning achievement of Stanislavsky's lifelong search in the sphere of methodology."[260]

Bella Merlin, who was among the first Western European actors to study at the Moscow Art Theatre after it opened to the west in the 1990s, describes the differences between these two final methods:

> In many ways, the method of physical actions and active analysis are very similar in the rehearsal techniques: rather than using sedentary textual analysis or imaginative visualizations, the actor now accesses character through experience. In other words, by getting up and doing it through a process of improvisation. It's important to note that there is a crucial difference between the two approaches. The method of physical actions is concerned with finding a logical line or 'score' of individual actions through a scene,

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[259] Nemirovich-Danchenko, "Letter 264, Nemirovich-Danchenko to Stanislavsky, 1905," *Moscow Art Theatre Letters*, 219-220.

[260] GeorgiiÌ Aleksandrovich Tovstonogov, *The Profession of the Stage-Director* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972) (out of print) in James Thomas, *A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016): epigraph.

while active analysis is an holistic system integrating body and mind, and most importantly spirit.[261]

Sharon Carnicke explains that the division between the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis sprang from Stanislavsky's protégés, namely Mikhail Kedrov (894-1972), Vasily Toporkov, and Maria Knebel.[262] They had been working together with these new ideas as they developed a production of Moliere's *Tartuffe* under Stanislavsky's tutelage. After Stanislavsky died, the production was staged at the Moscow Art Theatre directed by Kedrov, who stressed the Soviet approved Method of Physical Actions. As Carnicke lays out in her *Stanislavsky in Focus*, the "psycho" part of the concept was not amenable to the Social Realism of the censors, so the separation between "psycho"(internal) and "physical" (external) grew.[263] Kedrov eventually became Artistic Director of the organization and promptly fired Knebel as she wasn't one of his "students."[264] Knebel was a proponent of Active Analysis but Kedrov's influence as Artistic Director and the "rightful heir" to Stanislavsky's ideas allowed his understanding to pervade.

Yet, these two methods often become conflated. Krasner states, "Active analysis, frequently attributed to Stanislavsky's 'late' period beginning in the late 20s or early 30s, emphasizes the 'through-line' of physical actions. It is sometimes even called 'the Method of

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[261] Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky,* 4-5.

[262] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 153 – 154.

[263] Ibid., especially chapter 7.

[264] M. O. Knebel, "*Vsia zhizn'"* 477, in Sharon Marie Carnicke, "The Knebel Technique," *Actor Training,* ed. Alison Hodge (London: Routledge, 2010), 103.

Physical Actions' and referred to as 'scoring the text.'"[265] James Thomas suggests that the method of Active Analysis was "misnamed at first, the method of physical actions" instead of being two separate methodologies.[266]

I had the great fortune of participating in "The S Word: A Practical Acting Laboratory" at the University of California, Riverside, in April of 2018.[267] This workshop, part of an annual symposium surrounding the work of Stanislavsky and its contemporary applications, was "a practice-based research weekend, applying actor training to global questions surrounding empathy, dynamic listening, ceremony, healing, and the power of language."[268] I was assigned to Sharon Carnicke's section of the workshop, which explored Stanislavsky's later rehearsal method of Active Analysis. Although I had read about extensively about Active Analysis, the

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[265] Krasner, "Stanislavski System, Sense," 196.

[266] James Thomas, *A Director's Guide to Stanislavsky's Active Analysis (*London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016), xiii.

[267] The third international "The S Word" event held University of California, Riverside from April 6th-8th 2018, with co-conveners, Dr. Paul Fryer (Associate Director of The Stanislavski Centre) and Dr. Bella Merlin (professor of acting and directing at UCR). I write about this workshop and its findings in greater extent in my article "Page - Body - Performance: A Journey into Active Analysis and How it Helps the Actor's Body Learn." *Stanislavsky Studies*. London: Taylor and Francis. Spring, 2019.

[268] Richard Gonzales, "UCR Department of Theatre, Film, and Digital Production," November 28, 2017, https://theatre.ucr.edu/stanislavski-the-s-word-a-practical-acting-laboratory/.

workshop helped me realize that I had also misunderstood and conflated it with the Method of Physical Actions.

Carnicke had assigned readings from two chapters she had written about Active Analysis that focused on the under-appreciated Moscow Art Theatre member Maria Osipovna Knebel (1898−1985). A brilliant actor, director and teacher in her own right, she had worked as Stanislavsky's assistant when they were exploring Active Analysis while working toward the production of *Tartuffe*. As a vocal proponent of this method (along with ideas from Michael Chekhov and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko) she became what Carnicke argues was "the most important theatrical voice of Russia's Soviet era."[269] She had made it her mission to carry on "the System's full complexity, even when she could not name it [due to Soviet censorship]. By the 1960s, she fought back, calling what had passed for the System under Stalinism a gross 'vulgarization' of her mentor's actual work."[270] She described this approach as "experiments to create for the actor an improvisatory state of mind and body within the rigid framework of first-class dramatic material."[271] Within the dramatic structure lies "the true heart of Active Analysis; actors determine how a scene's main 'event' is created by the collision of an impelling 'action' and a resisting 'counteraction.'"[272]

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[269] Carnicke, "The Knebel Technique," 99.

[270] Knebel, "*O Tom, Chto Mne Kazhetsia Osobenno Vazhnym*", 109 in Carnicke, "The Knebel Technique," 102.

[271] Knebel, "*Vsia zhizn',"* 332-336 in Carnicke, "The Knebel Technique," 111.

[272] Knebel, "*Poeziia Pedagogiki* [The Poetry of Pedagogy]," 332-36 in Carnicke, "The Knebel Technique," 111.

At the workshop, Carnicke introduced the concept of Active Analysis to the group. Stanislavsky used Active Analysis during his last period of exploration. Maria Knebel carried the practice on in her own directing and teaching and it is still commonly used in Russia. Just as Stanislavsky often did, Carnicke provided an explanatory metaphor: if you look at the physics of throwing a ball, you'll see that if gravity is removed, the ball, once thrown, will just continue to keep going in a relatively straight line. No force changes the ball's course.[273] If put into story form it would be a short, boring tale: "I threw a ball and it kept going." Every scene starts with some such impelling action that moves the scene forward; in this scene the impelling action would be: I threw a ball. Without gravity, nothing is changed; with gravity, however, something happens to change the action. A map of the dynamics of the scene would now show the force of gravity pulling the ball down towards the ground. The ball's trajectory is changed as resistance pulls it down acting as a counteraction to the initial action. The action pushes the scene forward and the counteraction changes the action/momentum of the scene.[274]

Taking the concept out of the world of physics and sports, Carnicke demonstrated Action/Counteraction in a closer setting. Turning towards an assistant next to her, she demanded that they get out of the room. The assistant did not comply, and instead offered a counteraction directly back, refusing to leave. This went on for a moment, after which Carnicke noted that her action was to throw the assistant out, and the assistant's direct counteraction was to refuse to go.

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[273] For simplicity, the additional force of friction is ignored.

[274] Carnicke noted that she stresses the idea of action/counteraction more than some other proponents of Active Analysis.

The Levins also discuss the centrality of confrontations in their book, *The Stanislavsky Secret*:

> Confrontations among people never arise out of thin air — they are always stipulated by the given circumstances. Among such circumstances, there is one which influences one of the sides to initiate the struggle. We shall call it the main circumstance, and the side that initiates and continues the struggle is the *leading* side (or leading character). Accordingly, the other, respondent side of the conflict shall be called the *led* side.[275]

Carnicke prefers to use "counteraction" as opposed to the more commonly used "conflict" because these relationships are not always directly opposite each other. For instance, Anton Chekhov's plays often require more of an oblique counteraction wherein a character faces no direct conflict, but rather is undermined by conversation, distraction, or another device. She coached the assistant/actor in her demonstration for a moment, then began again to force the student to leave. This time the assistant didn't reply directly or confrontationally, but instead used an oblique counteraction by asking a student if they thought they should leave. The scene went on without the assistant ever directly refusing but always applying a subtler counteraction. Once the third actor entered the scene, a new dynamic was established. This new person had to align themselves with either the action or the counteraction of the scene. They did not bring in their own action — if they did, it would begin a new impelling action. In this case, the student aligned themselves with the assistant and both worked against Carnicke's action. She explained that this simple structure helped keep everyone's focus on the action, ensuring that there is only

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[275] Levin, *The Stanislavsky Secret*, 25-26.

one driving force — we always know the center of gravity. In this type of work the counteraction is what determines style, length of a beat and scene, and alliances between characters.

Carnicke then discussed another example of counteraction at work. She pointed out that in *Romeo and Juliet*'s balcony scene, both characters really want marriage; however, without a resistance there would be no drama, so proposing marriage is not the action of the scene. She said that Romeo is in love with poetry as well as Juliet. He wants a poetic image, which is the action of the scene. Juliet is pragmatic and more down to earth; she undercuts his poetry and just wants to set the details, which is the counteraction of the scene. So, they fight about poetry and style — they speak differently in a give and take of push and pull. When Romeo finally delivers his "I wish I were thy bird" speech, Juliet agrees to his poetic image and the event is completed. Now he is satisfied and can leave.

Every scene has a map comprised of the chain of events of action (compelling) and counteraction (resisting). The end of the map is the destination that closes it. It happens, finishes, and then a new event starts. For instance, to go back to the baseball metaphor, once the ball falls to earth, a dog picks it up and runs with it (the action) initiating a new scene that leads to a new event. One event follows another developing a chain of events as the score.

In each event we need to look to the key points to find the basic melody of the action, counteraction and alliances. An alliance can change its mind and support a different side during the scene, but the action and counteraction cannot, or the scene's center of gravity would be

lost.[276] In addition, each actor must give themselves a verb that puts them in the same chain of events that work toward the same story. Carnicke stressed that an actor needs to choose a verb that advances their action or counteraction: for example, if the action is "I want him out of the room," a character may throw him out, sweet talk him out, or bribe him to leave. The verb choice accounts for the actor's personality.

Carnicke emphasized that every scene has a *zadacha* that it presents to you much as a math teacher gives her students a math problem to solve. For example, in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* Nora lives in a culture that she doesn't understand. She forged her father's signature to borrow money for her husband's medical treatment and is now being blackmailed with threat of exposure; this is her problem. The problem grounds the action. In fact, Carnicke explains, Knebel talks about the beauty of mathematics or vector analysis as a metaphor−figuring out forces and their directions.

This "figuring out" is still an analysis of the play—only it is an active, "on-your-feet" process. Instead of sitting around a table *thinking* the problem through, you are *doing* instead. In rehearsal you test the verbs to see what makes the most sense—not only in your imagination as you do around the table, but instead based on your choices and those of your partners. The event is what happens *between* you. Carnicke called this work an *étude,* which simply means a

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[276] Carnicke pointed out that Stanislavsky only used the term "action" in the 1920s but by the 1930s had added counteraction as in "action/counteraction." Personal email to author, October 23, 2018.

study.[277] Each successive *étude* will incorporate more and more of the given circumstances and eventually the actual dialogue of the playwright.

Other Stanislavskian scholars also emphasize the importance of focusing on the acting partner in performance, even when using the Method of Physical Actions. The Levins discuss "communion as interaction between partners in the process of the struggle on the stage. This means that the actor performs an action in order to elicit from his partner some concrete real behavior, which he needs to attain his own concrete real goal."[278] They emphasize: "the action is always directed at the partner in order to subordinate him, subdue his will, and thereby change his thinking in a desirable way."[279] Stanislavsky himself pointed out "if the actors do not wish to lose the grip of a large audience, they must take great care always to be in unbroken communication with their partner through their own feelings, thoughts and actions."[280]

Active Analysis then, allows the actor to fully play an action or counteraction directed towards producing an action in their fellow actors in the scene on a moment-to-moment, responsive basis, all while using the dialogue given by the playwright. The following insights from cognitive science will once again pull these concepts and practices apart, revealing the complex mental processes that support the claims herein.

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[277] *Études* have the script to guide them, as opposed to *improvisation* which Dr. Carnicke links to creating scenes that are not in the script - e.g. what happens between scenes.

[278] Levin, *The Stanislavsky Secret,* 13.

[279] Ibid., 3.

[280] Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work,* 233.

## THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF ACTION

### Embodied Action

In the 1990s scientists began to stress the concepts of a physically embodied brain that is always in relationship to its environment — or "situated" — as the basic way in which humans function.[281] As they have asserted, the idea of embodiment does not just mean that the brain is *within* the body, but rather that it is a *part of* the body. As Rhonda Blair and Amy Cook point out in the Introduction to *Theatre, Performances and Cognition*, "the mind is the reciprocal interaction between perceptual and proprioceptive experience, between external and internal environments, such that what happens in one environment influences what happens in the other."[282]

Although scientists have not yet pinpointed the exact mechanisms and timings of how sensory-motor areas of the brain activate language areas, it is clear that for many simple

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[281] Andy Clark, "An Embodied Cognitive Science?" *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (1999): 345. Theatrical researchers such as Rhonda Blair, Amy Cook, Rick Kemp and Jonathan Lutterbie have explored the nature of this embodiment extensively, albeit with some differing foci.

[282] Rhonda Blair and Amy Cook, "Introduction," in *Theatre, Performance and Cognition*: *Languages, Bodies and Ecologies,* ed. Rhonda Blair and Amy Cook (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016), 6.

concepts, "mental simulation" — "the reactivation of sensorimotor information" — is key.[283] This simulation is often described as a "mirroring" process.

The brain has four primary areas associated with movement, all located within the frontal cortex: the motor cortex (responsible for direct stimulation of muscles that cause movement), the pre−motor cortex (which allows "learning and executing complex movements that are guided by sensory information"), the supplementary motor area (crucial for behavioral sequences) and the pre-supplementary motor area (which seems to help control spontaneous movements).[284] Additional areas of the brain are activated by specific actions with intentions such as the parietal reach area, which, as its name suggests, is activated when one reaches for something.[285] Scientists believe that the supplementary motor area "determines the location of the target and supplies information about this location to motor mechanisms in the frontal cortex."[286] The motor areas are responsible, then for the movement itself. These motor areas of the brain become activated between 200-300 milliseconds after a stimulus occurs.[287] As discussed in chapter 1, when someone watches or listens to someone else do an activity (a stimulus), their own

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[283] Cedric Galetzka, "The Story So Far: How Embodied Cognition Advances Our Understanding of Meaning-Making," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 8, Article 1315 (2017): 1.

[284] Neil R. Carlson and Melissa A. Birkett, *Physiology of Behavior*, 12th Edition (New York: Pearson), 241-249.

[285] Ibid., 256.

[286] Ibid., 257.

[287] Galetzka, "The Story So Far," 2.

mirroring systems resonate and respond.[288] Not only are the viewer's areas of the brain involved in movement activated, they also activate neurons in areas that are responsible for a physical sensation of feeling the movement of another person.[289] The motor areas are activated even if someone is merely describing a physical action in words alone, albeit at a lower rate.

The most pertinent mirror system research, however, may be in conjunction with understanding goals through actions.[290] Scientist Hidehiko Takahashi and his team found that mirroring neurons fired stronger, longer and in more specific areas when a physical action was observed to have an intention to it. In other words, observing goal-directed physical actions fired more mirroring motor neurons than non-goal-directed physical actions. In fact, many scientists now believe that motor mirror neurons systems are only fully activated when an action is done with a perceived intention behind it.[291]

In order for a scene partner or a spectator to understand an action on stage (what a character is doing), they search foremost for what the intention of the movement is. In the spectator's brain, mirroring neurons are firing in direct response to the actor's movement. If there is an obvious intention to the character's movement, then these motor neurons in the spectator

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[288] See Rizzolatti et al. "The Observation and Execution of Actions," in chapter 1 for details.

[289] Acharya and Shukla, "Mirror Neurons," 118–124 and V. Gazzola and C. Keysers, "The Observation and Execution of Actions," 1239-1255.

[290] Hidehiko Takahashi, "Enhanced Activation in the Extrastriate Body Area by Goal-Directed Actions," *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* 62 (2008): 214–219.

[291] Ibid.

are specific and strong, close to what is happening in the brain of the actor himself. If there are no obvious intentions to the character's motion, however, the brain of the spectator fires in more generalized locations of motor neurons and to a weaker degree. It seems that the parts of the brain associated with memory light up instead, indicating that the spectator must search for a memory to make sense of the action. Importantly, spectators automatically strive to make sense of the action, or in what most of us understand as Stanislavsky's terminology, to find an objective for the character or a solution to the problem.

Of course, on a theatrical stage a spectator can see the entire body of the actor which activates an additional mirror network in relation to facial expressions. Even objects that are in relation to the body help with understanding the goal of a character, so it is not only movement cueing understanding. The narrative surrounding the character will also aid a spectator in understanding this goal as "embedded" cognition would remind us.[292] In other words, if a goal is not obvious, a spectator searches the individual action steps (what the person just did) in attempt to construe an overarching objective.[293] This helps explain why spectators of Stanislavskian-type

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[292] As part of what is known as "4E Cognition" consisting of embodied, enactive, embedded, and/or extended frameworks all working together to produce cognition. See Ximena Gonzalez-Grando and Tom Froese, eds. *Special Issue: Spotlight on 4E Cognition Research in Mexico, Adaptive Behavior,* Vol. 26(5) (2018): 204.

[293] Mari Hrkac´, Moritz F. Wurm and Ricarda I. Schubotz, "Action Observers Implicitly Expect Actors to Act Goal-Coherently, Even If They Do Not: An fMRI Study," *Human Brain Mapping* 35 (2014): 2189.

acting can easily make sense of characters' actions given the clarity that the techniques' focus on action creates.

We perceive and understand the world through action, so the system's focus on action is key. This action is dependent on human bodies as they are the vehicles for action. As discussed earlier, for an actor of the system, actions are to be made towards a partner. Dynamic systems theory, originating in mathematics and informing 4E and other models of research, takes this interaction as key. In this extended cognition view, the mind is connected to the environment. Even tools and "public language" are included in this context.[294] All these factors help the brain act as a "prediction machine" to try to figure out what action will happen next and what the results of that action may be.

Phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty also ties perception to intentionality of movement so much so that perceiving itself is considered a motor skill.[295] Trimble explains that this theory inverts the previously understood Cartesian idea that perception leads to action, with one that resonates with cognitive science — the "active, seeking brain [is] behind our experiences."[296] He quotes literary critic George Steiner: "It is verbs, particularly

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[294] Gonzalez-Grando and Froese, "Action Observers," 190.

[295] Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Colin Smith, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge, & K. Paul [Atlantic Highlands], N.J.: Humanities Press, 1962, 1981, 2002).

[296] Trimble, *The Intentional Brain*," 278.

verbs of motion, which enunciate the otherwise inexpressible nature of being. The verb 'to be,' and the assertion 'is' have determined the destiny of man."[297]

The actor's job then, ultimately, is to find the action via a verb that best allows the audience — including the scene partner — to predict what they (as the character) want and then respond in a favorable manner. Finding intention-imbued movement that will, through mirroring systems, physically affect those perceiving would be the most direct way to affect a viewer. For instance, if an actor claps their hands together in front of their scene partner's face, both the scene partner and audience members will have their own motor areas associated with the clap activated. The primary motor cortex is physically juxtaposed to the primary somatosensory cortex whose primary inputs are from the somatosensory system (the six senses of visual, auditory, touch, smell, taste and proprioception—the perception of body position, which is important for balance and agility in movement). This close proximity allows for almost instantaneous reactions to occur as there is a slight distance between the perception of a stimulus and the reactionary movement. This is what allows us to pull our hand away from a hot stove before we seem to have time to think about it. There is no real "decision" to act, we just do it. So the actor on stage who has just had hands clapped in front of their face, will perceive the sound of the clap, the visual image of it and the change created and may "instinctively" move back away from the hands–that is, their primary somatosensory cortex sent a message directly to their motor cortex to move their body out of the way. Of course, after rehearsing the clap the actor receiving it may decide their character "wouldn't do that" and choose to stand their ground.

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[297] G. Steiner, *The Poetry of Thought: From Hellenism to Celan* (New York: New Directions Books, 2011), 204.

Rehearsal allows for what once was automatic to become a choice. But the choice to *inhibit* a reaction must occur–the internal cue is still there. These types of verbs that indicate strong movements are clear in the method of physical actions. An actor must just go about doing the actions prescribed by the playwright, the director or themselves. For simple and direct actions like a clap or a slap, the scene partner will have a physical reaction as described above, and the audience member will experience it through their own mirroring system in addition to other cues.

Abstract concepts and symbols pose a difficulty for the theory of embodied cognition, however.[298] An experiment that examined the effects of physical inhibition on the left posterior middle temporal gyrus area of the brain–a region that is known for complex conceptual processing and distinct from motor areas–demonstrated that not only was the subject less able to understand verbs (nouns were unaffected), but also that activation of the primary motor cortex was reduced.[299] So while the motor areas are responsible for movement and movement comprehension, other brain regions are necessary for context and meaning. The essential point for my argument, however, is that the motor areas are essential for understanding verbs and the movement associated with them. In fact, the motor system is "a necessary component for language comprehension."[300] As Alva Noë asserts "perception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do…. The world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction."[301]

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[298] Galetzka, "The Story So Far," 1.

[299] Ibid., 2.

[300] Ibid.

[301] Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 2004), 1.

Since we seem to need movement to understand language, speech must be an action. The Levins point out that for Stanislavsky, "action is inseparable from the process of communion between partners."[302] The key to this communion is that "each character has the greatest and most ardent desire to immediately convert the other person to his own belief."[303] Each character performs a physical action to elicit a concrete physical response from their scene partner. Speech was included in this physicalizations for Stanislavsky as he called it "verbal action." "The word and speech must also act; that is, they must force the other person to understand, see and think just like the speaker does."[304] Since physical action elicits such immediate results due to mirroring systems, something must be lost if a perceiver has to translate verbal action, which is heard perhaps, but only seen as movement of the face, rather than the whole body. Even if gestures add to this action, they are generally for emphasis without additional semantic content of their own. Acting teachers stress the playing of verbs and give out list of verbs to help the actor along on this quest for something playable. While at first glance this would seem to be a good solution, many lists use generalized and metaphoric verbs. Words such as "ape appeal," "to anger," "to disconcert," and "to worry" are suggested. Trying to use these as active verbs requires mind manipulations — how does one "ape appeal?" I also find actors tend to use vague, inactive verbs such as "to make them understand" and even worse, ignore impacting their partner with "to tell." Instead, cognitive science points to the immediate recognition of intention behind more physical verbs. When an actor claps, their scene partner and audience members mirror the

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[302] Levin, *The Stanislavsky Secret,* 13.

[303] Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal*, 166.

[304] Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 499 in Levin, *The Stanislavsky Secret,*14.

action and understand it viscerally and immediately. This physical action is expressed as a change in the vocal quality of speech as well, since it too, is movement; if the actor's body is not blocked by muscular tensions, every part of it will respond to the main physical action.

I have found focusing on concrete physical verbs for actors gives the immediate and visceral responses needed. Since many actors are not fully engaged physically, I take the use of verbs in action a step further than Stanislavsky by utilizing Rudolf Laban movement techniques. Laban's work, sometimes called the Laban/Bartenieff movement analysis, describes and categorizes human movement into "Eight Efforts" or, more closely aligned to the subject of this chapter, "Action Drives" (Punch, Slash, Dab, Flick, Press, Wring, Glide, and Float).[305] Importantly, each of these Action Drives is associated with an inner intention; the intention behind the action is what determines the quality of movement. Although primarily used to describe movements as they occur, I have found that adapting these verbs to *create action* is an effective tool. My students will stand and physically punch to feel the movement in their bodies. They will then perform variations of the verb with the category: for instance, the punching category includes strong/direct/quick verbs such as "to bash," "to chop," "to poke," and "to pull."[306] After physicalizing each of these verbs, they will begin to add it to text allowing the

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[305] See Jean Newlove, *Laban for Actors and Dancers: Putting Laban's Movement Theory into Practice: A Step-by-Step Guide (*New York: Routledge, 1993); and Diana Theodores, "Laban for Actors and Dancers,*" Theatre Research International*, no. 2 (1994): 177.

[306] Laban's Efforts are based on the combining the "factors" of space, weight, time and flow; the fighting polarity effort elements of direct, strong, sudden and bound; and the indulging polarities of indirect, light, sustained and free.

action to influence the words. They can then choose verbs that fit their scene and perform the actions during a rehearsal. Of course, having an actor perform these literal movement/actions may ultimately not make sense for the style of the play so they will have to slowly back away from the outward display of the movement while keeping the inner flow active, allowing the voice, facial expressions and body to still be affected. I have seen a three-fold benefit to this working method. First, the actor is forced to make strong, physical choices that are direct and simple. They have only one thing to think about at a time, and even when the outer movement is restricted the inner movement or action remains. Second, their scene partner has a lot of information from which they will physically react. As discussed earlier, their senses will immediately perceive the movement and respond accordingly. The larger, more distinct movement used in early stages of rehearsal require little effort to understand their partner's intention, so they can react without spending mental processing resources. Even as the actor decreases the outward movement of the action, the scene partner will have it in memory. Third, the audience will be affected by what they perceive through sight and hearing. Even though reined in, the actor's body will have musculature movement and a vocal quality that will influence their mirroring systems in a visceral manner.

**Attention, Expertise and Cognitive Load**

One of the key benefits to using these concretely active verbs is that it elicits a response from a spectator without them having to supply much mental effort.[307] Cognitive Load Theory,

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[307] Mental effort is defined as "the neurocognitive process that reflects the controlled expenditure of psychological information-processing resources during perception, cognition and action." Logan T. Trujillo, "Mental Effort and Information-Processing Costs Are Inversely

part of the broader category of cognitive learning theory, was first described by John Sweller in 1988.[308] The Working Memory model of cognitive load theory was introduced by A. Baddeley in 1992 and expounded upon by Sweller *and team* in 1998.[309] Since then the theory has taken root with scientists adding to it, refining it and debating its intricacies. It relates primarily to memory systems, learning processes and types of cognitive load on working memory. John Q. Young and team discuss cognitive load theory as it relates to the training of medical doctors in their article "Cognitive Load Theory: Implications for Medical Education."[310] They believe that "cognitive load theory has particular relevance to medical education because the tasks and professional activities to be learned require the simultaneous integration of multiple and varied sets of knowledge, skills and behaviors at a specific time and place. These tasks may overload the learner."[311] The rehearsal process is one in which an actor (a learner) requires those same things

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Related to Global Brain Free Energy During Visual Categorization," *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 13 (2019): 1292.

[308] See John Sweller, "Cognitive Load During Problem Solving," *Cognitive Science* 12 (1988): 257-285.

[309] See Alan D. Baddeley, *Working Memory, Thought, and Action,* Oxford Psychology Series: 45 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 556–559 and Alexander Skulmowski and Günter Daniel Rey, "Measuring Cognitive Load in Embodied Learning Settings," *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol 8 (2017): 1-6.

[310] J. Q Young, Van Merrienboer, S. Durning, and O. Ten Cate, "Cognitive Load Theory: Implications for Medical Education: AMEE Guide No. 86," *Medical Teacher* (2014): 371–384.

[311] Ibid., 371.

and may also be overwhelmed with information and stimuli (overloaded) at times. Although I will not go into the detail their article covers, I will use it as a model for the way in which learning may work while using active verbs and during the rehearsal process when Active Analysis is used.

I look to learning theories as I see the entire rehearsal process as one of learning how to best convey an idea to an audience through action. The process of discovering the best way requires, as Stanislavsky stressed, great concentration at every moment of rehearsal and performance, so I will also touch upon how attention factors into learning. As mentioned earlier, many scientists such as Kevin O'Regan and Alva Noë reject the twentieth century theories that to perceive an object requires the brain to construct a representation of the thing being perceived.[312] Instead, a concept of embodiment in which the body perceives those items that ready us for action pervades.

Alexander Skulmowski and Günter Daniel Rey suggest that to achieve maximum effectiveness in our actions and learning, we must take cognitive load into account. Based on the premise that the brain can only deal with a finite amount of input at a time, discovering how to reduce the cognitive load for a task will allot cognitive space for other activities.[313] Young and team explain that cognitive load theory "builds upon an established model of human memory

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[312] J. K. O'Regan and A Noë, "A Sensorimotor Account of Vision and Visual Consciousness," *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 24, no. 5 (2001): 967.

[313] Skulmowski and Rey, "Measuring Cognitive Load," 1-6.

that includes the subsystems of sensory, working, and long-term memory."[314] I will examine each of these.

Scientists believe that we have three basic stages in learning. First, input from our senses creates information, that input is filtered and moves into our working memory to be manipulated, and then that manipulation is stored in long-term memory. Working memory is what allows us to learn — that is, it allows us to store information in memories. Cognitive load theory surmises on how we can manage that working memory.

There are different pathways in the human memory system, starting with sensory memory. Cognitive load theory suggests that auditory and visual stimuli are processed in two separate, but loosely connected, channels. During an improvisation, the primary audio stimulus is in the dialogue between acting partners. The primary visual stimulus is their bodies. An actor's attention will focus on their scene partners while an inattentional blindness (we don't consciously see what we don't focus on) usually "screens out" the visual stimuli of other people in the room and the setting surrounding them. Touch and smell may also be in play but are often less important and mostly outside of an actor's attention — at least until they must touch a partner. The image of their scene partners' bodies is perceived by their eyes and held in their "visual sensory memory" (also called "iconic memory") for a brief time. Their words, including all the subtext, textual and musical aspects of them, are held in the actor's auditory sensory memory (also called "echoic memory") very briefly. Young and team explain that this sensory system has vast capacity for information. Both the auditory and visual systems can perceive huge amounts of information at a time, most of which never reaches our consciousness. We only hold

[314] Young, Van Merrienboer, Durning, and Cate, "Cognitive Load Theory," 372.

onto this information for a moment, however (around 0.25 to 2 seconds).[315] The information an actor focuses on — primarily the words and bodies of their partners — are raised to their conscious awareness and then moved into their working memory while the rest slips from consciousness.

Working memory can only hold about seven pieces of information at a time.[316] Working memory is aptly named as this is where we can take information and manipulate it. And although many of us claim to be fantastic multi-taskers, we can only process (organize, compare, and contrast) between two and four items at a time.[317] Furthermore, this information only stays in working memory for about thirty seconds, afterwards it is lost unless we rehearse it (usually by saying it repeatedly to ourselves). So, for an actor, the images and auditory information given them by their partners and filtered by their attention is in their working memory. By using the

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[315] Richard E. Mayer, "Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning," *The Cambridge Handbook of Multimedia Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 31–48 and Young *et al.,* 372.

[316] Experiments have shown that working memory can hold 7 (+/- 2) pieces of information. See George A. Miller, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity for Processing Information," in *Collected Work: Human Learning and Memory: Selected Readings* (New York.: Oxford University Press, 1967): 219-234..

[317] P. A. Kirschner, J. Sweller and R. E. Clark, "Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching," *Educational Psychologist* (2006): 75–86 and Young, Van Merrienboer, Durning, and Cate, "Cognitive Load Theory, 372.

strong, concrete verbs of Laban, cognitive load is much lower than if an actor must think through a verb phrase or a metaphor. The proximity of the somatosensory cortex with the motor cortex along with action mirroring systems allow for processing without involving working memory, so it is freed for other activities.

These informational units that do go to working memory have to be organized into small groups or what scientists call "chunks." These chunks may group further into "schemas." A schema is a representation that includes several pieces of information or chunks into one unified whole. This whole can then be manipulated as only one piece of information. For instance, I can think of a "smore" as one whole item instead of thinking about a graham cracker, a chocolate bar and a marshmallow. For me my smore schema also includes a campfire, a stick to roast the marshmallow, the scents of warm sugar and a hot fire which would take up all my working memory capacity.[318] The first time I saw a smore, I had to start with all the individual parts. Then I learned that they went together into the concept of "smore." The next time I saw the same item I only had to remember "smore" as one item instead of seven items, so I have plenty of working memory left over.

Schema theory is not only applied to visual and other sensory representations, but it is also applied to physical skills. Generalized motor schemas may string together the actions of a repetitive movement with the conceptual schema recall and schema recognition, first at a conscious level in working memory (one is learning a new skill) and eventually at a

[318] Young, Van Merrienboer, Durning, and Cate, "Cognitive Load Theory, 373.

subconscious level when it becomes implicit memory (one becomes an "expert").[319] This dynamic ties back to the idea of maximizing schema for skills in medical training. Étienne Rivière and colleagues stressed that practicing medical skills can " develop the abstract cognitive structure (the general motor schema) that directs the execution of the family of movements and actions involved in completing that specific task and related tasks" such as "learning bronchoscopy by performing the procedure on a model."[320] They are creating schemas of how to perform skills.

Likewise, actors train to create performance schemas. An actor's years in acting classes create chunks of procedures to vocally express text, and other chunks in how to use their body on stage. These chunks have come together into an ever-increasingly elaborate schema that includes the concepts of basic performance skills (vocal volume, clarity of speech, opening to scene partners and audience, etc.).[321] This schema is stored in long-term memory, where the actor can

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[319] Richard A. Schmidt, "Motor Schema Theory after 27 Years: Reflections and Implications for a New Theory," *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 74 (2003): 366–375.

[320] Étienne Rivière, Mathieu Asselin, Alexandre Lafleur, Gilles Chiniara, "Simulation for Procedural Tasks," in *Clinical Simulation* (Second Edition), ed. Gilles Chiniara (Cambridge: Academic Press, 2019), 387-388.

[321] Young and team explain, "Expertise does not come from a superior ability to analyze multiple pieces of novel information, from general problem-solving skills or from better working memory. Rather, expertise is an adaptation. It stems from the ability to efficiently recognize patterns or states by comparing what is perceived against the person's extensive domain

retrieve it as needed. In fact, after many years of performing actors rarely need to consciously think about these performance skills; they are pretty much automatic. Since they do not have to spend working memory on them, they have free space to concentrate on and manipulate their partners' words and image, and plan what actions they will take. As chunks may be used in more than one schema, they can still be focused upon independently when needed. Long-term memory can contain huge amounts of data, although it must be pulled into working memory to be manipulated. So, having large amounts of information in schemas, organized by relationships and usage, allows for more processing space in working memory.[322]

Young and team define expertise as, "the ability to efficiently recognize patterns or states by comparing what is perceived against the person's extensive domain knowledge that is stored in well-organized schemata in long-term memory…. Expertise is critically dependent on long-term memory."[323] While this paradigm has obvious applications to the training of actors, it is also important to my analysis of Active Analysis.

Since the goal of theatrical rehearsal is to *learn* the performance score, optimizing cognitive load would enhance the process. Our working memory cannot allow every bit of information about a play to be manipulated at one time. It is already common practice to break down a script into smaller sections, and work on each one independently at first, often focusing

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knowledge that is stored in well-organized schemata in long-term memory." Young, Van Merrienboer, Durning, and Cate, "Cognitive Load Theory," 374.

[322] Ibid., 373.

[323] Ibid., 374.

on one area of performance at a time (e.g. one may have a "blocking" rehearsal where the only focus is movement/physical relationship; or a rehearsal focused on listening to scene partners).

*Études* based on given circumstances of a play are key to Active Analysis. To do this, actors must access the schemas that are recalled by the given circumstances from their long-term memory, add new bits of information and arrange the materials into chunks. Deciding on the action and counteraction of the scene and choosing strong, concrete Laban-type action words, will alter the schema for the purposes of the scene. With each successive *étude*, the actors can refine their action and verbs. These choices in turn affect the scene partners' choices as the stimuli enter their consciousness through their senses, continuing the cycle.

Focusing on the action (or counteraction) through verbs shifts some of the actor's cognitive load away from character and relationship to allow more concentration and flexibility with action. Active analysis does require the playwright's words to be incorporated after the action has been established. Cognitive load may make an even greater difference here. Although most actors are experienced decoders of squiggles and lines that form letters that become whole words in a regularly accessed schema for reading, when one reads a script that is new to them, they are a novice learner to that story. In rehearsal, not only does the actor have to become an expert on the story and their character within it, but they also have to translate the story from the squiggles on a page to an action of their body that is flexible enough to readily adapt to the actions of the other bodies in the scene. This is a complex task.

I'd now like to turn back to The S Word: A Practical Acting Laboratory under the guidance of master teacher and scholar Sharon Carnicke. While the entire workshop was essential for clarifying the ideas contained in this chapter, I will focus on what was likely the mental processes of a scene from *Three Sisters* as I experienced it during Active Analysis.

Although I have never worked on a production of *Three Sisters*, I have seen the play several times, so I have a basic familiarity with it. I also have a general knowledge of Anton Chekhov (1860-904) plays due to previous exposure. So, when I read the scene during the laboratory, I was able to draw on the schemas I already had, add to them and refresh them based on the facts of the scene (the given circumstances). We then discussed the action, counteraction and alliances within the scene. From here I will start with what would happen in a more traditional rehearsal process if we were to "put it on its feet" with scripts in hand.

After getting myself in an appropriate location on stage, I would look down at my script and read the first line of dialogue. Reading is another highly complex process. Reading, writing, and producing or listening to language have a great deal of overlap in the brain, and yet they are different enough that someone with a brain injury that no longer enabled him to read, was still able to write.[324] When actors with neurotypical brains read familiar words in a script they generally see them as whole words and pronounce them in their minds subvocally (an entire word is a chunk of letters which are chunks of squiggly ink). So, when we read a scene for the first few times, we must go through this whole brain process of reading/comprehending text before we can say the line. At this early stage of rehearsal, I would probably read the line, and if it was not mine I would either continue to read as I receive additional auditory confirmation when my scene partner said the line aloud, or I may look up at him shifting my focus from the written word to my partner. As I watch my partner, I receive a lot of different information. At the same time my working memory is allowing me to read, it is activating schemas associated with performance and the given circumstances.

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[324] Carlson and Birkett, *Physiology of Behavior*, 469.

At this point I probably do not have one detailed schema for these circumstances, but more likely a few smaller chunks, taking up more working memory load. Since my capacity is about seven items, I will need to ignore any additional information for the time being. Since I don't have to speak yet, I may then look up from the script at my scene partners for visual cues as to their circumstances. Cognitive action theory tells us that when we watch another person's movements, we automatically search for an intention to that movement. Part of my brain that is responsible for my own similar movement is activated in a type of mirroring process, likely helping me understand my scene partner's motivations.[325] A similar mirroring effect occurs with speech, facial expressions, and even gaze.[326] In addition to these mirroring effects, my working memory is searching for schemas in my long-term memory to make sense of what I see. Since I am looking down for at least the first part of my scene partner's lines, I likely only catch a bit of

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[325] See Joelle Ré Arp-Dunham, "The Cognitive Stanislavski in the Rehearsal Hall," *Stanislavski Studies: Practice, Legacy, and Contemporary Theater* 5, no. 1 (2017): 67; Acharya and Shukla, "Mirror Neurons," 118–124; Gazzola and Keysers, "The Observation and Execution of Actions," 1239-55; V. Gallese and A. Goldman, "Mirror Neurons and the Simulation Theory of Mind-Reading," *Trends In Cognitive Sciences* (1998): 493-501; and Takahashi, Shibuya, Kato, Sassa, Koeda, Yahata, Suhara, and Okubo., "Enhanced Activation in the Extrastriate Body Area," 214–219.

[326] Hrkac´, Wurm and Schubotz, "Action Observers Implicitly Expect," 2189; and Patric Bach, Toby Nicholson, and Matthew Hudson, "The Affordance-Matching Hypothesis: How Objects Guide Action Understanding and Prediction," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* (2014): 9.

this movement, diminishing my natural ability for recognition. Then I must look back at the script, once again reading the words until it is time for me to speak. Since I am likely reading my lines as my scene partner is speaking, not only am I not able to incorporate their visual cues, my working memory is not able to incorporate all the verbal cues they are giving either. The cognitive load is too great. Instead, I am mentally rehearsing the lines until it is my turn to speak. This pattern continues throughout the scene. The majority of this scene rehearsal would be spent in my own internal space, not responding directly to my partner.

Active analysis follows a different path. It starts out the same, as we read the scene then decide on the action, counteraction and alliances. But then the processes diverge. I no longer need to look away from my scene partner, so I can use the visual input from their physical actions, gaze, and facial expressions, and the auditory input from their words in full. Since I don't have working memory tied up with reading, there is more space available to manipulate the given circumstances, my action through my verb, and adjust each to the input from my partner. It may be a short etude the first time as not all the given circumstances can be in my working memory, but on each successive trial my schemas will grow with detail.

In the workshop, using active analysis we read assigned excerpts from *Three Sisters* to ourselves, discussed each scene's "facts" (given circumstances) and decided together on the action, counteraction, and alliances. After choosing our active verbs, we then studied the scene on our feet two more times, checking the script for the facts and refining our decisions between each *étude*. I was assigned the role of Masha. Although, on the surface the short scene is a quarrel between Masha's lover, Vershinin and another man named Tuzenbakh, this is not the driving force of the scene. The action is Vershinin's: he wants to impress Masha with his wit and charm. Tuzenbakh has the counteraction of trying to argue with Vershinin (as he misunderstands

what Vershinin is actually doing). Masha is aligned with Vershinin. I chose "to touch Vershinin" as my verb. I had a delightful time trying various ways to just physically touch him (without getting caught) throughout the *étude*. Instead standing by just listening to the men in the scene, I became an active participant. When another group played the scene between Natasha, Olga and the servant Anfisa, I saw Anfisa as an active agent for the first time rather than a simple pawn for the others to fight over. Even in these initial *étude* I was transfixed by the action. Although we didn't get to do the *études* very many times due to time constraints, it was clear to me how effective this tool could be.

In a longer rehearsal period after each *étude* we would go back to the script, refining, clarifying actions and verbs, writing our discoveries in the script so we would end up with a score that looks similar to the traditional table-work version, but created on our feet, through *active* analysis. Maria Knebel suggested that this was how an actor will "draft" and "re-draft" their performance over time.[327]

By focusing on the action/counteraction of the scene, and choosing a physical verb to play, my working memory was able to manipulate my action in a focused and clear manner. My "expertise" as an actor of over 25 years allowed the automation of basic stage techniques so they did not need to enter my working memory, allowing more processing space for action. My character and the style of the scene altered my impulse "to touch" Vershinin only in that I had to make sure no one saw me. And as I clandestinely followed him throughout the room, searching for the perfect moment to touch him, the scene came alive for me, my scene partners and ultimately for the audience.

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[327] Knebel, "*O Tom, Chto Mne,"* (1971): 53 in Carnicke, "The Knebel Technique,"106.

**Power for Action Creates Character**

Influential neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese and Corrado Sinigaglia's article "The Bodily Self as Power for Action" posits that one sense of the body is completely enactive in nature being "given to us as source or power for action." This power for action consists of the "variety of motor potentialities that define the horizon of the world in which we live"; in other words, the people and objects that we interact with allow us to have a sense of who we are as a body.[328] The concept that action leads to a sense of self may have an interesting effect on the idea of creating a character in a play; a character can be defined as a new sense of the self in action. If we think of Stanislavsky's "what would I do if I were in this situation?" we can see how action creates character for him.

Gallese and Sinigaglia do not refer to a single sense channel (like sight or proprioception) when speaking of "sense of body," as the binding principle – that different sensory information is integrated into one experience (for instance, we see lips move and hear a voice and think of speech as one thing). They point to the 1911 distinction by Head and Holmes between a "*body schema* considered as a coherent and dynamically updated model enabling and monitoring the execution of bodily movement, and a *body image* considered as a conscious representation of perceptual features of the body.[329] Gallese and Sinigaglia argue that Head and Holmes recognized that body schema is action oriented, extending our bodies to the subjects and objects around us, and more recent studies include tools as extensions of body schemas. So body schema

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[328] Vittorio Gallese and Corrado Sinigaglia, "The Bodily Self as Power for Action," *Neuropsychologia* 48 (2010): 746.

[329] Ibid., 747. Italics in original.

is "characterized by both multi-sensory integration and dynamic plasticity" that is not confined to basic physical action but "encompasses the level of *motor goal-relatedness* characterizing each basic action."[330] Since body schema is a dynamically shifting concept, one's body seems to be "an attitude directed towards a certain existing or possible task."[331] So an actor fulfilling a task has a body image surrounding that task; since it is a task the actor does "as if" they were in the given circumstances of the character, they in reality *are* that character in action. They have agency and a self-awareness to plan and execute an action. Of course, other brain mechanisms allow (healthy neurotypical) actors to realize the differences, but Stanislavsky's instruction to play the action above all is key. But it is the "correct instrumental goal-relatedness of these actions as they are performed [which] enables the experience of ownership they evoke" and are "determined by the activation of the neural networks" involved.[332] Since the "premotor regions responsible for the control of action are thus also crucial for the agents' awareness of the same actions" it is the physical motor action that allows us to think of a "self" whether it be our "actor" self or our "character" self.[333] Since this is in turn coupled with our mirroring systems, we see the sense of ourselves also in relationship to the actions of others. This is what keeps actors focused on their scene partners in this dynamic action system. Gallese and Sinigaglia conclude: "What is critical in the mirror mechanism is the fact that it capitalizes upon the same motor potentialities for action that constitute the minimal sense of self as bodily self…. we want

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[330] Ibid., 747-748. My italics.

[331] Ibid., 748.

[332] Ibid., 750.

[333] Ibid., 751.

to emphasize that the mirror mechanism capitalizes upon the very same power for action at the basis of our first-person capability for acting. In so doing the mirror mechanism contributes to the emergence of a bodily self.[334]

I am not saying that external physical differences are no longer needed, only that they shape *how* we act, not *what* we act. We do not need to "put on" a character, only perform actions in the manner in which the character's body would perform them.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has made a thorough review of Stanislavsky's concept of the centrality of action in his system. From early in his creative exploration, Stanislavsky eschewed the commonplace histrionics of his contemporary actors in favor of a more "truthful" action on stage. Over time, he concluded that physical action and active analysis were the keys to this truth, and that emotion would come of its own accord as a natural outcome of that action. Cognitive science backs up his claim with further evidence. His "Magic If" (*Magicheskoe esli by)* is explained and then later supported by evidence of character building by Gallese and Sinigaglia's concept of "power for action." Discussions of the translations of "problem" and "task" instead of "objective" are also backed by the science as "objective" has not been found in the action-related scientific literature while the other two words are common. Stanislavsky's method of physical action and then active analysis are discussed in detail and then illuminated by the scientific underpinnings of each. I include my own experience with these techniques as further explanation and discussed the physical nature of action and the brain processes behind it including mirroring systems and the connection between perception and action. My own work

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[334] Ibid., 753.

with Laban movement efforts and active analysis is included as examples and as a way in which to explain cognitive load during the acting processes and how Stanislavsky's active analysis may lessen it. Overall, this chapter demonstrates that Stanislavsky's focus on action is central for the actor to reduce their cognitive load enough to play concrete, actionable verbs while dynamically interacting with their scene partners and following the through−line of the play, action by action.

# CHAPTER 3

# IMAGINATION

*Listen carefully to what I'm about to tell you:* ***every one of our movements on stage, every word must be the result of a truthful imagination.***

—Stanislavsky as the Director, Tortsov[335]

*What is it to imagine? We have examined a number of dimensions along which imaginings can vary; shouldn't we now spell out what they have in common? Yes, if we can. But I can't.*

—Philosopher Kendall Walton[336]

In her influential book *The Actor, Image, And Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience,* Rhonda Blair asserts that "Imagination is **a**, if not **the**, **key term** that provides a link between acting and cognitive neuroscience."[337] I would add that imagination is perhaps the link between all the disparate brain functions actors must use in performance, as it is one of the basic functional tools of everyday existence. And yet, despite the frequent every-day usage of the

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[335] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 84. Original italics.

[336] Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 19.

[337] Blair, *The Actor, Image, and Action,* 41. Bold in original.

word and the centrality of imagination to the actor, imagination remains an undertheorized concept for theatre scholars and practitioners, and an elusive, and often contested topic for philosophers and neuroscientists. Stanislavsky's remarks about imagination can help sort through some of its disparate meanings and functions, highlighting the most relevant for the actor, and can lead to a greater understanding of what Sharon Carnicke's seminal *Stanislavsky in Focus* asserts is Stanislavsky's most important "lost term": *perezhivat.* For her, *perezhivat,* which can be roughly translated as "to experience," equates to his idea of "living the part."[338] Since contemporary cognitive science views imagination as a foundational part of consciousness, it is surely, in some basic way, integral to how an actor can "live through a role" and "experience" on stage. Blair stresses that in this "living through" the role "the actor does not become the character, but experiences or lives life through the character, as she performs a meticulously shaped score."[339] This chapter argues that imagination is the key to Stanislavsky's idea of experiencing a role, and that current research in cognitive science can help us understand not only the link between imagination and experiencing, but also how we can better use imagination to enhance the ability of actors to live through their roles during performance.

**Stanislavsky's Term "Imagination"**

The term "imagination" seems to have avoided the pitfalls of disputed jargon that plague many of Stanislavsky's other frequently used words, like "problem/objective" and "bits/beats." He assumes we all know exactly what he means when he says how important the imagination is for an actor, and to a large extent we do. It is important, however, to parse out the nuances of his

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[338] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 107.

[339] Blair, *The Actor, Image and Action,* 82.

use of and discussions about imagination to see how and when the imagination can be accessed, incorporated, and developed in the actor. Although protégés such as Michael Chekhov, Stella Adler and Maria Knebel are often distinguished from Stanislavsky by their more intense focus on imagination, this concept actually occupied a great deal of his writing and teaching.

**The Romantic Concept of Imagination**

Although practicing after the official Romantic period, Stanislavsky reflected the Romantic ideas of the creative, unknowable gifts of imagination in his practice and writings. As neuroscientist Nigel J. T. Thomas points outs, "the Romantic conception of imagination (which was heir to a long tradition) has had an enormous and ineradicable intellectual influence and is deeply embedded in our folk psychology." [340] Although still influential today, it had an especially powerful effect on a man who desperately wanted to live a life in art. Thomas suggests that this Romantic influence included the valorization of "creative imagination" that was a "unified faculty" responsible for image production. For the Romantics, "mental imagery and creativity were intimately bound up with one another."[341] They were not one and the same thing, however.

**The "Magic If"**

Stanislavsky points to the important "magic if" process he had already outlined in an earlier chapter titled "Action, 'If', 'Given Circumstances": "Our work begins by introducing the magic 'if' into the play and role, as this lifts the actor out of everyday life into the world of the

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[340] Nigel J. T. Thomas, "Are Theories of Imagery Theories of Imagination? An Active Perception Approach to Conscious Mental Content," *Cognitive Science* Vol 23 (2) (1999): 208.

[341] Ibid., 231.

*imagination."*[342] Actors' imaginations momentarily remove them from their own concerns and help them focus on the characters they are portraying. Theatrical action is not possible without imagination.

This realignment is essential for Stanislavsky's conception of theatrical art. He stresses, "The normal world is not art. This by its very nature, needs inventiveness…. The actor's task is to use his creative skills to transform the story of the play into *theatrical fact*. Our imagination has an enormous role to play here."[343] It is what allows the world of the play to have its own rules that allow for truth within the circumstances of the play, or as David Saltz may say, truth within the "infiction," which is theatrical truth. That there are theatrical facts at the same time as human facts allows the actor to have Diderot's idea of a dual consciousness in which actors can watch themselves at the same time as they are inhabiting a character. Kostya, the fictional student in *An Actor's Work*, describes the process, "I, as it were, split down the middle. One half was the actor, the other watched like an audience."[344]

Stanislavsky, as his alter ego Tortsov, insists that although the dramatist gives much information, it is the actor who must fill in the details of the character's life and behavior. Referring to the text he asks, "Is that sufficient to create fully what a character looks like, his mannerisms, his walk, personal habits?… Can that really portray the character, determine all the nuances of his thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and actions?… Our most immediate source of help

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[342] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work,* 60.

[343] Ibid. Original italics.

[344] Ibid., 527.

here is our imagination, with its magic 'if' and Given Circumstances."[345] Actors need "mobile, dynamic, responsive and properly developed" imaginations to fill in the details of characters' actions, bringing them to life with truth in the circumstances.[346] For Stanislavsky, this process necessitates both the "homework" of research and asking "what would I do if I were in these circumstances?" and then physically embodying these imaginings in action.

It is important to note here that Stanislavsky insists that this truth is not the truth of realism but truth in whatever world the play creates. Fantasy plays were indeed a "passion" of Stanislavsky as he considered it "a joy… to imagine something that had never existed in life but is none the less true, and lives in us."[347]

**Mental Images**

Tortsov clarifies, "All I have to do is set a theme for you and you begin to see pictures with what we call your mind's eye. In our actors' jargon we call these *mental images, the inner eye.* Judging from personal experience, to imagine, fantasize means above all to see the things one is thinking about with the mind's eye."[348] So both the processes of imagining and fantasizing require mental visual image stimulation. Importantly though, the images are not the final goal, action is: "All you had to do was see the familiar setting in your mind's eye, feel its atmosphere, and immediately familiar thoughts connected with the place where the action occurred came

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[345] Ibid., 62.

[346] Ibid., 85.

[347] Ibid., 186.

[348] Ibid., 73.

alive in you. *Thoughts produce feelings and experiences, and then the impulse to action*."[349] Imagination (which can be created willfully) is the spark for truthful action (performed with genuine feeling that cannot easily be summoned at will).

Stanislavsky is also specific about how these images can be created and used, though his explanations rely heavily on metaphor. He differentiates the outer images of sensory stimuli and the inner images of imagination, both based on given circumstances, as the two things of which an actor must be aware during performance: "Every moment in the outer and inner progress of the play, the actor must see what is going on around him."[350] When rehearsing for Massenet's Opera *Werther*, Stanislavsky instructed, "listen, listen with redoubled attention, to your partner's words. Look at what he is doing. And enter into *his* part entirely."[351] Imagination is at play in that this "entering" includes not only the visual perception of the acting partner and physical surroundings, but also the "film strip" of mental images "projected onto" the actor's "mind's eye." This focus allows an immersion into the life of the character so that the actor as character "lives his own life entirely." Living their own life references the idea of experiencing during performance or really living/acting, not pretending to live/act. Once again, Stanislavsky comes back to the integration of emotions stimulated by imagination with experiencing: "These images created corresponding mood inside, which then acts upon your mind and evokes matching

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[349] Ibid., 73. My italics.

[350] Ibid., 74.

[351] Stanislavski, *Stanislavski on the Art of the Stage,* 283. Original italics.

experiences."[352] Importantly, Stanislavsky is not instructing the actor to switch off receiving outside stimuli to concentrate on these inner imaginings, but instead to let the "mind" be the projector and the screen be "somewhere outside me, in the empty space before me."[353] He clarifies that the imaginary images or sounds "take shape outside ourselves but nonetheless arise, in the first instance, inside ourselves, in our imagination and our memory."[354] For him, then, the imaginations and sensory stimuli occur in the same physical space so an actor need not vacillate between the inner and outer, but rather experience both simultaneously.

**Developing Imagination**

When a student asks how one can develop their imagination, Stanislavsky clarifies between two different imaginative processes: "There is the kind of imagination which takes the initiative, which works on its own. It develops on its own, without special effort. It works constantly, tirelessly, waking or sleeping." This type of imagination is an unconscious process independent of the actor's Will.[355] He continues, "There is also the kind of imagination which lacks initiative but which readily accepts anything suggested to it and then develops it

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[352] Ibid.

[353] Ibid. This view reflects the romantic view of "consciousness as a lamp that used imagination to shed light on the world creating experiences" as previously discussed.

[354] Ibid., 75.

[355] Carnicke explains that Stanislavsky used "unconscious (*Bessoznatel'nyi*)" to refer to "that which in mental life is not available to the conscious mind." He divided it into two parts: the "subconscious (*Podsoznanie)*" which "lived within each person" and the "superconscious (*Sverkhsoznanie)"* which "transcends the individual." Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 181.

independently. That kind of imagination is comparatively easy to develop." This conscious process is a matter of purposely choosing to "receive"; the strength of the actor's Will affects the imagining. Stanislavsky cautions, "However, if the imagination just accepts what has been suggested to it, and doesn't develop it, then there are problems." Just "going through" life using the imagination complacently will not lead to good acting. "There are people who neither create on their own nor accept what is given them. If they can only latch onto the externals of what has been demonstrated to them, they have no imagination and without imagination you cannot be an actor."[356] If the same stimulus of "externals" perceived is simply reflected back unchanged, Stanislavsky believes that a lack of imagination is at hand and art will not ensue. It requires imagination to take these "externals" and internalize them to create truth for the actor. Without this imagination, he insists, one cannot be an actor.

Tortsov goes on to explain that this "imagination must incite first inner then outer action."[357] Imagination is a lure for action, so if an act of the imagination does not invoke an impulse to physical action, it is not helpful. "Actors' work doesn't consist only in using their imagination, but also in the physical expression of what they have imagined. [Actors need to] transform the imaginary into reality."[358] Once the imagination has sparked an action, the actor must externalize the action through the body.

Another important insight into the way that an actor uses imagination comes from Tortsov's work with his students to develop their imaginations. He asks them to start with their

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[356] Ibid., 63-64.

[357] Ibid., 65.

[358] Ibid., 67.

relationship to objects that indicate something other than their original intended use. Actors are not to hallucinate that the object is something other than what it is, nor should they try to transform the image they perceive into something else, but rather believe in the truthfulness of their *relationship to* the object. The cheap plastic ring just given to me by my scene partner can "be" an expensive diamond engagement invitation if I treat it as such. Or, as Stanislavsky illustrates, a couple of old chairs standing in for set pieces can be transformed through imagination: "While you may not believe the chair is a genuine tree or rock, we do believe the genuineness of our *relationship* to these artificial substitutes and treat them *as if* they were trees or rocks."[359] "As if" is about truthful relationship to people and objects; it is this truth of relationship that leads to true actions and emotions for the actor.

In addition, acting cannot be specific without imagination. To avoid acting "in general," which is "intolerable in art," actors need to find very specific details pulled from reality by doing research. Research can include collecting information from books, photographs, stories, museums, visual art, etc. "All these important data give your work a firmer foundation, make it less flimsy, something which always occurs when you make-believe 'in general'…. Only don't forget that at all times you must be in touch with what is logical and sequential. That will enable you to bring wavering, unstable fantasies nearer to unwavering, stable reality."[360] Again, this is an internal reality or truth rather than an external one, but is fed with external stimuli that can be transformed in the actor's mind (fantasy) into a new artistic reality. This reality also needs to be in a logical, sequenced order, not just a random collection of thoughts or impressions. He

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[359] Ibid., 69. My italics.

[360] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work,* 71.

cautions that actors should use external stimuli as "hints, nudges, starting off points," but "the most important creative work falls to our sense of make-believe."[361]

**The Imagination Process**

Stanislavsky not only discussed how the actor uses imagination, but he also gave step-by-step instruction on how to use and develop it. The actor needs to begin with a state of "repose" that is "the indispensable quality of every creative art."[362] The body must be free of tensions and irrelevant thoughts, so imagination has room to act. This repose allows for "*mental alertness"* and concentration.[363] Then it is time to apply the "magic if" and perform the actions stimulated. If the actor's "imagination is sluggish," and in need of additional stimuli, they must ask themselves: "who, what, where, why and for what reason whatever you see on the stage is happening."[364] In rehearsal, Stanislavsky would go back and forth between these questions based on given circumstances and trying them out with improvisational *études,* before continuing with the scripted words.[365]

Stanislavsky also comes back to these basic questions to create detailed images in classroom work. "Every idea you have must be precisely sustained and strictly determined. The questions — *who, when, where, why, for what reason, how* — which we asked so as to stir our imagination, helped us create a picture of our imaginary, illusory life with greater and greater

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[361] Ibid., 71-72.

[362] Stanislavski, *Stanislavski and the Art of the Stage*, 150.

[363] Ibid., 177.

[364] Ibid., 275.

[365] Ibid., 300.

definition."[366] He does not say that an actor must ask these questions and employ the "magic if" (or "what would I do if my fiction became fact?") at every moment of the play, however. "There are, of course, cases when the picture draws itself without the aid of conscious, mental activity, without leading questions, just intuitively. But you yourself can see that you can't rely on the dynamic energy the imagination, leave it to fend for itself."[367] Once again Stanislavsky is attempting to reach a truthful performance by stimulating the imagination either by unconscious means (through perceiving and reacting) or/and through conscious means (through purposeful imaginings).

He instructs actors to "pay particular attention to developing your imagination. Develop it in every possible way — through those exercises with which you are already familiar, that is, direct to work on the imagination as such, as well as indirect work."[368] He instructs them to mentally combine images, create stories about objects, take the given circumstances from a play and add details, and in addition to answer specific questions about who, where, why, when and how for a play. Practice in the classroom helps ready the actors to fully use their imaginations on a production. He cautions:

> *Every one of our movements onstage, every word must be the result of a truthful imagination.* If you speak a word, or do something mechanically on stage, not knowing who you are, where you come from, why, what you need, where you are going, or what you will do there, you will be acting without imagination, and this fragment of your

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[366] Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, 83-84.

[367] Ibid.

[368] Ibid., 85.

existence on stage, however long or short, will hold no truth for you. You will perform like a machine that's been wound up, an automaton.[369]

Machine-like, lifeless acting is an anathema to Stanislavsky. "Make it a rule never to do anything on stage mechanically, as mere outward form."[370] Imagination is the key to this truthful life on stage. "What can warm us, excite us so much as our own imagination?" he asks.[371] He answers with the controllable process at the heart of acting: "imagination, while devoid of flesh and blood, has the ability to summon genuine actions from flesh and blood – from our bodies."[372] This aspect of an actor's psychotechnique stimulates emotion and action leading to the feeling of "I am" in the actor, and the "life of the human spirit" on stage: an actor experiencing.

**Experiencing: "I am Being"**

The entire first year of study outlined in *An Actor's Work* is titled "Experiencing," and, as Carnicke stresses, experiencing is the "*sine qua non* of the system."[373] The inner work every practitioner of the system cultivates leads to actors experiencing life on stage. Yet, "experiencing" is only a rough translation of the Russian word Stanislavsky used, *perezhivanie.*

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[369] Ibid., 84. Original italics.

[370] Ibid., 85.

[371] Ibid.

[372] Ibid., 84.

[373] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 107. For a thorough review of Stanislavsky's use of the term "Experiencing" see chapter 4.

There is no exact English translation. Problematically, Elizabeth Hapgood translated this term with various words and phrases in different parts of *An Actor Prepares* as Carnicke explains:

> She [Hapgood] translates the term variously in order to encompass its many meanings and nuances. In doing so, however, she makes readers unable to see it as a discrete concept, which Stanislavsky struggles to establish and define. Depending on context she chooses: "the art of living a part" [15], "to live the scene" [121], "sensations" [172], "living and experiencing" [15], "experience," "emotional experience," and finally, "creation." Additionally, she aligns the term with "emotions" and "sensations" when she translates *perezhivanie* as "the capacity to feel" [170], but "feelings" (*chuvstvovaniia)* as "experiences" [166]; both derivative verbs (*perezhit'* and *chuvstvovat')* become the single "to feel" [277]. Ironically, while Western practitioners turned other ideas into heatedly debated jargon — emotional/affective memory, objectives, motivations, etc. — Stanislavsky's own definition of his System disappeared from the polemics.[374]

Hapgood also chose to delete the subtitle, "*The Creative Process of Experiencing,"* from *An Actor Prepares,* further undermining its importance. Since the Hapgood translations were the only avenues in English for people to understand the system for so long, it is not surprising that the term "experiencing" generated little controversy, or even much consideration. Stanislavskian scholar and artist Sergei Tcherkasski stresses that Stanislavsky himself wasn't caught up in the picky minutiae of the word, and that, reflecting the emotional connotations inherent in the

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[374] Carnicke, *Stanislavski in Focus,* 109.

Russian word, contemporary Russians are just as likely to define it as "suffering" as they would "experiencing."[375] The *concept* is key rather than the term.

Although "experiencing" may not have caught on in Western actors' lingo, the similar expression "I am" has. Directors and teachers often encourage actors to speak of themselves as character in the first-person "I" rather than discussing the third-person "he," "she" or "they" (e.g. "she wants to slap him" versus "I want to slap him").[376] Although acting with either point of view uses imagination at its heart, this difference is essential for distinguishing between Stanislavsky-type "experiencing" a role and "presenting" a role. Whether or not these are the same processes in the brain will be explored shortly.

So, what does "experiencing" mean for an actor? Carnicke describes it as a creative "state of mind and being" encompassing "'inspiration,' 'creating,' 'creative moods,' and the activation of the 'subconscious.' Stanislavsky also compares it to the sensation of existing fully within the

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[375] Sergei Tcherkasski, "Method of Action Analysis: from Stanislavsky to Today – A Practical Session on the Director's Craft of Play Analysis," Lecture at "The S Word: Stanislavsky in Context" Symposium, The University of Malta (April 6, 2019).

[376] Alternately, while being interviewed, actors will sometimes purposely distinguish themselves from their character in the audience's minds by using the third person. These same actors will often use the first person when performing; they understand the difference needed for the acting process versus separating their own persona from their character's persona for the public.

immediate moment — what he calls 'I am' (*Ia esm'*)."[377] "Experiencing" is the whole of the actor's work during performance and is completely subjective. Carnicke explains:

> All his attempts to pin it down sound equally abstract, metaphorical, and finally unsatisfying. So then, what is "experiencing?" Stanislavsky describes this state as "happy," but "rare," when the actor is "seized" by the role. Michael Chekhov, who experimented with the system at the First Studio, writes that, when an actor reaches this state: "Everything changes for him at this happy moment. As the creator of his character, he becomes inwardly free of his own creation and becomes the observer of his own work […] He has given to his image his flesh and blood, the ability to move and speak, to feel, to wish, and now the image disappears from the mind's eye and exists within him and acts upon his means of expression from inside him."[378]

The "disappearing" from the mind's eye entails a shift from conscious imagining to unconscious imagining that he may not consciously register but still affects his choices and internal state. The actor can focus on the stimuli encountered in the scene while automatically drawing on the imagination developed and nurtured in rehearsal and life in general. This "existing fully within the immediate moment" reflects the concepts of "flow" and the Dynamic Systems Theory that John Lutterbie, borrowing from mathematics theories, explores in *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance*.

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[377] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 8, 155.

[378] Carnicke, 108 and Michael Chekhov, *On the Technique of Acting* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 155.

## THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF IMAGINATION

### The Scientific Term "Imagination"

As Kendall Walton suggests in the epigraph at the top of this chapter, philosophers and scientists have struggled with what imagination is and how it works in the human body since Aristotle. At its most basic, imagination is simply the act of having an image or concept of something not currently being perceived through the senses. This image is most often visual, but all the senses may be employed. Biologically, imagination can be seen from a similarly broad lens. Philosopher and cognitive scientist Nigel J. T. Thomas offers one of the more comprehensive and helpful definitions:

> Imagination is what makes our sensory experience meaningful, enabling us to interpret and make sense of it, whether from a conventional perspective or from a fresh, original, individual one. It is what makes perception more than the mere physical stimulation of sense organs. It also produces mental imagery, visual and otherwise, which is what makes it possible for us to think outside the confines of our present perceptual reality, to consider memories of the past and possibilities for the future, and to weigh alternatives against one another. Thus, imagination makes possible all our thinking about what is, what has been, and, perhaps most important, what might be.[379]

In an article published in the scientific journal *Neuron,* Marianne Cumella Reddan, Tor Dessart Wager, and Daniela Schiller offer what is perhaps the most succinct definition: "imagination is

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[379] Nigel J.T. Thomas, "Imagination, Mental Imagery, Consciousness, and Cognition: Scientific, Philosophical and Historical Approaches," *Dictionary of Philosophy of Mind* (2006). Web. Leslie Stevenson compiled a list of "Twelve Conceptions of Imagination" that focuses on

an internal simulation of real-life events."[380] The rest of this chapter will explore the complexities of the concept in depth.

**The Senses**

To begin unpacking the complex relationship between the imagination and the senses, I will briefly review how the senses work in the body. The brain is encapsulated in a layer of cerebrospinal fluid and blood vessels within the hard, protective skull, covered by skin and oftentimes hair. It needs other organs to relay information about the outside environment, so decisions about actions can be made to keep the body alive and well. Each of the senses (including sight, scent, hearing, taste, touch, proprioception, balance and temperature) require specialized cells to interact with the world outside the body causing chemical and electrical chains of reactions that tell the brain information. For instance, in our eyes we have cells that simply react to movement in our vision field. They have a very fast pathway to the brain so we can quickly react in response. Our eyes have other cells that determine color and move in a slower chain of reactions, as a delay in arrival is less likely to cause a predator to harm us. Kirchhoff explains that this speed differential is due to hierarchies of predictive processing:

> The input to the system from the sense is conceived as prediction error and what cannot be predicted at one level is passed on to the next. In general, low levels of the hierarchy predict basic sensory attributes and causal regularities at very fast, millisecond, time

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"the most influential conceptions of imagination" in a philosophical sense. See Leslie Stevenson, "Twelve Conceptions of Imagination," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43, no. 3 (2003): 238.

[380] Marianne Cumella Reddan, Tor Dessart Wager, and Daniela Schiller, "Attenuating Neural Threat Expression with Imagination," *Neuron* 100, no. 4 (2018): 994.

> scales, and more complex regularities, at increasingly slower time scales, are dealt with at higher levels.[381]

The more time we have, the more factors we can take into consideration when decision-making. Along the way we can add new stimuli that test our hypotheses. A "prediction error" will alert us to discrepancies in what we *thought* would happen versus what our senses tell us *did* happen so we can adjust accordingly. For instance, we often "mishear" things when we expect something different.[382] It is also what makes touching ourselves feel different from when someone else touches us; our predictive models attenuate the experience.[383]

**Mental Images**

Once one of our senses receives information from the environment (or within the body), that information is relayed to the appropriate sensory cortex. From there, relevant information is sent to the prefrontal cortex where decisions can be made, and then to motor areas to cause a

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[381] Michael D. Kirchhoff, "Predictive Processing, Perceiving and Imagining: Is to Perceive to Imagine, or Something Close to It?" *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 175, no. 3 (2018): 760.

[382] Ibid., 754.

[383] Konstantina Kilteni, Benjamin Jan Andersson, Christian Houborg, and H. Henrik Ehrsson, "Motor Imagery Involves Predicting the Sensory Consequences of the Imagined Movement," *Nature Communications* 9.1 (2018): 1-9.

physical action.[384] The cerebellum, generally thought to be responsible for sequencing events, seems to play an important role in this process as well. It appears to "generate internal sensory predictions for both executed and imagined actions."[385] It is also likely how we can imagine time and tempos — an extremely important process for Stanislavsky.

For most stimuli, memory is also involved in these models. In fact, there is considerable brain activation overlap between remembering the past and imagining the future.[386] As discussed in the last chapter, when a stimulus is perceived, its features are compared in our memories to items in schemas to see if we have experience to help guide our responses. While there are exact matches sometimes, on many occasions we find no exact duplicate but only something similar. We can then use our imaginations to compare these items or schemas, often blending them together into new imaginings in a process often called "mental synthesis."[387]

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[384] This is a vastly simplified description. Some of the fastest pathways – usually those regarding danger to the body – cause a physical, reflexive reaction even before the prefrontal cortex has time to become aware of the stimulus through a more direct pathway.

[385] Kilteni, Andersson, Houborg, and Ehrsson, "Motor Imagery Involves Predicting," 6-7.

[386] C. Brock Kirwan, Stefania R. Ashby, and Michelle I. Nash, "Remembering and Imagining Differentially Engage the Hippocampus: A Multivariate FMRI Investigation," *Cognitive Neuroscience* 5, no. 3–4 (2014): 177.

[387] Blair, "The Actor, Image and Action" and Rhonda Blair and John Lutterbie, "Introduction: Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism's Special Section on Cognitive Studies, Theatre, and Performance*," Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (2011), thoroughly

Mental synthesis is likely the key element of imagination.[388] Clusters of neurons link together after being mutually triggered in a process of "binding-by-synchrony," forming what neuroscientists Andrey Vyshedskly and Rita Dunn refer to as "neuronal ensembles."[389] Neuroscientists often describe this process, sometimes called "Hebbian Learning," with the phrase: "Cells that fire together wire together."[390] The pre-frontal cortex is responsible for the synchronization of neuronal ensembles (primarily in posterior sensory cortex regions) into a new, morphed image.

This same process is also a part of language, which also depends on mental synthesis. Both mental synthesis and language develop in children at about the same time. When neuronal ensembles fire together, they can become mental schemas, in one object (e.g. car) or one scene (living room). As Leeuwen points out, however, if it was only a matter of juxtapositioning one

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discuss how the blending theories of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner are extremely helpful to the actor.

[388] Other elements of imagination include planning, memory recall, spontaneous insight, dreaming and hallucination. Andrey Vyshedskiy and Rita Dunn, "Mental Synthesis Involves the Synchronization of Independent Neuronal Ensembles," *Research Ideas and Outcomes,* no. 1–7 (2015): 1.

[389] Ibid., 2.

[390] Christian Keysers and Valeria Gazzola, "Hebbian Learning and Predictive Mirror Neuorons for Actions, Sensations and Emotions," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B,* 369 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2013.0175.

image on top of another we couldn't get the complex imaging of "geometric transformation problems," such as imagining a dancing cat (a behavior associated with humans combined with something that is not human).[391] Further support comes from studies that have shown that people who are stronger imaginers generally also have more emotion, stronger memories and more physiological arousal.[392] This reflects why strengthening the imagination will benefit each of the actor's drives of feeling (emotion), representation (stronger memories) and Will (related to physiological arousal), central to Stanislavsky's methods.

Schemas that include the body moving through space are essential for both physical action and imagining. What is in the space and how one interacts with objects in the

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[391] Van Leeuwen, "The Meanings of 'Imagine' Part I: Constructive Imagination," *Philosophy Compass* (2013): 220.

[392] Peter J. Lang, "Cognition in Emotion: Concept and Action," *Emotions, Cognition, and Behavior* (1984): 192-226; and Reddan, Wager and Schiller, "Attenuatung Neural Threat," 996. Sergei Tcherkasski reports that the Russian State Institute of Performing Arts in St. Petersburg uses this concept in their student acceptance process. In addition to interviews, a psychologist will introduce a cold-water bath to the hand of a prospective student and measure their physiological responses (such as heart rate, body temperature and blood flow), and then again as the student is imagining the cold-water bath. A strong imaginer, they have found, will have even greater physical reactions when imagining the cold water than they do when they actually experience it. Poorer imaginers will have little to none. This objective data does not fully encompass the audition process, he notes, but only adds additional information for the program directors to consider.

environment, are key to these schemas. They also play a role in determining body schemas and therefore our concepts of "I" as a distinct person. Once these ensembles are "wired" together, they will fire in the exact same way on subsequent trials until another, different stimulus changes it. Experiments that use fMRI to measure brain activity in imaginers have shown that trained personnel are able to predict what someone is imagining or visually perceiving just based on their brain activity patterns.[393]

Importantly, these models work to improve future action even if the physical action is not performed at the moment. For instance, mentally rehearsing dance steps uses the same models as actual performance of the dance steps, allowing for improvement of the dancer's performance on subsequent trials.[394] This would clearly be beneficial with theatrical blocking as well. Studies have demonstrated that imagined movements can affect physiological signals such as heart beat and breathing similarly to executed movements, further suggesting a biological overlap of brain networks.[395] This neural plasticity also allows for change in reactions to fear-inducing stimuli

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[393] Tomoyasu Horikawa, Yukiyasu Kamitani, "Generic Decoding of Seen and Imagined Objects Using Hierarchical Visual Features," *Nature Communications* 8 ( 2017): 9.

[394] Kilteni, Andersson, Houborg, and Ehrsson, "Motor Imagery Involves Predicting," 6-7. Neil Utterback explores this practice more fully in "The Olympic Actor," *Theatre, Performance and Cognition: Languages, Bodies and Ecologies, Performance and Science: Interdisciplinary Dialogue,* eds. Rhonda Blair, Amy Cook (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2016), 85-87.

[395] Ibid., 2.

with practice (such as imagining a snake in a safe environment can help reduce the fear of snakes).[396]

Researchers at Dartmouth University have found evidence for the long-theorized concept of the "brain's workspace" as the place for imagination.[397] This indicates that there is not one specific area of the brain in which imagination occurs; imagination operates across a broad neural network, activating many parts of the brain at once. Depending on what is being imagined, different areas will be activated. Imagining an object and using the senses to experience an object involve some of the same processes, so they compete with one another (e.g. attending on one visual image interferes with the detection of another visual image). This overlap of brain networks indicates that a similar process is responsible for both.[398] Neuroimaging studies reveal that visual mental imagery activates areas in the visual cortex (when one imagines something visually the areas of the brain responsible for actually seeing something are activated). The specific areas of the brain activated are also dependent on the type of imagery (for instance,

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[396] Reddan, Wager, and Schiller, "Attenuating Neural Threat," 1001.

[397] Alexander Schlegel, Peter J. Kohler, Sergey V. Fogelson, Prescott Alexander, Dedeepya Konuthula, Peter Ulric Tse. "Network Structure and Dynamics of the Mental Workspace," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. 110 (40)( 2013), 16277-16282.

[398] Studies involving patients with brain lesions in which they are impaired with either perception or imagination but not both, indicate they are not exactly the same process, however. See Berit Brogaard, and Dimitria Electra Gatzia, "Unconscious Imagination and the Mental Imagery Debate," *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017): 2, for a deeper discussion.

face recognition areas are activated when imagining a face). Similarly, when the imagery is emotional in content, the areas of the brain that process emotional information are activated.

Agnati and colleagues assert that "some neuronal systems can have two capabilities: to perform a function and to create in the internal theater of the subject the virtual performance by the subject of that function."[399] They look to mirroring systems and motor imagery, as discussed in the previous chapter, as examples of the ways in which this process may work.

In either case, the imagination is responsible for this "predictive processing" that allows for a virtual reality or a Star-Trek-type holodeck experience of the world that integrates imagining, remembering, and perceiving. They interact so seamlessly that we don't usually realize that our imagination, emotions and past experiences change not only how we understand memory, but also influence the way we experience our world in the *present*.[400] Stanislavsky interpreted this ability as a "filmstrip" of images available to the actor, created through research and rehearsal, and available to the actor during each moment of rehearsal. His filmstrip wasn't a flat, two-dimensional space however, and since he didn't have Star Trek terminology to use, he wrote about the relationship between projector and screen — another three-dimensional space. Thinking of the imagination in this way may help actors to understand that they don't have to

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[399] Luigi F. Agnati, Diego Guidolin, L. Battistin1, G. Pagnoni and K. Fuxe, "The Neurobiology of Imagination: Possible Role of Interaction-Dominant Dynamics and Default Mode Network," *Frontiers in Psychology* (2013): 2.

[400] Christopher C. Berger, and H. Henrik Ehrsson, "Mental Imagery Induces Cross-Modal Sensory Plasticity and Changes Future Auditory Perception," *Psychological Science* 29, Vol. 29(6) (2018): 933.

choose between research-based imagination and playing "in the moment"; these two things occur in the same mental space.

Leeuwen points out that "imagine" can take on different shadings of meaning in different contexts: a constructive meaning, an attitude, or mental imagery.[401] He gives the example of thinking of a purple-eyed dragon. We generate an image by a *constructive* blending process, our *attitude* is that of a fictional creation (we don't believe it is real), and we represent it in a visual and possibly auditory *mental imagery*. Imagining something without having any particular attitude about it is called "objectual imaging," while imagining with an attitude is "propositional imagery."[402] Unconscious imagination takes place, for instance, when one is about to reach for a glass of water. We have a visual representation of the glass, the hand and the arm in space and estimate the route it will move. If this is a fast process, and if our focus is elsewhere, it will be unconscious.[403] Stanislavsky usually refers to something more akin to "creative imagination" rather than the colloquial "I imagine so" as a theatrical equivalent to phrases such as "I believe it to be true" or "I suppose" in real-life.

**Developing Imagination**

Imagining one's personal future seems to rely on the same neural networks as remembering one's past. Both processes need episodic memory, which includes information about the self (such as time, place, and context for personal events). Both the hippocampus and

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[401] Leeuwen, "The Meanings of Imagine," 222.

[402] Brogaard and Gatzia, "Unconscious Imagination," 2.

[403] Brogaard and Gatzia, "Unconscious Imagination," 6.

the parahippocampal cortex within the medial temporal lobes are central to both processes.[404] Interestingly, some brain areas show more blood flow during imagination than they do in physical action, indicating that imagination is not simply getting ready for action but rather part of its own "imagery neuron system" (INS).[405] The closeness between the INS and action support Stanislavsky's insistence that imagination can — and should — lead to action.

There also seems to be a greater correlation between imagery for motion and actual physical action than there is between imagery for vision and visual perception.[406] This divergence is possible as the vision process is divided into the dorsal pathway (heading toward the top of the brain) for physical action (sometimes called the "where" pathway) and the ventral pathway (heading toward the base of the brain) for cognitive processing of perceptions (sometimes called the "what" pathway). These differences, along with perspective changes, may also be what generally allows for different perspectives between what we imagine ourselves doing or feeling and what we imagine another to be doing or feeling. For actors, it is shifting from the "my character is doing XYZ" to "I am doing XYZ," allowing for experiencing the action as a character.

Although visual perception and conscious vision imagining for movement do not use identical networks, they do overlap. Unconscious visual imaginings seem to have a much greater

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[404] Linda J. Levine, Heather C. Lench, Melissa M. Karnaze and Steven J. Carlson, "Bias in Predicted and Remembered Emotion," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 19 (2018):73.

[405] Agnati, Guidolin, Battistin, Pagnoni and Fuxe, "The Neurobiology of Imagination," 9.

[406] Brogaard and Gatzia, "Unconscious Imagination," 5.

overlap with networks of perception.[407] Imagining can occur mixed in with or as a part of perceptions. Thomas gives the example of a child playing with a doll.[408] She sees the physical doll before her with an emotionless face but may imagine smiling lips on it. This blend can feel like it is outside of her, in the space before her in which the doll resides, not in her head. He suggests that "the lips themselves were actually being seen, but in a peculiar manner."[409] He accounts for this in much the same way a perception of our surroundings or an image can change depending on our point of view both physically (to see a photo of the duck-rabbit as a duck) and attitudinally/emotionally (the shadow is a ghost at midnight but just a shadow at noon). For Thomas, these examples are due to perception and imagination existing on non-mutually exclusive continuums in a situated cognition approach called "perceptual activity theory."[410]

As a result, it appears that we often use both of these processes at the same time. Horikawa and Kamitani have conducted research that reveals, "that feature level representations elicited in visual perception were recruited during mental object imagery in a graded manner.[411] Both object imagery and mental concepts work in concert, at the same time, influencing but not controlling each other.

Imagination also plays a part in silent inner speech and working memory. Vandervert explains, "When you mentally rehearse a phone number as you look for your cell phone and then

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[407] Ibid, 1.

[408] Thomas, "Are Theories of Imagery Theories of Imagination?," 234.

[409] Ibid.

[410] Ibid, 233.

[411] Horikawa & Kamitani, "Generic Encoding of Seen," 9-10.

mentally retrieve that number to tap it in to the keypad, two portions of the dentate nucleus [which links the cerebellum to the rest of the brain] are deployed on the same task in working memory—first comes dorsal activation in the imagination of silent inner speech followed by ventral activation in the imagination of cognitive retrieval."[412] Imaginative language use likely serves the same function as image thought: as representations that can be manipulated in order to solve problems.[413] The imagining function is the basis. For actors, character is tied directly to and expressed through the voice. Stanislavsky said that speech can be an action, and since this act of the imagination does not compete with the same brain areas (or imagery neuron systems), it can be a simultaneous action.

Whether it's a conscious or an unconscious process, receiving stimuli from outside of the brain (including interoception) is considered a bottom-up or outside-in phenomenon. Imaginings, whether they be images, scenes, or sounds, including self-talk, start internally, so they are considered top-down or inside-out processes. In either case, the hippocampal system, associated with memory, is key to both remembering the past and imagining the future. [414] The particular

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[412] Larry Vandervert, "Vygotsky Meets Neuroscience: The Cerebellum and the Rise of Culture through Play." *American Journal of Play* 9, no. 2 (2017): 206.

[413] Matt Faw and Bill Faw, "Neurotypical Subjective Experience Is Caused by a Hippocampal Simulation," *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews-Cognitive Science* 8, no. 5 (2017): 15.

[414] Andrej Bicanski, Neil Burgess, "A Neural-Level Model of Spatial Memory and Imagery," *eLife* (2018): 7.

patterns within the structure differentiate the two processes.[415] By increasing our exposure to images and experiences, and then manipulating them in sensory recall and other exercises as Stanislavsky suggested, we can improve upon both.

**Experiencing: "I Am Being"**

In addition to top-down and bottom-up processing, there is also a "default-mode network" (DMN) that is the "baseline pattern of functional brain activity" during periods of rest, when no goal-directed action is required.[416] The DMN, active when the brain is not attending to world-oriented tasks, is indicative of the fact that healthy brains never stop working altogether.[417] One or another network is always at play, and not only those responsible for basic life functions (e.g. heartbeat, breathing, digestion, etc.). DMN studies have shown that it primarily involves activations in medial temporal, parietal, and frontal circuits. Imaginative simulations activate the same brain regions for tasks such as "envisioning the future (prospection), remembering the past, conceiving the viewpoint of others (theory of mind), and spatial navigation [which] are all specific instances of a more general process of 'self-projection.'"[418] It is our imaginations that are creating scenarios that help us define who we are to ourselves and under the default-mode system. Conceivably, then, if we change these imaginings, we can change our self-concepts. Recent investigations suggest that is exactly what actors do when they are inhabiting a role. We

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[415] Kirwan, Ashby, and Nash, "Remembering and Imagining," 177.

[416] Anna Abraham, *"*The Wandering Mind Where Imagination Meets Consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies,* 25, No. 11–12 (2018): 41.

[417] Faw and Faw, "Neurotypical Subjective Experience," 3.

[418] Agnati, Guidolin, Battistin, Pagnoni and Fuxe, "The Neurobiology of Imagination," 2.

use these processes to project our every-day selves (who we think we are) or our character-self (in performance).

In a first of its kind 2018 study, Steven Brown, Peter Cockett and Ye Yuan used fMRI to scan actors' brains as they were answering questions as themselves or as a character in a "fictional first-person" perspective.[419] With guidance from an university acting teacher, the researchers specified that the actors take on the characters in what they called a Stanislavskian first-person perspective during performance after a third-person period of research and rehearsal.[420] They did different experiments looking at both *role* change, wherein an actor spoke as themselves versus as character, and *perspective* change (theory of mind) as they thought about what the character would do as a participant versus an observer. Using Leslie's language, they switched from their own "primary representation" (the basic ways in which representations are formed) to a "secondary representation" (what we think someone else is representing)."[421] The actors always knew which representation they were expressing and moved between the two

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[419] Steven Brown, Peter Cockett and Ye Yuan, "The Neuroscience of *Romeo and Juliet*: an fMRI Study of Acting," *Royal Society Open Science* 6 (2019): 1-20. The study had females portray Juliet and the males perform Romeo. Perspective in this section does not refer to Stanislavsky's use of the word as associated with the Supertask in the "Perspective of the Actor and the Role" chapter in *An Actor's Work*, but rather the literary story-telling device.

[420] The study conflates Stanislavsky with the Method in terminology, but basically followed Stanislavsky's practices as outlined in the system.

[421] Alan M. Leslie, "Pretense and Representation: The Origins of 'Theory of Mind,'" *Psychological Review* 94, no. 4 (1987): 414.

fluidly, just as we do when we are thinking of someone else's point of view in everyday life. The difference is when one is "acting" in this first-person manner, the "I" in question can be what the actor feels is either a character or themselves.

The results showed clear differences in brain activation patterns between each perspective, particularly in attention, perspective taking and embodiment areas. The most important finding related to imagination and character is that significant parts of the prefrontal cortex were deactivated while the posterior part of the precuneus was activated in the first-person acting process: one could say the "I am" result.[422] The authors of the study argue that these findings suggest that the deactivations "might result from a reduction of trait resources related to the present self and self-embodiment" while the precuneus activation "might represent a departure from a unified and focalized sense of attention and consciousness, towards the dual consciousness that typically characterizes dramatic acting, most especially mentalistic acting."[423] And yet, these inner and outer actions must encapsulate a whole process, not two separate ones. Stanislavsky explained this phenomenon: "when the actor has made himself the band of visual images, when he himself is swept away by all his different 'I want to's' so much that they have become his real life, when he says with all his outer and inner actions – 'I am'…", then the actor can "sweep away" the spectator into the role as well.[424]

When one is "acting" in this first-person manner (*experiencing* the role), however, the "I" in question can be what the actor feels is either a character or themselves —the two overlap and

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[422] Brown, Cockett and Yuan, "The Neuroscience of *Romeo and Juliet,"* 3.

[423] Ibid., 18.

[424] Stanislavski, *Stanislavski and the Art of the Stage*, 224.

oscillate. Importantly, when an actor is in this first-person perspective, the activation in the pre-frontal cortex regions decreases indicating less theory-of-mind activity (what would "they" be feeling/thinking/doing) and increases the posterior part of the precuneus, or the "I" center of the self-model. It seems that actors are able to have brain and perception operate in two aspects at once as if they had two "selves."

The researchers also added a trial with actors answering in the third person point of view, but with a British accent. Surprising to the researchers, but supportive of the Action chapter in this dissertation, they found "that a gestural change to one's accent while still maintaining the self-identity led to a qualitative pattern of deactivations similar to that for acting, suggesting that changes in embodiment can lead to neural changes in networks associated with perspective taking and role change."[425] Just by donning an accent, the actors' senses of themselves were decreased and the perspective of the characters increased. This working from the "outside-in" supports Stanislavsky's instruction that "The actor… must be able to call to his aid all the different inner and outer stimuli that arouse the right feeling in him. He must know how to find the stimuli for each feeling, and you must be able to determine which stimulus produces which feeling."[426] He stresses that an inner stimulus may produce an outer effect. In *My Life in Art* Tortsov says that there are many examples about how the role of Stockman in *An Enemy of the People* was created through outer-to-inner physical work. Tortsov suggests that in strong actors the outward physical characteristics in a role can "appear spontaneously, because the right frame

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[425] Ibid.

[426] Stanislavski, *Stanislavski and the Art of the Stage*, 56 – 57.

of mind has been created."[427] Conversely, an "outer" stimulus can serve as a lure to an "inner" experience. As Tortsov gives one particular lesson, he slowly scrunches his face and changes his physicality which in turn causes a "mental change to match the physical appearance."[428] Michael Chekhov's Psychological Gesture takes this concept even further as it distills a gesture to an intense point to lure action and emotion from actors on a consistent basis.

**Imagination: Experiencing Integration**

With all the information on how the brain is physically able to facilitate imagination, a question arises: How do the top-down processes of conscious imagining and the bottom-up processes of experiencing work together in the actor's process? I find it helpful to alter the terms slightly to make them clearer. I think of imagination as an "in-in-out" process (prefrontal cortex or subcortical areas > sensory cortexes & memory > prefrontal cortex >/ action), and perception as an "out-in-out" process (stimulus > sensory cortexes & memory > prefrontal cortex >/ action). The slash before "action" indicates that the prefrontal cortex may decide against action—and often does. Imagination takes place across these structures in the holodeck of the various networks and structures. For many scientists, imagination is what unites extrinsic and intrinsic functions into "schemata that organize our experience" and serve as the basis for understanding.[429] Reason would not be possible without imagination and "imagination is the

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[427] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 517.

[428] Ibid., 519.

[429] Ana Deligiannis, "Imagining with the Body in Analytical Psychology. Movement as Active Imagination: An Interdisciplinary Perspective from Philosophy and Neuroscience," *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, no. 2 (2018): 166.

central engine of meaning."[430] Amy Cook goes so far as to say "imagining and understanding are the same thing….This suggests that language is less a system of communicating experience than actually being experience; we do not translate words into perceptions, we perceive in order to understand."[431]

If we have such a predilection for imaging, how do we differentiate it from reality? Leeuwen gives a detailed description of the likely processes:

> First, constructive imagining is often not much of a departure from reality at all; rather, it is a selective playing with elements of ideas already accepted as representing reality, like percepts and beliefs. Second, when constructive imagination does depart more daringly from reality, two things keep it coherent and directed: (i) contextual cues signal the presence of an outlandish genre (or make-believe game) and generally determine when the departure occurs and in what direction, and (ii) the imagining in the departure is still inferentially governed by genre truth attitudes, which effectively give the rules of the game.[432]

Our brain typically knows when we are in the game and when we are not; in other words, it knows when we are in fictional constructs and when we are in real life. Actors have to rely on this process, understanding that they can experience truthfully as the character, while having full

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[430] Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 15.

[431] Amy Cook, "Interplay: The Method and Potential of a Cognitive Scientific Approach to Theatre," *Theatre Journal*, Volume 59, Number 4 (2007): 589.

[432] Leeuwen, "The Meanings of 'Imagine,'"228-229.

control of their bodies and their expressions: a strong psychotechnique is needed to accomplish this feat.

As we have discussed, one of the key parts of this psychotechnique is the "magic if." Jason Christopher Davis helpfully distinguishes the imaginative "as if" from the "as if" state of consciousness.[433] He explains that since Stanislavskian-type actors must act with intentionality, they do so through an "as if" state of consciousness in which the actor behaves as if the character were a real human being with real intentions. For him, "'as-if' intentionality is the active state of being within that imaginative 'if' construct." Intentionality for action and imagination go hand-in-hand. Davis points to Searle's assertion that *"as-if* intentionality is not a kind of intentionality, rather a system that has *as-if* intentionality is as-if-it-had-intentionality." For Searle, "as-if" reflects metaphorical language rather than the true intentionality of a subject. To simplify Searle's example, the statement that "I am thirsty" implies desire to drink on my part, but the phrase "my lawn is thirsty" is used as a metaphor (my lawn does not have intentionality only the "mere appearance" of it).[434] Searle says that we usually don't consciously analyze others' or our own intentions in everyday life, only when philosophizing; I would add, of course, that we also

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[433] Jason Christopher Davis, "Quintessence of Dust: Cognitive Neuroscience and an Actor's Process" (Graduate Master's Theses, Capstones, and Culminating Projects, Dominican University, 2012), 66.

[434] John Searle, "Breaking the Hold: Silicon Brains, Conscious Robots, and Other Minds," in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, eds. Ned Joel Block, Owen J. Flanagan, Güven Güzeldere (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997): 499-500.

consciously analyze intentions when acting.[435] So, although Searle uses the as-if construct in metaphor, it aptly applies to the imaginative use of as-if for an actor: both require imagination and mentalizing outside of oneself. The consciousness and ability to take action of both actor and character is the difference (as opposed to a lack of consciousness or ability to take action on the part of a lawn).

This brings up the sticky point of differentiating between experiencing and consciousness. Are they the same thing? Philip Zarrilli describes experiencing as an "enactive" process in which "a (theatrical) world is made available at the moment of its appearance/experience for both the actors and audience."[436] Shea and Frith define consciousness:

> To mean both awareness and what-it's like-ness (i.e. both access and phenomenal consciousness... So a conscious representation forms part of a subject's awareness in the sense that it is available for verbal report and use by other consuming systems: reasoning, selecting targets for action, storage in episodic or semantic memory, and perhaps other consuming systems at the personal level. Representing consciously also has a subjective character for the subject – it is part of their phenomenal mental life."[437]

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[435] Ibid. 499. Although for most people, the majority of analyzing others' intentions is unconscious, we do sometimes need to consciously analyze intentions in real life as well as on the stage.

[436] Zarrilli, "An Enactive Approach," 635-647.

[437] Nicholas Shea, and Chris D. Frith, "Dual-Process Theories and Consciousness: The Case for 'Type Zero' Cognition," *Neuroscience of Consciousness*, no. 1 (2016): 2.

A "conscious representation" takes place through perception and/or imagination. And since actors use both processes while acting, consciousness must be in play. The "phenomenal mental life" can be that of the actor as self or of the "I am" state of a character. In order for the actor to be experiencing, however, the "I am" state must be that of the character. Faw and Faw suggest that "the phenomenon known to neurologically intact people as 'Subjective Experience' is best understood as the activation of various sites in both extrinsic and intrinsic networks by a brand new episodic memory engram."[438] For this dissertation we can define "episodic memory engrams" as an episodic memory system originating from the hippocampus. They suggest this system is "like a media news outlet" that collects reports from around the brain and organizes them into a new episodic memory that feels like a "virtual-reality" summation of the event. This "memory pattern is then 'broadcast' back to structures across the brain" where they can be compared to predictions, corrected for errors, and feel like "one unified history." Importantly, it is this episodic memory system "that gives rise to the event of experiencing."[439] Other studies back these findings by showing that the "conscious experience of reliving past events" either in real life or on stage pulls from episodic autobiographical memory. The bilateral angular gyrus is a likely key structure for this process; it is also key for the "conscious on-line experience of

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[438] Faw and Faw, "Neurotypical Subjective Experience," 1. They explain that this memory engram is "a complex theta wave coding pattern originating from field CA1 of the hippocampus."

[439] Ibid., 8. With this evidence, they stress that the hippocampus is not just for encoding memory, but also for generating experiences.

being located and experiencing the world in first-person."[440] Imagination, memory and experiencing are so intertwined it can be difficult to see where one process starts and another ends. This gives additional credence to Stanislavsky's instructions to actors to feed their imaginations and memories. Shea and Frith also surmise that the "connection between deliberate reasoning and consciousness is remarkably tight."[441] If, as argued earlier, imagining and reasoning are bound together as complementary processes, then imagination and consciousness must be as well. When we are conscious our imaginations are in play. Experiencing in performance relies on imagination just as it does in everyday life; the difference is in perspective and the sense of who the "I am" is. Stanislavsky liked to think of the "I am" as a new creation called the actor/role (*artisto-rol')* rather than the simply an add-on of a character to the actor's persona.[442] For him, good acting is *always* a creative act of experiencing.

Another important aspect to experiencing and consciousness is that although there are "three main constituent elements of experience (mind, body, and world)" they "do not need to be equally represented in all activities."[443] There are times when we don't really notice — and

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[440] Lucie Bréchet, Petr Grivaz, Baptiste Gauthier, and Olaf Blanke, "Common Recruitment of Angular Gyrus in Episodic Autobiographical Memory and Bodily Self-Consciousness," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* (2018): 1. The angular gyrus, located in the parietal lobe adjacent to the temporal lobe, is a cross-modal hub that helps makes sense of the world.

[441] Shea and Frith, "Dual-Process Theories," 7.

[442] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 170.

[443] Faw and Faw, "Dual-Process Theories," 2.

therefore don't experience — one of the aspects for a time. For instance, if we are reading a book, we probably aren't noticing or experiencing our body. That is until hunger pains may bring it back into consciousness/experience. If I am running down the street chasing my escaped pet, I probably am not thinking of mental tasks but rather my goal and my body. In this way, experiencing requires conscious attention.

Imagining is one of the ways we can readily change our brains with new connections on a regular basis, both within and between senses and imaginings.[444] This process can continue throughout our lives; studies have shown that older people have significantly more vivid, original and transformative imaginations than their younger counterparts.[445] Since imagination is thought to be "a process by which information about one's environment can be simulated and reorganized in order to improve predictions and learn under reduced risk," it is a basic function of the human body.[446] We spend much of our time simulating what effect minor adjustments in our actions would cause. Our beliefs both shape and constrain these imaginings (what is likely, what is the desired outcome, etc.). Sometimes these simulations are looking towards the results of more drastic changes in our actions.[447] For instance, if we are to imagine "what would I do" in my character's circumstances, "genre truth attitudes" (what makes sense in the given

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[444] Berger and Ehrsson, "Mental Imagery," 926.

[445] Dorota M Jankowska, and Maciej Karwowski, "Measuring Creative Imagery Abilities," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (2015): 12.

[446] Reddan, Wager, and Schiller, "Attenuating Neural Threat," 1003. The authors point out that some other animal species seem to have similar imagining functions.

[447] Ibid.

circumstances) applies. Leeuwen's description of imagination as simulation closely reflects Stanislavsky's "as if" strategy. He says:

> Constructive imagination is largely the inferential working-out of what would happen in the world (as one believes it to be), if it were minimally altered in the ways indicated by the pretense-initiating representations. And beliefs that contradict initial imaginings get bracketed (as I like to put it) – excluded from the inferential background of imaginative elaboration.[448]

Once again, this harkens back to Saltz's infiction argument; what are the rules of this particular game? Or, as Leeuwen asks, what are its brackets? When we are in everyday life and not purposely imagining alternate worlds, most of these simulations are not even conscious processes; we are not in the game. As actors we must make imaginations purposeful and learn to control their constraints as much as possible.

One of these less controllable constraints may be the difference between visual perception and visual imagery. Bartolomeo suggest that experience is constrained by a person's environment while their imagination is constrained by their memory.[449] If this is the case, then it is essential for actors to expand their memories with new experiences. Zarrilli stresses that since perception is "active and relational" requiring action on the part of the organism perceiving, then the actor can increase their perceptual skills to improve their ability to experience a role.[450] This

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[448] Leeuwen, "The Meanings of 'Imagine'," 227.

[449] Paolo Bartolomeo, "The Relationship Between Visual Perception and Visual Mental Imagery: A Reappraisal of the Neuropsychological Evidence," *Cortex* 38, (2002): 357–378.

[450] Zarrilli, "An Enactive Approach,"10.

process of perceiving can include not only physical objects and people in the environment, but *also* imaginings and memories. We pull from our inner resources while responding to our outer stimuli in one giant process of experiencing as an amalgamation; or as Stanislavsky put it, "dramatic experiencing is a composite whole."[451]

**Conclusion**

Stanislavsky sought a way in which to use conscious processes to activate actors' artistic, subconscious inner life through a psychotechnique. His research showed him that the creative state cannot be forced but must be evoked.[452] Imagination was one of the key ways in which to do this.

Once this creative state is reached, actors could imagine "if" they were in these circumstances what would they do? As Carnicke notes, "Placing oneself in the role does not mean transferring one's own circumstances to the play, but rather incorporating into oneself circumstances other than one's own."[453] An actor responding to their partner, imagining the circumstances in the holodeck of their mind, along with the suppression of the self-identity and living-through the "I am" of character identity can create the experiencing of the role in performance. Actors create as they experience, making them artists who can infect their audiences with "the life of the human spirit of the role."

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[451] Konstantine Staislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenni*, 480 in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 108.

[452] Stanislavski, *My Life in Art,* 356.

[453] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 64.

I'll let Stanislavsky have the last word as to what imagination encompasses for actors:

> It is customary to call what we have been studying 'the Stanislavski system.' That is a mistake. The strength of this method lies precisely in the fact that no one conceived it, no one invented it…The 'system' can make you believe in things that do not exist. And where there is truth and belief you have genuine, apt, productive action, experiencing, the subconscious, creativity and art.[454]

[454] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work,* 611.

# CHAPTER 4

# THE WILL

*As you see—so you feel*
*As you feel—so you think*
*As you think —so you will*
*As you will—so you act*
—K. Sri Dhammanada

Throughout my career I've worked with acting teachers from a wide variety of Stanislavsky-based traditions. I never had any of them suggest, much less stress, the importance of the Will for actors. Although other theorists have analyzed similar concepts such as desire, want, and focus, this chapter will uncover and attempt to reclaim the special role the Will has for an actor. Books such as Sonia Moore's *The Stanislavsky System: The Professional Training of an Actor* barely mention the term Will. Irina and Igor Levin's *The Stanislavsky Secret* only uses the term Will as it relates to action (an actor should subdue the Will of an acting partner) and to the fact that one can't Will an emotion to appear.[455] Somehow, the deep importance of the Will in Stanislavsky's work was lost over the years, through translations and transformations. This chapter will attempt to reintroduce the centrality of the concept of the Will in the work of Stanislavsky and his protégés. As we shall see, the Will plays a vital but complex and multifarious role in his work. The concept of the Will, however, is notoriously slippery, and

[455] Levin and Levin, *The Stanislavsky Secret,* 14, 32, 50.

Stanislavsky himself never attempts to provide a rigorous definition. Depending on the context in which he uses the term, Will can be the force to carry out the wants or tasks of a character or an actor; it may be for control of the actor; it can be either conscious or unconscious; it is sometimes considered the push to get from desire to action for a character; the Will is also the power to create an atmosphere for and urge to create for an actor; it can be fortified and it can create energy and the Will can be transferred to scene partners and the audience as well as from actor to character.

I begin the chapter by locating the Will as a central tenet of Stanislavsky's work and then discuss how the concept of creative Will is associated. I will then look at some of the understandings of Will that may have influenced Stanislavsky's ideas (saving the decidedly scientific for later). The chapter then examines how the Will relates to action, feeling and a sense of a dual consciousness. The first half of the chapter wraps up with methods Stanislavsky discussed to stoke the Will. The second half of the chapter is focused more on the science around the concept of the Will. I situate his comments on the Will in the context of relevant scientific theories from his own time. I will then turn to present-day research in philosophy and cognitive science to explore how Stanislavsky's ideas relate to current conceptions of Will, including free Will and Will-power, and try to untangle the relationships among desire, volitions and other related terms. The chapter ends with implications for this research. I will argue that not only is Stanislavsky's emphasis on the Will in acting supported by contemporary science, but more importantly, introducing an emphasis on this "drive" may help inform current acting pedagogy.

**The Will as a Fundamental Component of Stanislavsky's System**

Stanislavsky's March 8, 1909, speech to a theatrical conference outlined a six-pronged process for the actor. It began with the stimulation of the actor's Will and a dedication to the

playwright's text.[456] Likely influenced by his Moscow Art Theatre co-founder, the literary-centered Nemirovich-Danchenko, Stanislavsky often stated that the *text* is the first step in stoking the Will of an actor.

Early in the development of the System, the topic of the Will appears in a series of letters between Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko. Nemirovich-Danchenko had been stressing the centrality, as he saw it, of the literary aspects of a play. In a letter dated October 1910, he insists, "When I began on 'Miserere' I began *in my own way.* I began the search for the *inner image* by means of *infection.* That's what one must *start with.*"[457] Stanislavsky's reply a month later (November 16, 1910) affirms Nemirovich-Danchenko's pre-eminence in literary matters but stresses the process that his system suggests for approaching a play: "At the moment I know that before you start work with my system you must: a) stimulate the process of the *will.'"*[458] A few days later (November 21-22, 1910), Nemirovich-Danchenko replied with a bit more pressure. Nemirovich-Danchenko says he is having a difficult time establishing "the inner image" of the role as Stanislavsky sees it. After indicating agreement on several important parts of the fledgling system—such as breaking the play into units, analyzing character desires, and most importantly, "emotionally experiencing the inner image"[459]—Nemirovich-Danchenko

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[456] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art,* 200.

[457] Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, "Letter 318", *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters,* ed. Jean Benedetti (London: Routledge, 1991), 286. Author's italics.

[458] Kontstantin Stanislavski, "Letter 319," *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters*, ed. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 1991), 287. Author's italics.

[459] Nemirovich-Danchenko, "Letter 320," *The Moscow Art Theatre Letters,* 288.

concedes Stanislavsky's first step to finding a role: "You write: a. The process of *the will.* Fine. Independence is always essential."[460] Based on the curt remark, he may not have fully grasped the importance Stanislavsky placed on this first step of igniting the Will in an actor, but he didn't argue the point.

Years later (1932) when it came time for Stanislavsky to write about his discoveries, the Will was still central. As Stanislavsky's editor, Liubov Gurevich, was attempting to assemble his chaotic notes into a cohesive book, she warned of Soviet censorship. One of her main concerns was with his use of the term "Will." Soviet ideology stipulated that people were simply products of social and economic forces, so the idea of any universal traits was frowned upon.[461] She wrote:

> [W]ill is not seen as an independent human freedom but as a complex process of the highest order involving emotional and intellectual elements and which is guided by a *conscious representation of the whole.* As to the role of the intellect in the creative process, it must be present in every chapter.[462]

The term "Will" struck a chord of dualism and idealism that the government would not tolerate. Gurevich warned that releasing the book's two parts, which were provisionally titled "Experiencing" and "Physical Characterizations" at the time, would likely be censored.[463] Stanislavsky was still defending himself three years later: "I know that certain critics accuse me

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[460] Ibid., 289. Author's italics.

[461] Jean Benedetti, *His Life and Art*, 336.

[462] K.S Archive, No. 2400 in Benedetti, *His Life and Art*, 346. Author's italics.

[463] Ibid., 345.

of idealism… even mysticism… But I want an actor's subconscious reflexes to be controlled by his conscious mind and will. Where is the idealism in that?"[464] He wasn't backing down on the centrality of the Will for the actor.

The importance of the Will is made clear throughout *An Actor's Work* particularly in the chapter titled "Inner Psychological Drives." Stanislavsky describes the Will (*Volia*) as one of the three fundamental "Inner Psychological Drives," "Inner Motive Forces" or "initiators" in the actor's creative process,[465] along with feeling and mind (*chuvstvo, um).*[466] Sharon Carnicke explains that these "three basic drivers behind creativity" each have a specific function: "'mind' (for analysis and understanding), 'will' (for control) and 'feeling' (which fosters passionate and zestful relationships with the characters we create.)"[467] These are not simple terms that Stanislavsky always used in the same manner, however. Benedetti suggests that all three drives are for "carrying out tasks" of the character, but at other times he says actors must imbue their own Wills during the performance.[468] Carnicke suggests the concept of the Will is often "more

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[464] Radomyslenskij Archive in Benedetti, *His Life and Art*, 360.

[465] Benedetti, "Notes" in *An Actor's Work*, 276; Stanislavsky, *An Actor Prepares*, 247, and Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 182, respectively.

[466] Patrick C. Carrier, "Reading for the Soul in Stanislavski's The Work of the Actor on Him/Herself: Orthodox Mysticism, Mainstream Occultism, Psychology and the System in the Russian Silver Age" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2010), 4.

[467] Sharon Marie Carnicke, "Stanislavsky's System: Pathways for the Actor," in *Actor Training*, 22.

[468] Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work,* 273-282.

precisely 'wanting' (*khotenie*), to solve the character's 'problem' or fulfil a 'task' (*zadacha)*."[469] Will is tied directly to action. One may desire (have a wish) to do something but not ever act on that desire. It takes Will to push someone from desire (or even an intention) to action (whether they are an actor or a character). How this triumvirate of drives works together will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

Stanislavsky continued to emphasize the centrality of the Will to the acting process throughout his career. Near the end of his life, in a letter to his opera group, Stanislavsky instructed the group's members to try to strengthen their "mutual bonds of artistry….This is so important that it is well worth the sacrifice of self love, caprice, favoritism, and all the other evils it can drive a wedge into collective intelligence, your will, your feelings for each other."[470] Stanislavsky never wavered on the importance of the Will. He insisted that anything that disrupts an actor's Will is destructive to the creative process.

The Will is essential for outer as well as inner creative states for Stanislavsky. The outer creative state constitutes various elements such as "facial expression, voice, inflexions, speech, movement, bodily expression, physical action, contact, adaptations."[471] All of these elements must be well-trained to perform nuanced, clear physically expressive actions and at all times be "subservient to the commands of the will." In this light, the Will is in control of the actor and is what connects the internal processes to the external manifestations of those processes. The Will's

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[469] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 182.

[470] Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 363.

[471] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 580.

"link to the inner state and their interactions, must become an instant, unconscious *reflex."*[472] Our body, as actors, must be conditioned to respond to the slightest demand of our Will without taxing the intellect. Instead, the Will allows whatever feelings and actions are present to reflexively respond. Actors aren't to be ruminating on their body's physical movements during a performance. Training allows it to simply respond to the actor's Will to perform the action of a character as discussed in chapter 2.

As we shall see later in this chapter, the great Russian acting teachers who studied directly with Stanislavsky—Michael Chekhov, Eugene Vakhtangov, and Richard Boleslavsky—followed their mentor in recognizing the significance of the Will. Boleslavsky went on to found The American Laboratory Theatre, where Lee Strasberg studied (in fall of 1924, and then left), passed his version of what he learned to the rest of the Group Theatre, and spawned the American Method. But somewhere in this generation seems to be the break-down of the centrality of the Will in acting training. Many theorists have written about the differences in the techniques of prominent teachers Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner (1905-1997) and Uta Hagan (1919-2004), but all of their writing suggests a shift away from the Will, while emphasizing either emotion/inspiration (Strasberg and Meisner) or intellect/action (Adler and

[472] Ibid. Author's italics.

Hagan).[473] Neither Meisner nor Hagen refers to the Will at all in their primary works, nor do many of the more recent generations of acting teachers.[474]

**The Creative Will**

Stanislavsky often talked of the need for actors to be in a creative state in order to act well. Irina and Igor Levin situate this quest as the underpinnings of Stanislavsky's systems as he suggested that it was part of what started his formal quest in 1906:

> I ask myself whether there are any technical ways of producing the actor's creative state? This does not mean, of course, that I wish to create inspiration itself by artificial means. Not inspiration itself, but simply a favorable environment for it, which I would like to learn to create within myself arbitrarily: that certain atmosphere, which causes inspiration to descend into our souls more frequently and readily….How to go about making this state not appear unexpectedly, but be created by the actor's own will, on his 'order'? And

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[473] See Richard Hornby's *The End of Acting* (especially chapter 12: Strasberg and "Affective Memory") and David Krasner's *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future* among others. Adler does frame the action within the drives of the Will, mind and feelings on occasion without emphasizing them.

[474] See Robert Cohen, *Acting Power* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1978), 21; Robert L. Benedetti, *The Actor at Work* Fourth Edition (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1986), 202-203; and Charles McGaw and Larry D. Clark, *Acting is Believing: A Basic Method* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1987), 34.

if it should be impossible to acquire this state immediately, could it be done piecemeal – put together, so to speak, from separate elements? [475]

The actor's Will is necessary to order the production of the creative state when it is needed. When Will is used in this context it is called the creative Will. Stanislavsky's "system" is in many ways the journey along this pursuit, rather than a set of dogmatic practices.

The creative state is a physical and mental state that allows actors to concentrate on the tasks at hand without regard to their own personal lives, worries or egos. When the creative state is not achieved, actors will worry about the audience, tense up and "rely on stage tricks."[476] Stanislavsky said he "wanted but the soil in myself in which it [the creative state] could appear at will, the atmosphere in which inspiration most often and most freely enters my soul."[477] This idea also included the idea of the "creative will" (*tvorcheskaia volia)* which is a Will that transfers energy from actors to their scene partners and the audience.[478] The "creative idea" is another related term. The common word Stanislavsky used for "creative idea" (*vymysel)* can also be translated as "fiction," or a "notion."[479] For Stanislavsky, the "creative idea" began to "signify any fictional element in a scene that actors invent to spark their imaginative work."[480] In all these

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[475] Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (Collected Works in Eight Volumes) vol. 1 in Irina Levin and Igor Levin, *The Stanislavski Secret*, 8.

[476] Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, 262-263.

[477] Ibid.

[478] Carriere, "Reading for the Soul," 176.

[479] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 172.

[480] Ibid., 86.

senses, creativity is essential for the actor, and must be stimulated. The key to accomplish this lay in the actor's Will. "The actor must arouse in himself the urge to create afresh each time thus bringing other psychological mechanisms into play."[481] In this sense, the urge to create is an aspect of the actor's Will.

Chapter 15 of Jean Benedetti's *Stanislavski: His Life and Art* is titled "The Creative Will."[482] In December of 1907 Stanislavsky drafted a chapter discussing the creative Will for his Manual on acting. He decided to use Maurice Maeterlinck's symbolist drama *The Blue Bird* as the practical laboratory for this work. After a frustrating rehearsal process, he despaired, "*I* am the only one who is doing any thinking, *I* have to galvanize the will of every single actor."[483] The Will of the actor held a central place and was sometimes a difficult thing to capture. In May of the next year he wrote a letter which not only used the term "affective memory" for the first time, but also discussed the Will:

> What fascinates me most is the rhythm of feelings, the development of affective memory and the psychophysiology of the creative process. With the help of these experiments I have managed to achieve much greater simplicity and strength in existing roles and I am able to fortify my creative will to such an extent that even when I am ill, or have a temperature, I forget about my illness and find energy on stage.[484]

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[481] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 170.

[482] Ibid., 182-187.

[483] Konstantin Stanislavskii, *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh* (Collected Works in Eight Volumes), VII, 413 in Benedetti, *His Life and Art*, 183. Italics by author.

[484] Ibid., 386 in Benedetti, *His Life and Art*, 184.

Here we see the creative Will as the force to "find energy" and concentrate on the task at hand. These aspects of the Will are central to this chapter.

The connections between Yoga and Stanislavsky's practices have been well established.[485] Yoga also seems to have had a significant influence on Stanislavsky's concept of the Will, and in particular the creative Will. Yogi Ramacharaka's *Hatha Yoga* describes the Will as central to Yoga. Ramacharaka claims that yogis can affect their bodies down to the cellular level by exerting their Wills effectively.[486] Importantly, the techniques of this exertion can be taught with chants that focus their attention to call up their Will, and direct "orders" from their Wills to their cells.[487] Once the Will (the power for action and control in this sense) is focused by the chant (or another repetitive action), the mind is able to imagine (form a mental image) causing the body to respond appropriately.

Yogi Ramacharaka, a pen name of American William Walker Atkinson (1862-1932), seemed to want to bring yogic principles mixed with elements of contemporary psychology to

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[485]William Wegner, Andrew White, Sharon Carnicke, Rose Whyman, and Mel Gordon have notably discussed the connections between Stanislavsky and yoga. Especially see Sergei Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga,* Trans. Vreneli Farber (Holstebro: Routledge), 2016, for the most thorough research in this connection. I will follow Tcherkasski's use of the capitalized "Yoga" to refer to the information from the Ramacharaka book and a lower case "yoga" to refer to the system of exercises practiced today.

[486] Yogi Ramacharaka, *Hatha Yoga or The Yogi Philosophy of Physic Well-Being* (Hollister, MO: YOGeBooks, 1904), 128-130.

[487] Ibid., 129.

the western world in his book. The vision of the way prana and the ego work together is a key example.

> Prana must not be confounded with the Ego—that bit of Divine Spirit in every soul, around which clusters matter and energy. Prana is merely a form of energy used by the Ego in its material manifestation… With the Ego in control, cohesion exists and the atoms are held together by *the Will of the Ego*.[488]

The "Will of the Ego" is the Will of the individual and also of the whole "Divine Spirit." Prana is the energy that the ego uses through its own Will. The energy is just the tool; the Will allows the ego to be in charge.

Stanislavsky's emphasis on rhythm runs throughout his writings and practice and can also be found with a tie to the Will in Ramacharaka's *Hatha Yoga*. Discussing the effects of rhythmic motion, it reads: "The whole system catches the vibration and becomes in harmony with the will, which causes the rhythmic motion of the lungs, and while in such complete harmony will respond readily to orders from the will."[489] According to this passage, the Will can become "in harmony" with  parts of the body. By harmonizing in this way, the body will be more apt to respond to the Will. In addition, prana energy is absorbed through this harmony, allowing it to be used by the Will.

Reminiscent of some of Stanislavsky's breathing exercises, *Hatha Yoga* is more explicit about the Will's role than Stanislavsky is in his writings. It says one must use the Will to start the processes of imagining the prana entering the lungs and "being taken up at once by the Solar

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[488] Ibid., 135. Italics mine.

[489] Ibid., 145.

Plexus, then with the exhaling effort, being sent to all parts of the system." He explains that it is not necessary to use the Will on this exhalation as it will simply respond to the body. This exercise can be directly translated to an acting class or rehearsal to introduce the concept of using the Will in acting while reaping the benefits of relaxation and focus.

Stanislavsky looked to Hatha Yoga not only for relaxation and energy resources, but also when it came to the playing of action. As Tcherkasski points out, both Ramacharaka and Stanislavsky claim that "if one's 'wishing' or 'want' is not strong enough, neither man nor character will reach his goal."[490] Here Stanislavsky brings the idea of character Will into the creative process alongside actor Will. Throughout the *Hatha Yoga* book and other yoga writings it is clear that the Will is a central focus. World-known and respected Yogi B. K. S. Iyengar goes so far as to describe "Hatha Yoga as the Yoga of Will."[491] Stanislavsky seemed to take its message, also emphasizing the Will and making it central to his system.

Jonathan Pitches' Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting looks to Stanislavsky's 1909 production of *A Month in the Country* to understand how Stanislavsky began to mesh the disparate early western theories of psychology with the eastern ideas of yoga. Stanislavsky's notes on the production read:

> The lacework of the psychology of love which Turgenev weaves in such a masterly fashion demands a special sort of playing on the part of the actors, a playing that might

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[490] Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga*, 70. "Wishing" found in Ramacharaka, *Raja Yoga,* 24 and 'want' in Stanislavskii, Sobranie sochinenii 9, II, 220-221.

[491] B. K. S. Iyengar with John J Evans and Douglas Abrams, *Light on Life: The Yoga Journey to Wholeness, Inner Peace, and Ultimate Freedom* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale, 2005), 127.

> allow the spectator to see closely into the peculiar design of the emotion.…One needed some sort of unseen rayings out of creative will.… The actor needs greater strength in his spiritual rayings out. [492]

Pitches suggests that Stanislavsky seamlessly combined his ideas of structure of action (playing the through-line as he determined it) and using the Eastern concepts such as prana to communicate the emotions it created. The important thing for this discussion, however, is that these rayings come from the actor's creative Will. This relationship between an actor's Will and a character's Will is explored more fully later in this chapter.

Symbolist dramatists also likely influenced Stanislavsky's concept of the Creative Will. Valery Bryusov was a poet, writer, dramatist, translator, critic and historian and by 1904 was considered one of the principal members of the Russian Symbolist movement. In 1905 Bryusov became the literary advisor to Meyerhold's Theater Studio which was under the tutelage of Stanislavsky. Bryusov's 1902 article, "Unnecessary Truth" had helped kick-start the Russian anti-realism movement of the early twentieth century and fed Meyerhold's theatrical explorations.[493] He believed that the realistic trappings of a performance on stage blocked the search for a deeper spiritual truth in the performance and challenged the Moscow Art Theatre: "It

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[492] Jonathan Pitches, *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (London: Routledge, 2006), 82. My italics.

[493] Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 313.

is time that the theatre stopped counterfeiting reality."[494] Instead, Bryusov insisted they "should make it possible for the actor to express the physical in the spiritual" as the Will of the artist's soul is what has the power to create.[495] For him, the soul is the seat of the creative Will, not the intellect.

Symbolist writer Andrei Andrei Bely also wrote about an artistic Will. His 1912 novel *Petersburg* features a lead character who creates another being through his own thoughts.[496] "According to Bely, the artist 'lays his/her soul'… through a process of recognizing the truth and 'willing' (volenie) the creation into being."[497] Actors can create new beings (characters) by the power of their Wills in their imaginations (thoughts in this case) and through their actions.

For the symbolists, the Will is at the center of truthful dramatic creation. The idea begets energy which begets the Will. "The Idea is a step in the objectification [object-making] of the Will. The Will is the deepest beginning of existence . . . That, which in Will approaches and departs, which illuminates and extinguishes, is essence."[498] Carriere aptly makes the connection between this Symbolist foundational principle of the "will as the creative force," of art, and Stanislavsky's reliance on the Will in creating imaginative belief.[499] Carriere sums up, "These

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[494] Valery Bryusov, "Against Naturalism in the Theatre (from "Unnecessary Truth"),"in *Theatre in Theory 1900–2000,* ed. David Krasner (Singapore: Utopia Press, 2008), 59.

[495] Ibid. 59-60.

[496] Carriere, "Reading for the Soul," 212.

[497] Belyi, Teatr i sovremennaia drama 155 in Carriere, "Reading for the Soul," 213.

[498] Belyi, Simbolism kak miroponimanie 245 in Carriere, "Reading for the Soul," 217.

[499] Carriere, "Reading for the Soul," 217.

artists were drawn to Stanislavski's work because they recognized in it the manifestation of a Symbolist definition of the creative process, tvorchestvo, as the active (aktivnyi) process of the will (volia)–life-giving and world-creating and communal–and as the access to essential truth through the will-feeling, vole-chuvstvo."[500] The actor as feeling, Willing artist was vital.

In 1916, soon after Stanislavsky's initial writings about the Will, Willard Huntington Wright published *The Creative Will: Studies in the Philosophy and the Syntax of Aesthetics*.[501] Although not well-known today, Wright's work was important in the early twentieth century, influencing cultural circles and writers such as William Faulkner.[502] Wright laid out the significance of the Will for any work of art: "All expression, in the common sense, is the result of the three elements of consciousness —will, intellect and emotion."[503] He says that all great art has the purpose of "touching on the activities of the creative will."[504] Artists have always tried to discover the creative Will through practice, he claims, but science is now working to solve the riddles of the creative Will too. One essential element of this work is the realization that even master artists cannot just call up an impromptu "masterpiece" at Will without the right

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[500] Ibid., 211-212.

[501] Willard Huntington Wright, *The Creative Will; Studies in the Philosophy and the Syntax of Æsthetics* (London: John Lane Company, 1916), The Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/creativewillstud00wrigrich/page/n4.

[502] M. Gidley, "William Faulkner and Willard Huntington Wright's *The Creative Will*," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Volume 9 Issue 2 (1978), 169.

[503] Wright, *The Creative Will,* 12.

[504] Ibid., 77.

circumstances surrounding the action. As with Stanislavsky's lures for emotions, Wright suggests that "the combination of circumstances must be on point" to stir the creative Will.[505]

In a passage reminiscent of Stanislavsky's understanding of the Inner Motive Forces of the Will, Mind and Feeling, Wright stresses that "art is the poised expression of willing, knowing and feeling."[506] He denigrates art forms (dance in particular in this case) that he asserts rely solely on emotion without balancing the intellect and the Will. Although he concedes that there are some aspects of art that work below consciousness, he feels it requires the Will to engage with art consciously. For Wright, only these consciously Willed concentrations allow for the intellect to make sense of the art and create a deeper emotional experience.[507] Many other of Wright's philosophical assertions mirror details of Stanislavsky's system, as well, indicating that they may have been affected by the same zeitgeist if nothing more.[508]

As a man of the Russian intelligentsia, Stanislavsky also looked to philosophies, scientists and literary agents for inspiration.[509] Although more in alignment with general Stanislavskian conceptions of the Will than with the Creative Will, the influence of theosophy

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[505] Ibid., 83-84.

[506] Ibid., 163.

[507] Ibid., 283.

[508] Parallels between Stanislavsky's work also include a reliance on form and order, denigration of naturalism in favor of artistic expression, lines of action, and a reliance of the expression of the art and not just on its feeling.

[509] Philosopher, writer, collaborator and friend, Maxim Gorky was an early theosophy enthusiast and had great influence over Stanislavsky's thoughts.

must be mentioned. Patrick C. Carriere argues that "chief among those discourses that had an impact on Russian thoughts are the theosophical (as represented in works by Mdme. Blavatsky, Anne Besant and C.W. Leadbeater) and anthroposophical (as developed by Rudolf Steiner) schools."[510] Carriere identifies the chapter titled "The Motive Forces of Psychical Life" in The Work of an Actor on Himself Part I, as a particular match. [511] He prefers this translation (as opposed to "Inner Psychological Drives" by Benedetti and "Inner Motive Forces" by Hapgood) because it suggests a more physical, wholistic and non-psychological term that corresponds to the theosophical lens more than the Freudian one.[512] In any case, keenly reminiscent of Stanislavsky's "Inner Motive Forces" is clearly reflected in the prominent theosophist Helena P. Blavatsky's assertion in The Secret Doctrine that "Mind is a name given to the sum of the states of Consciousness grouped under Thought, Will, and Feeling."[513]

**The Will and Intentional Action**

When he first began to develop a system, Stanislavsky focused primarily on discovering strategies to bring the creative state under the control of the Will. As the concept of action became increasingly central to his methods, he grew more interested in exploring the role of the

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[510] Carriere "Reading for the Soul," 153.

[511] Ibid., 154. Carriere explains that he uses the translation of "phychical" rather than "psychic" for Stanislavsky's term "*dvigateli psikhicheskoi zhizni)* as it doesn't have the same negative connotation in contemporary English, 147.

[512] Ibid., 152-154.

[513] H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1888, 2005), 39.

Will in the actor's performance of intentional actions. At this point, the intentions are those of the character, but the actor uses their own Will to perform the actions. In reductive terms, one could define the Will as the inner force that chooses action or inaction. This choice for action is what differentiates "Will" from "desire" for Stanislavsky. One may have the "Will power" to accomplish a task; we do not have "desire power." Simply desiring something does not accomplish anything until the Will is engaged to take action.

An oft-discussed influence on Stanislavsky's thinking was the French psychologist Théodule-Armand Ribot. Stanislavsky's library contained 6 volumes of Ribot's work, and his influential ideas on Stanislavsky's understanding human emotions has already been discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.[514] One of these volumes is titled *Diseases of the Will.* For both Stanislavsky and Ribot, "free will" is a metaphysical question rather than a material one so they aren't interested in it. They prefer to discuss "the motives which produce" volitions instead. Ribot's introduction qualifies, "I shall limit myself to studying the will in its double mechanism of impulse and inhibition and in its source the individual character."[515] Stanislavsky looked to the "impulse" with its source in the "character" in particular. "Inhibition" also had a place in his System, though. The Will as a "very complex psycho-physiological mechanism, in which alone

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[514] Mikhail Agursky, "An Occult Source of Socialist Realism: Gorky and Theories of Thought Transference," in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture,* ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 247-72.

[515] Théodule Ribot, *The Diseases of The Will*, trans. Merwin-Marie Snell (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1894), 1.

resides the power to act or to restrain" reverberated throughout Stanislavsky's writings.[516] Ribot ties the Will directly to action: "The fundamental principle which dominates the psychology of the will under its impulsive form… is that every state of consciousness always has a tendency to express itself, to manifest itself by a movement, an act." For Ribot and Stanislavsky the Will manifests itself in action.

This Will must be trained, however. As children, Ribot maintains, we are slaves to our desires so that they control us reflexively. But as we mature, we learn to overcome our desires and can control our actions.[517] Part of this control comes in the form of education (we learn to fit into society, choosing to behave in the manner that will reap the most rewards for ourselves) and part of it through habituation. "By habit, the restraint becomes more and more easy and rapid."[518] By repeatedly performing an action, it becomes habit and we no longer need to expend mental resources−including Will−to control those actions. Actors' Wills need to be trained as well.

Although acting teachers and directors often tell students to "follow their impulses" (which is usually good advice since this is a difficult task for many actors), inhibition of actions is also a necessity on stage (as well as in life of course). Ribot gives the example of someone in a fit of rage. Their Will must overcome the natural impulse to lash out and strike. Importantly, this "restraining power varies according to the time and the circumstances."[519] We need to be in a

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[516] Ibid., 3. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Stanislavsky's emphasis on action.

[517] Ibid., 4. See Chapter 2 for a discussion on habituation.

[518] Ibid., 17.

[519] Ibid., 13.

good state to make decisions and for actors that means the creative state, free from tensions of everyday life.

Ribot suggests these Willings are on a type of continuum with basic reflexes requiring little Will, and difficult tasks requiring much. He suggests, “it is impossible to say exactly at what moment there commences the volition proper, that is to say, the personal reaction.”[520] At some point the Will takes over and begins to cause volition leading to the action. He says that “volition is a transition to action…. Choice is but one stage in the process of volition.”[521] We must engage our Will to cross the finish line. Two great problem arise with Will, however. “Either the impulse is lacking, and no tendency to action is produced (abulia); or too rapid or too intense impulse prevents a choice.”[522] The Will must be able to make a choice for action, but both of these difficulties with impulses can prohibit it. Part of the work for an actor is to allow these impulses room to turn into a Willed action.

Some of Stanislavsky’s most favored students can help flesh out aspects of the Will in relation to action. Evgeny Vakhtangov, vividly articulated the relationship between desire, Will, and action: "At first, a desire arises that becomes the will, then begins to act consciously aiming towards its gratification." He went on to explain that "Desire is the motive for action. Therefore,

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[520] Ibid., 25.

[521] Ibid., 27.

[522] Ibid., 86.

the fundamental thing which an actor must learn is to wish, to wish by order, to wish whatever is given to the character."[523] Once again, the actor's Will is in service to the character's desires.

For Michael Chekhov, another of Stanislavsky's protégés, the Will was a central component of any acting method:

> Let us take an example from Stanislavsky's Method —the objective. Very often actors try by mistake to apply the objective to the realm of ideas—it cannot be applied there—it has to be applied to the realm of the will, because the objective is that which I am going to *do*, to act, that which I *want*.[524]

In addition, Chekhov understands the Will's role in acting as a lure for emotion:

> Each gesture, each Action one makes, springs from a certain Will-impulse. The opposite is also true: the Gesture the actor makes can stir his Will. We have said that the more definite the Will-impulse, the more expressive the Gesture. Now we can add that the better the Gesture is formed, the stronger and clearer it is, the surer it will reach the Will and stir, stimulate, and arouse it. A strong Gesture of affirmation or denial, expansion or contraction, repulsion or attraction, will inevitably agitate the Will, calling forth in it a corresponding desire, aim, wish. In other words, the Will echoes the Gesture, reacts on it.[525]

So, every physical action an actor makes comes from an attempt to fulfill the character's desire

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[523] Eugene Vakhtangov, "The School of Intimate Experience," in *Actors on Acting,* Eds. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1970), 509.

[524] Chekhov, *Lessons for the Professional Actor*, 32. Italics in original.

[525] Chekhov, *On the Technique of Acting,* 39.

and each of those physical actions can create a stronger Will within the actor. Chekhov discusses the will at great length in his books, much more than even Stanislavsky does, but with the caveat that for him the Will bypasses the psychological and is more reliant on the physical. He reveals his idea of Will and dual consciousness when he suggests actors use their Wills to discover characters' objectives:

> Act spontaneously several times, then as yourself ask, 'What have I done? What was I aiming at?' This is to search for the Objective by appealing to one's Will. Here again, before knowing what the Objective is, we experience it. While freely acting so many moments or scenes, the actor must keep a 'spying eye' upon himself. Whether the answer comes while you are acting or afterward, it will arise from the realm of your Will, avoiding the sphere of your intellectual reasoning.[526]

So, as Kemp points out, Chekhov's Psychological Gesture resembles Stanislavsky's idea of a Super-task but in a physical manifestation.[527] The power of the movement conjures the actor's Will while the quality of the movement incites the actor's feelings.

Richard Boleslavsky was another of Stanislavsky's influential students. His *Acting: The First Six Lessons* spends little time on the concept of Will, reducing it simply to the artist's will to perform well. However, when he discusses "actions," a term that for him has a meaning close to Stanislavsky's "tasks," the character's Will is implicit. In his lecture series, Boleslavsky focuses more on the idea of the Will. He describes the inner work of an actor as complicated and less knowable than the outer. This inner part consists of "the *intellect* the *will* and the

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[526] Ibid., 109.

[527] Kemp, *Embodied Acting*, 63.

*emotions,*—three separate parts which allow the actor to attain the chief essential in his art, the ability to '*live* through his role.'…Only by developing his intellect, his will and his emotions can he learn how to 'live' his parts."[528] Not only does Boleslavsky place great importance on the actor's Will in his lectures, he also reiterates the tripartite nature of Stanislavsky's Motive Forces. "Through your will-power and the knowledge of your craft you have organized [your feelings] and re-created it."[529]

For Boleslavsky, the Will is a practical entity. "It is merely necessary to think of life as an unbroken sequence of two different kinds of steps….Problem steps and Action steps….The first step is for the actor to understand what the problem is that confronts him. Then the spark of the will pushes him toward dynamic action."[530] Once the actor discovers what it is they want (as a character) — their "artist's will"—then they need to "define it in a verb."[531] The verb comes from the Will.[532] The actor Will and character Will are aligning in the "artist's Will."

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[528] Richard Boleslavsky, "The 'Creative Theatre' Lectures: What is an Actor?" in *Acting: The First Six Lessons,* 82-83. Italics in original.

[529] Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons,* 17.

[530] Edith J.R. Isaacs, "Introduction," in *Acting: The First Six Lessons*. 3.

[531] Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons,* 28.

[532] Boleslavsky brought a new and lasting element into the discussion of the Will, however. In his lecture titled "What is a Collective Work in a Theatre?" he provides a lengthy illustration of how the stage director's Will needs to be governing over all others. The actor must have "submission to one single will" −that of the director. Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons,* 93-95.

**Will-Feeling**

In the previous section, I have focused on the connection between Will and action. For Stanislavsky, however, Will has an equally important connection to feeling—and indeed Will, feeling and action cannot be fully understood in isolation of one another. In *An Actor's Work*, Tortsov explains the concepts of the Three Generals—mind, will and feeling—to his students, he notes that in "recent times science has introduced important refinements in the definition of the psychological inner drives." Almost immediately Tortsov redefines these three concepts using what he calls "new scientific terms: Representation, Appraisal and Will-Feeling."[533] For Stanislavsky, these three concepts took center stage in the creative process of acting.[534] The first two are both parts of the mind: we imagine something as a representation and then we appraise its validity and value. But Will-Feeling is much more complicated.

Instead of offering a definition of Will-Feeling, Tortsov gives examples in his Socratic style. He suggests students think about going to the theatre to see a play. He then describes how images of a box office, then the auditorium and perhaps a scene or two might appear in the filmstrip of their imaginations, in other words, their *representations*. He suggests they will hold an opinion as to what this will be like, their *appraisals*. "'But this time both the will and feeling suddenly get angry and reject what the mind has suggested (i.e., a representation and an appraisal). You have created inner turmoil and aroused the inner elements. So,' Tortsov summed up, 'having started with the mind (an imaginary picture and an appraisal) you brought will and

[533] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 273.

[534] Ibid., 276-279.

feeling into play.'"[535] He claims that the Will is "inseparable from feeling" and even capable of feeling in its own right; these "two psychological inner drives [came] together in a common effort."[536] But as this concept is a complex one, Tortsov begs pardon from science in using whichever term best suits the artistic need at any given time.[537]

The essential thing for Tortsov is that all three of these drives or Motive Forces work together: "When we set the mind to work we also involve the will and feeling in the creative process. Or to put it in other terms: the representation of something naturally provokes an appraisal of it. Either of them involves will-feeling in the operation." This working-together is the key to the creative process/creative Will: "Only when all three inner drives are working in a common alliance can we create freely, sincerely, directly, organically, not using someone else's but our own personality."[538] The Will-Feeling is what allows the actor to "believe" the representation created in their imagination and have true feelings. When one of Tortsov's students challenges this idea, Tortsov looks to the influential poet Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) for support: "I rain tears o'r these imaginations [*vymysel*]. Only the true image, artistically created through the forces of will and feeling in unity with the mental representation, can evoke such a heightened response."[539] The Will and Feeling of the actor must be in unity to create the

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[535] Ibid., 278.

[536] Ibid.

[537] Ibid., 279.

[538] Ibid.

[539] Pushkin 536 from the poem "Elegy" (Elegiia 1830) in Carriere, "Reading for the Soul," 224.

"true image" and therefore great art.

In discussing the use of affective-memory, Tortsov uses Ribot's example of two travelers who had been frightened when "cut off on a cliff by the tide."[540] He says that afterwards one of the travelers remembered every action he had performed during the difficulty. The other traveler only remembered the feelings he had experienced during it. "These feelings had been retained in his Emotion Memory." Tortsov explains. He suggests that if one of the actors before him had gone through a situation and came away with all of the emotions of the second traveler without trying at all (through "no effort of will"), they would have a naturally occurring "quite exceptional Emotion Memory. But unfortunately, that's a very rare phenomenon."[541] More often the Will must be engaged to bring up the feelings. However, the path may start with feeling which engages the Will and causes the appropriate response (stimulus). "Once he is familiar with this path an actor can, at will, at any moment, summon up the recurrent experiences he needs. So, we move from feelings created by chance to the stimulus so that thereafter we can go from the stimulus to the feeling,'" Tortsov explains.[542] This reflects "The Requisite Balance of the Artist" section of Wright's artistic aesthetics book which stresses, "The artist is a man in whom the will to create and ability to feel are perfectly poised."[543]

The key here is that for Stanislavsky (as well as many of the art theorists of his time) all three of these Motive Forces work symbiotically as lures for each other. The actor cannot focus

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[540] *An Actor at Work*, 198.

[541] Ibid.

[542] Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 219.

[543] Wright, *The Creative Will,* 187.

solely on emotions (an accusation often leveled against Method actors), nor can the actor focus only on action (often leveled against the Method of Physical Actions) nor only on the mind (an accusation often leveled against the system's script scoring). All three elements must be engaged, neglecting none.

David Krasner points out the great misunderstanding of the Method of Physical Actions as it relates to this triumvirate. Many theatre makers have suggested that Stanislavsky discontinued relying on emotion when he began using the Method of Physical Actions. Instead, although he would talk about one aspect at a time on occasion, he maintained that the actor's own emotions must be invoked in order to allow them to "experience" in the moment of performance.[544] Stanislavsky continued his reliance on emotion throughout his career, but insisted that it must be paired with Will and action.

Just as Stanislavsky's study of Yoga informed his concept of the creative Will, it also likely informed his understanding of "Will-feeling." This idea of Will is not just an act of intellectual imagining. It is something that can be *felt* by the actor as well as controlled. "Actors should *feel* their movements, will, emotions, and thoughts so that their will forces them to perform this or that movement (prana), so that the movements are not senseless."[545] According to this idea, part of the acting training process should be teaching actors how to experience their Wills both in how they feel (internally) and what they can do (externally). Ramacharaka suggested students relax their muscles, "throw aside all mental strain," and then make mental

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[544] Krasner, Stanislavski System, Sense," 199-200.

[545] Stanislavskii, Sobranie sochinenii 8, III, 394 in Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga*, 88. Author's italics.

images of whatever problem is bothering them. They then each should move this image "to the sub-conscious mentally by an effort of the Will." Students are to then instruct their minds, through their Wills' power, to analyze the problems and find solutions.[546]

Like the yogi described here, the actor must release muscle tension, place the issue at hand before their gaze in an image (like a chunk of material), and purposely—through the act of the Will—place this chunk into the subconscious to work its way out below conscious thought. The Will demands the subconscious to do the work. For an actor, this problem may be the intellectual analysis of a play's action and all the technical details of performance. For most of the performance of a play, these lay at a level below consciousness but are active while the focus of the actor is on their partner, responding to whatever is happening on stage.

**Dual-Consciousness: The Relationship Between the Actor and Character's Will**

A character may desire something (have an objective), but unless the actor's Will is engaged, the character, as embodied by the actor, will not actually take action to attain that objective. The actor's Will must be engaged to carry out the character's Will. This duality of the actor and character's Will implies a dual consciousness that, as Carnicke notes, Stanislavsky felt was integral to acting:

> Stanislavsky... invokes Diderot's dual consciousness in *An Actor Works on Himself Part II,* when he describes the performer's "sense of self" (*samochuvstvie)* as comprising two equally important perspectives — being on stage and being within the role. He had identified this division in one of his favourite actors, Tommaso Salvini, whom he had seen play Othello, a role he considered most challenging. Quoting Salvini, he writes:

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[546] Ramachakara, *Raja Yoga*, 229-30 in Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga,* 102.

> "While I act, I live a double life, I laugh and cry, and still I analyze my tears and my laughter, in order that they can affect more strongly the hearts of those I want to touch." Stanislavsky concludes that "this dividing of oneself does not interfere with inspiration. On the contrary, one helps the other." As he baldly states in his artistic notes, "I have two wills on stage, not one." Even more tellingly, he uses hyphens to yoke the "human being" with the "actor" (*chelovek-akter)* and the "actor" with the "character" (*artisto-rol')* typographically connecting the experience of the performing actor with that of the person and role. [547]

Carnicke further notes that Stanislavsky felt this dual consciousness was "sincere," not artificial.

Dual consciousness is important to my theory of the Will in performance. As Stanislavsky suggested, there are two Wills for an actor to manage: his own Will as an artistic creator trying to perform well, and the character's Will expressed as tasks or objectives. This implies that every performance (in the Stanislavskian style) must deal with these two Wills to some degree or another.

Stanislavsky's idea that actors have "two wills on stage" echoes Ribot's ideas about the transference of Will, which indeed may have influenced Stanislavsky directly. Ribot claims that most human activities don't even need Will; we rely on habit, reflex, passion and "above all… imitation…. For the majority of men, imitation suffices; they are contented with what has been will in others, and, as they think with the ideas of the world at large, they act with its will."[548] In this view, if we imitate action, we are not using our own Will. We can use someone else's Will

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[547] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 119. Italics mine.

[548] Ibid., 131-132.

to follow along and just do what is easy. For an actor, there are two Wills. One is their own. They must decide to enter fully into the creative state and perform all the actions required. The other is the character's Will. That is manifested in theatrical action on stage following the through-line of the play as outlined by the Will of the playwright. To continue this line of inquiry, however, we must more clearly understand what "character" means for Stanislavsky.

Ribot uses the word "character" to describe the traits of human beings that harness their actions:

> Volition is a final state of consciousness which results from the more or less complex co-ordination of a group of states, conscious, subconscious, or unconscious (purely physiological), which all united express themselves by an action or an inhibition. The principal factor in the co-ordination is the character, which is only the psychic expression of an individual organism. It is the *character which gives to the co-ordination its unity,* not the abstract unity of a mathematical point, but the concrete unity of a consensus.[549]

For Ribot, our *character* is what gives us unity of action; we are what we do. In addition, our character constrains our actions. A fictional character does the same things. Fictional characters are what they do. "In other terms, and to leave no ambiguity," Ribot explains, "the psycho-physiological labor of deliberation results on the one hand in a state of consciousness, the volition, and on the other in a set of movements or inhibitions."

The impulse to act may be strong, according to Ribot, but the individual may nonetheless not Will to act; failures of the Will abound. [550] Contrariwise, the impulse may be so strong that

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[549] Ribot, *The Diseases of The Will,* 123-134. Italics mine.

[550] Ibid.

even the Will to do otherwise cannot control it. Character is both "the effect of interior causes" and the "psychological expression of a certain organized body, drawing from it its particular coloring, its special tone, and its relative permanence."[551] For Ribot, character is a fixed entity that constrains all human choices. We cannot possess the Will to act if the action is outside the purview of our character. "That [character restraints] is the ultimate stratum upon which rests the possibility of the will, and which makes it energetic, weak, intermittent, commonplace, extraordinary."[552] Stanislavsky applies these complex understandings of character to fictional characters that actors portray. The *actor's* character does not constrain the actions on stage, the *fictional person's* character does. Each of these entities has their own character and their own Will. The actor must engage both. Carnicke explains that for Stanislavsky, "every actor is both an artist and a unique human being," or a "human being/actor" (*chelovek-akter).* [553] They only have their own mind, body, and Will-Feelings with which to work. Referencing an actor playing Hamlet, Tortsov, Stanislavsky's fictional alter-ego in *An Actor's Work,* instructs his students that the actor must "invest the words with something of his own, his personal representations of life, his heart, his living feelings, his will."[554] This suggests that actors must use their own Wills in the process.

When this state of duality is created, actors feel as if they are experiencing what is happening to the character to a large degree, or "as if he were doing it in real life" as Sonia

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[551] Ibid., 112.

[552] Ibid.

[553] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 174.

[554] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work,* 279.

Moore suggests.[555] When this merging between role and self occurs, the actor can enter a state of "I am."[556] This sense of "I am" does not mean the actor forgets they are in a performance and they will return to their own life after the curtain closes; instead it is that they have the belief in their own true actions towards other things or people that they want the audience to have.[557]

Maria Knebel writes that Stanislavsky began describing this duality as "'two perspectives': the perspective of the actor and the perspective of the role."[558] She explains the actor must understand the role's arc from start to finish to be able to play the action towards the super-task. At the same time, the character only knows what has happened in the past and what is currently happening. Actors must be able to have both of these things in their minds at the same time. This must happen as the actor merges the role with them self as the actor-character. The gap between role and actor needs to be eliminated as much as possible in the moment, for Stanislavsky. Knebel stresses that Active Analysis can help mitigate these seemingly incompatible concepts by having the actor enter the "I am" state by embodying the character

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[555] Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavsky System,* 33.

[556] Tcherkassi explains that Hapgood doesn't translate the phrase "*ya esm*" at all and Benedetti translates it as "I am being." Carnicke, Whyman, Carrier and Tcherkassi translate it as "I am." Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga,* 106.

[557] Moore, *The Stanislavsky System,* 33.

[558] Knebel, "General Principles of Active Analysis" in Carnicke, *Stanislavsky's Active Analysis,* 98.

from the very start of the rehearsal process.[559] This quickly gets the actor to a first-person perspective in which the actor's Will and character's Will can easily align.

Tcherkasski links the "I am (*ya esm*)" to the desire for the elevation of the soul found in one's superconscious based in yogic principles.[560] "In a sense," he writes, "Stanislavsky's 'I am' is a synonym for the creative state of an actor in the process of true experiencing."[561] For Yogi Ramacharaka, "the consciousness of the 'I AM', is the consciousness of one's identity with the Universal life."[562] The Russian language does not use articles, nor, as Carnicke explains, does it " use a present tense form for the verb 'to be.' Hence, 'I am an actor' literally translates as 'I actor.' *Ia* esm' is from Old Church Slavonic, a language invented and used for liturgical purposes in medieval Russia. Hence, Stanislavsky's use of it carries implicit spiritual overtones."[563] For the actor, when in this "I am" state, the concerns over one's own personal self-consciousness gives way to the unity of actor/character. Stanislavsky advised, "at every point in the role look for some desire which concerns you and you alone and banish all other, vulgar desires concerning the audience" so that you can be "carried away by genuine feelings."[564] The actor is not subsumed by the "I am," however. Tortsov explains to a student:

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[559] Ibid, 92-93.

[560] Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga,* 106.

[561] Ibid.

[562] Ramacharaka, *Raja Yoga*, VI in Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga*, 107.

[563] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 174-175.

[564] Benedetti, *Stanislavsky: His Life and Art,* 194.

> ‘It will happen that you will experience vertigo caused by several moments of the unexpected and complete merging of the life of the character you portray with your own life on stage. It will happen that you will sense the particles of yourself in the role and the role−in yourself.’
>
> ‘And then?’
>
> ‘And then−what I have already told you: truth, faith, ‘I am’ will place you in the power of organic nature with its subconscious.’[565]

As Stanislavsky suggested, there are two Wills for actors to manage: their own personal Wills as artistic creators, and characters’ Wills expressed in relation to problems to be solved (or objectives). This implies that every performance must deal with these two Wills in some degree or another. As many people primarily associate the psychologically motivated realist character with Stanislavsky (although this is a reductive understanding of Stanislavsky, as we have seen throughout this study), many people identify great acting with the realistic embodiment of characters, and most of Hollywood style film-acting embraces it. This idea of “organic” acting in which an actor finds themselves in the role and the role in themselves happens when, as Philip Auslander says "We often praise acting by calling it 'honest' or ‘self-revelatory,’ ‘truthful,’ when we feel we have glimpsed some aspect of the actor's psyche through her performance, we applaud the actor for ‘taking risks,’ ‘exposing herself’.”[566] This type of acting reflects the

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[565] Stanislavskii, SS 9, II), 439 in Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga,* 108.

[566] Philip Auslander, "Task and Vision: Willem Dafoe in LSD," in *Acting (Re)Considered: a Theoretical and Practical Guide,* ed. Phillip B. Zarrilli (New York: Routledge, 1995), 29.

Symbolists' desire to "reveal the souls" of actors as they perform actual physical action and experience genuine, spontaneous feelings on stage—or, in popular parlance, "become" the characters.

Although most would argue one can never truly "become" another person/character, David Z. Saltz effectively proves that an actor can still perform real actions on stage as a character in his article "The Reality of Doing: Real Speech Acts in the Theatre." In it he discusses the idea of "borrowed belief." Actors are "committed to acting as if they held the implied belief" of the character. An actor also has "borrowed intentions" that can be played honestly on stage: "Actors can perform real and sincere actions onstage simply by accepting, as part of the convention of performance, a rule that they must work to achieve their characters' objectives." So, within the Stanislavskian given circumstances of the play, if an actor believes her character would have reason to do something, she will perform that action just like a "chess player has reason to try to capture the other player's king."[567] This argument still allows for the concept of a dual consciousness as I've defined it. "Organic" actors use their own Wills to borrow the beliefs and intentions from their characters to fulfill the characters' Wills.

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[567] David Z Saltz, "The Reality of Doing: Real Speech Acts in the Theatre," in *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future,* ed. David Krasner (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 61-79. Carriere prefers the translation of *predlagaemye obstoiatel'stva* as "suggested circumstances" rather than the common phrase "given circumstances." This suggests something that is offered that can be taken or left as the actor desires and demonstrates Stanislavsky's "respect for the creative freedom of the actor in the interpretation of the text." Carriere, "Reading for the Soul," 176.

Stanislavsky strives towards having actors get so caught up in a performance that the performance may "seem like real life" and the actors lose themselves “in the role totally, continuously, having an unwavering belief in what is happening.” But this “only rarely” happens. “The rest of the time, the true and the true-seeming, the believable and the likely alternate.”[568] Actors do not completely forget themselves on stage; dual consciousness allows for both the character's Will and the actor’s Will to be present. In styles other than realism, this duality of Will can still occur, though it may be that more of the actor’s Will is at play than the character’s Will at times.[569]

**Stoking the Will: Action and Attention**

For actors to bring themselves into a state of creativity requires training. Specifically, actors must train their Wills. Boleslavsky insisted that actors must obediently perform whatever problems the playwright, director or designer present in order to train their artistic Wills.[570] This type of Will, he says, “makes you ‘want to do,’” leading one into action.[571] The action itself then increases and sharpens the Will in turn. In the latter half of Stanislavsky’s third working phase,

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[568] *An Actor at Work,* 327. At other times Stanislavsky warns of getting too carried away by the emotions of a character; the result will not be artful.

[569] In a fight scene, for example, where an actor’s character want to knock out the other person in the scene, but the actor must keep the other actor safe in a fight scene, only show that there is a fight. This would also occur in Forum Theatre wherein a character may have the polar opposite will of the actor.

[570] Boleslavsky, “Lectures from the American Laboratory Theatre,”129.

[571] Ibid., 164.

when a singer/actor at the Opera Studio was having difficulty with fear of making a wrong choice (not in a creative state), Stanislavsky instructed:

> Now, don't think too much about it. Start right off, or else you will fall into the habit of excessive introspection and will be afraid to sing. All right, you will make mistakes, but what of that! You will exercise your willpower and not be balked.[572]

Pavel Rumyantsev, who recorded this event, said that before long the "creative and artistic impulse takes hold of the singer."[573] Their Will is activated.

Stanislavsky's extensive work in the Opera Studio is fertile ground upon which to see how Stanislavsky used these principles in the 1920s. When another singer/actor stopped themselves mid-song, Stanislavsky objected, "Oh, why did you stop? It was interesting to me and the rest of us to watch you get back on the right track, but you were too weak-willed. You lost your head out of fear of being overly criticized, a feeling that is still inside you."[574] This feeling became overpowering, causing her Will to fail.

Like Boleslavsky, Stanislavsky saw the Will in a loop with action, but included a great many more things in this loop. Mind, Will and Feeling always act together as the Three Motive Forces, and action results. Once a stimulus enters the mind, an idea may be sparked. The mind appraises the idea and a feeling is generated. Then, depending on the appraisal and the feeling, the Will may be incited to perform an action. Usually, if one of these forces is enacted, the others will follow suit. However, on those occasions in which they don't, the actor must use a lure such

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[572]Stanislavsky and Rumyantsev, *Stanislavsky on Opera*, 33.

[573] Ibid.

[574] Stanislavsky and Rumyantsev, *Stanislavsky on Opera*, 11.

as rhythm (as discussed above).[575] Rhythm generally referred to the totality of the inner rhythm a character feels and the outer rhythm the character displays. By focusing on these dialectical aspects, the Will may be stoked. Stanislavsky emphasized that a person can be filled with drive and inward excitation while remaining completely still with their body. "*Words, lines, thoughts, representations which lead to judgements all directly affect our minds. The Supertask, Tasks, the Throughaction all directly affect our will (wants). Tempo-rhythm directly affects feeling*."[576] Each drive affects the others.

A stimulus to the Will may also come, according to Stanislavsky, not from the mental investigation of the play or from affective memory, but simply from "an accidental external stimulus" such as just happening to see a person on the street who seemed to embody the character.[577] This is where research can help. Images, people-watching, music and other external sources to the play may spark the Will, the mind or the feelings.

Will, according to David Magarshack, can also be "indirectly aroused by a problem."[578] He explains that actors only partially initiate the Drives in their first encounters with a script, so rehearsal is about deepening their understandings of the play, little by little, fanning the embers of the Motive Forces so that the character's tasks may be fulfilled and their problem solved as the actor's Will and the character's Will grow ever closer. This type of arousal can be incited by the almost clichéd actor expression "what's my motivation?" Of course, the question implies

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[575] Magarshack, "Introduction," *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage,* 63.

[576] Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, 503. Italics in original.

[577] SS I, 427-428 in Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 213.

[578] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 213.

asking "why does my character want to do that?" The reason behind an action comes from a place of reason (the mind); the Will is the impetus to do the action. One can stimulate the other.

Benedetti tells how Stanislavsky put ideas about physicalization and the creative Will into practice in his early 1908 production of *The Blue Bird*. He discovered that when actors knew why they were doing particular actions—what their motivations were—their "will to perform" that action would be aroused in what I call a "Will-to-Action" loop. In fact, "The will is perhaps only strong when there is a definable goal for it."[579] The task and its motivations must be clearly defined in order for the Will to be activated. The given circumstances and the "magic if" will illuminate the problem and the tasks to solve it. Stanislavsky clarifies, "However true the Task, its main, its most important quality is its fascination for the actor himself. It has to be pleasing, draw him, make him want to do it. Like a magnet it attracts his will to create."[580] Supertasks (and tasks) must be emotional (spark feelings), volitional (incite the Will) and reasonable (attract the mind). Importantly, any of these drives may be sparked first, and a physical action of the body could be the impetus. Though the popular conception is that the system always requires starting with the psychological examination of a character (a mental activity that creates an "inner image" of the character), in fact Stanislavsky discovered that starting with an external exploration of the character in the body may sometimes be a better entryway.[581] Bella Merlin suggests the inner motive forces be thought of as thought (mental-center), feeling (emotion-

[579] Ibid., 182-183.

[580] Ibid., 146.

[581] Ibid., 216.

center) and action (will-center).[582] For her, action and the Will go hand in hand. Referencing Stanislavsky's work in Active Analysis at the end of his career, she writes:

> It's quite possible that without his previous exploration of round-the-table textual analysis (focusing on the thought-center) and his notorious affective memory (focusing on the emotion-center), Stanislavsky might never have reached the conclusion that it was in fact the *body* (via the will-center) which was the most accessible to the performer. With both analysis and affective memory, the actors were really starting at one remove from the stage experience. They were sitting round a table or conjuring up imaginative memory: they weren't actually experiencing the encounter.[583]

However, Stanislavsky didn't just abandon the playwright. The text remains central and is even part of the first steps. In his previously cited 1910 letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko, Stanislavsky placed the Will and the text in close proximity. "At the moment I know that before you start work on my system you must: a) stimulate the process of the *will*; b) begin the process of investigation with some literary discussion."[584] Active Analysis did cut down on "table work" by getting actors on their feet right away, but they had to base each action on the text, even if their *études* used their own words. Boleslavsky suggested that actors may use their imaginations and affective memory to discover the "colors" of a role before they begin to speak the text. By doing so the actor "*actually lives*" the role and the text in turn "inflames" the actor's Will.[585]

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[582] Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky*, 59.

[583] Ibid., 17.

[584] SS, VII, 484-485 in Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 201.

[585] Boleslavsky, "The 'Creative Theatre' Lectures," 118. Italics in original.

The given/suggested circumstances come from the text, and they are what enables actors to put themselves in the place of the character. "What would I do in such a circumstance, what do I want, where am I going?"[586] These questions stimulate the actor's Will to align with the character's Will. Stanislavsky insists that these questions must be answered with "verbs which express actions and not with nouns which express ideas and concepts."[587] And since action is so effective in stimulating the Will, using physically active verbs as outlined in chapter 2, stimulates the Will more effectively than vague or conceptual verbs.

In addition to stoking the Will by engaging the character's motivations and actions directly, Stanislavsky proposed that the Will can be stimulated by focusing and directing the actor's concentration and attention. In Boleslavsky's *Acting: the First Six Lessons*, the teacher defines "concentration" as "the quality which permits us to direct all our spiritual and intellectual forces toward one definite object and to continue as long as it pleases us to do so —sometimes for a time much longer than our physical strength can endure."[588] This passage is from the very first of his six lessons and describes what for him is the most basic skill upon which an actor relies. Most acting teachers recognize the importance of concentration, lecture about it, and have students perform exercises to sharpen concentration skills; but few tie concentration in with the concept of the actor's Will.

Merriam-Webster defines concentration in a similar manner to Boleslavsky, as the "direction of attention to a single object," and equates it with "focus." Attention, according to

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[586] Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 232.

[587] K.S. Archive, No. 1388/1 in *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 232.

[588] Boleslavsky, *Acting: The First Six Lessons*, 7.

Merriam-Webster is "the act or state of applying the mind to something" or "a condition of readiness for such attention involving especially a selective narrowing or focusing of consciousness and receptivity."[589] According to these definitions, both concentration and attention require "focus," and the two words are often used interchangeably in common parlance. Stanislavskian scholars Katerina Kamotskaia and Mark Stevenson helpfully define the terms in the following way:

> We would suggest attention is the mental awareness of an object, person, or atmosphere. Concentration of attention is a conscious application of this awareness and we use focus almost as a synonym but with a suggestion as a more specific concentrated version of attention. Communication takes the form, using any of the five senses, of a 'dialogue' – silent or not – between the actor and the object of his attention.[590]

Sharon Carnicke unpacks the concepts:

> During performance, Stanislavsky expects actors to give their full spiritual/mental and physical attention (*vnimanie*), in other words their total concentration (*sosredotochennost')*, to the actions of the play, their scene partners, and the objects necessary to their work. He calls all these points of focus, whether animate or inanimate, the 'objects' (*ob'ekty*) of attention.[591]

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[589] Merriam-Webster, 2011. Web. 11/14/19. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/

[590] Katerina Kamotskaia and Mark Stevenson, "Decoding the System: First Steps," in *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavsky*, ed. Andrew R. White (London: Routledge, 2014), 281.

[591] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 172.

Where this attention lies may be the key to the system. In order to induce the desired state of "experiencing" a role, the object of attention must be the task at hand and its effect on the other, usually a scene partner, on stage with them, producing a state of "Public Solitude" (*Publichnoe odinochestvo*). He encouraged actors to think of "circles of attention" around them to have appropriate places on which to place their focus, starting from very near to very far. Whenever an actor loses their way on stage and begins to think of the audience or simply loses their concentration, they can pull their attention to an object immediately around them to focus once again. Tortsov instructs:

> As the circle, with the lights at full, grows bigger, the area on which you have to concentrate grows larger. However, this can only continue as long as you are able, mentally, to hold onto the circumstance firmly. As soon as it begins to waver and dissolve, you must quickly reduce the circle to dimensions you can cope with.[592]

Stanislavsky continued to focus on circles of attention throughout his career. He ties it in with physical "muscular" tension, with staging changes and focus with singer/actors at the Opera Studio:

> An actor from our theatre may not simply sing at an audience…. Our approach in art is directed at an *object*. Every actor, like every human being, has some object towards which his thoughts, his attention, is drawn when he embarks on any creative work.[593]

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[592] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 100-101.

[593] Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, *Stanislavsky on Opera*, 4, 130, 58.

Boleslavsky stressed that Stanislavsky placed a significant emphasis on concentration, tying it to the spiritual work of an actor. Of an exercise also reflected in Michael Chekhov's work, he wrote:

> Stanislavsky began teaching us his "soul concentration," what you would call—getting inside the skin of a character. He drew around each one of us an imaginary circle, which encompassed the true personality of the characters we portrayed. If we began acting "out of our parts" he would call to us: "Are you in the circle?" Some actors would wave a line about them, step in, concentrate a moment, and then go on in the proper key.[594]

In addition to staying in character, concentration can help actors overcome nervousness; "You must attach your attention on some object and not allow yourself to be torn loose from it." implies acts from the Will both to *do* the action (attach your attention) and to sustain the action (not be torn loose from it).[595] This ability to suddenly focus must be cultivated.

> *You must guide your attention. That is why an actor finds it important, indeed imperative, to stick to this rule: An actor must be able in a single instant to fix his attention on the object presented, that he may react to it with true feelings, and also he must be able as quickly to turn off his attention and cut out his emotions, returning to his own life.*This implies virtuosity in the handling of your attention… The thing is that the creative capacity of an actor and a singer is a *science*. Unfortunately, few realize this.[596]

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[594] Richard Boleslavsky, "Stanislavsky−The Man and His Methods," *Theatre Magazine* (1923), 80.

[595] Ibid., 19.

[596] Ibid., 31. Italics in original.

*Psychology of Attention* (*Psikhologiia vnimaniia*) was one of the six volumes in Stanislavsky's library written by Ribot.[597] Ribot does not attempt to "define or to characterize attention" and instead "take[s] for granted that everyone sufficiently understands what the term means."[598] He marks the degree of attention by its intensity and duration. There are two kinds of attention, according to Ribot: one which occurs naturally and spontaneously, and the other, "precarious and vacillating in nature," which must be trained and cultivated.[599] It takes an "effort of attention" to concentrate thoughts upon some subject.[600]

For Ribot, attention works on muscles, allowing them to move purposely. It is tied to action. One can "concentrate the attention" to move muscles more precisely.[601] This attention may also be involved with emotions, he asserts, but only in that it can affect the muscles involved with expressing or inhibiting the outward manifestation of an emotion.[602]
For Ribot, the Will manifests itself in the body and is invoked with the concentration of

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[597] See G. V. Kristi's note in Stanislavskii, RAS I, 414 in Carrier, "Reading for the Soul," 234.

[598] Théodule Ribot, *The Psychology of Attention* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co, 1890), 1.

[599] Ibid., 2.

[600] Ibid., 89, 102. Ribot asserts that it is "well known" that "an incapacity for sustained attention is one of the symptoms of every impairment of the mind." Ribot, *The Psychology of Attention,*122.

[601] Ibid., 19-20.

[602] Ibid., 45.

attention, not as a purely mental phenomenon. The Will is likewise responsible for drawing attention to an item. The "impairments of voluntary [willful] attention" occupies a significant part of *The Diseases of the Will*. Following Ribot's lead, Stanislavsky speaks almost exclusively about attention rather than concentration, and carefully ties it to the actor's Will.

Wright's *Creative Will* also mentions the importance of the Will in relation to concentration. He says:

> There are many perceptive operations which require a conscious knowledge and an *active process of the will*. In one who sees and feels deeply, these volitional activities produce the greatest and most intense pleasure; and unless one brings to bear on a work of art a *conscious concentration* and performs the process of perception by organizing [sic] the intelligence, only a very superficial emotion will be experienced. Art enjoyment, in its deep sense, is a result of education and study, and of painstaking analysis.[603]

In his view, the Will is an active process (one of action) that is required if one is to enjoy a work of art. The action is one of "conscious" (willful) concentration requiring effort.

Stanislavsky may also have been influenced by yogic writings regarding attention and concentration. Andrew White describes in great detail the influences of Ramacharaka's writings on Stanislavsky's practices, including his use of concentration and attention.[604] The fifth lesson in *Raja Yoga* is "Cultivation of Attention," echoing Ribot's understanding of attention as a

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[603] Wright, *The Creative Will,* 283. My italics.

[604] See Andrew R. White, "Stanislavsky and Ramacharaka: The Impact of Yoga and the Occult Revival in the System," in *The Routledge Companion to Stanislavsky*, ed. Andrew R. White (London: Routledge, 2014), 287.

faculty to be developed. White suggests that Stanislavsky's key exercises of "Circles of Attention" (*krugi vnimaniia*) are related to yoga and help develop the attention in actors so that they will not be self-conscious while performing (instead they enter a feeling of public solitude). Whereas Ramacharaka refers to inner and outer concentration, as White points out, Stanislavsky adapts inner concentration to suit the actor: "The greater part of the actor's life on stage, during creativity, proceeds on the plane of creative dreams and fantasies, the imaginary given circumstances. All of this is invisible, lives in the actor's soul and is accessible only through inner attention."[605] For him, inner attention allows imagination; outer attention allows action. Concentration is what bridges the gap between them.

Tcherkassi also points to yoga as an inspiration for Stanislavsky's understanding of the importance of concentration's link to the Will. He describes the eight limbs of the yogic structure including "pranayama: control of prana—life energy—through rhythmic breathing and suspension of 'the restless activities of the mind'."[606] Rhythmic breathing can help the suspension of "the restless activities of the mind"; in other words, rhythmic breathing can help actors focus. Another petal is Pratyahara, which is the "withdrawal of senses from their external objects; gives inner spiritual power, allows one to achieve mental concentration, increases will power."[607] Through rhythmic breathing an actor can use their attention to "withdraw" from things external to the body and concentrate on their internal functions. This allows for "mental

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[605] SS II 1989: 170-1 in White, "Stanislavsky and Ramacharaka," 299.

[606] Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga,* 57.

[607] Tcherkasski, *Stanislavsky and Yoga,* 57.

concentration" and an increase in Will power. Rhythmic breathing can increase the Will's strength.

Moscow Art Theatre actor Vera Soloviova recalls the importance of attention work for Stanislavsky: "We worked a great deal on concentration. It was called 'to get into the circle.' We imagined a circle around us and sent 'prana' rays of communion into the space and to each other."[608] The Circles of Attention were not just for help with Public Solitude but were also to develop concentration of focus on scene partners and even audience when warranted.

Actors were to practice going back and forth between the circles of attention so they could be invoked when needed. In Stanislavsky's exercise to help with concentration, he included simple and concrete actions the actor can take. "Psychophysical concentration begins with sharpening the senses through observation," he instructs.[609] Carnicke gives descriptions of several observation exercises (regarding sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste and affect) in her chapter "Stanislavsky's System." Each of these requires the actor to go back and forth between their outer environment and their inner thoughts and feelings. This oscillation requires the Will; by regular practice the Will is strengthened and "paying attention" becomes easier.

Merlin discusses some of the difficulties with the English translation of the Russian term "*vnimanie."* Both Hapgood and Benedetti translate it as "attention." She feels that "attention" sounds militaristic, while "concentration" feels too "schoolish," and so it is important to see the

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[608] Vera Soloviova, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner and Paul Gray, "The Reality of Doing," *The Tulane Drama Review,* Vol. 9, No. 1 (1964), 137.

[609] Stanislavskii 1990: 400 in Carnicke, "Stanislavsky's System," 9.

whole phrase Stanislavsky used: "Creative Concentration and Attention."[610] She points out that the word "creative" in the phrase gives the two similar-but-different concepts equal weight.

Stanislavsky's mentees also emphasized the necessity to develop attention and tie it to the Will. Carnicke points out that Knebel:

> spends significant time developing skills of "observation" and "concentration."… Moreover, as she teaches students to identify and attend to the many points of focus in any given scene, she also asks them to select from these many "objects of attention" a single "main object."[611]

This "single main object" is the point of focus. It requires a strength of Will to attend to all of the "objects of attention" in a scene, while concentrating on the "main object."

Boleslavsky seems to have a similar emphasis on attention and concentration. He says that first of all, an actor must "train his own will-power to the point of becoming complete master of his soul. This can be accomplished by developing a quality known as Spiritual Concentration."[612] Since Boleslavsky defined acting as "The life of the human soul receiving its birth through art," he considers the "object for the actor's concentration" to be "the human

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[610] Bella Merlin, "*An Actor's Work* is Finally Done: A response to the new Jean Benedetti translation of Stanislavski's An Actor's Work," January 2008, http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/stanislavski/downloads/bella-article.pdf10.

[611] Carnicke, "The Knebel Technique," 107-108. Carnicke says that the ideas of the "main object' stemmed from Nemirovich-Danchenko and helped actors concentrate on one major focus.

[612] Boleslavsky, "The 'Creative Theatre' Lectures," 107.

soul."[613] Spiritual concentration allows the Will to concentrate on the dealings of the soul. Boleslavsky describes spiritual concentration in terms of affective memory work: "Spiritual concentration is the ability to say to any of your feelings: 'Stop, and fill my entire being!' This faculty can be developed and trained as much as one can train a human body and this training is the main problem of a creative school of acting."[614] He moved concentration of attention from the oscillation between external and internal aspects of the actor, primarily to the internal. The influence on the American Method is clear.

The emphasis on attention and concentration is not new for acting students and teachers. I have found, however, that the related exercises are usually not tied into the idea that Will creates action. Instead, by simply performing the introspection of the internal processes, or only the external sensory exercises, actors end up with unrelated foci of attention. Stanislavsky brought the attention process to the body in a wholistic way, so that it could spark the Will and lead to action.

**Current Scientific Conceptions of Will**

When Ribot discussed the science of the Will, he understood that the Will is a higher-order brain function, residing in the cerebral cortex, that begins the processes of action. [615]

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[613] Richard Boleslavsky, "The First Lesson in Acting," *Theatre Arts Magazine*, VII (1923), 288, 292.

[614] Richard Boleslavsky, "The Creative Theatre," trans. Michel Barroy. Unpublished lectured notes in the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library, 1923, 50 in Brault, "The Theory and Practice," 17-18.

[615] Ibid., 115-116.

Stanislavsky's emphasis on the Will makes sense given this understanding; it also makes sense that as scientists began to shift the understanding of the cerebral cortex from a Will center to an intellectual model in the early twentieth century, the centrality of the Will was left behind in its wake. The current embodied models of cognition are once again changing the focus.

John J. Davenport asserts that philosophic and scientific theories of the Will became unpopular in the early twentieth century.[616] In the early twenty-first century, however, they are making a comeback. Davenport credits philosopher Brian O'Shaughnessy with managing to "restore the concept of 'willing' to some respectability through a focus on the experience of controlling bodily action," and through his efforts, in part, "volitional concepts have enjoyed a remarkable comeback in theories of action generally."[617] The concepts of Will and action are inseparable for most contemporary theorists, as they were for Stanislavsky. The fact that the discussions about the Will had fallen out of favor in the twentieth century may be a factor in why a focus on the Will among acting teachers also declined during this period.

But what exactly is the Will? Part of the difficulty with defining it is that the Will is related to the concept of "free will," that is, the idea that humans are free to choose their actions. Many major religions are predicated on this precept, as are courts of law. Humans are free to choose to behave in such a way that may hurt society, and therefore society (or God) must provide a negative consequence to prevent the negative choice. If people have no free Will, then

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[616] John. J. Davenport, "'Feature Book Review,' of *The Will: A Dual Aspect Theory*, by Brian O'Shaughnessy," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Issue 202 (2011), 259.

[617] Ibid., 259.

they are not responsible for their actions, and should not be punished. With no punishment, there is little reason for people to behave well. The conclusion some make is that humans need a concept of free Will for society to work properly. This debate has become part of the popular culture, with dozens of articles in magazines and newspapers annually. It is important to briefly discuss the concept of human free Will as writing about the Will is pointless if the Will doesn't involve a choice.

Some philosophers and scientists claim that there is no free Will—and indeed that free Will is logically and physically impossible. One meta-study analyzed recent media coverage of the topic of free Will and found that most of the articles pointed to a Benjamin Libet and team landmark 1983 study that suggested that bodies begin to move before the individual is aware of it, and therefore the movement cannot have been chosen freely (through a conscious choice). The experiment was cited over 1700 times and has "inspired dozens of studies with similar methodologies."[618] This experiment has become such a pop-cultural phenomenon that it was cited as truth by the fictional neuroscientist Amy Farrah Fowler on the popular television program "Big Bang Theory."

Libet and team, used electroencephalography (EEG) to determine when subjects decided they were going to spontaneously move their fingers. The experiment compared the timing of the observed neural activity (readiness potentials with the EEG) versus the time when the participants "decided" they were going to move and when they realized that they had moved.

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[618] Eric Racine, Valentin Nguyen, Victoria Saigle and Veljko Dubljevic, "Media Portrayal of a Landmark Neuroscience Experiment on Free Will," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 23 (2017): 991.

Libet and team observed that the EEG suggested that participants began to move several hundred milliseconds *before* the subjects claimed awareness that they were going to move.[619] This argument against the concept of a free Will was further bolstered by the provocative title of Daniel Wegner's 2002 book *The Illusion of a Conscious Will*.[620]

The popular media picked up on this basic conclusion and ran with it as "disproving" free Will.[621] Most ignored Libet and his colleagues' caveat that the they believed the individual still has the capacity to veto or alter the movement once it is initiated and also reduced the nuances inherent in Wegner's work to the title.[622] The press also failed to discuss the many subsequent experiments and papers that question the validity of the results.[623]

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[619] Benjamin Libet, Curtis A. Gleason, Elwood W. Wright, Dennis K. Pearl, "Time of Conscious Intention to Act in Relation to Onset of Cerebral Activity (Readiness-Potential) - The Unconscious Initiation of a Freely Voluntary Act," *Brain* 106 (3) (1983): 623–642.

[620] Wegner based his claim on the idea that the Will is simply a feeling, not an independent faculty. Daniel M. Wegner, *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

[621] Racine, Nguyen, Saigle and Dubljevic, "Media Portrayal of a Landmark," 1001.

[622] Sean A. Spence, *The Actor's Brain: Exploring the Cognitive Neuroscience of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.

[623] Peter G.H. Clarke, "Neuroscíentific and Psychological Attacks on the Efficacy of Conscious Will," *Science & Christian Belief*, Vol 26, No. 1 (2014), 13.

Recently several important books have been released supporting the theory that there is a neural basis of free Will.[624] Leonid Perlovsky asserts that "free will exists as a cultural concept" (an idea that resonates with the ecological view of human entities), or that free will is part of a top-down cerebral process. [625] Others refute that the science proves a lack of free Will by discounting Libet and his team's original suggestion that the readiness potential somehow indicates a causal action.[626] As to questions of legal culpabilities, it seems the system has decided

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[624] Peter Tse says that "once scientists have tenure, they have the freedom to finally speak out on the deep questions from a scientific point of view," pushing back against the popular press while acknowledging its hold over academia. Peter Tse, *The Neural Basis of Free Will: Criterial Causation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), Xi. This book gives a good overview of a current influential view of free will. Also see Spence, *The Actor's Brain: Exploring the Cognitive Neuroscience of Free Will* and Marcel Brassa, Ariel Furstenbergb, Alfred R. Melec, "Why Neuroscience Does Not Disprove Free Will," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 102 (2019): 251–263.

[625] Leonid Perlovsky, "Free will and Advances in Cognitive Science," *Open Journal of Philosophy,* Vol.2, No.1 (2012), 32-37 and D. I. Dubrovsky, "The Problem of Free Will and Modern Neuroscience," *Neuroscience and Behavioral Physiology,* Vol. 49, No. 5 (2019): 629-640 respectively.

[626] Beatriz Sorrentino Marques, "An Issue for Wegner's Theory about the Conscious Will: The Readiness Potential does Not Conclusively Represent Preparation for an Action," *Veritas | Porto Alegre*, v. 63, n. 3 (2018), 1029-1045 and Andrew C. Papanicolaou, "The Myth

(as of now) that since people are "mixtures of unconscious and conscious intentions," they can be judged to be responsible for their actions.[627]

Perhaps the theory of Willed action most pertinent to my argument is that of Peter Ulric Tse. He suggests that scientists "have been thinking in the wrong way about how neurons encode and transmit information."[628] He suggests that neurons can actually "*rewire"* pathways without creating new material connections (through axons) by switching on and off neural circuits.[629] If the pathways are not hard-wired, they can be altered throughout our lives, and are changed much more than previously thought. Of course, social, physical, and other constraints limit every human, but we can always learn, we can always train, and we can always choose if we have consciousness and the ability to attend to our experiences.

Once we accept the idea that people have a Will that is to some extent free, the question arises as to just how much control people actually have over it and how that control is exerted. Colloquially, we tend to think of self-control as related to avoiding a desire that won't be good for us in the long run. Kristien Aarts and Gilles Pourtois use the term self-regulation instead of

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of the Neuroscience of Will," *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*, American Psychological Association, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2017): 310–320.

[627] Susan Pockett, "The Concept of Free Will: Philosophy, Neuroscience and the Law," *Behavioral Sciences & the Law* 25 (2007): 281-293.

[628] Peter Ulric Tse, "A Biological Basis for Free Will," *The New Scientist* (2013), nphttps://www.newscientist.com/article/mg21829200-400-a-biological-basis-for-free-will/#:~:text=FREE%20will.,aware%20of%20willing%20to%20move.

[629] Ibid. my italics.

"self-control" and define it as "the process of regulating automatic responses, thoughts or feelings, in order to behave in accordance with internal and/or external goals."[630] People who cannot self-regulate are said to be "out of control." Sarah Stroud describes weakness of Will as abandoning a plan you had previously decided upon —a *resolution* —without compelling reasons.[631] If we do not have the Will to choose the long-term goal over the short-term pleasure, then we are "weak-Willed."

One argument is that there really is no such thing as weakness of Will, just a higher desire for one choice (usually the short-term) over another.[632] Thalos suggests that "weak-willed behavior might be explained as behavior that is ours (caused by our brain processes) but not experienced as originating from processes transpiring in our brains (as it ought to be). It is experienced as alien, but actually is not alien."[633] So for her, being weak-Willed is simply a "failed" experience as it doesn't track the motivation causation. Donald Davidson, however,

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[630] Kristien Aarts and Gilles Pourtois, "Error Monitoring Under Negative Affect: A Window into Maladaptive Self-Regulation Processes," in *The Handbook of Biobehavioral Foundations of Self-Regulation,* eds. Guido H.E. Genolla, Mattie Tops and Sander L. Koole (New York: Springer Science, 2015), 109-124

[631] Sarah Stroud, "Weakness of Will," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Edward N. Zalta (2014), <https//plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/weakness-will/>

[632] Mariam Thalos, "The Sources of Behavior," in *Distributed Cognition and the Will*: *Individual Volition and Social Contex, eds.* Don Ross, David Spurrett, Harold Kincaid and G. Lynn Stephens (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007), 127.

[633] Ibid., 128.

attributes this lack of Willpower to a failure in *judgement*, rather than Will. A person simply chooses badly.[634] In all these cases, the Will is intimately tied to the evaluation (Appraisal) of a choice.

Neurologically, Wayne Christensen proposes a detailed model of self-control in his chapter "What Determines the Self in Self-Regulation?"[635] This model suggests a "higher" self-control function and an evolutionarily older, "lower" self-control function. The low-order controllers can generate action without the higher-order controllers' activation. As choices become more complex, the higher-order controllers must engage.[636] Christensen considers the episodic control as the highest function as it looks to and incorporates goals. It can affect the lower orders below it as it can redirect the senses to particular stimuli. In this model, the higher the function, the more integrating from various brain regions and functions occurs.

These theories allow for several factors that influence what can go wrong in controlling ourselves, causing a weakness of Will and allowing us to "give in to temptation" or "give up too easily." If an effort is perceived to be too high, we may cut our losses and give up before a goal is reached. This could be from either a physical or a mental effort. If we have habits that are so ingrained (strong neurological connections) that they seem insurmountable to go against we may not possess the Willpower to forge new pathways. Or if our bodies are not at a state of

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[634] Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 21–43.

[635] Wayne Christensen, "What Determines the Self in Self-Regulation?" in *Distributed Cognition and the Will,* 255-288.

[636] Ibid., 277-278.

homeostasis, we may do something not truly in our Will to alleviate this uncomfortable position. Other factors are also at play. Since we rely so much on the various neurotransmitters mentioned previously, anything that disrupts their efficiency can produce a weak-Willed event. Anxiety, for instance, may cause a disruption in "emotional tagging of actions" so a person will feel greater stress than their body's physiology warrants.[637] The person may then make choices simply to alleviate the stress rather than deal with the issue causing the stress directly.

Various neuroanatomical and neurophysiological studies have pinpointed the areas of the brain that are most heavily involved with the idea of Willpower. One of the most famous cases in brain research is that of laborer Phineas Gage who had a rod slammed into his lateral prefrontal cortex and yet remained alive. He had severe difficulty with carrying out intentions over time and became extremely impulsive. In addition, an fMRI study by McClure and team, showed that when subjects chose long-term rewards over short-term rewards their lateral prefrontal cortices and parts of their parietal cortices were more active than when they chose the other way around.[638] Other studies also implicate the dorsal anterior cingulate gyri and supplementary motor areas. Although there is not a consensus on how these areas work together, George Ainslie suggests that the Will system, "comes from the (usually tacit) perception of a limited-warfare relationship among successive motivational states, which makes current choices test cases for

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[637] Aarts, "Error Monitoring,"109.

[638] Samuel M. McClure, David I. Laibson, George Loewenstein and Jonathan D. Cohen, "Behavior: Separate Neural Systems Value Immediate and Delayed Monetary Rewards," *Science,* Vol. 306, No. 5695 (October 2004): 505-506.

future choices in similar situations."[639] For him, like Stanislavsky, motivation and control of actions are directly tied to the Will. Strengthening an actor's power for Will is essential.

**A Tangled Relationship: Desire, Striving, Volition, Intention, Effort and the Will**

We speak of "free will" but not "free desire," and "willpower" but not "desirepower." The implication is that desire is something humans cannot control; our Will to act we can. But we are often not successful in carrying out that action, we only strive (or try) to complete. We attribute the Will as fortitude to try to act on our intentions, while desire is more of a feeling and often passion related. However, people can be "Willful" without being a slave to their desires. Volition speaks of the power for action and the executing of that action but is not exactly the same as Will or striving. This section will attempt to unpack some of these complex issues.

Esther K. Papies, Lawrence W. Barsalou, and Dorottya Rusz define "desire" as "the conscious or unconscious state of motivation for a specific stimulus or experience that is anticipated to be rewarding."[640] Desire is a complex body function that seems to use different brain pathways than pleasure processes or the Will. A desire for food also has some different pathways than a desire for sex. More complications arise with the notion that one may desire something but not like it (as in the case of drugs, OCD rituals or waking up at 3 am to feed a

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[639] George Ainslie, "Thought Experiments that Explore Where Controlled Experiments Can't," in *Distributed Cognition and the Will: Individual Volition and Social Context,* ed. Don Ross (MIT Press, 2007), 173.

[640] Esther K. Papies, Lawrence W. Barsalou, and Dorottya Rusz, "Understanding Desire for Food and Drink: A Grounded-Cognition Approach," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 29, no. 2 (2020): 193–98.

baby). Desire can be classified as an emotion, and although we desire something, if we have "weakness" of Will, we won't strive to get it.[641] Desire is clearly related to the Will as we use our Will to suppress our desires or to fulfill them.[642] In Stanislavsky's terms desire is relatively equivalent to a "wish."

Sean Spence uses the concept of volition to simply mean "Willed movement."[643] Thomas Goschke takes the concept of volitions further, stating that:

> The concept of volition is a summary term that denotes a set of specific cognitive mechanisms, which enable humans to anticipate future consequences of actions, to flexibly reconfigure response dispositions, and to inhibit habitual or impulsive responses in favor of long-term goals.[644]

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[641] Jonathon D. Crystal, "Motivational Neuroscience: Instant Desire for Something You Know Is Bad," *Current Biology* Volume 23, Issue 6 (2013): 239-241.

[642] Kent C. Berridge, "'Liking' and 'Wanting' Food Rewards: Brain Substrates and Roles in Eating Disorders," *Physiology & Behavior*, no. 5 (2009): 537.

[643] Sean A. Spence and Chris D. Frith, "Towards a Functional Anatomy of Volition," in *The Volitional Brain: Towards a Neuroscience of Free Will,* eds. Benjamin Libet, Anthony Freeman, Keith Sutherland (New York: Imprint, 2004), 11.

[644] Thomas Goschke, "Volition in Action: Intentions, Control Dilemmas, and the Dynamic Regulation of Cognitive Control," in *Action Science: Foundations of an Emerging Discipline,* eds. Herwig, Arvid, Beisert, Miriam, Prinz, Wolfgang (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 409.

Ach, Kuhl, Botvinik and others have found that conflicts between intentions (what one is striving to do) and habits (one's patterns of behavior) cause "volitional effort" to increase.[645]

Although mentioned briefly before, it bears repeating that while Goschke and others broaden the idea of volitions to include much of what previous and other current theorists defined as Will, the actual phrase "the Will" has been taboo in the science community for some time. Will is related to the concept of a free Will and unless that is the direct query of the work at hand, it is simply a term that has been avoided by most.

Sean A. Spence, however, does not shy away from directly naming the Will. He also puts volition at the top of his Will associations but without equating them, suggesting that the Will is part of the "machine for volition."[646] He reminds us that "when we pursue the cognitive neurobiological architecture of volition, we find representations of not only our 'own' acts but also the actions and intentions of others."[647] The mirroring system for understanding intentions allows us to recognize our own, as well as others' volitions.

Ilham Dilman asserts that, "Our will, as it finds expression in our intentions, choices and decisions, belongs to us, flesh and blood beings, and it is embedded in situations of human life in which we act."[648] The Will is expressed through intentions and, reminiscent of the 4Es (embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive cognition), it is a bodily activity that is embedded

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[645] Ibid., 417.

[646] Spence, *The Actor's Brain*, 127.

[647] Ibid, 147.

[648] Ilham Dilman, *Free Will: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), 67.

in the environment. Dilman continues, "We enter these situations as beings with a specific history in the course of which we have learned a great many things [extended] and have become the particular individual who judges, deliberates, takes decisions, acts [enactive]."[649]

Ainslie suggests that the Will is needed "as a basic means of knitting a person's intentions together from one moment to the next" and is a basic component of what makes up the self.[650] In addition to reflecting Stanislavsky's concept of given circumstance, both of these theories are relevant to Stanislavsky's concepts of the Will for the actor. Personal weakness of Will allows the actor's attentions to shift to inappropriate targets (did the audience like that?), may cause a lack of appropriate rehearsal and preparation (the perceived effort is too high) or allow the negative physiological changes of stage fright to either impair performance or even stop it altogether —all difficulties Stanislavsky mentions. The early system's introduction of the through-line of a production upon which all the intentions of the characters navigate in action, clearly reflects Ainslie's stringed-intentions argument.

Intentions may not be *responsible* for actions, however. Many of our actions (in real life) are spurred by unconscious processes that we will sometimes assign a conscious intention to an action in retrospect that it never really had one.[651] On stage, actors have the luxury and necessity of knowing those intentions, however, even if their character does not.

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[649] Ibid., 263.

[650] Ainslie, "Thought Experiments that Explore," 173.

[651] Wegner, *The Illusion of Conscious Will,* 318.

Wegner does not agree that intentions cause Willed action. For him, there is a different, independent system that "generates the feeling of willing" that is not what causes us to act. Like Stanislavsky, however, Wegner regards Will and feeling as inseparable:

> Why, if this experience of will is not the cause of action, would we even go to the trouble of having it? … The answer becomes apparent when we appreciate conscious will as a feeling that organizes and informs our understanding of our own agency. Conscious will is a signal with many of the qualities of an emotion, one that reverberates through the mind and body to indicate when we sense having authored an action.[652]

He clarifies, "conscious will is an *emotion of authorship*."[653] While Wegner may be at the extreme end of the spectrum as to the relationship between Will and emotion (essentially saying the Will mostly exists as a feeling), he doesn't discount the essential nature of the Will. He admits that the feeling of a Will (Will-feeling) signals ownership of an action to an agent (a representation) and allows for the agent to designate moral responsibility (appraisal) of an action. The Will remains the go-between for feelings, appraisals and representations and serves as a "somatic marker of personal authorship" and contributes to the sense of a self.[654] This idea of the Will contributing to a sense of a self with agency may also contribute to an actor's "experiencing" a role when they use their Will to perform the actions of a character; it is the self's Will causing the action.

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[652] Ibid.

[653] Ibid.

[654] Ibid., 327.

"Effort" is another key term in some scientific theories of the Will. Eugenia Radulescu, Yoko Nagai and Hugo Critchley describe "mental effort" as "an affective experience that encompasses subjective, physiological and behavioral dimensions" that act as "a general feeling of labour and personal strength." [655] It is tied to peripheral autonomic responses and the evaluation of those bodily responses. Since it is the conscious appraisal of a physiological condition, it is a "feeling" state, but not an emotion or an action.[656] Emotions of sadness or other perceived negative states are directly related, however, as they decrease the capacity for mental effort.

Effort bridges the gap between the mental and physical. As mental effort increases, more attention must be paid to particular elements of the task at hand. The body responds in turn, and the feedback will "contribute to a feelings state of perceived difficulty, control and achievement."[657] This feeling acts to modulate the perceived usefulness of the activity (evaluation), provokes adjusted action, and "contributes to the feeling of conscious will."[658] If it

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[655] Eugenia Radulescu, Yoko Nagai and Hugo Critchley, "Mental Effort: Brain and Autonomic Correlates in Health and Disease," 237 and Helma M. de Morree and Samuele M. Marcora, "Psychobiology of Perceived Effort During Physical Tasks," 255 both in *Distributed Cognition and the Will: Individual Volition and Social Context.*

[656] Radulescu, Nagai, Critchley, "Mental Effort," 238.

[657] Ibid.

[658] Helma M. de Morree and Samuele M. Marcora, "Psychobiology of Perceived Effort During Physical Tasks," in *Distributed Cognition and the Will: Individual Volition and Social*

feels like it is taking effort to do something, we must use Will to fortify ourselves to do it. Brehm's motivational intensity theory suggests that effort is proportional to the task difficulty until one reaches a point of maximum effort, beyond which they cannot go. At this point, effort must be reduced, or the subject will simply quit performing the task.[659] Mental fatigue causes the perception of physical fatigue (even without physiological signals), especially over long periods of time, when concentration is required. Actors and their teachers must understand limits of exertion as limits of Willpower and find alternate ways in which to achieve a desired effect than simply "pushing" the actor. There are physical and mental limits for every person. Of course, training will help broaden those limits if done carefully and thoughtfully over time.

Now I would like to look at the integrated-systematic ways in which the Will may work. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is implicated in what can be called "self-generating" action and the planning of the response to that action. Lesion studies have revealed that damage to this area triggers a type of aphasia in which a person can repeat what others say but cannot initiate speech on their own.[660] In addition, when this area is "turned off" with transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), people were not able to engender novel, non-stereotypic (non-routine) answers to questions.[661] The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is likely, in effect, our idea creation center and plays a role in making choices, especially related to movement. Making choices is

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*Context,* ed. Don Ross, David Spurrett, Harold Kincaid and G. Lynn Stephens (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 256.

[659] Ibid.

[660] Spence, *The Actor's Brain,* 103.

[661] Ibid., 105.

also directly related to the capacity of the Will, which would be irrelevant without it. Spence surmises:

> Why we should not suggest that DLPFC [dorsolateral prefrontal cortex] is a region that is implicated in the biology of choice, so that if a "Will" were to exist, this is one region that could be pivotal to its function. The data… suggests that DLPFC plays a part in "choice," especially when the.y are discernible (behavioral) "alternatives."[662]

Given the above, it is not surprising that the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is also involved with "self-control" in stopping oneself from committing an action that has previously been intended. So even if Libet and colleagues' experiments suggest an intention to act comes before awareness of that action, there is clearly a "veto" power in place.

The orbitofrontal prefrontal cortex has a role in relating a "reward value" to objects or targets of an action towards which the Will strives. Spence notes that in this case, the valance of the goal (or importance) is key.[663]

The anterior cingulate cortex has a specific relationship to attention, conflict and error monitoring, and is involved with human awareness of pain. It is also essential for the motivation for action, with obvious implications for the Will, which can be defined here as the urge to act.[664] The anterior cingulate cortex also is activated when a subject must pay attention to an action and when habitual responses must be dampened. Important for this study, the anterior cingulate cortex also "modulates 'autonomic' (involuntary, homeostatic) activity associated with affective

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[662] Ibid., 108.

[663] Ibid., 112.

[664] Ibid., 108-109.

(emotional) behaviors and response selection."[665] In other words, it uses emotional cues to regulate automatic bodily processes. For an actor whose automatic bodily responses sets them in a nervous panic, causing dry mouth, shaky limbs, nervous ticks and heart palpitations, this type of regulation is essential. And they are all tied in with the function of the Will; damage to this area has even been implicated in a diminished "emotional will power."[666] The physical structures of the brain itself seems to bind the Will to feeling, appraisal and representation.

Spence reports that any damage to the loop system described above can result in a person who no longer has the Will for action; all their desire for volition is simply gone, and they don't even seem to care.[667] If this is the case, then it seems that every aspect involved in the Will loop system can either reinforce the actor's Will, imagination, emotions and ability for action or hinder them. Integrating training to reinforce all four areas is key.

**Implications of Current Research for Stanislavsky's concept of the Will**

Earlier in this chapter, I examined some techniques that Stanislavsky developed to stoke the actor's Will using attention and concentration, then situated them in the context of the science of his day (specifically the work of Ribot). We are now in a position to consider these techniques in the context of current psychological and neuroscientific research.

William James's definition of attention (of which Stanislavsky may have been aware) still rings true:

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[665] Ibid., 109-110.

[666] Ibid., 110.

[667] Ibid., 262.

> Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. Focalization, concentration, of consciousness are of its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others.[668]

Brad Motter provides a more recent scientific definition: "Our ability to concentrate our perceptual experience on a selected portion of the available sensory information, and, in doing so, to achieve a clear and vivid impression of the environment."[669] Interoception, essential for an actor, is implicitly included as sensory information in this statement.

Attentional processes occur within each sensory field, activating corresponding sensory brain areas. These attentions may also be inwardly directed towards the body or thoughts (interoception, memories, problem solving, etc.). Where we place our attention must be selected at every conscious moment, either intentionally with Will, or unintentionally without Will. Although detailing each of these attentional processes is outside the purview of this dissertation, I do need to consider a few key areas related to the Will. Most attentional processes are influenced by whatever has just happened —if we just heard a loud screech we will look towards where the noise originated, shifting our visual attention to see what caused the noise (was it a truck?), and our auditory attention to listening for another sound (is it close?), and perhaps even

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[668] William James 1890: 403–404 in John Duncan, "Attention," *MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences,* eds. Robert A. Wilson and Frank C. Keil (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 39.

[669] Brad Motter, "Attention in the Animal Brain," *MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences,* 174.

causing an action (jumping out of the way). If we don't see a source for the sound, our attention will be primed to keep looking and listening for one.

Willed action requires focusing attention on information relative to the goal at hand, while simultaneously inhibiting distracting stimuli. To write this sentence I need to focus on the thought I am conveying and typing the correct keys to communicate that idea. I need to "ignore" my dog at my feet and the raindrops on the window. If my smoke detector goes off, it would be wise for me to "allow" the distraction to guide my attention to its cause. It is evolutionarily good for me to be able to switch between sustained attention (to complete a task) and stimulus driven attention (to keep me from getting burned by a fire). We constantly need "background monitoring" which allows me to do both; I can simultaneously concentrate on this paragraph, without shutting my consciousness off from important stimuli.[670] I know a generally compliant elementary student who would regularly get into trouble when she wouldn't put an engrossing book away when the teacher would call the end of reading time. Her focus was so intense on the book that her background monitoring was not attuned to the less-than-overwhelming voice of a teacher. Maybe a fire alarm would have broken through and "caught" her attention.

Some scientists refer to a "master" attention controller as the "supervisory attentional system" (SAS).[671] It is what allows us to shift from the "automatic pilot" response that relies on schemas (routines or habits) and perform a novel action or respond to an unfamiliar environmental stimuli. When it is difficult to choose the next action or we have to suppress our routine sequence of actions, the supervisory attentional system is at play. It must evaluate already

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[670] Goschke, "Volition in Action," 420.

[671] Spence, *The Actor's Brain*, 357.

held schema against the current environmental and intentional circumstances to choose where to place attention to achieve the desired outcome. Spence points out that "when we are fatigued, distracted, or tempted to do '2 things at once', we're more likely to lapse, to allow 'rogue schemata' to escape our control."[672] If we are blasting our favorite song in the car, we will be more likely to forget the turn to the doctor's office and go straight to work "without thinking about it." Most of us have driven someplace and not even remembered the drive afterwards. These distractions draw our attention away and allow the schema of "driving to work" take over. Different brain systems are implicated in each of these scenarios as well. Prefrontal, executive systems are responsible for selected attention and the generation of novel actions, while posterior and inferior systems are needed for routine, automated tasks.[673]

The selection and control of attention requires mental effort. When it is a top-down process (I *choose* to attend to this writing rather than my grumbling stomach) I need to engage my Will in order to obey myself. My motivation to write must outweigh my motivation to eat.[674] There are ways I can help my struggling Will to accommodate my desire to write, such as setting

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[672] Ibid., 357.

[673] Ibid., 272.

[674] In addition to the System descriptions of motivation, I am also subscribing to Debbie M. Yee and Todd S. Braver's definition of motivation here, which states that "In scientific literature, motivation has been characterized as the energization and direction of behavior, response vigor, arousal and intensity of motor output, or as a biologically-driven impulse that compels an organism to act." Debbie M. Yee and Todd S. Braver, "Interactions of Motivation and Cognitive Control," *Current Opinions in Behavioral Sciences*, 19 (2018), 83.

a timer for a certain amount of time, reminders of deadlines, an accountability partner, etc.… However, exhaustion, hunger, certain medications, and even sadness can diminish my capabilities for mental effort to keep my attention.[675]

Scientists have found that if someone places their attentional focus in on them self, they automatically begin a self-evaluation process.[676] Some people do this more than others, and those that have a high trait of self-focus usually are Willing to put forth more effort on tasks, than those who don't.[677] This greater effort results in greater goal achievement, however, just making the goal more important (raising the stakes in actor parlance) *does not* result in higher effort. Instead, people with higher self-focus traits seem to be more highly attuned to their environment. They seem to respond to priming effects more, too, allowing them to more easily react to a stimulus.[678] So, self-focused attention is a factor in achieving a goal more effectively, but actors need their attention on something other than the self. This seems to be one of the many paradoxes an actor must navigate. In training and rehearsal there are times when self-focus, as is often practiced in yoga exercises, is essential. Self-focus on the character we are playing from a first-person perspective would likely also give us benefits. As Stanislavsky stressed, however, the focus of attention during the scene must remain in a close circle on the object at hand. Pavel

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[675] Radulescu, Nagai, Critchley, "Mental Effort," 239.

[676] Paul J. Silva, "Self-Striving: How Self-Focused Attention Affects Effort-Related Cardiovascular Activity," in *Handbook of Biobehavioral Approaches to Self-regulation*, eds. Guido Gendolla, Tops, Koole, (New York: Springer Science, 2015), 308.

[677] Ibid., 309.

[678] Ibid.

Rumyantsev records Stanislavsky, in the last phase of his search for an acting system, saying that when performing we must:

> "Forget about the technique of acting," … "'Technique is only of value on the stage when you forget all about it. You have only one objective in your first scene – to look at Olga and Tatiana and please them. Everything else will emerge from your subconscious if you carry out your simple objective."[679]

While rehearsing, actors need to use their Wills to shift between self-monitoring and playing character tasks, but while performing, they must Will their attention to its object. This object is usually the scene partner(s). Truly, focus is the fuel of the Will.

As this chapter has shown, *affective* responses direct attention to possible hazards and rewards in people's environments. The senses bring the information to the prefrontal cortex (unless it is bypassed by reflexive responses), which then *appraises* the information (based on the sensory information and the emotion and feelings it provokes), compares it to the memory of previous relevant instances, and develops options for a response (*representation*). The *Will* is invoked to give energy to the response. All of Stanislavsky's Motive Forces are part of this process. Since the Will is an essential component of the acting process (in both senses of the word "actor"), what can we do to increase its power?

Stanislavsky was convinced that in order for actors to be able to focus on the objects at hand, their technical skills had to become habitual; for that to happen, actors needed to be in continual training.[680] Translated into current science lingo, only when novel experiences are

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[679] Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 66.

[680] Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 52.

repeated enough that the new connections between neurons become strong enough to develop into schemas, will a habit be formed. Stanislavsky  realized that even with the best of training, an actor cannot always sustain "an unbroken line of attention"; that is to be found only in "madmen."[681] In fact, actors need to be able to agilely shift attention between the character's desires and the practical needs of a production. The Will is the key factor in both processes. It takes strength of Will to discipline oneself into regular training, and it takes strength of Will to maintain the required duality of attention (between the character's object of attention and the physical demands of a performance) and Wills (the actor's Will and the character's Will) on stage. In addition to the intrinsic motivator of "becoming a better actor," adding other rewards into this process would offset the high cost of the mental effort required and help increase Willpower to continue. Pavel Rumyàntsev, co-author with Stanislavsky of the book *Stanislavsky on Opera*, writes that

> Stanislavsky's research showed him that stoking the Will is a circular process: "Thoughts are embodied in acts," Stanislavsky taught us, "and a man's actions in turn affect his mind. His mind affects his body and again his body, or its condition, has its reflex action on his mind produces this or that condition. You must learn how to rest your body, free your muscles and, at the same time, your psyche."[682]

One of the first steps, then, is for actors to "free" their body of unwanted muscular tension. This principle is not new to acting practitioner of course, but the idea that not only will this freedom affect technical skills (such as the Kristen Linkletter concept of "freeing the natural voice"), but

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[681] Stanislavski and Rumyàntsev, *Stanislavski On Opera*, 255.

[682] Ibid., 4.

it can also help stoke the Will. ""These exercises,' said Stanislavsky, 'develop a sense of tranquility, of self-control and power'."[683] This power is not only of physical strength but of strength of Will. Willpower is needed less to move the body in the desired manner when there is less tension, leaving more Willpower for other tasks. As cognitive science has shown, we have a limited amount of available physical and mental effort, so anything that lessens the load is helpful. The circular aspect is when attention from the object of focus wanes, the body or perhaps audience is brought into attention resulting in greater physical tension. The Will must be invoked to shift focus once again.[684] By regular training in relaxation techniques, we can allow our Will freedom to work elsewhere.

Studies of impaired self-regulation may also suggest ways to increase Willpower in an actor. Kerstin Brinkmann and Jessica Franzen focus on rewards and goal setting to help depressed patients, as they often have a low reward response and set goals too high. "Behavioral activation" starts with small, easily attained goals and pairs them with pleasant activities.[685] Intrinsically we know that we need to make acting classes and rehearsals fun, but this may impel us to place an even higher emphasis on pairing the fun with goals. These doctors also suggest

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[683] Ibid., 5.

[684] See Benedetti, *Stanislavski: His Life and Art*, 25.

[685] Kerstin Brinkmann and Jessica Franzen, "Depression and Self-Regulation: A Motivational Analysis and Insights from Effort-Related Cardiovascular Reactivity," *Handbook of Biobehavioral Approaches to Self-Regulation*, eds. Guido H.E. Gendolla, Mattie Tops and Sander L. Koole (New York, London: Springer, 2015), 343.

using “mindfulness-based cognitive therapy… to increase reward sensitivity.”[686] While we need to be careful not to wander into therapy sessions for our students, the mindfulness practices related to yoga, sensory recall exercises that allow the “savoring” of a moment, paired with positive reinforcements of small “wins” can also increase Willpower. We should also watch for students who seem to be having difficulty with these things and suggest appropriate counseling services to help them further.

In my own classes, I’ve framed an exercise around Stanislavsky’s yogic appropriation of “prana rays” to help actor’s focus their Wills. In one exercise, for example, students stand facing a wall and focus on the first circle of attention by putting their arms straight out in front of them. They then imagine that a beam of energy fills in the space between their bodies and hands. Once they do this for a bit, they then adjust their imagination to a narrower ray focused on a point on the wall opposite them. It helps if the actors point their finger toward each object of concentration and imagine each ray traveling from the body, down the arm, through the finger and to the wall. If we are in a theatre, we repeat the exercise, focused on the rear of the auditorium. Then each actor chooses a partner some distance from themselves and sends their rays to the other person. Once a clear communication is established between partners, text may be added. Additional tasks may be added such as to imagine burning a hole into the wall with their ray, carving their name into the brick, or picking at a scab on their scene partners face (still from a distance with rays). Importantly at each stage of the exercise, after they work for a moment, I encourage them to focus all their Will into accomplishing the task with the rays. This automatically increases the “stakes” and maintains focused concentration, while increasing their

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[686] Ibid.

familiarity and dexterity with the concepts. The exercise may continue by playing with various manifestations of the rays such as pulsing (various tempos), size, weight, etc… and by adding in character problems. Afterwards I will incorporate aspects of the exercise into a warmup for daily practice,

Another way we can stoke our Will in the classroom and rehearsals is by simply stating out loud, especially to other people, what our personal and character intentions are, just as Yogi Ramacharaka instructed. Clark points out that studies have shown that stating a goal out loud can promote a desired consistency between who we say we are and who we want to be, essentially holding ourselves accountable. We don't want to be the person no one, especially ourselves, can trust. The cost is too high.[687] Talking about our goals both as actors (e.g. long-term such as I will do yoga every day, and short-term such as I will focus on his face for this moment), and as characters (e.g. long-term such as I will get revenge on him to the short-term such as I will push him away from me) will help stoke our Wills to complete the tasks. The really exciting result, though, is that by completing one task efficiently, we will further stoke our Wills to complete the next one. "Excitation-transfer theory" posits that the affective boost from completing one task will arouse further activation with a "residual activation."[688] It creates a type of emotional contagion that boosts our Wills towards more goal-directed actions for both actors and characters.

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[687] Clark, "Soft Selves," 16.

[688] A. Timur Sevincer and Gabriele Oettingen, "Future Thought and the Self-Regulation of Energization," in *Handbook of Biobehavioral Approaches to Self-regulation*, eds. Guido Gendolla, Tops, Koole (New York: Springer Science, 2015), 325.

Stoking "Perceptual novelty" and/or "context unfamiliarity" may also help raise Willpower.[689] A stimulus that is new in our environment will draw our attention to it. Most directors know that introducing new problems or foci into a rehearsal can spark new choices, but it can also increase the actors' Wills. This brings up another seeming paradox, however. The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex is more highly activated (requiring greater mental effort) when a new motor routine is being learned. Once it becomes a schema (is habit), the brain activity shifts more to posterior brain regions, freeing space for prefrontal mental activity (Representation and Appraisal).[690] Importantly, an automated routine is more consolidated in specific brain areas than a novel one. This consolation leaves out various connections around the brain leaving imagination and other insights excluded.[691] By introducing novel information/experiences into a rehearsal, actors' brains can open back up, allowing their creative freedom to explode once again. New ideas produce positive affect, stoking the Will to do it again. If too many new tasks are introduced at one time, however, they compete for mental space, causing stress and inefficiency depleting the Will.

Looking back to some of the specific steps Stanislavsky outlined to increase the Will of an actor, we must differentiate the training process from the rehearsal process. Training the body to respond to the physical actions of the Will requires the "outer" processes of ridding it from

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[689] Radulescu, Nagai, Critchley, "Mental Effort," 238.

[690] This shift has parallel activities within the various nuclei of the basal ganglia, which is most often linked to the initiation and execution of movements, indicating the entire "loops" of activity change. Spence, *The Actor's Brain*, 170.

[691] Ibid.

excess tensions, strengthening and making it flexible, and responsive. “Inner/outer” activities should encourage introspection and sensory/emotional recall (helped by yogic type practices not deep, psychological probing), and practice with analysis, goal seeking and all aspects of performance. All these activities require attention and concentration of Will, resulting in a “creative state.”

When working on a role, Stanislavsky says to start with the text, not through a sit-down-and- map-out-every-choice process, but one of active analysis. This analysis (which may include exploring the physicality of a role “from the outside-in”), when paired with an active, incentivized Will, will spark a “creative idea” for the actor to play. Research can also help. Images, people-watching, music and other external sources to the play may spark the actor’s Will, the mind or the feelings. The task and its motivations must be clearly defined, using the given (suggested) circumstances and the “magic if” to help clarify the problem and therefore what the Will of the character is. Actors must, “without thinking about it too much” jump in and perform whatever problems are put before them, aligning their Will with their character’s Will. This type of Will, Stanislavsky says, makes actors “want to do,” leading them into action.

One last practical example for how the Will may be used in production has two of the scientific principles discussed in this dissertation as its inspiration. The first insight stems from the 2018 study of first-person versus second-person perspective acting suggesting that the deactivations in the frontal cortex and activation of the precuneus seems to represent a departure from a unified sense of a self towards a dual consciousness. This idea strengthens my impetus to focus on the two Wills of actor and character and how they may at times merge into one (Stanislavsky’s *artisto-rol*).

The second impetus revolves around the concept that when people focus in on themselves, they automatically begin to evaluate themselves, and those who are better at self-evaluation tend to put forth more effort on tasks. This greater effort results in greater goal achievement, while just making the goal more important (raising the stakes) does not. So, I wanted actors to be able to quickly self-evaluate and adjust during a performance while at the same time engage their own personal Wills to carry out their characters' Wills. The goal of Stanislavsky's "I am" experiencing, created, in part, by aligning the actors' Wills with their character Wills, may allow for quick introspection which could immediately increase actors' Wills and, in effect, raise their engagement with the task.

When I directed a production of Emily Mann's play *Mrs. Packard*, the cast and I discussed the idea of the actor's Will versus the character's Will.[692] I suggested that actors try to align their own Wills with their characters' Wills as much as possible. For instance, at one point an inmate was watching Elizabeth Packard with the intention of threatening her. When coached, the actor purposely chose to align her own Will with the character's Will, which suddenly made the task much more important for her and the dramatic tension in the room increased substantially. In fact, the actor playing Elizabeth Packard declared that the inmate was suddenly "really scary." In previous rehearsals I may have told the actor to "increase the stakes" in her work. But that phrase is problematic as it takes the actor out of the moment. Instructions such as "pretend like someone will die if you don't get it!" needs an additional layer of imagination to work (adding to cognitive load) while taking the focus away from the scene partner. By simply aligning her own Will with her character's Will (in essence, borrowing her character's Will), she

[692] Produced at the University of Georgia, in the fall of 2015.

achieved a quick, more dynamic result. Of course, there are times when this alignment is not desired and Stanislavski's oscillation of "watching himself" in performance is necessary. For instance, there was an extensive amount of stage combat in *Mrs. Packard*. In that situation actors' Wills must strive to protect their partners (while selling the combat) while the characters' Wills strive to hurt someone. These opposite desires must both be apparent, but the actor and character Wills do not align, resulting in the necessary performance monitoring. Once the combat or other self-monitoring activities are no longer needed, the actor can quickly realign her Will with her character's Will and continue playing her actions with the strength of both Wills. In these ways, an actor can follow Stanislavsky's advice to "invest the words with something of his own, his personal representations of life, his heart, his living feelings, his will."[693]

**Conclusion**

The topic of this final chapter has led us towards a unification of the dissertation's argument as a whole: Emotion, action and imagination all come together to influence, and ultimately to fall under the influence of, the actor's Will. The Will-to-Action loop (including the Mind, Will and Feeling) will, as the actor progresses along the spine of the play, develop its super-action. Each action increases and sharpens the Will in turn. And if one of the three Motive Forces is enacted, the others will often follow suit; on those occasions in which they don't, the actor must use a lure such as rhythmic breathing or movement, novel stimuli, shifting physicality and/or attention, recall methods, and other incentives, always keeping in mind, that there is a point in which there is simply no mental effort left, and rest is the only solution. During performances, using Circles of Attention and objects of focus are key. And perhaps most

[693] Stanislavsky, *An Actor's Work*, 279.

important of all, maintaining a healthy, chemically balanced, strong and supple mind and body, relatively free from anxiety, allows the Motive Forces to work unimpeded.

# CONCLUSION

The name of Constantine Stanislavsky is ubiquitously identified with the process of acting. References abound from pop culture's Sheldon Cooper's studying *An Actor Prepares* as the genius child in search of the best teacher of acting knowledge in *Young Sheldon,* to the scientific Neil R. Carlson and Melissa A. Birkett's *Physiology of Behavior* which references Stanislavsky's search for replicable emotion.[694] Despite the impressive scholarly efforts of Sharon Carnicke, Richard Hornby, David Krasner and others to de-couple overly emotionalized Method Acting from Stanislavsky, the link is still pervasive outside of academic circles. My own experience when telling non-academics of my research reinforced this truth to me as almost every person who had heard of Stanislavsky assumed he was associated with Method acting. This dissertation is less interested in the separation of the Method from Stanislavsky, however, and more concerned with uncovering what Stanislavsky actually wrote about and practiced.

My years of experience studying acting both from "inside" the process as an actor, and from "outside" the process as a director created a desire within me to understand not only the techniques actors use in performance, but also how their bodies allow acting to happen. What mechanisms in the human allow pretending and allow others to recognize that pretense? How

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[694] Carlson and Birkett, *Physiology of Behavior,* 359. The text reaffirms the contention of a general misunderstanding of Stanislavsky's system however, in that it credits Method Acting to him.

can an actor feel the emotion of another person and yet keep their own identity separate? Does an actor feel their character's emotion, or do they perceive that emotion and empathize with their own version of that emotion? Why did I find the concept of objectives and tactics so transformative as a young acting student, but often so burdensome as a professional? I decided to study the person who is often credited with the first long-term study of the acting process to try and understand what central concepts he discovered in the process, and then look to contemporary science to see how they compared. Would Stanislavsky's ideas hold up under scientific scrutiny? If so, how are they helpful?

To answer this basic question, I decided to investigate four of Stanislavsky's key concepts: Emotion, Action, Imagination, and the Will. First, I needed to closely analyze what Stanislavsky wrote about each subject, what he said about each, and how he put them into practice over time. When comparing this data to current cognitive science writing, I found it is clear that Stanislavsky was very much who he said he was – a man who wanted to discover what he called "the laws of nature" inherent in the acting process. He didn't think he was inventing new techniques, but rather investigating the techniques the best actors already used so they could be emulated.

Chapter 1, Emotion, examines influences on Stanislavsky's concept of emotion, what he wrote about it, and how he and his system shifted the emphasis on emotion over time. The controversies created by the system's transmission west and the transposition of Stanislavsky's ideas by his protégés are untangled. The claims and ambiguities are then put to the test and clarified with current empirical research in the way humans experience emotion. By concentrating on what the bodily changes during an emotion are and how they are registered as feelings, we are able to refine our understanding of emotion and relate it to Stanislavsky's

techniques to "lure" emotion from an actor. The chapter also tackles the age-old question as to whether acted emotions are "real" emotions or something else entirely; that "something else" I posit are what Stanislavsky calls "analogous emotions." Cognitive science suggests a thin line between "first-time" and "analogous emotions" that blurs the distinction of what is real and what is not. Despite the changing methods he uses to entice it in actors, the continuing centrality of emotion to Stanislavsky is key.

The second chapter, Physical Action, scrutinizes Stanislavsky's way of working with action in rehearsal and performance and compares it to current cognitive science research on the centrality of physical action in social understanding. Both agree on the necessity of an embodied, physically direct approach in actor training. Stanislavsky's focus on action allows actors to reduce their cognitive load enough to play concrete, actionable verbs while dynamically interacting with their scene partners and following the through-line of the play, action by action. By focusing on the action/counteraction of a scene, and choosing a physical verb to play, actors' working memory can manipulate their actions in focused and clear manners appropriate to their characters.

Chapter 3 looks to Stanislavsky's remarks about imagination. Mental images combined with real-time sensory inputs coupled with action stimulate desired analogous emotions. Most importantly, the chapter connects imagination to what Sharon Carnicke asserts is Stanislavsky's most important "lost term" *perezhivat.* For her, *perezhivat,* roughly meaning "to experience," equates to his idea of "living the part."[695] Since contemporary cognitive science views imagination as a foundational part of consciousness, it is surely, in some basic way, integral to

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[695] Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus,* 107.

how an actor can “live through a role” and “experience” on stage. Rhonda Blair stresses that in this “living through” the role “the actor does not become the character, but experiences or lives life through the character, as she performs a meticulously shaped score.”[696] This chapter argues that imagination is the key to Stanislavsky’s idea of experiencing a role, and current understandings of cognitive science help us understand not only the link between imagination and experiencing, but also how we can better use imagination to enhance the ability of an actor to live through their role during performance.

The last chapter examines the influences that various theorists' concepts of the Will at the turn of the twentieth century may have had on Stanislavsky’s thinking, writings and practice, and some of the important ways these concepts were carried on in his legacy. The chapter then turns towards cognitive science to try and understand current theories of the Will to see if they can enlighten the concepts further. The chapter grows towards a unification of the dissertation as emotion, action and imagination all come together to influence the actor’s Will. An intentional focus helps create and fuel the Will in a loop of either growth or decline. Anything that gets in the way of any element of this loop affects the ability of the Will. I argue that not only is Stanislavsky’s emphasis on the Will in acting supported by contemporary science, but more importantly, a reintroduction to his emphasis on the multifaceted concepts of the Will will benefit acting pedagogy.

These four areas of the acting process¬ Emotion, Action, Imagination and the Will¬ are central to the work of the actor just as they are central to the way humans work. Understanding that actors experience *analogous* emotions to their characters frees actors from the tyranny of

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[696] Blair, *The Actor, Image and Action,* 82.

needing to “feel everything their character feels” to have a good performance. Instead, a focus on action, not just as individual characters, but also action as it relates to the competing forces of action and counteraction, is key. Stoking the imagination process helps actors “experience” truthful action in each moment on stage. Finally, Stanislavsky’s centrality of a multifaceted concept of the Will as a vehicle to generate energy to concentrate on the task at hand and create imaginative belief in the world and actions of the play was a central tenet throughout his search for a system that would help actors communicate “truth” on stage.

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