

Contents / Содержание

Sergei Tcherkasski (St Petersburg State Theatre Arts Academy, Russia): Inside Sulimov's Studio: Directors Perform a Play - pg. 4/ Сергей Черкасский (Санкт-Петербургская государственная академия театрального искусства, Россия): «В мастерской М. В. Сулимова: Режиссеры играют спектакль» – с. 26

Peter Zazzali (University of Kansas, U.S.A): An Examination of the Actor's Double-Consciousness Through Stanislavski's Conceptualization of 'Artistic Truth' - pg. 47/ Питер Заззали (Канзасский университет, США): «Исследование двойственного сознания актера посредством концептуализированной Станиславским идеи 'сценической правды'» - с. 56

Michael Craig (Copernicus Films, Moscow): *Vakhtangov and the Russian Theatre*: Making a new documentary film - pg. 66 / Майкл Крэг («Copernicus Films», Москва): «Вахтангов и русский театр. Создание нового документального фильма» – с. 72

Steven Bush (University of Toronto, Canada): George Luscombe and Stanislavski Training in Toronto - pg. 79/ Стивен Буш (Университет Торонто, Канада): «Джордж Ласком и преподавание по методу Станиславского в Торонто» – с. 93

David Chambers (Yale School of Drama): *Études in America: A Director's Memoir* - pg. 109/ Дэвид Чемберс (Йельская школа драмы): «Этюды в Америке: Воспоминания режиссера» – с. 126

Eilon Morris (UK) : *The Ins and Outs of Tempo-Rhythm* - pg. 146 /Эйлон Моррис (Великобритания): «Особенности темпоритма» – с. 159

Martin Julien (University of Toronto) : "Just Be Your Self-Ethnographer": Reflections on Actors as Anthropologists - pg. 174 / Мартин Жюльен (Университет Торонто): « 'Просто будь самоэтнографом': Размышления об актерах как антропологах» – с. 184

Book Reviews - pg. 195 / Рецензии на книги – с. 197

Laurence Senelick, ed: *Stanislavsky – A Life in Letters* (Routledge) - reviewed by Rebecca Reeves/ Лоренс Сенелик, ред.: «Станиславский: Жизнь в письмах» (Раутледж). Рецензия Ребекки Ривз

Christina Gutekunst and John Gillett: *Voice into Acting: Integrating Voice and the Stanislavski Approach* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama) - reviewed by Zachary Dunbar/ Кристина Гутекунст и Джон Джиллет: «Голос в актерском мастерстве: Объединяя работу над голосом и метод Станиславского» (Блумсбери Метьюэн драма). Рецензия Закари Данбара

Phillip B. Zarrilli, Jerri Daboo, Rebecca Loukes: *Acting: Psychophysical phenomenon and Process* (Palgrave Macmillan) - reviewed by Thomasina Unsworth/ Филипп Б. Заррилли, Джерри Дабу, Ребекка Лаукс: «Актерское мастерство: Психофизический феномен и процесс» (Палгрейв Макмиллан). Рецензия Томасины Ансворт

Examination of the Actor's Double-Consciousness Through Stanislavski's Conceptualization of 'Artistic Truth'

Peter Zazzali

In a rather well known anecdote regarding Method acting, Dustin Hoffman and Laurence Olivier were filming *Marathon Man* during the 1970s, when the former was away from the set for several days staying out late and not sleeping for the sake of getting into his role, to which Olivier famously quipped: "My dear boy, why don't you try acting."¹ Olivier was of course playfully poking fun at his younger colleague's attempt to become the character he was playing through mental and physical exhaustion, thereby emulating the given circumstances of his part. Though the pedagogy of what we call Method acting is relatively recent, having been coined by Lee Strasberg during the 1930s, the practice of an actor losing himself in a role for the sake of rendering a believable performance has existed for centuries. To capture Electra's "grief and unfeigned lamentation" at the loss of her brother Orestes, the ancient actor Polus used the ashes of his dead son as a prop. In the English theatre of the eighteenth century Charles Macklin was reported to have prepared for an entrance as Shylock by violently shaking a ladder backstage to work up a fury, just as the characters played by Sarah Siddons so possessed her that it took hours after a performance before she would return to normalcy.² France's Michel Baron and Francois-Joseph Talma "entered deeply into the emotions" of their characters, as did Germany's Friedrich Schroeder, Italy's Eleonora Duse, and America's Edwin Booth.³ Throughout the history of Western acting, performers have vigorously explored techniques and approaches to enable themselves to convincingly create a character. In doing so, they have invariably had to grapple with what Denis Diderot refers to as the paradox of the actor's double-consciousness, a conceit iterated in a 1787 debate between two of his contemporaries, the renowned actresses Hyppolite Clairon and Marie-Francoise Dumesnil:

Mlle. Dumesnil: [to Talma] Of course, one must neither play, nor even represent. You are not to *play* Achilles, but to *create* him. You must not *represent* Montagu [Romeo], you must *be* him.

Mlle. Clairon: My dear, you labor under great delusion. In theatrical art all is conventional, all is fiction.⁴

This article addresses the actor's double-consciousness by putting the pedagogy of Constantine Stanislavski in conversation with psychology and neuroscience. With respect to the latter, I will rely on the distinguished work of Antonio Damasi, whose theories about the cognitive functions of the human brain offer valuable insights into the craft of acting, most especially as they apply to the actor's conscious and subconscious minds. What do actors experience when they perform? How do they process stimuli to build a character, and by extension, their performance? What joint roles do their minds and bodies play in these transactions? These are just a few questions that I will address in examining the consciousness of actors.

¹ Dustin Hoffman, interview by James Lipton, *Inside the Actors Studio*, Bravo, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M6Kh5AXF0M> (accessed 17 July 2013).

² Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds., *Actors on Acting: The Theories, Techniques, and Practices of the World's Great Actors Told in Their Own Words* (New York: Crown, 1970), 141.

³ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

Consciousness is a term that has been hard to define throughout history. From Plato's theorization of the human soul and Hippocrates' materialist views of sensory perception to Cartesian duality and the monistic views of many current philosophers and psychologists alike, our understanding of what it means to be conscious has remained unresolved since the beginning of civilization. Perhaps this uncertainty is best demonstrated by the multiple academic disciplines and professions dedicated to studying it, each with its own range of conflicting theories on the topic. Consciousness' interdisciplinarity can be traced from its core fields of philosophy, neuroscience, physics, and psychology, to more correlative ones such as cognitive science, religion, artificial intelligence, and of course, the arts and humanities. As William James once said, "its meaning we know as long as no one asks us to define it."⁵

With all due respect to James, I want to nonetheless attempt a definition of consciousness with the intention of relating it to acting, and would therefore like to reference the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*:

1. a. The quality or state of being aware of something within oneself.
b. The state or fact of being conscious of an external object...
2. The state of being characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, and thought.⁶

If our working definition of consciousness pertains to any combination of an individual's awareness of her emotions, thoughts, sensations, and volition in relationship to an external (or internal) object, which presumably could be either living or inanimate, tangible or intangible, then we can start to put consciousness in conversation with acting. I am positing consciousness as a subjective concept, a move that makes sense in that I am relating it to actors and therefore pushing against the oppositional view held by many physicists who regard the concept as a strictly "third-person" entity for scientific observation. After all, actors represent the human condition through psychophysical action that in turn expresses thoughts, ideas, and emotions towards the artful construction of a performance. Moreover, consciousness implies something that is inherently *experiential*, thereby underscoring its application to performance and the actor's work. As such, I would like to propose a working-definition of consciousness as follows:

An *individual's* awareness of her emotions, thoughts, sensations, and volition in relationship to an external (or internal) object, which presumably could be either living or inanimate, tangible or intangible that is part of an *experience*—shared or otherwise.

The esteemed neuroscientist Antonio Damasio compares the formation of human behavior to a symphony orchestra in depicting it as "the result of several biological systems performing concurrently." Just as a symphonic composition consists of a plurality of movements involving many instruments, some of which are constantly heard and others that contribute intermittently, so human action generates from a complex network of internal and external stimuli.⁷ The actor's consciousness is somewhat simpler, at least insofar as it pertains to his craft. An actor builds his performance through an organization of specifically and artfully chosen stimuli that yield a desired effect in creating a moment. Whether it is an image, a thought, or a gesture, he composes a score of

⁵ Quoted in Arne Dietrich, *Introduction to Consciousness* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 20.

⁶ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary and Thesaurus*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness> (accessed 17 July 2013).

⁷ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt, 1999), 87.

stimuli that constitute and define his performance. The theatre scholar Rhonda Blair refers to this process as “blending and compression,” insofar as an actor’s chosen stimuli are the “tools” that “integrate” his performance “to create something new.”⁸ Relying heavily on cognitive science, Blair argues that an actor is in “constant negotiation” of his conscious mind for the purpose of triggering his “sensory-motor mechanisms and [his] experience of being a body, much of which is unconscious.”⁹

Theorizing the actor’s subconscious can best be attributed to Stanislavski, whose signature text, *An Actor Prepares*, equates subconscious playing with an inspired state of creativity. Claiming that his system is “directed to put our subconscious to work and...not to interfere with it once it is in action,” Stanislavski claims the actor’s conscious mind enables him to access his “creative subconscious.”¹⁰ The process therefore consists of making and organizing choices (selecting stimuli) to build a performance that is rendered subconsciously. For example, an actor chooses character objectives of varying sizes and significance all of which are willed by psychophysical action. Stanislavski provides *Othello* as a case study to make this point. In citing Act 3 scene 3, when Iago arouses Othello’s jealousy in suggesting Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio, Stanislavski claims that the actor playing the titular character undergoes a series of psychophysical changes that are defined by the character’s objectives. At the scene’s outset Othello is content and at peace, insofar as he has successfully fled Venice with Desdemona and is happily in command of the Venetian army in Cyprus. His nagging father-in-law, Brabantio, who outright opposed his betrothal to Desdemona along racial grounds, is long gone as is the bigoted and political environment of Venice. His devotion to his wife, “the ideal among women,” is what Stanislavski terms Othello’s super-objective, the pursuit of which is determined by everything he says and does: his through-line of action. Though these given circumstances define the beginning of the scene for Othello, Iago immediately challenges his state of contentedness. He arouses Othello’s jealousy, which results in the formulation of numerous “immediate objectives,” such as finding out the veracity of Iago’s claims, a goal that propels Othello henceforward until he is convinced that Desdemona has been unfaithful. The pursuit of these objectives is fortified by what Stanislavski calls psychophysical action—or tactics—that are active verbs consuming the actor’s instrument and causing “the work of nature and the subconscious [to] take place.”¹¹

These actions prompt the emotional expressivity that the actor playing Othello attempts to create. Jealousy, rage, and self-doubt are just a few of the feelings that constitute Othello’s experience during this scene, yet Stanislavski asserts that an actor can only achieve a credible rendering of emotion through his actions, a conceit upheld by cognitive science and psychology. Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Action, for example, can be traced to the James-Lange theory of the nineteenth century, which locates physical stimuli as the source of human emotion. William James and Carl Lange argue that an object is observed by the brain’s cortex before causing a physical response that in turn elicits human emotion. The classic example they provide is a person who sees a bear is inclined to run and simultaneously experiences fear. It is the act of running in conjunction with the recognition of the bear that causes the emotional response. Damasio provides a more contemporary view of the same psychophysical paradigm: “Specific emotions often succeed stimuli or actions that seemingly motivates them in the subject, as judged from the perspective of the observer.”¹² Thus, the Stanislavskian actor spends his time during rehearsals selecting actions that generate the needed emotional response to create the character. In doing so, he relies on his conscious mind to give rise to his subconscious.

⁸ Rhonda Blair, “Cognitive Science and Performance,” *TDR* 53, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 93-103.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, trans. Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008), 329; also Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Handbook*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1963), 135.

¹¹ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, 332-37.

¹² Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, 93.

Creating what Stanislavski terms a “sense of belief” in a character’s given circumstances and the actions within them is a function of the actor’s imagination. The goal is for the actor to immerse himself in the role, an experience in which his consciousness fluctuates between the life of the character and his own self-awareness. Stanislavski’s system is devised to achieve subconscious playing, with the actor arriving at “an unwavering belief in what is happening” in accordance with the performance.¹³ In more pedestrian terms, such an occurrence is often referred to as “staying in character.” The actor’s imagination is an essential resource in that he must take a fictional circumstance and render it truthfully for an audience, a feat that is contingent on the integration of internal and external objects serving as psychophysical stimuli, all of which are endowed by his imagination. Whether it is a character’s thought, something drawn from the actor’s memory, a response to a fellow actor, a prop or set piece, the production’s *mise-en-scène*, or a psychophysical action, the actor’s performance consists of numerous objects that stimulate him into an altered consciousness arrived at through his imagination, which, to borrow from Stanislavski’s colleague Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, will “lift the imagination of the spectator...to all that is called poetry.”¹⁴

As Nemirovich-Danchenko implies, the actor’s use of his imagination is not a schizophrenic experience, but an artful one that is intended to serve the spectator. When Stanislavski refers to an actor’s sense of belief, he is not advocating a literal transformation into another person’s psychophysical reality, but calling for an illusion of truth. “The art of representation demands perfection if it is to remain art,” he declares in differentiating performance from reality.¹⁵ This is a crucial distinction when considering the actor’s double-consciousness in that despite common misconceptions of his system by notable American teachers (e.g., Lee Strasberg) of the so-called Method, as Sharon Marie Carnicke and others argue, Stanislavski’s system avails the actor “the nearly simultaneous perspectives [of] being on stage (or in front of a camera) and being within the role.”¹⁶ His use of what he famously terms the “Magic If” can then be understood as one of his many techniques to free the actor’s imagination into a state of inspired play towards creating the *semblance* of a realistic experience. Formulated as a kind of thought experiment, the Magic If challenges the actor to imagine “if” he were the character to consider how he might respond to its given circumstances. The Magic If functions as a departure point for finding a character through imaginative play; it is not a “hallucination,” according to Stanislavski, but a technique in which “[the actor] does not forget that he is surrounded by stage scenery and props.”¹⁷ In its most basic form, the Magic If opens the actor to stimuli that jar his subconscious into creating an illusion of reality, which is after all the purpose of the craft.

The neurological function of the process of “making believe” relies on an actor’s use of what Damasio terms the extended consciousness. Building on the accumulation of knowledge and experience through the course of one’s life, a person’s extended consciousness works as a miraculous hard drive of learned information from which one can complete tasks. Extended consciousness ultimately defines who we are in that the actions of our daily lives, the decisions that we make in choosing them, what we think, and how we behave are all products of our past conjoined with our hopes for the future. What Damasio calls our core consciousness, on the other hand, refers to how our brains process information at any given moment by responding to a stimulus and formulating it as knowledge through our sensory perception; contrarily, extended consciousness applies this process to the course of a lifetime. As such, it functions as a warehouse

¹³ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, 327.

¹⁴ Quoted in *Actors on Acting*, 498.

¹⁵ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, 26.

¹⁶ Sharon Marie Carnicke, “Stanislavsky’s System: Pathways for the Actor,” in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (New York: Routledge, 2000), 18; also Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus: An Acting Master for the Twenty-First Century* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁷ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Handbook*, 94.

of memories and images that according to Damasio give us “the sense of our autobiographical self.”¹⁸

Our extended consciousness provides the capacity to personally identify with others, a key attribute in the work of actors. It is our life experience—our memories—that makes us keenly aware of others and our sociocultural environment. Extended consciousness is therefore a powerful tool for any actor attempting to explore a character. For example, when Daniel Day Lewis refers to his recent screen portrayal of Lincoln by admitting, “I never felt that depth of love for another human being that I never met,”¹⁹ he is relying on his ability to empathize with the character, which is a function of his extended consciousness. Like many actors, he did considerable homework on the role that in the case of playing an historical figure included biographical research, all of which was intended to enable him to find the character from within himself. Of course Lewis was not really becoming another person, but creating the illusion of Lincoln. Though on-camera acting generally requires a more verisimilitudinous portrayal than performing in a theatre, it still is the stuff of make-believe. Lewis employed his imagination to construct the belief that he had become America’s sixteenth president, a feat that was apparently enhanced by the film’s director, Steven Spielberg, who took pains to refer to his lead actor as “Mr. President” while on the set. In fact, Lewis’ Method approach to the role was such that he evidently struggled to let go of Lincoln, as he confessed to Lesley Stahl in an interview for *60 Minutes* that he “wished he [the character] would stay with [him] forever.”²⁰

A common misconception of Stanislavski’s system is that he wanted an actor to get lost in a role. Perhaps this misunderstanding can be attributed to the ways in which his work was first introduced and disseminated in the US through the teachings of Lee Strasberg and other proponents of the Method. Strasberg is most responsible for employing what Stanislavski refers to as affective memory, a technique used to fulfill the emotional requirements of a given moment by instructing the actor to focus on an image or object from his past to substitute for the character’s feelings. Adapting this technique from the psychology of Théodule Ribot, Stanislavski recommends affective memory as one of numerous tools an actor can use to meet the emotional demands of a part.²¹ Nonetheless, he distinguishes between using one’s personal experience to explore a role and being outright delusional. Despite the connection that an actor like Lewis may have to his character, he is always conscious—on some level—that he is acting. Stanislavski is adamant about this point in contending that one should “act from [his] own personality” and “never run away from [himself].”²² Relying on the experiential content of his extended consciousness, the actor therefore brings himself to meet the demands of a part. As such, his consciousness may be somewhat altered, yet he must never lose sight of the fact that he is performing, no matter what the medium or dramatic style, or else he “loses communication with [himself],” and most crucially, his audience.

To avail himself to the stimuli that shape his performance, the Stanislaskian actor must reach a heightened state of relaxation and focus. In the case of the former, Stanislavski recognizes the importance of an actor being physically relaxed for the purpose of being responsive to his consciously selected stimuli: a physical action; a line of spoken text; a thought or an image. The significance to Stanislavski of the actor’s physical training has been often overlooked, at least insofar as it applies to American interpretations of his system. Indeed, the second installment of his trilogy, *Building a Character*, is dedicated to the development of the actor’s instrument, thereby underscoring the psychophysical monism of his pedagogy: “You cannot convey the subtlety of Chopin’s music on a trombone and you cannot express delicate unconscious feelings with crude

¹⁸ Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, 198.

¹⁹ Daniel Day Lewis, interview by Lesley Stahl, *60 Minutes*, CBS, 14 November 2012.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 149.

²² Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work*, 209.

parts of our physical apparatus.”²³ Through Yoga and other exercises from Eastern performance traditions, Stanislavski embraces the joint function of the mind and body in expressing emotion. His approach is applicable to how cognitive scientists explain the practice of meditation in that it allows a participant to effectively edit the input of stimuli through a state of relaxation. Such a state, however, does not induce detachment from one’s surroundings, but on the contrary, invites heightened awareness and focus so as to “master the art of attention” in “sustaining any content in [one’s] consciousness.”²⁴

In attempting to achieve this heightened state of concentration,²⁵ Stanislavski began to explore Hatha Yoga as early as 1906 while working on the role of Astrov in a production of *Uncle Vanya*.²⁶ Shortly thereafter, his Moscow Art Theatre colleague, Leopold Antonovich Sulerzhitsky, introduced him to meditative techniques that would later become the basis for Stanislavski’s holistic approach to an actor’s expressivity.²⁷ Sulerzhitsky conducted workshops as part of the Moscow Art Theatre’s First Studio during the 1910s, where skills such as concentration and the transference of energy were practiced and developed.²⁸ Stanislavski identifies this energy as *prana*, a Hindu term referring to “all pervading” forces in nature that humans can harness and distribute “to bring about desired results.”²⁹ He increased his understanding of *prana* by studying the Hatha techniques of Yogi Ramacharaka to merge theory with practice towards accessing the mind-body-spiritual continuum that encompasses his system.³⁰ Indeed, Stanislavsky’s “circle of attention” paradigm can be attributed to his reading of Ramacharaka. Stanislavski describes the interaction of actors with their stage partners as an “emitting of rays” that constitute the giving and receiving of concentrated energy. In a state of relaxed centeredness, the Stanislavskian actor focuses on an internal object—such as an image or a thought—that initiates the volition for an action to be transmitted upon an external object, which most often is a fellow player. Thus, the actor connects to consciously constructed stimuli to direct his actions to another player who in turn reciprocates, and so the two jointly render repeatable performances grounded in the portrayal of human truth. This process is effectively explained by one of Stanislavski’s students, the Slavic actress Vera Soloviova (1895-1986):

²³ Ibid., 352.

²⁴ Dietrich, *Introduction to Consciousness*, 268.

²⁵ Scholars of Stanislavski have often distinguished between the terms “concentration” and “attention,” both arrived at from the Russian, *vnimanie*, which Hapgood translates as “Concentration of Attention.” For the sake of expository clarity, I am using these two synonymous terms interchangeably. Bella Merlin offers an informative analysis of these terms, as well as others comprising the Stanislavski lexicon, in her article “‘Where’s the Spirit Gone?’ The Complexities of Translation and the Nuances of Terminology in *An Actor’s Work* and *An Actor’s Work*,” *Stanislavski Studies* 1 (February 2012): 3-4.

²⁶ Sergei Tcherkasski, “Fundamentals of the Stanislavski System and Yoga Philosophy and Practice,” *Stanislavski Studies* 1 (February 2012): 4.

²⁷ Mel Gordon, *The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia* (New York: Applause, 1987), 31.

²⁸ For more on Stanislavski’s teachings on the exchange of energy between actors, see R. Andrew White, “Radiation and the Transmission of Energy: From Stanislavsky to Michael Chekhov,” *Performance and Spirituality*, No. 1 (2009).

²⁹ Yogi Ramacharaka, *Hatha Yoga: The Yogi Philosophy of Physical Wellbeing* (L.N. Fowler and Company): 89, 95.

³⁰ For a comprehensive examination of Stanislavski’s use of Yoga, see Sergei Tcherkasski, “Fundamentals of the Stanislavski System and Yoga Philosophy and Practice, Part 2,” *Stanislavski Studies* 2; also Tcherkasski, “Fundamentals of the Stanislavski System and Yoga Philosophy and Practice (Part 1),” *Stanislavski Studies* 1; Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 167-84; also R. Andrew White, “Stanislavsky and Ramacharaka: The Influence of Yoga and Turn-Of-The-Century Occultism on the System,” *Theatre Survey* 47.1 (May 2006): 73-92.

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 communication into the space to each other.... This exercise involved no words, but we gave whatever we had inside us. And you have to have something inside you to give; if you do not, that is where ‘dead forms’ come from.³¹

Referring to this exchange of energy as communion, Stanislavski describes its significance to the spectator:

When the audience sees two or more characters exchanging their thoughts and feelings, it becomes involved in their words and actions involuntarily...and is caught up in other people’s experiences.³²

And it is indeed “experiencing” the character’s situation that is essential to his system. In reacting against the hackneyed melodrama of nineteenth century European theatre, Stanislavski wanted to find a way to depict human behavior onstage, a goal contingent upon an actor’s truthful and personal attachment to his character. His work allows us to distinguish between an actor who convincingly “becomes” the character from one offering a falsified and shallow “indication” of it. Thus, Yoga and meditative techniques such as controlled breathing, stretching, and concentration exercises train the Stanislavskian actor to generate psychophysical action as part of a performance that is rich in the conveyance of human truth. Though never becoming unaware that he is performing, the Stanislavskian actor is able to experience his character’s thought process, physical life, and emotional makeup. He does not merely suggest the character, but conjures the illusion of becoming it, as defined by the play’s given circumstances. The system therefore enables the actor to live in a creative state that is as active as it is immediate for each performance, thereby establishing a presence that affects an audience.

This presence is marked by a heightened awareness that the actor possesses of himself and his surroundings, which is the manifestation of his conscious mind unlocking his subconscious. The conscious realm consists of specifically selected attachments that release the actor into a free and expressive state causing him to experience the psychophysical actions that constitute his performance. Contrary to many US interpretations of his teachings, Stanislavski insisted that acting was an “artifice” in which a “sense of belief” was sought to create the “illusion” of human truth as a theatrical or cinematic convention.³³ It is therefore the application of the system’s numerous techniques (e.g., “Magic If,” Given Circumstances, Active Analysis, etc.) in the context of the actor’s imagination that generates an illusion of truth, which is distinct from replicating the pedestrian nature of everyday life. These techniques are the very tools of a system that is organized by a conscious manifestation of subconscious playing towards transcending the ordinariness of verisimilitude. Some scholars of Stanislavski have gone so far as to depict the culmination of his work as “spiritual,” “soulful,” and “otherworldly.”³⁴ Though these assertions seem contrary to the practical rationale for his system, they speak to the fact that it not intended to be a reductive emulation of human behavior, but rather, a means for accessing the necessary *subconscious* state for

³¹ Paul Gray, “The Reality of Doing: Interviews with Vera Soloviova, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner,” in *Stanislavski and America*, ed. Erica Munk (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 211.

³² Stanislavski, *An Actors Work*, 232.

³³ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Handbook*, 41.

³⁴ See Rose Whyman, *The Stanislavsky System of Acting: Legacy and Influence in Modern Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38-103; Patrick C. Carriere, “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 Age” (PhD. diss., University of Kansas, 2010); and Charles Marowitz, *The Other Chekhov: A Biography of Michael Chekhov, the Legendary Actor, Director, and Theorist* (New York: Applause, 2004), 270.

experiencing a role, and by extension, serving both the play and its audience. As such, the actor “blends and compresses” stimuli into forming a creative score that gives rise to his character.³⁵ It is a decidedly integrated process. Whether it is an action, a thought, or an image, the actor supplies his role with attachments to elicit the needed expressivity for filling a moment, the sum of which is derived from his psychophysical warehouse of source material: his extended consciousness. To borrow from Antonio Damasio, his “body-minded brain” will cause him to “participate in the process” of perceiving and responding to stimuli.³⁶ Thus, the actor uses his past—his warehouse of personal experiences—to create and connect to artfully selected stimuli that constitute his performance and serve as the impetus for arousing his creative state.

Undoubtedly, the actor will shift between his conscious and subconscious levels of awareness while negotiating this process throughout his performance, which is, after all, what makes acting simultaneously appealing and maddening. Relying on techniques derived from Yoga and other Eastern performance traditions, the Stanislavskian actor can maximize his presence by developing his relaxation and concentration skills. Moreover, the system offers an array of strategies ranging from the Magic If to the Method of Physical Actions to unlock an actor’s imagination towards experiencing his role. As such, actors employ their extended consciousness to facilitate their exploration and discovery of a character, thereby leading me to conclude where I began: referencing Laurence Olivier. Describing acting as “the art of persuasion,” Olivier explains how he uses his vast repertoire of personal memory to “persuade himself,” and by extension, “the audience” into believing his portrayal of a given character:

You have got to find in the actor a man who will not be too proud to scavenge the tiniest little bit of human circumstance; observe it, find it, use it...I have frequently observed things, and thank God, if I have not got a very good memory for anything else, I’ve got a memory for little details. I’ve had things in the back of my mind for as long as eighteen years before I’ve used them.³⁷

While Olivier was anything but a devotee of Stanislavski’s teachings, his conjuration of a character involves accessing his memory in a manner that is strikingly similar to how the latter addresses the actor’s use of the past.

As you progress you will learn more and more ways in which to stimulate your subconscious selves, and to draw them into your creative process.... Do not be a cold observer of another human life, but let your study raise your own creative temperature. After prolonged penetrating observation and study, an actor acquires excellent creative material.³⁸

Stanislavski builds on this assertion by striking a chiasmic chord in stating, “truth cannot be separated from belief, nor belief from truth,” thereby underscoring the significance of the actor using whatever means necessary to generate the stimuli to access the creative state he seeks. For Olivier, finding truth onstage or before the camera was achieved by such stimuli—both external and internal—that fed his imagination and unlocked the inspired performances for which he was renowned. One example was his portrayal of Macbeth at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1954, when he overcame his mediocre rendering of “Shakespeare’s monster” some seventeen years earlier to give

³⁵ Blair, “Cognitive Science and Performance,” 93-103.

³⁶ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’s Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994), 225.

³⁷ Laurence Olivier, interview with Kenneth Tynan, quoted in “Shakespeare and Laurence Olivier,” *World Theatre* 16.1 (1967): 70.

³⁸ Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Handbook*, 26-7.

what Terrence Rattigan described as “the definitive Macbeth.”³⁹ As such, Olivier credits his “life experience” as the thing that caused the role “to fall round [him] like a cloak.”⁴⁰ His earlier Macbeth at the Old Vic, however, is self-described as “unsuccessful” and having left a good deal to be desired on the part of the audience, which raises a curious reassurance for those of us who are actors or acting teachers.⁴¹ Given his reputation as one of the finest actors of the twentieth century, we can take confidence in that even the great ones vacillate between their conscious and subconscious states when performing. As Stanislavski states, “One cannot create subconsciously.... Therefore our art teaches us first to create consciously and truly because that will best prepare the way for the blossoming of the subconscious, which is inspiration.”⁴² Our responsibility as actors and trainers should then perhaps be to arrive at a craft where we very consciously and artfully construct stimuli that yield the creative state in search of such sublimity.

³⁹ Laurence Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 200.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 104-05.

⁴² Stanislavski, *An Actor's Handbook*, 149.