

**APPLYING CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI'S ACTING 'SYSTEM' TO
CHORAL REHEARSALS**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	35
II.1 Constantin Stanislavski’s Writings	36
II.1.1 <i>My Life in Art</i>	37
II.1.2 <i>An Actor Prepares</i>	49
II.1.3 <i>Building a Character</i>	67
II.1.4 <i>Creating a Role</i>	88
II.1.5 <i>Stanislavski on Opera</i>	109
II.2 Relevant Literature About Stanislavski’s Acting ‘System’	128
II.2.1 <i>Beyond Stanislavsky</i>	129
II.2.2 <i>Konstantin Stanislavsky</i>	133
II.2.3 <i>The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit</i>	134
II.2.4 <i>Stanislavsky in Focus</i>	139
II.2.5 <i>The Stanislavski System</i>	143
II.3 The Stanislavski ‘System’ and Choral Music	146
II.3.1 <i>The Mastery of Choral Structure and Performance</i>	147
II.3.2 <i>The Madrigal Constellation and Madrigal or the Magic of Sounds</i>	153
III. IMPLICATIONS FOR CHORAL REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES	156
IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS	184
IV.1 <i>Kasar mie la gaji</i>	186
IV.2 <i>If Music Be the Food of Love</i>	195
IV.3 <i>There Will Be Rest</i>	201
V. CONCLUSIONS	210
BIBLIOGRAPHY	222

I

INTRODUCTION

Music has always been a manifestation of human behaviors and a way to express feelings and emotions beyond the power of communication through words. It is arguably considered a language in itself with respect to its communication role. Compared to speech and its aspects of languages and dialects, each with specific structures and characteristics that influence cultures and the intellect, music in its complexity deals with numerous genres, styles, and idioms that generate issues of communication and influence among various groups of people. The combination of music and speech in the form of sung music brings another unique perspective on this type of human interaction.

Communication in terms of sung words, in either solo or ensemble singing, combines the intellectual understanding of the textual connotations with their subtexts, which are supposedly presented or enhanced through the juxtaposition of the musical context. The amalgam of music and words is loaded with information that is intended to be communicated by means of sounds and sonorous structures to fully convey the creators' ideas and feelings.

The stronger the bond is between words and their supportive musical realization, the surer may become the manifestation of human emotions to audiences. The deeper and

more valuable the feelings and emotions are, the more demanding becomes the artistic endeavor of the creators. Throughout the history of humankind, emotions and thoughts seem to find a natural need for more elevated artistic expression to be translated or communicated to other people and to stand the test of time across cultures and throughout generations.

Music with words, or sung music, is common in all cultures and justifies its existence on the human need to express personal or collective feelings and emotions. In art music, these human emotions generate complex processes of creation that involve the knowledge, skills, talents, and efforts of the creators to better transfer, translate, or facilitate this emotional and informational material to the audience.

In the performing arts, the final product presented to audiences is the result of a collective work. This complex process involves the creators themselves: authors, composers, lyricists, playwrights, all those who envisioned the ideas intended to have a lasting impression and who developed the intricate elements of their artistic language. There are also the artists, musicians, actors, dancers, and their supportive production teams, all of them representing the performing side of such an artistic endeavor, those on whose shoulders stands the responsibility of delivering the pre-conceived messages, ideas, feelings, attitudes, and emotions of the creators—those who have to find the necessary and appropriate ways to communicate these elements in order to make an unforgettable impression on their public in repeated performing events.

Because of the similar goal of making lifelong emotional impressions on spectators, the performing arts must have a common ground on which methods and techniques used to present their respective artistic creations can easily cross from one art

form to another, in a perpetual attempt to find the truth in art. In the contemporary complexity of artistic human expression, the attempt to find interdisciplinary approaches to artistic truths, especially between similar disciplines such as the performing arts, must be closely considered in order to better serve the wide range of human emotions.

In this context, I found it worth exploring the possibility of transferring acting principles, methods, techniques, and systems to other performing arts and in particular to choral music. Of the multitude of functions which ensemble singing presents, the role of the operatic choir draws our attention in particular because it represents the link between the two artistic disciplines, theater and choral music. Singers in such a choir express their art in an acting environment through musical discourse. Together they form a collective character in an opera, but the nature of such a character employs the complexities of individual singer-actors.

When an opera chorus sings on the operatic stage, its individual members, along with the main individual characters in an opera, the soloists, should master both the singing and the acting aspects of the performance. Oftentimes, the soloists themselves are part of ensemble singing which involves communal performing elements, typical to the choral art. From this perspective, it was only natural to search for parallels and methodological resources that can be transferred from the theater art to choral music in general. This also includes the more traditional concert settings and other similar non-operatic performing functions in which the choral musical art is expressed in its fullness.

Since opera represents a union of all the arts, its artistic challenges attracted the interest and dedication of Russian actor and director, Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), an innovative practitioner and theoretician of the theater art. Based on his lifetime

experience, Stanislavski's contributions to realistic acting on the stages of the Russian theater and opera were developed in the first decades of the twentieth century and have influenced the international world of theater arts for the rest of the century.

This research intends to explore possible applications of Constantin Stanislavski's findings, acting theories, techniques, and methods in choral rehearsals and performances as a parallel between the dramatic art and the art of choral music.

His approach on acting was determined by the need for a more realistic and naturalistic expression on stage at the end of the nineteenth century as opposed to the superficial and melodramatic trends in the Russian vaudeville acts and amateurish theatrical companies in which the young Stanislavski was active at the time. In his writings¹, Stanislavski criticizes schools of acting that produce the so-called art of representation, in which an actor imagines a model of the character to be portrayed and transfers its features on himself on the stage without any personal spiritual implications. Mechanical acting, which he coins 'rubber stamps' because of its cliché imitations, represents another lifeless method of playing a role on the stage. Finally, Stanislavski condemns the exploitation of art for personal interests of individuals, especially for the purpose of obtaining immediate popularity.

Stanislavski's goal was to produce believable characters on the stage that would captivate and inspire the audiences and that would create lifelong emotional impressions on the public. In order to achieve this, actors must be alive on the stage in the sense that they must live the lives of their characters. To help the actors in this direction,

¹ Constantin Stanislavski and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, transl., *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 2003), 23-33.

Stanislavski developed an entire psycho-technique which comprises methods and exercises that aim at accessing an individual's subconscious in order to provoke inspiration in their artistic journey. All his life, he strived to find appropriate and effective ways to work with conscious elements of the human existence that would most likely trigger subconscious activities, which are beyond the control of the individual, but which may produce external actions that are true and natural to the portrayed character in the circumstances of the play.

Our conscious mind arranges, and puts a certain amount of order into, the phenomena of the external world that surrounds us. There is no sharply drawn line between conscious and subconscious experience. Our consciousness often indicates the direction in which our subconscious continues to work. Therefore, the fundamental objective of our psycho-technique is to put us in a creative state in which our subconscious will function naturally. [...] Conscious psycho-technique arouses the subconscious creativeness of nature.²

Constantin Stanislavski's modern approach to acting is developed in his so-called 'system' that studies the work of actors on themselves as living human beings and on their roles on the stage. His close encounters with a number of great actors of his time and their artistry, as well as his personal experiences as he learned the natural laws of the dramatic art, together with a series of circumstances marked by numerous uninspired amateur productions, led the constantly observant Stanislavski to discover principles that are of great importance for actors. In his work as an actor, director, and administrator of the Moscow Art Theater, which he founded in 1897 together with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858-1943), an emblematic figure in the Russian theater as dramatist, teacher, stage director, and critic, Stanislavski felt the necessity to compile his findings in

² Op. cit., 303, 315.

a systematic work. In a letter to writer Maxim Gorky from February 1933, Stanislavski expressed this desire:

Since the time when we were together in Capri and you had the energy to plough through my initial notes, my attempt to wield a pen in an effort to set down something in the nature of a Grammar of Acting, I have harnessed my mind to the task of putting on paper, as concisely and clearly as I can, what a beginning actor should know. Such a book is needed if only to put an end to all the twisted interpretations put on my so-called “system” which, in the way it is presently being taught, can put young actors on quite the wrong path...³

Stanislavski tried all his life to crystallize and clarify his system of the nature of human individuals. He considered nature the greatest creative artist and believed in the natural creativeness of the man. His system is a series of natural creative laws that are intended to give actors an understanding of their “instrument” which is themselves.

I have devoted all my activity in the theater not to the creating of some new art invented by me, but only to the most detailed, painstaking study of the creative nature of the person-artist in myself, in other actors, in my students, in amateurs, in musicians and singers. My work is not that of invention but of research.⁴

The innovative character of Stanislavski’s ‘system’ was its direct address of problems of a psychological nature. Some of its early developments took shape based only on Stanislavski’s personal observations when dealing with his and other people’s acting issues. This happened mainly because of its parallel timeline with the early developmental stages of psychology as a discipline. When psychology was formalized, its scientific principles and theories seem to have influenced Stanislavski’s ideas.

Although there is no proof of his contact with the great scientist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849-1936), whose teachings about conditioned reflexes became important in the same era as Stanislavski’s own teachings, the reformer of the theater had an opportunity to study neurophysiology and to give scientific

³ Constantin Stanislavski and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, ed. and transl., *Stanislavski’s Legacy: A Collection of Comments on a Variety of Aspects of an Actor’s Art and Life* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968), 206.

⁴ Op. cit., 204.

foundation to his System. Even scientists were astounded by his discoveries. [...] The first scientific book to make an analysis of the Stanislavski System from the point of view of neurophysiology is entitled *The Method of K. S. Stanislavski and the Physiology of Emotions* by P. V. Simonov, prominent physiologist and member of the Academy of Science of the USSR. Simonov does not believe that an actor must study physiology in order to act convincingly; the important fact is that physiology has scientifically proved the correctness of the Stanislavski System.⁵

No matter to what degree he changed or adapted his acting principles throughout his life, Stanislavski kept his ideals of artistic achievements. Quoting an emblematic figure of the Russian theater, Stanislavski wrote: “‘You may play well or you may play badly; the important thing is that you should play truly,’ wrote Shchepkin to his pupil Shumski. To play truly means to be right, logical, coherent, to think, strive, feel and act in unison with your role.”⁶

In his struggle to find ways to produce realistic characters on stage, Stanislavski devised this systematic approach to acting intended for the actors to ‘live life’ on the stage. Here are two of his attempts of describing the Stanislavski ‘system’:

The very power of this method lies in the fact that it was not concocted or invented by anyone. Both in spirit and in body it is a part of our organic natures. It is based on the laws of nature. [...] It is not possible to invent a system. We are born with it inside us, with an innate capacity for creativeness. This last is our natural necessity, therefore it would seem that we could not know how to express it except in accordance with a natural system.⁷

The ‘system’ is a sort of guidebook to help the soul become more creative. It is addressed to the soul so that it will accept what the author feels at a given moment in the works he has created. When the author and the actor coalesce in a part, a creative miracle has been performed. The ‘system’ helps the actor to express what the author wished to say. It also helps the actor to develop his physical apparatus so that he can reproduce in artistic form what his soul has created. Then there is

⁵ Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of the Actor. Digested from the Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 9, 12.

⁶ Stanislavski and Hapgood, *An Actor Prepares*, 15.

⁷ Constantin Stanislavski and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, transl., *Building a Character* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 2003), 319.

another highly significant point to be added: The 'system' is a form of science which an actor usually disregards because he pins his hope on inspiration from 'on high,' thinking that it will be provided when needed.⁸

In his later years, after he had already achieved recognition in Europe and America, Constantin Stanislavski learned about the advances in the psychological disciplines that eventually guided his ongoing developments of his 'system' in new directions. The main shift in his general course of thought was based on his belief that the key to creating the inner life of the character lays in physical action. These physical actions of the actors become the necessary catalyst to access the hidden emotions that are specific to the true life of the character to be portrayed. This development was named the Method of Physical Actions and became a part of the 'system.' It did not replace the 'system' and it did not dismiss Stanislavski's earlier idea that actors have the important task of accessing an emotional reaction already hidden in their subconscious by means of personal human experience (called Emotion or Affective Memory). In the early years of the 'system,' this recall of emotions would have been facilitated through stimuli such as imaginative suggestions, thoughts, or familiar objects. This was considered in time a direct approach to stirring inner feelings and emotions necessary to the role and the real life of the character on the stage, which in turn would generate normal, human, live physical actions or reactions on the stage.

Stanislavski's connection with the world of the opera represents the cornerstone for this researcher's attempt to draw parallels between acting principles and the art of choral music. Opera played an important role for Stanislavski's complex artistic personality. This close relationship was gradually built from early childhood, when he

⁸ Constantin Stanislavski, Pavel Romyantsev, and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, ed. and transl., *Stanislavski on Opera* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 1998), 8-9.

was exposed first to the Italian opera productions that toured Russia in the middle of the nineteenth century. These performances made an organic impression on him:

My brother and I were taken to the Italian opera in our earliest childhood, when we were six, or at most eight years old. And I am very thankful to my parents, for I have no doubts that it acted beneficially on my musical hearing, on the development of my taste and on my eye, which grew used to the beautiful. We had season tickets which entitled us to be present at forty or fifty performances, and we sat in the orchestra, very near to the stage.⁹

It is important to mention how deep an impression these early encounters with the operatic world made on the young Constantin, mainly because throughout his life he constantly referred to these ideals of artistic interpretations with honest enthusiasm and tried to infuse them into his actors and students in his directorial and teaching careers.

I remember many of the operas I saw at that time, and the casts that appeared in them. My impressions of the Italian opera are sealed not alone in my visual or aural memory – for I still feel them physically with my entire nervous system. When I remember them I experience again that physical state which was created in me by the supernormally high and silvery note of Adelina Patti, by her coloratura and technique which made me hold my breath, by her full chest tones which caused my spirit to swoon and brought a smile of satisfaction to my lips. [...] The same organically physical impression is sealed in my memory by the elemental force of the king of baritones, Cotogni, and the basso Giametta. I still tremble when I think of them.¹⁰

Born in Moscow in 1863 under the name Constantin Sergeyevich Alexeiev, he took the stage name of Stanislavski when playing in a vaudeville act, in an attempt to conceal his true identity as a young representative of high society. Stanislavski's family, the Alexeievs, was one of the richest families in Russia.

My father, a rich manufacturer and merchant, the owner of a mercantile firm a hundred years old, Sergey Vladimirovich Alexeiev, was a pure-blooded Russian. My mother, Elisaveta Vassilievna Alexeieva, had a Russian father and a French

⁹ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts Books, 1996), 32.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, 32-33.

mother – the once famous actress Varley who played in Petrograd in her time as a visiting star.¹¹

Constantin and his family lived a happy life during his childhood. Due to their social status, the Alexeievs were able to educate their children within an active artistic environment that instilled in them an interest in the fields of music and acting. Little Constantin, his brothers, sisters, and friends were frequently putting together private domestic performances in order to practice for an eventual opening of his own circus. Their childish games of staging almost anything that went through the “director’s” mind found their roots in the urge to imitate the superficial and exhibitionist world of live entertainment of that time. Father Alexeiev seemed to have encouraged the theatrical inclinations of his family by building an entire house on their estate near Moscow that resembled an authentic theater. Here, the Alexeiev children continued to present amateur performances, but Constantin gradually discovered his personal failures as an inexperienced actor. These times of self-discovery turned out to be beneficial because Constantin became aware of the necessity to search deeper for true acting methods and techniques. Sisters and brothers were working together and trying their best, mostly without expert supervision, and experimented with their acting and singing and were forced by the nature of their artistic interest to come up with viable techniques and dramatic approaches for the benefit of their growing passion.

Because of his social status, the young Constantin was urged by family to occupy himself with “some kind of social work,”¹² which led him to eventually become the director of the Russian Musical Society and Conservatory. This appointment facilitated

¹¹ Idem, 21.

¹² Idem, 76.

his contact with artistic circles and distinguished personalities of the Russian culture of that time, such as composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, composer and pianist Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev, and professor Vassily Safonov. His contact with the dramatic schools in his contemporary Russia led him to discover a lack of professionalism and methodology, while the few leading actors seemed to be self-educated through their contact with the old generation of actors and through personal experiences and explorations.

The majority of the so-called professors of dramatic art were charlatans, as they have remained till the present day; and prominent individual actors were in the possession of some fundamentals which they either worked out themselves, or received as a heritage from the great actors of the past generations.¹³

Constantin was accepted as a student in the famous drama school of the Imperial Little Theater, but dropped out after only three weeks because the teaching methods were product oriented. The school's professors were trying to create finite images of the plays and their roles and impose those onto their students. There was no teaching on how they were supposed to arrive at those ideal images and there was no methodological approach on the actor's craft. The young actor found a better way to learn by becoming a part of a small group of other young people who attended the performances of the Imperial Little Theater. This institution represented the elite artistic environment of the Russian theater, becoming the home stage for numerous famous actors and actresses of that time, including the pride of the Russian stage, Maria Nikolaevna Yermolova. "I can bravely affirm that I received my education not in the *gymnasia* but in the Little Theater,"¹⁴ admitted Stanislavski. His circle of friends prepared for each of the theater's productions

¹³ Idem, 79.

¹⁴ Idem, 91.

by reading the plays together, studying the writings on those plays, forming their own opinions, attending the theater, discussing, lecturing, and evaluating the plays.

A second family theater was added in the Alexeiev house in Moscow and the home circle of theater enthusiasts managed to present a series of productions that included operettas, a genre that was fashionable in the artistic and cultural life of the city. Constantin worked on these productions as a participant as well as a stage manager. Following the end of the Italian opera in Moscow and with the revival of the Russian national opera in which Tchaikovsky played a major role and inspired him, Constantin took voice lessons with famous tenor Fyodor Kommissarjevsky because of his interest in a career in opera. However, after a series of lessons that developed his voice and a Kommissarjevsky vocal studio performance hosted by the theater in the Alexeiev house in Moscow, Constantin's dream was broken by the realization that his vocal qualities were not fit for the opera and that he didn't have enough musical preparation.

His wealth and status in the artistic society of the city brought him in the company of experienced actors and friends from the Imperial Little Theater. Constantin managed to put himself on the same stage with such professional actors in his own home theater. While the Alexeiev Dramatic Circle as well as other local amateur groups were disintegrating, Constantin's incidental and semi-professional association with the Little Theater made him somewhat famous in provincial amateur acting companies. Consequently, he became a sought-after actor in their ephemeral and low-quality productions that were held in unpleasant societies.

Later on, Stanislavski would recall his almost desperate need to perform on stage as a young actor, but also his failed attempt to hide his real family name and his acting impulse, especially from his own parents:

Often I was forced to play in the company of suspicious-looking people. What could I do? There were no other places to act, and I so wanted to act. Among these amateurs there were gamblers and demimondaines. And I, a man of position, a director of the Russian Musical Society, found that it was dangerous for my reputation if I appeared. It was necessary to hide behind some pseudonym. I sought a strange name, thinking that it would hide my real identity. I had known an amateur by the name of Doctor Stanislavski. He had stopped playing, and I decided to adopt his name, thinking that behind a name as Polish as Stanislavski no one could ever recognize me. [...] I flew out on the stage, carrying a tremendous bouquet. I flew out – and stopped. In the central box sat my father, my mother, my tutor and the governess of my sisters. [...] On the next day, my father settled the matter in one sentence. “If you want to play on the side, found a decent dramatic circle and a decent repertoire, but for God’s sake, don’t appear in such trash as the play last night.”¹⁵

Continuously trying to discern the right direction for his artistic career, Constantin Stanislavski and his dramatic group founded the Moscow Society of Art and Literature. In his attempt to discover his true acting technique, the still young Stanislavski collaborated with Russian director Alexandr Fedotov in numerous productions of the Society. He was also influenced by valuable ideas and experiences of foreign actors and directors who toured Moscow, among them the German Meiningen Players and their director Kronek as well as the great Italian actor Tommaso Salvini (1829-1915). Stanislavski also made his directorial debut with the Society of Art and Literature by staging *The Fruits of Knowledge* by Lev Tolstoy, whom he met on the occasion of one of the company’s performances outside Moscow, and in several other plays.

¹⁵ Idem, 146-147.

One of the most important events in the artistic life of Stanislavski was his encounter with Vladimir Ivanovich Nemirovich-Danchenko, who was at that time a well-known playwright and director of the drama school of the Moscow Philharmonic Society. Their incredibly long initial discussion set the terms in which the two artists would found the Moscow Art Theater in 1897, which the two of them eventually co-directed.

My first conference with Nemirovich-Danchenko, which had decisive importance for our future Theater, began at ten in the morning of one day and lasted till three in the morning of the next day. It continued without a break for fifteen hours, and perhaps even longer. But our pains were rewarded, for we came to the conclusion that we could work together. [...] There were many more conferences between us, conferences that did not last fifteen hours as our first one did, but eight or ten hours was our average.¹⁶

In laying the foundations of the new theater, Stanislavski brought his group of amateurs which constituted the Society of Art and Literature and Nemirovich-Danchenko contributed with his group of students and graduates from the Philharmonic School. In addition to this nucleus, the two directors agreed to choose certain professional actors from Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and the provinces. According to their initial discussions, Nemirovich-Danchenko had authority over the literary aspects of the new Moscow Art Theater while Stanislavski led the artistic side of its activities.

The new institution was conceived as a venue for the naturalistic theater and quickly became famous for the staged production of *The Seagull* by famous Russian writer Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904). The success of the new approach on the theater encouraged the young artistic ensemble to produce three other masterpieces by Chekhov which he wrote in that period: *Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*. These works presented many difficulties both to the acting ensemble as well to

¹⁶ Idem, 299.

the audiences. However, Stanislavski's directorial approach of psychological realism and his attention to ensemble playing matched the demands of the text, in particular its buried subtleties. The close collaboration of the theater with the author benefited both parties because the success of the first production, *The Seagull*, restored Chekhov's interest in playwrighting while Stanislavski's advances in the art of acting based on his work on these plays were getting him closer to the realism of the Stanislavski 'system.' The magnitude of this fruitful artistic encounter was recorded through the words of Stanislavski himself:

Chekhov discovered to us the life of things and sounds, thanks to which all that was lifeless, dead and unjustified in the details of production, all that in spite of our desires created an outward naturalism, turned of itself into living and artistic realism, and the properties that surrounded us on the stage took on an inner relationship with the soul of the actor. Chekhov, like no one else, was able to create inward and outward artistic truth. This is why he was able to say the truth about men. This could not be said if they were surrounded on the stage by falsehoods. Chekhov gave that inner truth to the art of the stage which served as the foundation for what was later called the Stanislavski System, which must be approached through Chekhov, or which serves as a bridge to the approach of Chekhov. Playing Chekhov, one is not forced to search for the feeling of truth, which is such a necessary element of the creative mood.¹⁷

After the death of Chekhov in 1904 and a summer spent in Finland in 1906 where he began to better organize a formal and useful 'system,' Stanislavski resumed an intense work in the Moscow Art Theater. During one of his performances, he perceived the deep meaning of the concept that in acting, creativeness demands a special condition which he called creative mood. The experience was perceived with his soul but he also felt it with his body. Stanislavski came to a point of questioning himself if there can be natural

¹⁷ Idem, 351.

techniques to generate this creative mood that would lead to more frequent occurrences of inspiration in acting.

What I wanted to learn was how to create a favorable condition for the appearance of inspiration by means of the will, that condition in the presence of which inspiration was most likely to descend into the actor's soul. As I learned afterward, this creative mood is that spiritual and physical mood during which it is easiest for inspiration to be born.¹⁸

Following this awareness of the existence of deeper truths in the actors' craft, Stanislavski began to transform the theater's rehearsals into an experimental laboratory in order to continue his observations. The practical experiments bore the first fruits in terms of defining principles and techniques to help the actors reach to the inner life of a character on stage. Stanislavski and the actors of the Art Theater began to find themselves on a new and vastly unexplored territory of understanding the art of their craft. Stanislavski was at a point in his research where he had bits of information and struggled to put them together and give them a coherent meaning and a usable form for the actors. Questioning if such a system for the creative process exists and functions under well-established laws became the pivotal point in Stanislavski's artistic life. He was eager to find immediate answers for himself and his actors.

In certain parts of the system, like the physiological and psychological, such laws exist for all, forever, and in all creative processes. They are indubitable, completely conscious, tried by science and found true, and binding on all. Each actor must know them. He does not dare to excuse himself because of his ignorance of these laws, which are created by nature itself. These conscious laws exist for the purpose of awaking another and higher superconscious region of creativeness. This latter is outside of our comprehension, and we are helpless in our consciousness when we attain it. It is ruled by inspiration. It is that miracle without which there can be no true art, and which is served by the conscious technique of the actor which I tried to establish.

¹⁸ Idem, 462.

THE SUPERCONSCIOUS THROUGH THE CONSCIOUS! That is the meaning of the thing to which I have devoted my life since the year 1906 [...] and to which I will devote my life while there is life in me.¹⁹

The dramatic achievements and the highly artistic standards of the Moscow Art Theater led by Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko facilitated their collaboration with important names of the world stage. In early 1906, the company traveled to Berlin and gave successful performances in Russian in front of German audiences that included the Kaiser (Emperor), Wilhelm II. For the theater's production of *The Blue Bird* in 1908, Stanislavski traveled to France and met with its author, Count Maeterlinck. His real name was Maurice Polydore Marie Bernard (1862-1949) and he was a Belgian born poet, playwright, and essayist writing in French. In 1911, Count Maeterlinck won the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Around 1909, Stanislavski also met American dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), who was successfully touring Moscow. Because of her fame and novel artistic style, she is considered by many “the mother of modern dance.”²⁰ It was through Isadora Duncan's recommendation that Stanislavski and the Art Theater commissioned the famous English director and modernist theater practitioner Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) to produce William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Moscow in December of 1911.

The complex and demanding professional work in the Moscow Art Theater was interfering too much with the laboratory style of enterprise which Stanislavski pursued in order to discover the natural laws of the acting system. Therefore, he came to the

¹⁹ Idem, 483.

²⁰ “Credited with being the ‘mother of modern dance,’ Duncan believed that movements should be drawn from nature. Developing the ‘Duncan’ technique, comprised of basic movements such as swinging, hopping, running, skipping and leaping, Duncan sought to ‘free’ the body from the confines of ballet and created a truly modern form of dance.” From Nora Ambrosio, *Learning about Dance: Dance As and Art Form and Entertainment* (Third edition. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 2003), 86.

conclusion that their theater was not the right environment for his experiments. With this belief, in 1912 Stanislavski opened the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theater that functioned as a school of acting. Here Stanislavski and his assistants had the freedom to experiment within the parameters of the newly shaping acting system. In order to operate normally and fulfill its functions, the Studio had to be led by Stanislavski's close friend and assistant, Leopold Antonovich Sulerzhitsky (1872-1916), though it was still under the supervision of Stanislavski himself. In addition to the artistic activities of the Studio, the financial aspect had to be worked out, and this led to unexpected and slightly unusual, but healthy approaches, as described by Stanislavski:

The finances of such a Studio were to come not only from the performances, but from household economy and from the cultivation of the soil. In the spring the sowing, and in the autumn the harvesting, were to be done by the actors of the Studio themselves. This would bear greatly on the general mood and the atmosphere of the whole Studio. People who meet daily in the nervous atmosphere of the stage cannot establish those close and friendly relations which are necessary for true co-operation in art. But, if besides meeting on the stage, they met in nature, in common work on the soil, in fresh air, in the light of the sun, their souls would open, their physical labor would aid in the creation of unison among them. [...] I bought a large plot of land on the shore of the Black Sea in the Crimea, some few miles from the city of Eupatoria, and presented it to the Studio. [...] Each of the actors of the Studio was to build his own house with the labor of his own hands, and the house was to become his own property. During two or three years a group of the Studio actors under the leadership of Sulerjitsky went to Eupatoria for the summers and lived the life of primeval men. [...] This summer life in the lap of nature was not in vain. It really brought the actors of the Studio very close to each other.²¹

The activities of the Moscow Art Theater and the Studio, as well as Stanislavski's own research, followed the ups and downs of the realities of the artistic life, and they would also be influenced by the social and economic changes of the early twentieth-century Russia and Europe. The company was shaken by the First World War and by the

²¹ Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*, 537-539.

Russian revolutions. New political ideologies and social realities greatly affected the path of the Russian cultural life, and only the international fame of the Moscow Art Theater and Stanislavski's so-called neutrality or pretended ignorance with regard to politics led the new regime to spare the existence of this institution.

Toward the end of 1918, Stanislavski accepted the opportunity offered to him by the Bolshoi Opera Theater to open the Opera Studio, which provided training to young singers in the field of acting their roles on the stage. Due to Stanislavski's knowledge and love for opera, the Opera Studio became another laboratory of artistic creation where the director-teacher would experiment his systemic principles of acting with the singers-actors. The work was focused on the singers from the Bolshoi Opera Theater, but beginning in 1919 a group of young and inexperienced singers entered the Opera Studio as well. At the beginning of 1921, Stanislavski was offered an old private house in Moscow by the new Russian administration. This building at 6 Leontyevski Pereulok represented Stanislavski's last residence and the place where the Opera Studio held its activities, including opera performances. Under Stanislavski and his close assistants, the productions of several operas in the course of the Studio's existence as a school were regarded as educational. The building contained a large hall (a former ballroom), which Stanislavski adapted as a small concert hall for his school performances. These were so well conceived and worked through by the teacher-director Stanislavski and well delivered by the enthusiastic singers-actors that critics became very interested in the progress of this laboratory of creation for the Russian opera. Among these productions, in 1922 the Opera Studio performed Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's famous lyric opera *Eugene Onegin*, based on the novel in verse by the great Russian Romantic author Alexander

Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799-1837). The success of Stanislavski's approach on acting in this opera promoted the production of *Eugene Onegin* on the large stage of the Bolshoi.

Stanislavski continued his guidance of the Opera Studio either directly or indirectly, through well-instructed assistants, even when the Studio entered new phases, moved to new locations, and received new names and status. It became "The State Opera Studio with the sub-title 'Named for Stanislavski,'"²² Opera Studio-Theater, and the Stanislavski Opera Theater. Regardless of the name, Stanislavski and his operatic ensemble worked with great dedication in the direction of artistic realism, of the true life of their characters on stage, and of discovering the truth in their art using acting techniques that had already yielded fruits in the dramatic theater. One of the many reviews in the chronicles of that time mentions the following:

It was not by chance that Stanislavski put on *The Tsar's Bride* in its entirety and now *La Bohème*.... And he has produced it so simply, so 'naturally,' so warmly, and so subtly that it comes out as a true work of art. Here is no sentimentality, no sobbing, no extra effects. And it is all done somehow in original and touching tones. The question is: In what does Stanislavski's power as a director of opera lie, and what distinguishes his productions from others that attempted to tone down the operatic conventions and turn operas into musical dramas? First of all I would say the answer is in the extraordinary *modesty* of his approach. In an opera he sees a *musical creation* and not a drama with music. He most carefully, with utmost caution, lovingly approaches this combination of music and words. He wishes to preserve the whole musical foundation of the chosen work. He does not wish the words to overwhelm the music; he does not wish that our attention should be distracted by purely external impressions. He wishes to achieve a *confluence* into a single whole of everything that an opera presents to a spectator.²³

The acclaimed artistic successes of the early years of the Moscow Art Theater continued to draw interest on the international stage in Europe and America. The Theater's historic European and American tours lasted from 1922 to 1924. Seeming to

²² Stanislavski, Rumyantsev, and Hapgood, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 152.

²³ Op. cit., 268.

ignore completely the language barriers (the plays were performed only in Russian), audiences, critics, and dramatic experts who filled the theaters where the Russians came on tours were constantly intrigued by the reality of emotions of the characters on the stage and by the mastery of the actors' craft. In 1923, at the invitation of Russian-born American theater producer Morris Gest, the Moscow Art Theater led by Constantin Stanislavski went on a three month tour to the United States.

Some years later, in 1923-4, the Moscow Art Theater embarked on two tours of America to ease the Theater's ailing finances. The Americans had gone wild for the Russian 'psychological' acting, and were hungry for lectures and lessons to help them achieve equally detailed performances themselves.²⁴

The Russian way of acting and Stanislavski's fame as practitioner and teacher of dramatic arts stirred a profound influence in American theaters. Stanislavski's teachings came to America in the early 1920s through Russian immigrants, in particular Richard Boleslavsky (1889-1937), Polish-born under the name of Bolesław Ryszard Szrednicki, and Maria Ouspenskaya (1876-1949). They studied with Stanislavski and were part of his First Studio. Boleslavsky founded the short lived American Laboratory Theater in New York where American actors began to familiarize themselves with the Russian acting techniques.

One of Boleslavsky's students was Lee Strasberg (1901-1982). An immigrant himself, Strasberg became the co-founder of the Group Theater in New York in 1931 and promoted what has become known in America as Method Acting. Strasberg's Method derived closely from Stanislavski's 'system' that was known at that time and placed a strong emphasis on the concept of Affective Memory (Stanislavski's Emotion Memory).

²⁴ Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (Routledge Performance Practitioners Series. New York: Routledge, 2003), 25.

The term Affective Memory was coined by French psychologist Théodule-Armand Ribot (1839-1916) and the concept had been used by Stanislavski as Emotion Memory as part of his ‘system’ in order to help motivate exterior actions of the actors that are necessary to the role.

To me, as a spectator, what was going on inside of you was of much greater interest. Those feelings, drawn from our actual experience, and transferred to our part, are what give life to the play. [...] All external production is formal, cold, and pointless if it is not motivated from within.²⁵

Through Emotion Memory, actors would stir emotions in themselves by recalling situations from their past which are parallel to the situations in a play. These situations in turn are tied with certain emotions that the actors would transfer on the stage in order to realistically create their roles through their physical responses to evoked emotions.

Lee Strasberg developed his theory based on this approach on acting. His Method became the new American way of actor training. However, differences of opinion were raised among the members of the Group Theater with regard to the right approach in teaching the Stanislavski ‘system.’ A particular member of the company, Stella Adler (1901-1992) represented the only American-born who, in addition to being taught at the American Laboratory Theater by Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya, was also directly instructed²⁶ by Constantin Stanislavski for over a month in 1934 in Paris. By that time, Stanislavski had come to his late achievements of his research that included the Method of Physical Actions, and Adler adopted this new approach in her acting technique. Consequently, after returning to the Group Theater in New York, Stella Adler’s reports

²⁵ Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 178.

²⁶ According to Paul Gray, “Stanislavski and America: A Critical Chronology,” *The Tulane Drama Review* 9, no. 2 (Winter 1964), 34.

on the latest conclusions from Stanislavski provoked fiery discussions among the members of the company.

Adler returned to the group with a chart of the System Stanislavski had sketched on a blackboard for her (later published in Robert Lewis' *Method or Madness?*). She told the company that they had been misusing emotional memory exercises by over-emphasizing personal circumstances in preparation, and that Stanislavski recommended use of the given circumstances of the play and the magic "as if" as a character lever. Emotional memory is to be used only when nothing else works. There was a great argument among the Group. Strasberg intimated in a talk to the Group that there was no reason to imitate Stanislavski slavishly, that his own version of the System was preferable to Stanislavski's because of the differences between American and Russian actors.²⁷

After Strasberg left the Group Theater, frictions among members of the company continued to gravitate around the problems of interpreting and applying the intricacies of the Stanislavski 'system' in the American theater. These issues eventually led to the dissolution of the Group Theater in 1941.

The history of the American theater in the mid-twentieth century reveals how the importance of Strasberg's Method of acting grew among actors and directors to such a degree that studying with first or second generations of Stanislavski 'system' teachers was not important anymore. American actors became obsessed with receiving training in Method acting. In 1947, a group of respected acting teachers of the generation founded the Actors Studio in New York.

Robert Lewis, Cheryl Crawford, and Elia Kazan organized the Actors Studio as a training ground for young professionals. Their hope and aim was to provide the place for talented young actors and seasoned professionals to work out the problems of the actor's craft and receive fresh stimuli toward the discovery of new creative powers. [...] The need for Strasberg's kind of approach became more acute. Actors sought out Method training and Strasberg became the touchstone of the Studio.²⁸

²⁷ Gray, 34-35.

²⁸ Idem, 42-43.

In time, the fundamental gap between Stanislavski's system and the American Method of acting grew wider, especially after the delayed posthumous publication of Stanislavski's later work in America. His developments of the 'system' took a different path by turning the focus of an actor's work toward physical actions. By the time this approach was available to the American public, Strasberg's Method acting had become too influential and had established its own path in the history of the theater art. However, its focus on self-study and inner search for arousing past personal emotions degenerated in many Method schools so that it became dangerous for the mental sanity of the student-actors. Contrary to Stanislavski's continuous research and teaching career that had their deep roots in the practice of the theater art, the Method schools were not connected with the theater.

Most Method teaching is corrupt... it is not connected with the theatre. Stanislavski himself was connected with a theatre – always. It's a racket. Since they have to make money they work the racket. They become showhorses of authority in order to establish the reputation necessary to draw students.²⁹

The misconception which generated the evolution of Method acting in America was based only on Stanislavski's initial stages of his teachings. The work of an actor on himself, on his inner life, the search for his personal feelings and emotions, these constituted the premises on which Strasberg and the others founded their Method. However, in the case of Stanislavski, his 'system' of acting generated several more complex facets of the problem. He summarized his findings in the following manner:

My 'system' is divided into two main parts: (1) the inner and the outer work of the actor on himself, and (2) the inner and the outer work of the actor on his part. The inner work on the actor himself is based on a psychic technique which enables him to evoke a creative state of mind during which inspiration descends

²⁹ Quote from an interview with Elia Kazan in New York City, January 11, 1964, cited in Gray, 57.

on him more easily. The actor's external work on himself consists of the preparation of his bodily mechanism for the embodiment of his part and the exact presentation of his inner life. The work on the part consists of the study of the spiritual essence of a dramatic work, the germ from which it has emerged and which defines its meaning as well as the meaning of all its parts.³⁰

In October 1928, while playing a role on the stage of the Moscow Art Theater, Constantin Stanislavski suffered a heart attack. This event ended his acting career but also gave Stanislavski an opportunity to focus on writing about his findings. While he was recovering in Germany, Stanislavski was visited by his American friends, Norman Hapgood (1868-1937) and his wife Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (1894-1974), who persuaded him to write a book about his 'system' of acting. This idea had been discussed by them back in 1924 with the occasion of the US tour, when Norman, a journalist and editor but also a former US Ambassador to Denmark, facilitated the company's visit to the White House. With that same occasion, Elizabeth acted as translator for President Calvin Coolidge³¹ (1872-1933). Following Stanislavski's heart attack, the Hapgoods made financial arrangements for Constantin and his family to live closer to them in Nice, France for one year in order to focus on the writing of his books on acting.

Afternoons Mrs. Hapgood worked with Stanislavski, and in the evening translated for her husband what had been written. [...] Mrs. Hapgood translated her husband's suggestions back into Russian and the next afternoon she and Stanislavski worked on. Mornings Stanislavski spent rewriting, and writing letters as well as the detailed notes for the production of *Othello* he had worked out in his mind but which now had to be staged by two assistants at the MAT³² in Moscow.³³

³⁰ Konstantin Stanislavski, and David Magarshack, transl., *Stanislavski on the Art of the Stage* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1950), 27.

³¹ According to the Biographical Note in "Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood Papers," *T-Mss 1992-039, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

³² Moscow Art Theater

³³ Robert M. MacGregor, "Letter from Robert M. MacGregor," *The Tulane Drama Review* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1965), 211-212.

The intense work of writing the book was followed by several years of editing and cuts of the text. Also, Elizabeth Hapgood consulted several of Stanislavski's former Russian students and actors who were active in the United States in order to pay "the proper rendering in English of the special terms Stanislavski had invented for his 'system.'"³⁴ In 1936, Stanislavski's book *An Actor Prepares* was published by Theatre Arts, Inc. in English. It presented Stanislavski's approach of the inner creative state of a person in the process of actors' training.

Though initially conceived in one book, the theories about the formation of an actor cover two separate aspects, the inner and the outer work of an actor on himself. In his writing process, Stanislavski worked in parallel on these two aspects, using separate manuscripts. The first one was finished and published during his lifetime as *An Actor Prepares* (1936). The second has a more interesting story. In 1937, Elizabeth Hopgood visited Stanislavski in Moscow. There, he told her about a new book containing the second manuscript that was written in France as well as a few other chapters. However, Stanislavski was not satisfied at that moment with the form of the new book and needed to keep working on it. With Stanislavski's death a year later (1938) and the beginning of the Second World War, the publication of the second book, *Building a Character*, was delayed until 1949. This book reveals Stanislavski's wide angle on understanding the art of theater acting that encompasses not only the inner psychological aspects, but also an external form.

³⁴ MacGregor, 213.

Without an external form neither your inner characterization nor the spirit of your image will reach the public. The external characterization explains and illustrates and thereby conveys to your spectators the inner pattern of your part.³⁵

Through this second book, Stanislavski emphasizes the critical role that physical elements, such as costumes, movement, speech, diction, intonation, and so on, play in an actor's work. Due to the delaying of the book's publication, the timing of this written account of Stanislavski's 'system' was not beneficial to the direction of the American Method of acting.

If this second book had appeared even five years sooner, the voice of Stanislavski might have changed the course of the American theater – but the manuscript reached Hapgood only after the end of World War II. The book revealed to Americans for the first time Stanislavski's devotion to the theatrical elements of stage production. [...] But at the time of its publication, actors, directors, and teachers were deeply committed to an approach over-stressing the inner motive forces of character and the approach to a role through the personal experience of the actor.³⁶

In 1961, Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood published a third book, *Creating a Role*, which presented the continuation of Stanislavski's writings with a particular focus on the application of his 'system' in actual plays. This is another case where the difficult historical circumstances combined with Stanislavski's constant personal struggles to put in writing his principles of acting. Thus, the projected conclusion of his life work appeared on the actors' shelves only twenty-five years after the first book was published in America and twenty-three years after the death of the author.

The American publishers insisted that Stanislavski divide the work into two books, with the rehearsal practices comprising a third. Their suggestion was far from satisfactory for Stanislavski. He was afraid that readers would segregate inner work from external characterization, whereas he saw them as two sides of the same 'psycho-physical' coin. He reluctantly agreed to the separate volumes (the first to be called *An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of*

³⁵ Stanislavski and Hapgood, *Building a Character*, 1.

³⁶ Gray, 42.

*Experience*³⁷ and the second *An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Physical Characterization*³⁸), only if an outline of all three books was included in the first publication. Unfortunately, Stanislavski never wrote the overview.³⁹

Intriguingly, the work of Constantin Stanislavski continued beyond his lifetime.

Living in a socio-political context which manifested in Russian art as Socialist Realism⁴⁰, Stanislavski was concerned that his lifelong research which culminated with the Method of Physical Actions in the mid-1930s would be recognized as an acting system only because of its association with psychological Realism. This would definitely limit its role as a possible universal 'system' which would actually help and inspire actors and directors all over the world in their journey of discovering the truth in their art. Stanislavski's last four years of life were marked by intense work in this direction, despite the obstacles he encountered with respect to his declining health and the Soviets' standardizing of his approach to physical actions. Unfortunately for the world of theater, Stanislavski left only limited written resources, if any, regarding his last theories. However, his late legacy was left to grow from the roots of practice which he infused in his directorial assistants and actors.

This practical research of Stanislavski fueled "his ultimate experiment in acting practice, now known as Active Analysis,"⁴¹ or 'analysis through action.'⁴² There is some debate about the differences between the Method of Physical Actions and Active

³⁷ Published in English as *An Actor Prepares*.

³⁸ Published in English as *Building a Character*.

³⁹ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky*, 39.

⁴⁰ "Socialist Realism was a literary movement that came to prominence in 1934. Mirroring some of the elements of nineteenth-century Naturalism, it studied the behavioral patterns of human conduct. Unlike the Naturalists, however, the emphasis was now on environment, to the exclusion of heredity: in other words, we are not victims of our parentage, we can be whatever society wants us to be." From Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky*, 33.

⁴¹ Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky*, 32.

⁴² Moore, *The Stanislavski System*, 46.

Analysis. While through the Method of Physical Actions, actors used improvisations for a long time (days or weeks) before approaching the text of a play, in order to find the right physical actions specific to the substance of the play and its characters, Active Analysis of the text of the play would encourage the improvisation initiative of the actors shortly after reading the text of a scene, then the return to discussions upon the performed improvised actions and re-reading the text.

I am setting a new device 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.⁴³

Stanislavski's final experiments included several rehearsals on a new production of Molière's comedy *Tartuffe*. From March 1936 to April 1938, a group of experienced actors of the Moscow Art Theater were challenged by Stanislavski's new practice to stage this particular comedy, a thematic approach intended indeed to prove the universality of his system, under the direct guidance of the master. Among those who worked on this production-experiment, of great importance were Stanislavski's assistant director of the play, Mikhail Nikolaevich Kedrov (1893-1972), who also played the title role and finished the preparation of the play after Stanislavski's death in 1938, director and pedagogue, Maria Osipovna Knebel (1898-1985), and actor Vasily Osipovich Toporkov (1889-1970). They promoted the latest trends in Stanislavski's theories of acting that the master had not put in writing. Their careers as actors, directors,

⁴³ Excerpt from a December 1935 letter from Stanislavski to his son. From Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge/OPA, 2003), 154.

pedagogues, and writers of dramatic arts theories are considered essential in understanding the complexity and universality of Constantin Stanislavski's legacy.

Those who participated in his final workshops (Mikhail Kedrov, Vasily Toporkov, and Maria Knebel, among them) developed an oral tradition, and passed its lore about action on to their students. This body of knowledge, so dependent on Russian teachers, traveled to the West infrequently. In 1963, when the Moscow Art Theater again toured the US, actors spoke about the Method of Physical Actions at the New School for Social Research in New York. [...] Based in practice rather than theory, this body of lore, unlike published sources, maintains much of Stanislavski's integrative thinking.⁴⁴

A remarkable aspect of Stanislavski's theories is that "the System operates through the mechanism of cumulative practice, not selective theory."⁴⁵ The results of the practical knowledge led Stanislavski to constantly shift from one direction to another, from one approach to another, but his new findings never negated his initial ones. He simply found a variety of ways or methods to give the actors in their preparation for a multitude of roles. Stanislavski once wrote: "One must give actors various paths. One of these is the path of action. There is also another path: you can move from feeling to action, arousing feeling first."⁴⁶

In his work with the singers of the Opera Studio, Stanislavski developed an application of his acting 'system' to the world of music. Expressing a personal interest in the opera, he finally found his own way to be active in the operatic world by coaching the singers to become more involved in the actions required by the scripts and to better interpret the messages in their musical numbers. He set two main objectives from the very beginning of their work together: first, a focus on achieving expressive but incisive

⁴⁴ Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 153-154.

⁴⁵ Carnicke, 151.

⁴⁶ Excerpt from the Collected Works of Constantin Stanislavski. From Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 151.

diction would help the singer project the words they were to sing and second, a need to free the singers' bodies of unnecessary involuntary tensions. Stanislavski carefully devised exercises in order to overcome the singers' deficiencies in these areas but still acknowledging the physiological contractions specific to the process of singing.

In the process of projecting his voice a singer is obliged to tense certain muscles (of the diaphragm, the intercostal muscles, the larynx); that is to say these are working contractions which are necessary to the actual singing. It was the principal aim of a whole series of exercises prescribed by Stanislavski to make a distinction between the working contractions and superfluous tensions, thus leaving all the other muscles completely free. He was always on the watch for those unnecessary tensions in the body, the face, the arms, the legs of a singer, while performing. When an artist is performing in accordance with his inner feelings he must not be impeded in his movements by muscular contractions. The singer's whole attention must be centered on his actions.⁴⁷

Stanislavski emphasized that any exercise, no matter how technical it may be, must be done with intent and inner reasoning as well as with the full participation of the individual. He struggled with the routine practice of executing exercises without a definite purpose in the work of a singer-actor with himself or for a role. Too many times vocalizations in particular were done by singers in an attempt to warm-up their voice but with a complete detachment from their immediate goals or needs, both physical and psychological. Those exercises could become boring, purposeless, or even dangerously harmful to the singers and their voices if they were not conceived and produced with careful attention to the inner motives of each individual in certain circumstances.

In all our exercises Stanislavski insisted on inner justification for whatever we were doing at a given moment. This applied as well to vocalizing as to diction, to the logic of speech as to physical exercises—fluid movements, dancing, fencing. He always determined that we prepare “given circumstances,” some imaginative idea that we were to carry out during our work. He never allowed a single, even most elementary, technical exercise to be done “in general,” just for the purpose

⁴⁷ Stanislavski, Rumyantsev, and Hapgood, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 4.

of going through a form. [...] “All of your exercises [...] must have some creative relationship to what you are doing.”⁴⁸

Relaxation exercises were practiced in Stanislavski’s Opera Studio in order to create a sense of self-control and tranquility for the singers as well as their understanding of the human muscular structure. Some reservations from the part of his students regarding a possible lack of connection between these physical and psychological exercises and the actual singing were firmly answered by Stanislavski with the reinforcement that “for singing mannequins such exercises are indeed superfluous, [...] but for living human beings, if they wish to remain such on the stage, they are imperative.”⁴⁹

During his work on various projects in his Opera Studio, Stanislavski approached numerous ensemble scenes and ensemble singing with great care and conviction that the singers should apply principles from his acting ‘system.’ It was usually the case that most singers would cease to act while trying to follow the conductor’s baton in ensemble singing, mainly for synchronization. In Stanislavski’s opinion, the action in the opera doesn’t stop at any moment so the singers’ acting should continue throughout these complex scenes and he systematically taught various methods to his students on how to deal with these acting principles in the context of a musical discourse.

During ensemble singing the inner life of a character could never be interrupted even for a moment. This way of singing is achieved through intense inner concentration on the point to be conveyed, through a skillful and accurate rendering of the text. Naturally the technical grasp of the music itself had to be paramount so that the participants of the whole ensemble were able *to listen to* and *be listened to* by each other and not be glued to the conductor’s baton or listen only to themselves.

⁴⁸ Stanislavski, Romyantsev, and Hapgood, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 7.

⁴⁹ *Idem*, 5.

One main condition that the singers had to abide by was that the conductor must be seen only through “side vision,” that only an occasional check by a sidelong glance at him was permitted. While onstage they were never to be tyrannized by his baton. They had to feel his presence, sense his own inner rhythm just as he had always to sense and understand the rhythm of the actor-singer whom he was accompanying.⁵⁰

There are several important aspects in Stanislavski’s discussions with his opera students, including the role of the conductor in a musical production and the necessity for opera singers to train themselves more as collaborative musicians than individual stars. The conductor has the very significant role of fine-tuning the musical outcome to the true intentions of the authors, but without imposing over the ensemble with the danger of becoming a ‘traffic controller’ who waves his baton without any inner content. As for singers, Stanislavski “established a new order of things in opera under which a member of the chorus became a true artist, and not just a person bereft of all individuality who always played the same part throughout his life—that of ‘anonymous member of the chorus.’”⁵¹ Members of the choir were asked to be aware of all the actions at a given moment and also to use their imagination and find detailed life courses on the stage for themselves as individual actors; they had to determine who they were, who were their acquaintances, and what actions they were to do on the stage based on chosen objectives. These details had to be worked out individually by the chorus members so that their artistic presence on the stage became truly lifelike.

So here in this crowd scene he insisted that each character know exactly all the actions in progress on the stage at every moment that he was on. [...]

He went on to underscore certain points:

“By participating in the chorus in a mass scene an actor-singer has the opportunity to try out small, truthful actions. If you do not train yourselves to proceed from these small truths to larger ones you will only learn to lie, and that is the road to

⁵⁰ Idem, 53.

⁵¹ Idem, 114.

harm acting, routine performance. They speak in the theater of an ‘experienced actor.’ That usually connotes a rubber-stamp performer.”⁵²

Focusing on concrete applications of the Stanislavski ‘system’ of acting in the art of choral music and its rehearsal process, this research proceeds from the fundamental belief that all performing arts have a common ground of similarities with regard to their purposes, functions, activities, learning or educational aspects, their production and inter-human psychology. It is also my belief that these performing arts should take into consideration the complex psychological and physical behaviors of human beings that can be studied and presented on the stage as characters. With this in mind, this researcher considers also the possibility that principles, techniques, and methods that may traditionally be specific to one art form be transferred directly or in a slightly adapted way to another art form. Constantin Stanislavski’s lifelong and complex experience as an artist of the stage is only one example in which the fusion between performing arts happened organically. His work in the Opera Studio confirms that it is possible to successfully apply elements of his acting system to the world of music, opera, and choral music.

⁵² *Idem*, 239.

II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present research focuses on the possibility of drawing parallels between Constantin Stanislavski's 'system' of acting and the art of choral music. There are numerous resources available that present or study the 'system,' from its early developments and influences to its evolution and late discoveries, as well as its legacy and the new trends generated by it in the history of the modern theater. Only a few of them would serve the purpose of this review of literature. However, this researcher could not identify pertinent resources that address directly and clearly the application of the 'system' or parts of it as a choral method. Consequently, the material relevant to my topic consists of three categories outlined below that correspond to the respective three major sections of this chapter:

1. the major body of works by Constantin Stanislavski that are available in English translations, namely his autobiography—*My Life in Art*, his acting 'trilogy'—*An Actor Prepares*, *Building a Character*, and *Creating a Role*, as well as *Stanislavski on Opera*;

2. a selective literature about Stanislavski's contribution to and influences on the theater written by acting authorities such as Bella Merlin, Sharon Marie Carnicke, and Sonia Moore; and

3. a group of references about the use of psycho-technique by the Romanian National Chamber Choir *Madrigal* as found in monographic books and a scholarly research by the ensemble's founder and artistic director, Marin Constantin.

II.1 Constantin Stanislavski's Writings

It is instrumental that this research finds its roots in the English translations of the Russian texts by Stanislavski himself that are available to date. His original manuscripts are gathered as Collected Works in Russia and, at the date of this research, have no better English equivalent than Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood's translations, which arguably represent to a certain degree of accuracy Stanislavski's ideas. One of the critics of the English-language versions of Stanislavski's writings describes several deficiencies:

Along with her husband, Norman, the American translator, Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, substantially edited the texts, after which further snips were made by the Chief Editor, Edith Isaacs. Although the cuts may seem simple, some of them are particularly unhelpful. One crucial example concerns the Russian text of *An Actor Prepares*, which lists six important questions that all actors must ask themselves with each new character. Those questions are: *who, when, where, why, for what reason* and *how*. In the English translation, these six questions are given far less attention, with only four of them being summarized (when, where, why and how).⁵³

The same critic also enumerates several other issues such as confusing translations and odd usage of terminology, concluding that

Stanislavski was so keen that his writing-up of the 'system' was not seen as a 'gospel,' he chose language that was deliberately accessible to all readers. In the English translation, however, Stanislavski's simple terms, such as 'bits' of text and 'tasks' for the characters, were subsequently changed to the more scientific-sounding 'units' and 'objectives,' creating a different, rather alienating, tone.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 40.

⁵⁴ *Idem*.

On the other hand, as I already mentioned in the Introduction, there are researchers⁵⁵ who stated that, prior to publication, Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood conducted a thorough consultation with former members of the Moscow Art Theater then living in New York and with American theater experts with regard to the accuracy of her English rendition of Stanislavski's Russian terminology.

Despite the dispute about the role of Hapgood's English editions of the Stanislavski's writings, this researcher considers them sufficiently relevant for the purpose of this topic.

II.1.1 *My Life in Art*

The successes of the Moscow Art Theater in their American tours in the 1920s contributed to the publication in 1924 in the United States of Stanislavski's autobiographical book, *My Life in Art*. This plays a very important role in the process of understanding Stanislavski by means of a journey through his artistic life. It is the story of a person who had the benefit of a wealthy upbringing in a society that was soon to suffer fundamental changes. Stanislavski begins his autobiography with a description of the Russian society of the mid-nineteenth century in which wealthy people were contributing to the foundation of performing arts institutions. In this context the Alexeiev family, which was Stanislavski's real family name, was together with other representative names of the Russian high society very involved with artistic, educational, and charitable institutions. The Russian cultural life was blooming because of the significant financial

⁵⁵ According to Robert M. MacGregor, "Letter from Robert M. MacGregor," *The Tulane Drama Review* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1965), 213-214.

contributions by such rich families. The family life of these philanthropic people was geared toward cultural activities even as personal entertainment. Their children were exposed to proper education, arts, and cultural and social activities specific to their families' high social status in those times.

In the third chapter, Stanislavski explains his family origins. His father, Sergey Vladimirovich Alexeiev, was a rich manufacturer and merchant, while his mother, Elisaveta Vassilievna Alexeieva, had a Russian father and a French mother, who was a famous actress by the name of Varley. Together with their numerous children, they lived a rather domestic life on their estate near Moscow.

Stanislavski's recollections of his artistic childhood begin with his and his siblings' exposure to Italian opera productions that toured Russia at that time. Inspired by these performances, the children developed an interest in performances of any kind, especially circus numbers or ballet. They represented the entertainment of those generations. Little Constantin's imagination placed himself in charge of his own future circus for which the little children were already preparing through private domestic performances. Soon ballet and marionette numbers followed and at the same time attending the real theater became a necessary source of inspiration for the little actors. Nurturing the children's artistic interests, the Alexeievs erected a new building on their estate, which housed a theater auditorium where the little ones would develop their aspirations. Gradually, all the children's spare time was devoted to the theater and the productions of numerous dramatic scenes and plays. Operettas were also of interest to the young amateur artists.

In the eighth chapter, Stanislavski describes how by means of wealth and influence due to his family's high social status, he became the very young director of the Russian Musical Society and Conservatory and came to be part of important cultural circles in Moscow. Also in this chapter he describes the good old school of theater training developed by Mikhail Semyonovich Shchepkin (1788-1863) and his Moscow Little (Maly) Theater that became so famous and was nicknamed "the House of Shchepkin,"⁵⁶ after the famous actor. However, according to Stanislavski, his contemporary dramatic schools were focusing on final products and not on the process of molding the person, which was not helping at all young aspiring actors in their process of learning their craft. Consequently, the student Stanislavski left such a school after only three weeks. The next chapter describes how the attention given to the productions of the Little Theater by Stanislavski and his group of young theater aficionados gave a true education to that generation of theater people. His encounters with several great actors and actresses of the Little Theater marked his early formation as an artist.

The next few chapters recall Stanislavski's encounters with Russian composer, pianist, and conductor, Anton Grigorevich Rubinstein (1829-1894) as well as the young artist's attempts in operettas and as a more serious singer of opera. Stanislavski came to understand quickly that his voice was not adequate for the opera, but his acquaintance with his voice teacher, the famous tenor Fyodor Kommissarjevsky, became an important artistic mentorship and long-term friendship. Stanislavski's early amateur attempts in his family circle theater had high moments when several actors of the Imperial Little Theater joined in a production in which Constantin Alexeiev had the opportunity to play next to

⁵⁶ Constantin Stanislavski, *My Life in Art* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts Books, reprinted 1996), 91.

professionals. This brought him some fame in the amateur circles and he became a sought-after young actor under the stage name of Stanislavski.

Beginning in the fifteenth chapter, Stanislavski reveals his professional relationship with Russian director, Alexander Fedotov, who was trained in the old French school of acting. The two collaborated within the Society of Art and Literature, a new circle of talented amateur actors whom Stanislavski had known as a result of his previous acting engagements. Fedotov influenced Stanislavski's acting techniques as well as his political, social, and aesthetic views.

There is no doubt that Fedotov had created a complete perturbation in me. I understood now that to approach a role by imitating another actor does not yet create the necessary image. I understood that I had to create my own image. I understood that it was necessary to create something within myself, for without that there could be no excitement and no quickening of the creative spirit. [...] I believed then that emotion, pose, costume, make-up, manner and gesture could lead me to the image. I learned further that by a whole series of technical approaches one could create within himself the feeling of truth, which awoke creativeness.⁵⁷

The growing acting career of Stanislavski is presented in his description of numerous roles in which he strived to define and master acting and artistic principles. Several chapters focus on these roles that contoured Stanislavski's early career, but significant events on a personal level, such as his marriage with colleague actress M. P. Perevozchikova (her stage name was Lilina), are interspersed throughout his theatrical evolution. His exposure to the productions of the visiting German troupe, the Meiningen Players, led by their stage director Kronek, was also another episode that marked Stanislavski's ideas. His first real experience as a drama director was with Lev Tolstoy's play, *The Fruits of Knowledge*, which he documents in the twentieth chapter of the book.

⁵⁷ Op. cit., 184-185.

His fortunate encounter with the actual person Tolstoy is presented in the following chapter.

The enthusiasm with which Stanislavski recollected his amateur productions of *Uriel Acosta* and *The Polish Jew* demonstrates the real interest and energy that his generation of actors put in their work in the theater. Furthermore, his quest for artistic achievements propelled Stanislavski to the world of professional actors when, as he describes in the twenty-fourth chapter, he directed such a company during their summer production near Moscow of Gogol's *Inspector General*. The experienced actors and the staging had already been prepared prior to Stanislavski's arrival. However, the actors were interested in Stanislavski's directions and soon they became amazed by the number of changes and interpretations that their new director brought into their performance. Stanislavski was not happy with this first collaboration with professionals because of his approach of imposing his own theatrical interpretations on his actors.

I began to order the actors about exactly as I ordered about amateurs. Of course they did not like it, but they obeyed, for they lost all ground beneath their feet. What I said and what I wanted was right. [...] But the means I used for attaining my new ideas and influencing the actors were not the right ones. Simple despotism does not persuade an actor in his inner self; it only violates his inner self. A black cat seemed to have run between us already. I found out personally the meaning of actors' intrigues, gossip, undermining, and what the Americans call "kidding." I also came to know that it is much easier to destroy the old than to create the new.⁵⁸

Stanislavski learned from these initial contacts with the professional world and his subsequent directorial activities became more successful. He again described in detail several actions he had to take while working with a professional theater in order to

⁵⁸ Op. cit., 247.

overcome provincial attitudes, lack of discipline and work ethics, and bad habits that were impeding on Stanislavski's work on artistic goals in their productions.

The impersonation of Othello by famous Italian actor, Tommaso Salvini, greatly influenced Stanislavski and he describes the Italian's performance in the twenty-sixth chapter of the book. Salvini's high artistry is well-documented by Stanislavski who also details the preparatory work of the actor before the performance, an unusual approach to the role for Stanislavski at that time. His own attempt to play Othello is revealed in the next chapter. The complexity of the role and the temperament of the young Stanislavski made this a real challenge for him. He concluded that his attempts were unsuccessful and that he had prematurely tried difficult theatrical roles. However, his courage to play Othello made a slightly favorable impression on the public and the press, which gave Stanislavski a long-awaited rejuvenation of his personal aspirations at playing major dramatic roles.

The next several chapters describe the beginning of the fruitful collaboration between Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko that materialized in their founding of the prestigious Moscow Art Theater. Its artistic work was divided by Stanislavski into two periods. The first one lasted from 1898 to 1906 and was marked by the artists' assiduous pursuit for artistic truth and for the development of a new system of acting principles and techniques.

The founding of our new Moscow Art and Popular Theater was in the nature of a revolution. We protested against the customary manner of acting, against theatricality, against bathos, against declamation, against overacting, against the bad manner of production, against the habitual scenery, against the star system which spoiled the ensemble, against the light and farcical repertoire which was being cultivated on the Russian stage at that time. [...] Like all revolutionists we broke the old and exaggerated the value of the new. All that was new was good

simply because it was new. [...] Always, then as well as now, we sought for inner truth, for the truth of feeling and experience, but as spiritual technique was only in its embryo stage among the actors of our company, we, because of necessity and helplessness, and against our desires, fell now and then into an outward and coarse naturalism.⁵⁹

Several chapters are dedicated to the intense work of the Moscow Art Theater in this first period. Remarkable is the theater's focus on the late work of and collaboration with playwright, Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. The Art Theater's success of Chekhov's play, *The Seagull*, and the insistence of the two directors of the theater determined the author to continue to write plays to be staged by this new Moscow dramatic institution, as described by Stanislavski in the thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh chapters. The collaboration continued and the theatrical company counted several successful seasons that usually ended in Petrograd or other provincial cities like Kiev, Odessa, and Warsaw, where, as Stanislavski reveals in his thirty-ninth chapter, the popularity of their company attracted large crowds and the acclaimed theater became subject to popular celebrations.⁶⁰

Several following chapters depict the company's attempts in several other stylistic directions. They included the productions of Maxim Gorky's socio-political play, *The Lower Depths*, Lev Tolstoy's play, *The Power of Darkness*, Henrik Ibsen's play, *The Enemy of the People*, as well as William Shakespeare's tragedy, *Julius Caesar*. Stanislavski's memories return though to his final collaboration with Chekhov for the production of his last play, *The Cherry Orchard*, in 1904.

In the forty-sixth chapter of *My Life in Art*, Stanislavski remembers the hard times of the 1905-1906 Russian Revolution. It was in the middle of these events that his theatrical company traveled abroad for the first time. After an adventurous trip they

⁵⁹ Op. cit., 330-331.

⁶⁰ Op. cit., 382.

arrived in Berlin, where for about six weeks they successfully performed several plays, including the drama, *Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich*, by Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy (1817-1875) at the special request of the Kaiser, Wilhelm II, who attended that performance.

The dawn of Stanislavski's acting 'system' is detailed in the forty-eighth chapter. Here, Stanislavski writes about his 1906 summer vacation in Finland that had a great influence on his private and artistic life. During this trip, his self-examination of past performances revealed to Stanislavski the fact that he had the tendency to lose in repeated performances the initial artistic creativity, which in time led to his lack of creative joy in his latest roles and a sense of an artistic exhaustion combined with boredom. Unlike consecrated dramatic artists that he admired in the past, Stanislavski felt like with the repetition of each role he was "sinking backward into a stage of fossilization."⁶¹ With the sadness of this perspective on his past work, Stanislavski continued:

Examining my past step by step, I came to see clearer and clearer that the inner content which was put into a role during its first creation and the inner content that was born in my soul with the passing of time were as far apart as the heaven and earth. Formerly all issued from a beautiful, exciting, inner truth. Now all that was left of this truth was its wind-swept shell, ashes and dust that stuck in the niches of the soul due to various accidental causes, and that had nothing in common with true art.⁶²

The next pages unveil the story of Stanislavski's gradual realization of the importance of several elements that will become key principles in his acting 'system.' Such elements described here as early discoveries are the actors' necessity to live in a creative mood on the stage, their concentration of attention on themselves and their characters while playing on the stage, and the developing of a sense of truth while on the stage through the so-called 'magic *if*.'

⁶¹ Op. cit., 459.

⁶² Idem.

The actor says to himself:

“All these properties, make-ups, costumes, the scenery, the publicness of the performance, are lies. I know they are lies, I know I do not need any of them. But *if* they were true, then I would do this and this, and I would behave in this manner and this way towards this and this event.”⁶³

The several chapters that follow present Stanislavski’s constant struggle regarding a formal acting system in the context of several plays which the Moscow Art Theater was producing. The list of plays that he describes includes the play, *The Drama of Life*, by Norwegian playwright, Knut Hamsun, the Symbolist play, *The Life of Man*, by a friend of the Art Theater, Leonid Nikolaievich Andreyev (1871-1919), as well as Maeterlinck’s *The Blue Bird*. These were new plays that the Moscow Art Theater premiered and the novelties they brought to the style of the modern theater were artistic challenges for the Russian company.

The modern trends in the world of performing arts were not foreign to the Moscow artistic circles. Among the foreign artists who toured Russia and exposed these novelties to their audiences, the American dancer Isadora Duncan and the English theater practitioner Gordon Craig have had significant influences on Stanislavski and his artistic path. In the fifty-fourth chapter of his autobiography, Stanislavski presents how through Isadora Duncan, he got to know and work with Gordon Craig, who in 1911 accepted to produce William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theater. The great public success of the production was not completely satisfactory for Stanislavski, for he knew of his own shortcomings and the guest director’s creative potential, which Stanislavski failed to unveil to the Russian stages.

⁶³ Op. cit., 466.

Apparently we could not expect a greater success. But I was not happy within myself. Firstly, because I had not been able to show Craig as I wanted to show him, secondly because this important production had brought new doubts into my work and my researches. We had wanted to make the production as simple and as modest as possible. Of course this modesty was to be a result of rich imagination. There was very much imagination and simplicity, but the production seemed unusually luxurious, grandiose, affected to such an extent that its beauty attacked the eye and hid the actors in its pomp. The new quality of the stage was a surprise to me. The more we tried to make the production simple and stronger it reminded us of itself, the more it seemed pretentious and displayed its showy naïveté.⁶⁴

The following two chapters are dedicated to the circumstances surrounding the opening of the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theater. Stanislavski's attempts to experiment with the company and teach the actors his methods of acting were met with reticence by experienced actors but with some interest from the younger generations that were eager to learn the craft of their art. Consequently, Stanislavski found himself somewhat isolated from the rest of the company in his quest for artistic truths. Criticism was raised with regard to his obstinacy to perpetuate his 'system' among his actors. To better serve his artistic intentions, Stanislavski founded the First Studio with his own material resources. This was intended "for the young people who came to seek my help"⁶⁵ in terms of learning how to act on the stage. The story of the existence of this First Studio is compelling, since the social and artistic hardship of the times could not stop the endurance and determination of that group of young actors in the making to follow a new but promising path in their lives. Assisted by the experienced Leopold Sulerzhitsky, Stanislavski built the First Studio's cohesive ensemble from both artistic and personal angles. His investment in a large plot in Crimea, where actors from the Studio spent several summers together living a very rustic life and learning to better

⁶⁴ Op. cit., 524.

⁶⁵ Op. cit., 531.

know and understand each other, was beneficial for the evolution and collaboration of a new generation of talented actors that would carry on Stanislavski's acting 'system.'

The fifty-eighth and fifty-ninth chapters of *My Life in Art* describe how the socio-political changes in Russia, due to the war and the two 1917 Revolutions which eventually generated the instauration of the world's first Communist state, impacted the arts and culture of that nation. The Arts Theater was confronted by a total change of their audiences; poor, uneducated people were brought to watch the theater's performances, but the actors were frustrated by the behavior of these new audiences. Stanislavski remembers how he had to take some actions in this new situation.

Yesterday our Theater had been filled by the old public which we had educated through many decades, and today we were faced by an altogether new audience which we did not know how to approach. Neither did the audience know how to approach us and how to live with us in the theater. We were forced to begin at the very beginning, to teach this new spectator how to sit quietly, how not to talk, how to come into the theater at the proper time, not to smoke, not to eat nuts in public, not to bring food into the theater and eat it there, to dress in his best so as to fit more into the atmosphere of beauty that was worshipped in the theater. At first this was very hard to do, and two or three times after the end of an act the atmosphere of which was spoiled by the crowd of still uneducated spectators, I was forced to come before the curtain with a plea in the name of the actors who were placed in an impasse.⁶⁶

The sixtieth chapter of this autobiography describes how Stanislavski came to open and work with the Opera Studio of the Bolshoi Opera Theater. The great operatic institution wanted to develop the dramatic side of their singers. A desire to improve their performances came from their high artistic exigencies and was caused by the singers' only focusing on their vocal technique while lacking in dramatic interpretations. Due to economic circumstances, consecrated singers could not commit to participating much in

⁶⁶ Op. cit., 554-555.

the Opera Studio because of their work demands in order to make a living. Stanislavski sought young singers as members of this new Opera Studio and established classes that focused on various elements of his acting ‘system.’

To the accompaniment of a pianist’s improvisations, the pupils lived for hours in rhythm, explaining in their actions how they felt the music. Relying on the same bases of the sensation of inner rhythm and action, they learned to walk, to do gymnastics, plastic and other exercises in my system for the development of correct consciousness of self in which rhythm plays a great and important part. There was a whole series of exercises and classes for the development of the feeling for the word and speech, for an altogether exceptional amount of attention was paid to diction in the opera.⁶⁷

In the last chapter of the book, Stanislavski reflects about his role in the life and evolution of the theater and the performing arts. He acknowledges his life work in the field, but admits with modesty that the importance of his contribution should not be perceived as strictly as that imposed by more formal systems. Stanislavski recognizes the new generations of artists and their valuable contributions to the arts and points out the necessity of educating and of passing on the wealth of knowledge to the young generations to come.

In the sphere of rhythm, plastics, the laws of speech, the placing of the voice, breathing, the logic of the continuity of human feelings, there is much that is incumbent upon all. And it is in that sphere which is incumbent upon all that beginning actors strain and cripple their natures most often. We can help them, we can save them from disaster, and they may well listen to what we have to tell them from the store of our experience.⁶⁸

In conclusion, Constantin Stanislavski’s autobiography, *My Life in Art*, represents a fascinating portrait of the beginnings of the modern theater arts in Russia painted through the perspective of an experienced actor, director, and educator. Beautifully written, this book constitutes the chronicles of the evolution of Stanislavski as an actor in

⁶⁷ Op. cit., 562.

⁶⁸ Op. cit., 565.

parallel with the changes in the Russian and world theater, which he has influenced with his visionary approach to acting.

II.1.2 *An Actor Prepares*

Written in a semi-fiction form, Stanislavski's book *An Actor Prepares* represents the first episode of the so-called 'Acting Trilogy'⁶⁹ that includes other two volumes, *Building a Character* and *Creating a Role*. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski disguises himself both under the image of the teacher, Director Tortsov, and as one of the more prominent students in the class, Kostya Nazvanov, who plays the role of the narrator. Kostya's classmates represent a variety of archetypes of the actors' personalities, each individual student-character surfacing a series of problems in the process of actor training. The unfortunate history surrounding the publication of Stanislavski's textbooks on acting that describe his 'system' has inadvertently placed the focus of the acting world on the inner preparation of an actor that is described in *An Actor Prepares*. The delay in the publication of the second part of the textbook, *Building a Character*, that emphasizes the importance of the external preparation of actors and their actions on the stage, misled the world of modern theater and especially the American theater in a different direction than Stanislavski's; this perspective has been described in the Introduction of this research. The essence of Stanislavski's trilogy is the presentation of his 'system' in a practical manner, as concrete working examples, exercises, and situations that he drew

⁶⁹ Constantin Stanislavski, and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, transl. *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 2003), i.

from his own experience in the Moscow Art Theater, interspersed with general principles and philosophies of art.

What Stanislavski has undertaken is not to discover a truth but to bring the truth in usable form within the reach of those actors and producers who are fairly well equipped by nature and who are willing to undergo the necessary discipline. The book does include, again and again, statements of general principles of art, but the great task set for himself by the author has been the embodiment of those principles in the simplest working examples, to be labored over day after day and month after month.⁷⁰

The first two chapters of the book describe the students' struggles in preparing and delivering their first testing performances, as well as Tortsov's precision in identifying, through his experienced vision, the students' weaknesses and cliché acting. The disappointments of this first test were brightened only by a couple of accidental moments in which the students gave themselves up completely to the events on the stage, even though they were motivated by personal frustrations and not by the subject of their performances. In the opinion of teacher Tortsov, these two moments were only hints of the art of living a role. In addition this art of living a role, four other schools of acting are described by Tortsov, namely representing a role, mechanical acting, overacting, and exploitation of the art. They are acknowledged by Tortsov as coexisting within each actor, but they are not what the necessity of mastering the art of living a part brings on the stage, namely the artistic truth. At the end of this initial discussion, Tortsov announces the need for his students to begin taking daily lessons in singing, gymnastics, dancing, and fencing because "the development of the muscles of the human body requires systematic and thorough exercise, and a long time."⁷¹

⁷⁰ Op. cit, Note by the Translator, viii.

⁷¹ Op. cit., 33.

The next four chapters address several problems that were present in the students' initial test performance. Titled "Action," the third chapter presents several exercises described in a dialogue format in which Tortsov and his students unveil for themselves and for the reader key elements of the 'system.' These include the idea that "on the stage it is necessary to act, either outwardly or inwardly,"⁷² which emphasizes the important role of inner activity that can show great inner intensity, even when there is not much external action. A very simple sit-and-do-nothing exercise proved the students that when ordinary actions from real-life existence are transferred on the stage, they become unusually difficult if not done with a purpose and with inner justification. At the other extreme, an exercise in which a student named Maria is searching for a precious lost brooch showed the class how excessive action for the sake of showing off distracts the actors themselves from what they are supposed to do.

In connection with 'Action,' Tortsov presents the concepts of 'If' and 'Given Circumstances,' by setting the "madman exercise" in which the students were asked to improvise their acting in the supposed circumstance of the coming of a violent man escaped from a mental institution. The three elements introduced in this chapter are intended to spark the imagination of actors who also grasp a significant artistic principle, "unconscious creativeness through conscious technique."⁷³

The fourth chapter refers to 'Imagination' and its importance in the creative act. Tortsov underlines that for artists, imagination is crucial and must be developed.⁷⁴ Young Kostya is asked to imagine his actions in the familiarity of his own room and present

⁷² Op. cit., 39.

⁷³ Op. cit., 53.

⁷⁴ Op. cit., 62.

them in detail in front of the class, but soon his imagination dries up. Another student, Paul, is asked to imagine himself as an oak tree and base everything he does on several fundamental questions, such as *who, where, when, why, for what reason, and how*.⁷⁵

Tortsov concludes this lesson on imagination with another principle of his art.

Our art demands that an actor's whole nature be actively involved, that he give himself up, both mind and body, to his part. He must feel the challenge to action physically as well as intellectually because the imagination, which has no substance or body, can reflexively affect our physical nature and make it act. This faculty is of the greatest importance in our emotion-technique. Therefore: Every movement you make on the stage, every word you speak, is the result of the right life of your imagination.⁷⁶

The fifth chapter tackles the critical element of 'Concentration of Attention.'

Setting up the money-burning exercise in which Kostya's retarded stage brother throws bundles of money into a fire, Tortsov comes to the conclusion that the failing of this exercise and its variations was due to the students' lack of power to concentrate their attention. The simple shift of attention to a real and purposeful action on the stage made his students ignore the presence of people in the audience. "In order to get away from the auditorium you must be interested in something on the stage. [...] An actor must have a point of attention and this point of attention must not be in the auditorium."⁷⁷ Using the demonstration technique of 'points of light,' Tortsov illustrates how the actors' focus on random objects, mainly in the auditorium, deters their attention from important objects, people, and actions on the stage. Students learn about and how to use the concept of Circles of Attention. The Small Circle of Attention refers to the head and hands of the

⁷⁵ These six questions (versus four in Hapgood's translation) were found by author Bella Merlin in the original Russian text and discussed in Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky*. This discrepancy was detailed earlier in this chapter.

⁷⁶ Stanislavski and Hapgood, *An Actor Prepares*, 77.

⁷⁷ Op. cit., 82.

student; his concentration on them helps him achieve the state of Solitude in Public. Then, the Medium, Large, and Largest Circles progress from the immediate surroundings to the stage and auditorium. Actors need to learn how to shift their focus among these circles in order to preserve their attention. Tortsov also explains that there is also an inner attention that requires exercises to develop it. He encourages his students to be observant in their daily lives, “to look at, to listen to, and to hear what is beautiful”⁷⁸ in nature and in art, literature, and music, in order to make lasting impressions in their minds and souls. While playing a role on the stage, these impressions may become the subject of the actors’ inner attention that would generate creativeness in their interpretation.

The sixth chapter builds up around the unfortunate event in which Kostya accidentally cuts one of his arteries by breaking an object as the result of his attempt to compensate externally an inner hesitation while performing the money-burning exercise. The happening shifts the focus of the acting class toward Relaxation of Muscles. Though confined in his bed to recover from his accident, Kostya is frequently visited by several of his classmates and by Rakhmanov, the Assistant Director, who keep him updated and even stimulate Kostya to try some of the muscle exercises that the rest of the students were experiencing in class.

The individual development of each actor continues in the next three chapters under the forms of textual analysis, theatrical truth, and emotion memory. Dividing the play into units that are governed by individual objectives is the main topic of the seventh

⁷⁸ Op. cit., 100.

chapter.⁷⁹ While units are mainly intellectual divisions of the play, they can carry names that are nouns. However, their generating objectives should be expressed by a verb, because “every objective must carry in itself the germ of action.”⁸⁰

The eighth chapter is very elaborate and discusses the philosophy of creating a sense of truth on the stage. The essence of this chapter lies in the intrinsic contradiction of acting, “the point of view that on the stage everything must be real in the imaginary life of the actor.”⁸¹ Tortsov leads his students through practice and discussions to the conclusion that there are two kinds of truth and belief in what people are doing.

First, there is the one that is created automatically and on the plane of actual fact [...], and second, there is the scenic type, which is equally truthful but which originates on the plane of imaginative and artistic fiction. [...]
In ordinary life, truth is what really exists, what a person really knows. Whereas on the stage it consists of something that is not actually in existence but which could happen.⁸²

Later on, in order to clarify the differences, Tortsov emphasizes that the actors, through their experienced emotions and actions on the stage, must inspire in themselves and in their audiences the belief in the possibility of those emotions and actions to exist in real life. “Each and every moment must be saturated with a belief in the truthfulness of the emotion felt, and in the action carried out, by the actor.”⁸³ A large section of this chapter is also dedicated to the same money-burning exercise. With the help of the Director, Kostya and the other student-actors bring into their play new angles to the personal stories of the characters in the scene. The new elements demonstrate how after a

⁷⁹ As mentioned in footnote 2, author Bella Merlin gives a closer translation of the Russian terms as ‘bits’ and ‘tasks’ (instead of ‘units’ and ‘objectives’) that Stanislavski unpretentiously employed for a more useful practice in actors’ vocabulary.

⁸⁰ Stanislavski and Hapgood, *An Actor Prepares*, 134.

⁸¹ Op. cit., 171.

⁸² Op. cit., 140.

⁸³ Op. cit., 142.

month since they first played this exercise, their imagination flourishes much quicker and comes up with artistic connotations that enhance their acting and keep it fresh. Another accomplishment is that in their constructive repetition of the exercise, the actors built a viable and continuous sequence of truthful physical actions that Tortsov calls ‘the life of the human body,’ which “is made up [...] of living physical actions, motivated by an inner sense of truth, and belief in what the actor is doing.”⁸⁴ Parallel with the creation of ‘the life of the human body’ of a character in a play, actors have already accomplished an “even more important step, which is the creation of the human soul in the part,”⁸⁵ because “the bond between body and soul is indivisible.”⁸⁶ It is remarkable that the author already introduces in this chapter the concept and the crucial importance of physical actions in creating the life of a role, as a precursor of Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Actions. In order to bring themselves repeatedly in a state of creativeness on the stage, actors must rely on small physical actions specific to the character they play that can stir emotional responses needed for the role. “We use the conscious technique of creating the physical body of a role and by its aid achieve the creation of the subconscious life of the spirit of a role.”⁸⁷

The same eighth chapter becomes even more difficult to grasp, because Stanislavski, through the words of Tortsov, presents several nuances in another student’s exercise based on the abandoned child scene from the play *Brand* by Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906). The student-subject is asked to repeat five times the scene in which the character finds an abandoned little child on her doorstep, decides to adopt it but the child dies in

⁸⁴ Op. cit., 156-157.

⁸⁵ Op. cit., 157.

⁸⁶ Idem.

⁸⁷ Op. cit., 160.

her arms. The actress tries to access her inner feelings which would create the ups and downs of her character, while Tortsov guides her performances. Before the last attempt, Tortsov infuses the suggestion that the actress should imagine the loss of her child, but this generates a very dramatic and convincing interpretation of the scene because the tragic event had really happened in the real life of the student-actress. Her truthful performance was triggered by the infusion of a real-life event from her past, however the actress was never hallucinating or overwhelmed by her emotions.

Tortsov makes a clear distinction between the mere representation of images and passions in some actors' performances and the truth in his art, which "helps to create the images themselves and to stir real passions."⁸⁸ He also refers to a certain sense of untruth (the characters and their actions are not the real life), which should help actors not to overact on the stage. He warns his students of his saying, 'cut ninety percent,' by which he asks actors to reduce the superfluous and false elements from their impersonations. Stanislavski calls the actors' process of finding the right actions on the stage and their belief in those actions, "our method of psycho-technique."⁸⁹

In the ninth chapter, Stanislavski introduces the term Emotion Memory throughout the discussions between Director Tortsov and his students. The concept is taken from the work of French psychologist, Théodule Ribot (1839-1916), who first presented it as 'affective memory.' Tortsov describes emotion memory as the psychological quality of recalling past experiences from the actor's personal life that also brings back certain feelings and emotions. He also differentiates between emotion

⁸⁸ Op. cit., 170.

⁸⁹ Op. cit., 164.

memory and sensation memory, the latter being connected with the five human senses and recalling primarily visual and sonorous experiences from the past that could create sensations in the present moment. For the actors it is important to comprehend that it is not the memory recall of past feelings associated with an event in their past that they need to isolate. Because of the ever-changing nature of human memories in time by overlapping with each other and with imagination, the actors' use of emotion memory techniques should be based on their mental and psychological connections among several impressions from their past and the inter-relationships of their initial emotional responses. Tortsov advises his students to stir their own personal feelings using emotion memory in order to enact a truly living part on the stage.

Never lose yourself on the stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist. You can never get away from yourself. The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part and the beginning of exaggerated false acting. [...]

Always and for ever, when you are on the stage, you must play yourself. But it will be in an infinite variety of combinations of objectives, and given circumstances which you have prepared for your part, and which have been smelted in the furnace of your emotion memory. This is the best and only true material for inner creativeness.⁹⁰

Summarizing their discussions and exercises, Director Tortsov concludes that actors have a wide range of stimuli around them that can prompt their emotional responses. He lists several of these categories of stimuli as what he calls the “psycho-technical store of riches,”⁹¹ from imaginative suggestions to the breaking down of a scene into units and objectives, from concrete objects of attention to true physical actions and the actors' belief in them, and from the text of the play with its intellectual and emotional implications to external stimuli on the stage (settings, lighting, and sounds).

⁹⁰ Op. cit., 192.

⁹¹ Op. cit., 206.

In the tenth chapter, Stanislavski brings into discussion the concept of Communion on the stage. This shifts the focus of the student-actors from individual to ensemble training. After an exchange of ideas, Tortsov and his students come to the conclusion that in real life, people are in a continuous connection or communication among themselves and with their surroundings. This is of utmost importance since by its nature, the theater “is based on the inter-communication of the *dramatis personae*”⁹².⁹³ The spectator is considered a silent partner in the communal exchange of emotions and ideas among actors on the stage.

If actors really mean to hold the attention of a large audience they must make every effort to maintain an uninterrupted exchange of feelings, thoughts and actions among themselves. And the inner material for this exchange should be sufficiently interesting to hold spectators.⁹⁴

However, Tortsov acknowledges the public’s resonance during performance and reinforces the idea of a certain type of communion with the audience in the same time with the relationship among the actors on the stage. He draws parallels with the music world.

If you want to learn to appreciate what you get from the public let me suggest that you give a performance to a completely empty hall. Would you care to do that? No! Because to act without a public is like singing in a place without resonance. To play to a large and sympathetic audience is like singing in a room with perfect acoustics. The audience constitutes the spiritual acoustics for us. They give back what they receive from us as living, human emotions.⁹⁵

Based on the Hindu philosophy that promotes the existence of a vital energy called Prana which radiates from the solar plexus,⁹⁶ Tortsov explains that there are two

⁹² Latin expression (literally, “the masks of the drama”) that designates the characters of a play

⁹³ Op. cit., 213.

⁹⁴ Op. cit., 214.

⁹⁵ Op. cit., 220-221.

⁹⁶ Op. cit., 215.

centers in us, namely the cerebral center of the brain (consciousness) and the nervous center of the solar plexus (emotion). These two centers can establish a line of communication between them that represents the concept of self-communion. Then step by step, Tortsov describes the notions of communion with another actor on the stage, communion with an imaginary object, and the mutual communion with a collective object, such as the audience.

Director Tortsov sets up two exercises that address the topic of communion. The first one demonstrates how important for an actor is the use of all the external means of direct communication (gestures, face, and voice). The second exercise focuses on the potential of silent communication through communion between two actors by means of sending out rays⁹⁷ or a “parallel interchange of currents”⁹⁸ or “irradiation”⁹⁹ without any kind of muscular tension. The complexity of this chapter’s topic is noted by Tortsov-Stanislavski but its importance is definitely relevant for the course of actors’ training and their performances.

In connection with Communion, Adaptation, which is the main topic of the eleventh chapter of *An Actor Prepares*, represents the adjustments actors must constantly make while on the stage. Of the many functions of the concept, Tortsov enumerates five, namely “adjusting or conforming oneself to a problem,” “vivid expression of inner feelings or thoughts,” calling “the attention to you of the person with whom you wish to be in contact,” preparing your partner “by putting him in a mood to respond to you,” and exchanging “certain invisible messages, which can only be felt and not put into

⁹⁷ Op. cit., 230.

⁹⁸ Op. cit., 231.

⁹⁹ Op. cit., 234.

words.”¹⁰⁰ When asked about the sufficiency of words in human interactions, Tortsov replies:

Do you suppose that words exhaust all the nicest shadings of the emotions you experience? No! When we are communing with one another words do not suffice. If we want to put life into them, we must produce feelings. They fill out the blanks left by words, they finish what has been unsaid.¹⁰¹

Tortsov-Stanislavski acknowledges the individuality of each actor and emphasizes that various given circumstances, settings, place or time of action may demand corresponding adjustments from actors in the way they express feelings and thoughts. “You must learn to adapt yourselves to circumstances, to time, and to each individual person,”¹⁰² Tortsov tells his students. Then, he continues to dissect the concept of Adaptation by discussing its amplitude and appropriateness, as well as its unexpectedness. The four types of Adaptation discussed in this chapter are mechanical, motor, intuitive, and semi-conscious. Tortsov gives credit to the subconscious, semi-conscious, and conscious motor adjustments in acting, in opposition to mechanical clichés (rubber stamps).

A rubber stamp piece of acting is conventional, false and lifeless. It had its origin in theatrical routine. It conveys neither feelings, thoughts nor any images characteristic of human beings. Motor adjustments, on the contrary, were intuitive, originally, but they have become mechanical, without sacrificing their quality of naturalness. Because they remain organic and human, they are the antithesis of the rubber stamp.¹⁰³

At the end of this chapter, Tortsov reveals to the acting class six placards, six elements of the creative process that need to be studied, namely ‘inner tempo-rhythm,’ ‘inner characterization,’ control and finish,’ ‘inner ethics and discipline,’ ‘dramatic

¹⁰⁰ Op. cit., 242.

¹⁰¹ Op. cit., 243-244.

¹⁰² Op. cit., 246.

¹⁰³ Op. cit., 257.

charm,’ and ‘logic and coherence.’¹⁰⁴ It is in these elements that we see the connection of the inner work of *An Actor Prepares* with the physical work of an actor which is addressed in the second book of Stanislavski’s system, *Building a Character*.

In the beginning of the short twelfth chapter, Tortsov declares that his students have worked so far on preparing their acting instrument through psycho-technique and they are close to moving to the next level. He makes an analogy to music by having the students identify the triumvirate of inner motive forces—*feeling, mind* (or intellect), and *will*—and calling them virtuosi or the “masters who play on the instrument of our souls.”¹⁰⁵ The close interaction and the interdependency of these three inner motive forces generate the creative process of an actor. Two possible sequences of such interactions that actors could use are described by Stanislavski. The fact that he concludes that the *will* comes at the end of these sequences is very important in the timeline of the development of the Stanislavski ‘system.’ It seems that at the time he wrote *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski could not find *will* as potential initiator in the acting process, but he would later revise this concept in his active analysis process.

We need to evolve an appropriate psycho-technique. Its basis is to take advantage of the reciprocal interaction of the members of this triumvirate in order not only to arouse them by natural means, but also to use them to stir other creative elements.¹⁰⁶

The thirteenth chapter presents the idea of an Unbroken Line in the life of the characters of a play. Actors need to be aware, construct, and follow a continuous line of actions for their characters. The Unbroken Line principle applies also to the concentration of actors who need to put all their efforts and energy into what is happening on the stage

¹⁰⁴ Op. cit., 260.

¹⁰⁵ Op. cit., 266.

¹⁰⁶ Op. cit., 268.

rather than in the audience; their attention toward the events on the stage and the Unbroken Line of actions should prevail in their acting. “A role must have continuous being and its unbroken line.”¹⁰⁷

In the fourteenth chapter, Stanislavski-Tortsov walks us through the actors’ creative process. First, actors must assemble the lines along which their inner forces move; their creative instrument (*mind, feelings, will*) stirs the inner ‘elements’ of an actor in order to draw life from the fiction of the play. Using all their inner forces helps the actors absorb the spiritual content and the innate truthfulness of the play and their roles. Then, the triumvirate of inner forces also gives out energy, power, will, emotion and thought, creating the ‘elements of the artist in the role.’¹⁰⁸ In the context of the specifics of a character, these elements direct the actor toward creative objectives in order to deliver the role. The fusing of these ‘elements’ creates an important inner state, which is labeled by Stanislavski as the “Inner Creative Mood.”¹⁰⁹ He also concludes that this creative state is better than the normal state of a human being because it involves the feeling of ‘solitude in public.’

That is a marvelous sensation. A theater full of people is a splendid sounding board for us. For every moment of real feeling on the stage there is a response, thousands of invisible currents of sympathy and interest, streaming back to us. A crowd of spectators oppresses and terrifies an actor, but it also rouses his truly creative energy. In conveying great emotional warmth it gives him faith in himself and his work.¹¹⁰

The Director also points out the importance that all the elements be present in the artistic creation of a role. Lacking at least one element or using a false one instead may

¹⁰⁷ Op. cit., 273.

¹⁰⁸ Op. cit., 281.

¹⁰⁹ Op. cit., 282.

¹¹⁰ Op. cit., 282-283.

destroy the harmony of the entire creative process. “The moment you introduce a false note truth becomes a theatrical convention. Belief becomes faith in mechanical acting. Objectives change from human to artificial; imagination evaporates and is replaced by theatrical claptrap.”¹¹¹

In the second part of the fourteenth chapter, the Director unveils the actors’ ‘warm-ups’ before acting in a play, the inner preparation process that they should do prior to the beginning of the first act. The list includes arriving two hours before their entrance, relaxing any muscular tension, warming-up their imagination by focusing on one object and using circles of attention, gradually bringing all ‘elements’ in the play of their imagination, and finally going over the fundamental parts of their respective roles.

The concept of Super-Objective of the plot is introduced in the fifteenth chapter as the main objective of a play that must bond together individual objectives, as well as the actors’ thoughts, feelings, and actions. The utmost importance of identifying the Super-Objective of a play is vital to the work of the actors while preparing and performing on the stage. “The main theme must be firmly fixed in an actor’s mind throughout the performance. It gave birth to the writing of the play. It should also be the fountain-head of the actor’s artistic creation.”¹¹² The actors’ continuous inner line of effort throughout a play constitutes the *through line of action*. Stanislavski considers that this *through line of action* directs all small units and objectives of the play toward its Super-Objective. At the end of this chapter, Stanislavski-Tortsov concludes that his ‘system’ of acting helps the student-actors gain control over three important features in

¹¹¹ Op. cit., 284.

¹¹² Op. cit., 295.

their creative process, namely *inner grasp* (the inner state or power of the actors created by the main inner current of a play¹¹³), *the through line of action*, and *the super-objective*. Puzzled by the conclusions of Tortsov's first course on acting, student Kostya Nazvanov (narrator and Stanislavski's younger *alter ego*) still longs to be inspired. The Director answers,

My 'system' will never manufacture inspiration. It can only prepare a favorable ground for it. If I were you, I would give up chasing this phantom, inspiration. Leave it to that miraculous fairy, nature, and devote yourself to what lies within the realm of human conscious control. Put a role on the right road and it will move ahead. It will grow broader and deeper and will in the end lead to inspiration.¹¹⁴

The concluding chapter of *An Actor Prepares* begins with the reinforcement of the idea that conscious psycho-technique may lead actors to their subconscious, the root of artistic inspiration. The actors' psycho-technique means putting themselves in an inner creative state that helps them find their super-objective and through line of action.

Put your thought on what arouses your inner motive forces, what makes for your inner creative mood. Think of your super-objective and the through line of action that leads to it. In short, have in your mind everything that can be consciously controlled and that will lead you to the subconscious. That is the best possible preparation for inspiration. But never try for a direct approach to inspiration for its own sake. It will result in physical contortion and the opposite of everything you desire.¹¹⁵

The conscious psycho-technique is a sequence of events that begins with the freeing of the muscles under a strict concentrated attention on one's body, and continues with the transfer of attention to the supposed circumstances of the exercise. Then, actors need to create new conditions for one's make-believe life, the source of real emotion, and force themselves to carry out each creative act to its fullest limit.

¹¹³ As defined in Op. cit., 296.

¹¹⁴ Op. cit., 302.

¹¹⁵ Op. cit., 314.

Carry all of the elements of the inner creative state, your inner motive forces, and your through line of action to the limit of human (not theatrical) activity, and you will inevitably feel the reality of your inner life. Moreover you will not be able to resist believing in it.¹¹⁶

The technical means to push each element to its very limit deal with identifying obstacles and finding solutions for them, as well as with a constant search for ways to facilitate the process.

In terms of difficulties, Stanislavski lists the public aspect of an actor's work. In order to overcome this challenge, the process requires the achievement of a proper 'creative state' and the introduction of the slightest stimulus so that the inner nature begins functioning. This stimulus can be some unexpected, spontaneous incident that is true to the super-objective and the through line of action. Vagueness represents another difficulty and the only way to deal with it is to clear up all that is lacking in precision. The way of dealing with the natural limitations of actors is for them to study their art and themselves in relation to it. Another obstacle on Stanislavski's list results from too conscientious work, in which case the actors are advised not to try so hard.

Stanislavski admits that the constructive side through which actors reach the "threshold of the subconscious"¹¹⁷ has to deal with the fact that this realm is not subject to reasoning. Consequently, he engages his imaginary students in a discussion on the creative force of the super-objective. The Director reaches the conclusion that larger objectives absorb the smaller ones that naturally fall under nature's guidance and under the subconscious.

You will see these larger objectives undergo a transformation, similar to that of the smaller ones, when the super-objective supersedes them all. They fall into

¹¹⁶ Op. cit., 315.

¹¹⁷ Op. cit., 318.

place as steps leading to a final, all-embracing goal – steps that will, to a large extent, be taken subconsciously.¹¹⁸

In close connection with these larger objectives, the through line of action has a creative force that drives the actors closer to their objectives and constitutes an instrumental ferment that facilitates the natural, subconscious behavior of actors in their roles. Stanislavski argues that in their search for the super-objective, artists need to pursue both the intellectual preparatory work for a play and its roles as well as the feeling of the atmosphere of their impersonation, and “pour these feelings into their already prepared inner state.”¹¹⁹ The Director continues:

An actor must not be forcibly fed on other people’s ideas, conceptions, emotion memories or feelings. Each person has to live through his own experiences. It is important that they be individual to him and analogous to those of the person he is to portray. An actor cannot be fattened like a capon. His own appetite must be tempted. When that is aroused he will demand the material he needs for simple actions; he will then absorb what is given him and make it his own. The director’s job is to get the actor to ask and look for the details that will put life into his part. He will not need these details for an intellectual analysis of his part. He will want them for the carrying out of actual objectives.¹²⁰

The last pages of *An Actor Prepares* unveil Stanislavski’s vision on acting as truthful as any human being can. He presents his highly artistic ideals in a purely naturalistic way, emphasizing the artist’s need to freedom of expression of his own human and spiritual being. “You cannot follow the line of external action sincerely and directly and not have the corresponding emotions,”¹²¹ says the Director to his young aspiring actors. The focus of all actors on stage should be only on the super-objective and the through line of action and the acting should happen subconsciously, in a natural way.

¹¹⁸ Op. cit., 323.

¹¹⁹ Op. cit., 326.

¹²⁰ Op. cit., 326-327.

¹²¹ Op. cit., 329.

Stanislavski's opinion is that the only way mechanical or stereotyped acting can be avoided is when the artists recreate their parts with sincerity, truth, and directness all the time. He goes beyond the boundaries of stage life and expands the philosophical aspect of his discussion on art to the real life itself. The highest purpose in one's life is named supreme objective and the steps one takes in a lifetime in order to fulfill it is called the supreme through line of action.¹²² Stanislavski clarifies that not all subconscious activity represents inspiration. The sought-after concept of inspiration is a subtle blend of conscious and subconscious activities reflected in objectives and their through line of action. Creativity in Stanislavski's 'system' requires "the conception and birth of a new being – the person in the part. [...] Each dramatic and artistic image, created on the stage, is unique and cannot be repeated, just as in nature."¹²³

II.1.3 *Building a Character*

A continuation of the first book of Stanislavski's 'Acting Trilogy,' *Building a Character* presents, in the same semi-fictional form, Director Tortsov's acting class and their work on the external, physical aspects of acting. The way any human being on stage can produce an artistic external characterization is summarized by Tortsov at the end of their first lesson-chapter:

Each person evolves an external characterization out of himself, from others, takes it from real or imaginary life, according to his intuition, his observation of himself and others. He draws it from his own experience of life or that of his friends, from pictures, engravings, drawings, books, stories, novels, or from some

¹²² Op. cit., 331.

¹²³ Op. cit., 336.

simple incident – it makes no difference. The only proviso is that while he is making this external research he must not lose his inner self.¹²⁴

The first step in this direction is presented under the form of a masquerade.

Students are asked by the Director to choose a costume and make-up of a certain character and to present their external appearance in front of the entire class. We learn in the second chapter about young Kostya's process of transformation into his character, the Critic, based on his chosen costume. Then, as expected, chapter three presents the Director's critique of the costume experiment. An important element is the realization that actors must not adapt their roles to their personal appeal. When addressing young Sonya, who tries to conquer her audience through her good looks, the Director reproves her: "You see, you really love yourself in the part more than you love the part in yourself. That is a mistake. You have capabilities. You can show not only yourself but a role created by you."¹²⁵ Tortsov continues enumerating a variety of types of unnatural external characterizations from a variety of so-called actors that are limited in artistic expression because of theatrical clichés and conventional mannerisms. The Director praised Kostya's impersonation of the Critic and after the young student described in detail his creative process, Tortsov concluded that through characterization the actor as individual can hide himself behind the external appearance of the character he portrays and detailed characteristics and behaviors specific to the role may easily surface.

Characterization, when accompanied by a real transposition, a sort of re-incarnation, is a great thing. And since an actor is called upon to create an image while he is on the stage and not just show himself off to the public, it is something that becomes a necessity for all of us. In other words all actors who are artists, the

¹²⁴ Constantin Stanislavski, and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, transl., *Building a Character* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 2003), 6.

¹²⁵ *Op. cit.*, 19.

creators of images, should make use of characterizations which enable them to become ‘incarnate’ in their parts.¹²⁶

In the fourth chapter, Stanislavski focuses on the expressiveness of the human body. The Director steps in a gymnastics class for actors to reiterate how people generally do not know how to develop their physical body, which on the stage becomes the main instrument of actors. Physical shortcomings should be controlled and manipulated by actors on the stage in order to avoid the public’s distraction because of them. Acting students are encouraged to exercise daily their body musculature for its general development and for a clear awareness of all their muscles and their capabilities. “The exercises contribute toward making your physical apparatus more mobile, flexible, expressive and even more sensitive.”¹²⁷ Sports are discouraged, however, because of the tendency to over-develop the body in a direction or another. Such unnatural excesses are not welcomed for the purpose of acting; gymnastics for the young actors is intended primarily to correct bad habits and deficiencies.

There is no such thing as ideal human structure. It has to be made. To that end one must first study the body and understand the proportions of its various parts. When the defects have been found they must be corrected.¹²⁸

Stanislavski introduces into the discussion about body expressivity his childhood image of the circus by bringing in his imaginary classroom a circus clown in order to teach his students, through tumbling and acrobatic stunts, about the quality of decisiveness that is needed in climactic episodes of a role. In such great moments on the stage, an actor “cannot stop to think, to doubt, to weigh considerations, to make ready

¹²⁶ Op. cit., 29.

¹²⁷ Op. cit., 37.

¹²⁸ Op. cit., 38.

and test himself. He must act, he must clear the jump at full gallop.”¹²⁹ Another benefit is that acrobatics can facilitate actors to be physically efficient when on the stage and to act in quick tempo.

Dancing classes are also encouraged for young actors because they serve as a preparatory tool for physical development exercises, through broad, definite, continuous motions of various body parts in harmony. Dance can also correct the position of arms, legs, and backs.

Enumerating dance, ballet, and gymnastics exercises, Stanislavski demonstrates that, during the preparation of an actor, a great importance must be given to the plasticity of the body through the development of its extremities (arms, legs, wrists, fingers, ankles). Natural body movements on the stage must be in concordance with the circumstances of the play and must become meaningful gestures.

In acting no gesture must be made merely for the gesture’s sake. Your movements must always have a purpose and be connected with the content of your part. Purposeful and productive action will automatically exclude affectation, posturing and other dangerous results.¹³⁰

In the fifth chapter, Stanislavski continues to focus on the idea of plasticity of motion and begins with the discussion around the purpose of gestures and poses in acting on the stage. They should become the “projection of some inner experience” and be “converted into real action with purpose and content.”¹³¹ The simplest action of walking on the stage becomes not so simple anymore under these circumstances and actors need a long period of walking exercises only to re-learn the proper way to do it naturally and to eliminate peculiarities. The mechanics of the human apparatus while walking are

¹²⁹ Op. cit., 39.

¹³⁰ Op. cit., 45.

¹³¹ Op. cit., 50.

gradually discovered by the students, but when asked to try the new ideas, some show even a regress from their old way of walking. The key to a light and unbroken way of walking seems to stand in the rising of one foot and the smooth transition of the body weight from one foot to the other. Tortsov emphasizes that movement and action are essential to any performing art, while his acting students move on to the “mercury drop” exercise that teaches them about fluidity of movement. Guiding muscular energy into natural movements of their body as well as eliminating unnecessary muscular tensions by freeing the blocked energy are the actors’ main goals regarding the plasticity of movement concept. Drawing a parallel between the energy used in wordless communications, concept introduced in the previous year (book), and the flux of energy necessary in the plasticity of physical motions, Tortsov begins to explore other artistic territories, including music:

Incidentally this is also true in other arts. Do you not believe that music must have that same unbroken line of sound? Obviously a violin cannot sing the melody until the bow moves smoothly and steadily over its strings. [...] What would you think of a singer who would cough out intermittent sounds instead of pouring forth the unbroken sonorous note?¹³²

Stanislavski introduces the concept of emotion of movement,¹³³ defining it as meaningful physical motions that are based on the actors’ inner line of activity. Emotions, will, and intellect generate an unbroken line of energy that is transferred with systematic exercise into fluent, plastic body movements that can then be molded in any artistic form. In their exercises, the student-actors use music in support of their attempts to discipline their movements and find a close connection between their inner movement of energy and any particular melody carrying its characteristic tempo-rhythm context.

¹³² Op. cit., 66.

¹³³ Op. cit, 70.

Stanislavski concludes that “external plasticity is based on our inner sense of the movement of energy.”¹³⁴

In the sixth chapter, Stanislavski emphasizes the importance for the actors in training for a role to get rid of superfluous gestures. These elements can easily hinder the physical embodiment of a role by blurring their acting through uncontrolled and unnecessary movement. Continuing his dissertation on the elements of Restraint and Control, Stanislavski recollects the story of a military band and its conductor whose automatic movements of his baton in the same constant tempo generated, after only a little while, the effect of producing un compelling, mechanical music. In contrast, Stanislavski chooses to describe the artistry of Arthur Nikisch, a famous orchestra conductor of his time. Nikisch demonstrated meticulous care for and understanding of the true substance of the music. He had the ability to control an entire orchestra with the tip of his baton but in the same time possessed that ‘intangible touch’ in all his conducting gestures that drew expressive coloring from each instrument. His conducting showed restraint and mathematical precision but never became monotonous or boring in slow tempo. On the other hand, his fast tempi never hurried the music, since he knew that expressiveness is most important and it should be allowed to be perceived by the audience.

Of how many conductors can one say that he knew how to penetrate into, guess at and catch all the fine shadings of a piece of music and to do what Nikisch did with such sensitivity, not only cull them out but also to convey and illumine them for the public? Nikisch did it because his work was performed not only with magnificent restraint but also with brilliantly keen finish.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Op. cit., 74.

¹³⁵ Op. cit., 82.

The connection between acting and music-making is reiterated in the seventh chapter in which Stanislavski approaches the elements of Diction and Singing. The parallel is obvious, since he proclaims, “Speech is music. The text of a part or a play is a melody, an opera, or a symphony. Pronunciation on the stage is as difficult an art as singing, it requires training and technique bordering on virtuosity.”¹³⁶ Stanislavski acknowledges the richness of meaning one can find in speech because it communicates messages from both the human mind and the human soul. In this context, diction is a must for all actors. Director Tortsov and Madame Zarembo, the diction coach, developed strategies and techniques to teach the young acting students how to correctly pronounce sounds, syllables, words, and phrases so that they maximize their communication skills and fully utilize this fundamental acting element. Tortsov enumerates several common deficiencies regarding the voice and vocal production, including a disagreeable timbre, a limited range, a lack of volume or expressivity, and inflexibility. He reaches the conclusion that in order to develop a good natural voice for singing and for speech, actors must learn the proper placing of sounds, must correct unnecessary pressures, tensions, forcing, and wrong breathing and articulation.

Stanislavski shares with his imaginary students the elements of vocal production that he learned while training to become an opera singer. The main conclusion of his observations and research was that it is imperative that singers have their voices placed ‘in the mask’ so that the sounds they produce resonate best and can be easily manipulated for various situations.

¹³⁶ Op. cit., 88.

The singers said to me: ‘A sound which is laid against the teeth or is driven against the bone, that is, the skull, acquires a ring and power,’ sounds which, by contrast, fall against the soft parts of the palate or the glottis, vibrate as though muffled with cotton. Another singer said to me: ‘I place sounds when I sing exactly the way a sick or sleeping person does when he sighs, with a closed mouth. By thus directing the sound to the front of my face, into the nasal cavity, I open my mouth and continue to make the mooring sound as before. But now the previous sigh turns into a sound, freely emitted and resonant as it detonates against the nasal cavities and other sounding boards of the facial mask.’¹³⁷

Then, Stanislavski continues to give details about his own training in vocal production. First, he experimented humming various sounds in the middle register of his voice by placing them in several resonant places of the mask until reaching fully ringing sonorous qualities. Then, by opening the mouth, those same sounds, experienced to the fullness of their vibration, became nasal. In order to fix this new problem, Stanislavski again experimented new exercises until realizing a slight pressure inside the nose. By simply removing this tension, he was able to clear up the nasal effect. Checking the possibility to widen his vocal range, Stanislavski was amazed that the intense work on the middle register took care of the higher and lower pitches as well. His next task was to tackle his high register, which he considered to be a very difficult undertaking. It took him a whole year of systematic practice until he was able to reach the higher register with the same tone quality of the middle one. His determination to improve his singing voice finally bore the fine fruits of a matured voice, characterized by a stronger and more substantial tone, capable of singing longer without fatigue, of producing a wider variety of coloring shades, and of equalizing the vowels. However, Stanislavski kept experimenting with a variety of other resonating places of the vocal apparatus and realized the complexity of vocal production, which does not end with singing ‘in the

¹³⁷ Op. cit., 103-104.

mask'. His study of vocal production continued with the problems raised by consonants and their peculiarities in each individual, as well as their combination with vowels.

Trying to implement the findings from the singing to the speaking voice, Stanislavski was again disappointed because all his sounds were again placed in the back of the mouth and throat, particularly in the soft surfaces of the palate. Encouraging his students to carefully learn from experts as to speaking correctly and beautifully at all times, Stanislavski emphasized the need for them to carry on this constant work into their daily life and activities.

The principal result of my work, however, was that in speech I acquired the same unbroken line of sound as I had evolved in singing and without which there can be no true art of the word. This is what I had been searching for so long, what I had dreamed of. It is what lends a quality of beauty and music not only to common conversational speech but also and especially to elevated poetry.¹³⁸

The great importance of speech in acting is evident in the fact that Stanislavski continues his dissertation on this topic in the long eighth chapter, elaborating on the elements of Intonations and Pauses. He urges his acting students to go beyond the words and try to identify the subtext. He defined it as “a web of innumerable, varied inner patterns inside a play and a part, woven from ‘magic ifs,’ given circumstances, all sorts of figments of the imagination, inner movements, objects of attention, smaller and greater truths and a belief in them, adaptations, adjustments and other similar elements.”¹³⁹ Since actors use both their body and their words when playing a role on stage, they should allow their feelings, imagination, and thoughts give life to the empty sounds of the words, which then are produced with an entirely different attitude and become significant.

¹³⁸ Op. cit., 114.

¹³⁹ Op. cit., 121.

As soon as people, either actors or musicians, breathe the life of their own sentiment into the subtext of a piece of writing to be conveyed to an audience, the spiritual well springs, the inner essence is released – the real things which inspired the writing of the play, the poem, the score of music. The whole point of any such creation is in the underlying subtext. Without it the words have no excuse for being presented on the stage. When they are spoken the words come from the author, the subtext from the actor.¹⁴⁰

Stanislavski believes that words create mental images for the audience so it is crucial that actors draw visual images through their speech. He proposes a method that accomplishes this communication of visual images through words every time while on stage. Actors should try to penetrate and feel the meaning of a text. Then, in order to overcome the elusive and unstable factor of the memory of emotions felt as well as the lack of disciplined concentration on the meaning of the words, actors should focus on inner images, study them and describe them as vividly as possible. When playing on the stage, actors should speak those words using these pre-studied inner images (their visual memory) toward their partner actors, the result providing greater stability and power to playing their roles.

This method is similar to the ones already described when working on movement and action, in which the Director and his acting students “turned to the more palpable, steady physical actions for help in arousing our unstable emotion memories, and in order to create the unbroken line of a part.”¹⁴¹ This time, the actors nurture the element of visual memory as well in order to help and maintain the strength and endurance of their verbal discourse over repeated performances of the same role.

¹⁴⁰ Op. cit., 123.

¹⁴¹ Op. cit., 135.

Stanislavski defines then the function of logical pauses in the spoken lines of actors as uniting words into groups, which he calls measures of speech, and dividing these groups from one another.¹⁴²

Reading in speech measures contains another element of great practical advantage to you. It is an aid to the process of feeling yourself in your part. [...] This habit of speaking in measures will make your speech more graceful in form, intelligible and profound in content, because it forces you to keep your mind constantly on the essential meaning of what you are saying when you are on the stage. [...] The first work to be done with speech or with words is always to divide into measures, to place the logical pauses where they belong.¹⁴³

The way actors should use their vocal intonations is influenced by the logical pauses of the discourse and by punctuation marks. Each of these intonations are very important because they can produce a certain effect on the listeners, from the question mark which calls for an answer to the exclamation sign asking for sympathy, approval, or protest and to the colon demanding attentive consideration for what follows.

Furthermore, Stanislavski introduces the concept of psychological pauses, which actors use to add life to their parts' thoughts, phrases, and measures. "If speech without the logical pause is unintelligible, without the psychological pause it is lifeless. The logical pause is passive, formal, inert, the psychological one is of necessity brimming with activity and rich inner content. The logical pause serves our brain, the psychological, our feelings."¹⁴⁴ An effective eloquent silence without dragging the vocal discourse, the psychological pause needs to be filled in with appropriate facial expressions or slight movements, those conscious or unconscious expressions of communion. Finally, a third type of pause in both music and speech is mentioned using its German nomenclature,

¹⁴² Op. cit., 137.

¹⁴³ Op. cit., 139.

¹⁴⁴ Op. cit., 150.

Luftpause or breath pause (breath mark), which should be used quickly just in time to catch a breath and continue the discourse.

Related to the topic of intonation, dynamic contrasts are of great value. Stanislavski demonstrates in a series of examples about the relativity of loud versus soft. In artistic acting singing (or music in general), loudness cannot be a measure in itself, but only in the context of multiple dynamic levels, which he calls inflections. “Forte is not forte in itself, or piano is not piano in itself. It means that there is no such thing as an absolute measure for either of them. [...] Forte is a relative concept.”¹⁴⁵

The necessity of producing a loud volume of sound on the stage is actually questioned by Stanislavski because in most cases it has no purpose. However, he acknowledges some instances when using a loud voice may be necessary.

This is notably true of mob scenes, or else when one is speaking to the accompaniment of music, singing, other sounds and sound effects. Even here one must never forget that it is still necessarily a question of relative, varied gradation of sound, and that allowing the voice to hang on one of several extreme notes in the vocal gamut is disturbing to the public. [...] It is true that this volume is not to be sought in high tension use of the voice, not in loudness or shouting, but in the raising and lowering of the voice, in intonations. Furthermore, volume is to be sought in the gradual expansion from piano to forte and in their mutual relationship.¹⁴⁶

Stanislavski begins his next chapter emphasizing the role of accents in the verbal discourse of actors. Accentuation underlines key words in phrases and by doing that it projects a better image of the subtext. The meaning of an accent varies and may indicate “affection of malice, respect or scorn, frankness or slyness; it may be ambiguous, sarcastic. It serves up a word on a salver.”¹⁴⁷ Stanislavski mentions three levels of

¹⁴⁵ Op. cit., 158.

¹⁴⁶ Op. cit., 160.

¹⁴⁷ Op. cit., 162.

accentuation: heavy, medium, and light. This scale is deliberately used in longer speeches that require certain words or series of words to be strongly emphasized while others are less accented, but still important, and yet others are toned down as if a background. Actors must also combine accentuation with intonation in order to add expressiveness to their speech.

When discussing the perspective on character building in the tenth chapter, Stanislavski considers two parallel lines, one of the role and one of the actor on the stage, his or her psycho-technique while acting. Referring to an orchestra concert as having been monotonous because of the lack of shadings and consequently boring for the listeners because of a lack of perspective, Stanislavski defines this concept as “the calculated, harmonious inter-relationship and distribution of the parts in a whole play or role.”¹⁴⁸ In other words, any single event on the stage should be considered and justified by the perspective on the role or play (or artistic creation in general). Everything on the stage must have perspective. This becomes an essential tool and reference for actors and artists, in general, as a rule of artistic creation when in front of any audience.

All actors must carefully study the play as a whole in order to form the overall perspective which will then guide them in individual character building. According to Stanislavski, there are three types of perspectives in theatrical arts. First comes the logical perspective, which conveys the coherent thoughts in a scene, episode, or act through a series of key words and their accents. Then, the perspective used to convey complex feelings addresses the inner plane of a role, the subtext, inner objectives, desires, and ambitions. Finally, the artistic perspective is used to add color to a story and speech.

¹⁴⁸ Op. cit., 191.

When we come to the laying on of color along the lines of artistic perspectives we again are obliged to adhere to qualities of consecutiveness, tone and harmony. As in paintings, artistic coloring does a very great deal to make it possible to distinguish planes of speech. The important parts, which must be filled out most, are most highly colored, whereas those relegated to the background are less vivid in tonal shades.¹⁴⁹

Stanislavski shares with his students that in acting, the concept of tempo-rhythm is vital for establishing an inner creative state on the stage which manifests in the outer tempo-rhythm of the physical actions. In the eleventh chapter of *Building a Character*, the Director defines the elements of tempo, rhythm, and measure as applicable to any temporal performing art. Establishing the correct tempo-rhythm in a play or of a part is not easy and requires patience and sustained exercise. Oftentimes, actors need to extract the independent tempo-rhythm of their parts in various moments of the play from the general, seemingly chaotic, tempo-rhythm of its complex scenes. The established rhythm used by actors in various circumstances throughout a play can produce “a state of genuine excitement and get from it an emotional impact.”¹⁵⁰ The tempo-rhythm of movement can raise a sense of awareness of what the actor is doing at any given moment as well as suggest appropriate feelings and activate the actors’ creative faculty. Interestingly enough, the acting class uses a musical exercise to influence emotion memory and imagination. In it, the students are asked to “act to music,” meaning to find and use motions to convey, through the corresponding tempo-rhythm, what music suggests to their imagination. The exercise proves the possibility that the same emotional load present in one piece of music can generate a variety of distinct individual interpretations

¹⁴⁹ Op. cit., 193.

¹⁵⁰ Op. cit., 210.

and a diverse emotional response. In Stanislavski's opinion, music as a performing art has a similar yet easier approach than acting when it comes to tempo-rhythm.

The lucky ones are the musicians, the singers, the dancers! They have metronomes, conductors, choir masters. They have their problems of tempo-rhythm all worked out, they are aware of its prime importance in their creative work. The accuracy of their musical performance is to a certain extent guaranteed, that is to say it is established, from the point of view of correct time and measure. These things are entered on their musical scores and are always regulated by conductors.¹⁵¹

Stanislavski continues this comparison with the musical arts with his reference to a choral scene from an opera he directed. All the participants, though not too familiar with acting techniques or tempo-rhythm and not rehearsing as much as actors, managed to create a viable scene, far superior than anything achieved in the acting class. The solution consisted of the use of tempo-rhythm, which "gave color, smoothness, shapeliness, suppleness to an otherwise ragged scene." It lent to the singers "a quality of magnificent clarity, fluency, finish, plasticity and harmony", and gave all the musicians "a true feeling for and possession of the inner aspects of their parts."¹⁵² He concludes that a play's tempo-rhythm is the one of the through line of action and the subtextual content of the play.

The importance of tempo-rhythm is so relevant for Stanislavski that he continues its study in the following chapter that addresses the concept in relationship to speech. The temporal aspect of the line of words denotes the need for organization and inter-relationship among words and syllables in a person's speech. The parallel with the singing art is again relevant for the acting students.

¹⁵¹ Op. cit., 235.

¹⁵² Op. cit., 238.

If the composer has put a whole note, the true singer will hold it to the end of the bar. If the music calls for triplets or syncopations, he will sing them with the mathematical rhythm required. The precision has an irresistible effect. Art requires order, discipline, precision and finish. Even in cases where one is called upon to convey a rhythmic effect musically, one must do it with clear cut finish. Even chaos and disorder have their tempo-rhythm.¹⁵³

Tortsov presents ways to achieve first a slow but fluent speech, then a quick but brilliant one. He correlates the rhythm of speech with the sensitive world of an artist, the rhythm of the verse or prose with the clearly defined rhythm of thoughts and emotions. “A clear cut rhythm of speech facilitates rhythmic sensibility and the opposite is also true: the rhythm of sensations experienced helps to produce clear speech.”¹⁵⁴ Musical rhythms, with their sequences of notes, durations, and rests, are the perfect examples to understand that in prose, letters, syllables, and words as well as breathing pauses are all inter-connected in complex rhythms that form measures of speech. An important aspect of tempo-rhythm in temporal arts is the combination of phrases of varying rhythms in one whole. If in music a conductor might visually make a smooth, gradual transition to a new tempo, a more complex rhythmic pattern, or even articulation, using conducting gestures, actors have to train themselves to internalize this kind of a transition and mentally make the switch from one tempo-rhythm to another.

In order to convey the utmost importance of the concept of tempo-rhythm in speech, Stanislavski describes a phenomenon that he experienced when listening to Italian actor, Tommaso Salvini, who was performing in his mother-tongue. Without the knowledge and understanding of the foreign language, a person can still be involved in the emotional world experienced by an actor on the stage not only through his vocal

¹⁵³ Op. cit., 249.

¹⁵⁴ Op. cit., 251-252.

intonations and inflections, but mostly because of the “clear cut, expressive tempo-rhythm of his speech”¹⁵⁵ that can captivate and engage an audience.

As in music, training with a metronome in the area of speech rhythm and tempo is necessary for all actors. However, Stanislavski points out that metronome markings in music are only references and that gifted musicians always use to slightly shift or alter the tempo in order to convey certain emotions or changes in mood, based on their personal sensitivity to the music performed and to their creative imagination. Actors have to mentally use their inner metronome to keep the tempo-rhythm of their speech, but always be aware of the necessary, sometimes imperceptible changes in tempo.

For gifted musicians an andante is not an inflexible andante, an allegro is not an absolute allegro. The first may at any time impinge on the second, or the second on the first. This life-giving oscillation does not exist in the mechanical tick of a metronome. In a good orchestra the tempi are constantly, almost imperceptibly, shifting and blending like the colors in a rainbow. All this applies to the theater. We have directors and actors who are just mechanical craftsmen, and others who are splendid artists. The tempo of speech of the first is boring, monotonous, formal, whereas that of the second is infinitely varied, lively and expressive.¹⁵⁶

Stanislavski concludes that while in actions, tempo-rhythm can create the mood and consequently stimulate corresponding emotional experiences, speech tempo-rhythm creates a state of inner experience and inner sensation. It directly stimulates the emotion memory and can arouse in an actor a true sense of living his part. “The direct effect on our mind is achieved by the words, the text, the thought, which arouse consideration. Our will is directly affected by the super-objective, by other objectives, by a through line of

¹⁵⁵ Op. cit., 259.

¹⁵⁶ Op. cit., 265.

action. Our feelings are directly worked upon by tempo-rhythm. This is an all important acquisition for our psycho-technique.”¹⁵⁷

The subject of stage magnetism (also known as stage charm) is briefly discussed by Stanislavski in the next chapter. It is explained as an intangible quality that some actors possess that helps them allure their audiences. However, Stanislavski considers that this is a dangerous asset for actors who may fall into the mistake of focusing only on the purpose of self-exhibition rather than on their roles. He talks about methods or approaches to shape a stage charm for the sake of artistic achievements. “Art lends beauty and nobility, and whatever is beautiful and noble has the power to attract.”¹⁵⁸

In the final three chapters of *Building a Character*, Constantin Stanislavski reaches the heights of his theories on acting. First, he calls the complex work environment of actors on stage theater ethics, discipline, and sense of joint enterprise. It is this ethics in the theater that contributes ultimately to the creative state of actors on stage. A primary condition for actors to become inspired in their work is to follow the principle, “Love art in yourself and not yourself in art.”¹⁵⁹ Stanislavski encourages his young actors to nurture in themselves the “passion for what is fine, elevating, for great thoughts and feelings”¹⁶⁰ that will help their understanding and assimilation of the works of the great playwrights, as well as their encounter with modern writers, artists, scientists, sociologists, or poets. Altogether, these collaborations will generate a deeper understanding of the meanings of their art through the study of techniques and methods of creativeness, through the torments and joy of creation, as well as the joys of

¹⁵⁷ Op. cit., 270.

¹⁵⁸ Op. cit., 274.

¹⁵⁹ Op. cit., 276.

¹⁶⁰ Idem.

accomplishment. Stanislavski sees the fascination of the artistic endeavors even in the doubts and failures of actors or productions, because there lies the stimulus for continuous work for improvement and progress. He thinks that the aesthetic satisfaction is never complete in real artists, which is a positive creative aspect given the energy that is provoked constantly. “Success is transient, evanescent. The real passion lies in the poignant acquisition of knowledge about all the shadings and subtleties of the creative secrets.”¹⁶¹ Stanislavski sees the actors as having a mission in the theatrical arts for which they need to develop a sense of self-control, the ethics and discipline of a public servant, because their message to the world on the stage and beyond may be characterized as elevating and noble. He underlines the importance of the collective creative effort in the theater world; ensemble acting is of a primary role in this art form. Rehearsals are supposed to be events that reveal problems that actors need to work on individually at home or in a practice room. They need to understand the right attitude about working together in rehearsals and the role of the director in giving instructions and expecting actors to literally take notes so that they can plan their homework accordingly. Actors work not only with facts and lines, but most of all with feelings that need to be recalled or evoked and that are specific to the roles in discussion. Comparing the practice routines of singers, pianists, dancers, writers, or other artists with the actors’ regular workouts, Stanislavski concludes that “an actor is responsible for his arms, his legs, his eyes, his face, the plasticity of his whole body, his rhythm, his motion”¹⁶² and exercises to develop and maintain the control over and the well functioning of these elements must be done on

¹⁶¹ Op. cit., 277.

¹⁶² Op. cit., 288.

a systematic basis all their lives. Stanislavski's philosophical dissertations about the ethics of the theater expand the mentality of people to new horizons in which the ideal theatrical institution, having its social, artistic and educational significance, participates in its entirety toward the common goal of expressing in physical and dramatic terms the fundamental idea behind any writer's play.

In the chapter Patterns of Accomplishment, Stanislavski summarizes the fundamentals of the so-called 'system': first, the principle of activity – actors do not play character images and emotions, but act in the images and passions of a role; second, the actors' work should focus on producing the given circumstances in which true feelings emerge spontaneously; and third, the principle, "through conscious technique to the subconscious creation of artistic truth" that governs the 'system' of acting.¹⁶³ Stanislavski emphasizes the idea that the process of living the part is crucial; every action in the creative work must be motivated and brought to life by feelings. The inner life of the artist is driven by three motive forces, namely the Mind, Will, and Feelings, which activate the various elements of the inner and outer creative state. In order to better understand the 'system', it is very important here to describe in detail the summary¹⁶⁴ that Stanislavski/Tortsov provided the students with regard to the creative process:

1. Imagination and its Inventions, the Magic If, and the Given Circumstances;
2. The established theme is broken up into Units and their Objectives;
3. Concentration of Attention on an Object in order to achieve an objective;
4. Actors must achieve a Sense of Truth in what they are doing;

¹⁶³ Based on Op. cit., 303-304.

¹⁶⁴ Based on Op. cit., 306-307.

5. Their desire to act leads spontaneously to Action;
6. Communion, that connection and exchange between actors, objects, or audience;
7. In relationship with Communion comes Adaptation;
8. Actors call upon the Inner Tempo-Rhythm to stir dormant feelings;
9. These elements release Emotion Memory to freely express Repeated Feelings and create Sincerity of Emotions; and
10. Logic and Continuity, which are present in every phase of the actors' work process.

With regard to the external, physical life of an actor, Stanislavski describes the natural steps in any person's morning activities that engage the body in its daily functions and processes, from the basic physical exercises to the waking up of the voice. This parallel with actors' work on their external creative state, their physical readiness, is invigorating. Clear diction, unexpected inflections and cycles of rhythms are all contributing to the actors' external, physical technique that must be "flexible, receptive, expressive, sensitive, responsive, and mobile—like a well oiled and regulated machine in which all the wheels, rollers and cogs work in absolute co-ordination with one another."¹⁶⁵ However, all these elements of inner and outer creative state, combined into the general creative state, cannot accomplish anything without the main generator of a work of art, the super-objective and the path to follow toward it called the through line of action.

¹⁶⁵ Op. cit., 312.

Finally, in the last chapter of *Building a Character*, esoteric as it may be, Stanislavski tries to draw his conclusions on the art of the theater. This includes the reference of his whole approach on acting as the ‘Stanislavski system’ as well as its characterization as being “the art of living a part” in which he asserts the principle that “the main factor in any form of creativeness is the life of a human spirit, that of the actor and his part, their joint feelings and subconscious creation.”¹⁶⁶ The focus of this approach is on the impressions made on emotions, because they have a long-term impact on the audience. This requires the actors to become real living beings on the stage where they should live in accordance with the natural laws, making the task more difficult. Because the ‘system’ is considered by Stanislavski a whole way of life, it is imperative that actors allow themselves to grow in it in time and study it in parts that eventually merge into a whole in order to be deeply understood in all its fundamentals. Delimitations are clearly made at the end of the book:

This ‘system’ is a companion along the way to creative achievement, but it is not a goal in itself. You cannot act the ‘system’: you can work on it at home, but when you step out on to the stage cast it aside, there only nature is your guide. The ‘system’ is a reference book, not a philosophy. Where philosophy begins the ‘system’ ends.¹⁶⁷

II.1.4 *Creating a Role*

Creating a Role represents the third and last book of Stanislavski’s ‘trilogy’ about acting. Published in 1961, twelve years after the second book of the trilogy, *Creating a Role* presents the preparation of specific roles by the young actors who supposedly had already been trained in all aspects of the ‘system’ that were described in the first two

¹⁶⁶ Op. cit., 320.

¹⁶⁷ Op. cit., 327.

books. After the publication in Russia of Stanislavski's manuscripts in the original language, his son sent three versions of this book to Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood for translation into English and publication. These versions had been drafted by Stanislavski himself at various times throughout his career and were all put together to form the final book project. Each of the three versions addresses a certain play, but one of them, which became the opening part of the book, is distinct from the rest of the trilogy with regard to the literary style and also the focus on the actors' preparation of the inner lives of their characters. It had been written between 1916-1920, before Stanislavski created the semi-fictional form used in *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*. Also, Stanislavski was in the early stages of development of his complex acting 'system' in which he was studying and teaching the actor's psycho-technique.¹⁶⁸ It is in the second and third parts of the book, written in the 1930s, that Stanislavski continues Director Tortsov's instructions to his acting students in which he continuously revises his methods and approaches on acting.

From the very beginning of *Creating a Role*, Stanislavski distinguishes three periods in the work of an actor on a role, namely the study of the role, the establishing of its life, and its enacting into a physical form.¹⁶⁹

Though the application of the first part of the book is on a popular 1823 Russian satirical comedy, *Woe from Wit* by Aleksandr Sergeyevich Griboyedov (1795-1829), the first few pages reveal a theoretical approach on the actors' first encounter with a play and their roles. He states that "First impressions have a virginal freshness about them. They

¹⁶⁸ According to Hapgood's explanations in Constantin Stanislavski, Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, transl., and Hermine I. Popper, ed., *Creating a Role* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 2003), Note by the Translator, xii-xiii.

¹⁶⁹ Stanislavski, Hapgood, and Popper, *Creating a Role*, 3.

are the best possible stimuli to artistic enthusiasm and fervor, states which are of great significance in the creative process.”¹⁷⁰ It is most important for actors to come to discover a new role without prejudice, without the influence of others, which can be disruptive and misleading. Actors should come to their own first impressions and avoid any kind of opinion from others. Stanislavski thinks that only when the actors’ own opinions and attitudes toward their roles are formed they could be open to outside advice without shaking their own artistic independence. He again makes an important distinction between possible impression only on the actors’ thoughts by outside opinions and no influence of these opinions on their personal feelings and emotions with regard to the way they themselves perceive those roles.

Stanislavski describes several stages in the period of study of a new role. From the first acquaintance with a part to its analysis, from the study of the external circumstances and putting life into them to creating inner circumstances and eventually appraising the facts of the play as written by its author, the process of creating a role begins with this series of preliminary steps that gravitate around the goal of becoming familiar with the play and the role.

We seldom come to know a play from one reading. Often it has to be approached in different ways. There are plays whose spiritual essence is so deeply embedded that it takes great effort to dig it out. Perhaps its essential thought is so complex that it must be decoded. Or the structure is so confused and intangible that we only come to know it bit by bit, by studying its anatomy piecemeal. You approach such a play as you do a puzzle, and it does not offer much interest until it is solved. It must be read over and over, and with each additional reading we must guide ourselves by what was established the time before.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Idem.

¹⁷¹ Op. cit., 7-8.

Stanislavski believes that artistic creation is the fruit of the artist's feeling. The role of the mind is subordinate and thought represents only one tenth of a person's artistic side. Consequently, an actor's analysis of feelings is critical in regard to the knowledge of a role.¹⁷² According to Stanislavski, the part that the intellect plays in the creative process has much to do with artistic enthusiasm. "An analysis made by means of artistic enthusiasm and ardor acts as the best means to search out creative stimuli in a play, and they in turn provoke an actor's creativeness. As an actor is enthused he comes to understand a part, as he understands it he is even more enthused; the one evokes and reinforces the other."¹⁷³ Stanislavski acknowledges that the actors' profound and detailed mental analysis of the play and their roles should have a greater chance to find agents to stimulate their unconscious creativity.

When Stanislavski begins to describe the play, *Woe from Wit*, he sketches a basic outline of the facts. Those facts represent the present life of the characters, but actors need to determine the past history of their characters as well as the prospect of their future. He also encourages the study of a play on a social level, going beyond the text of the play and researching "a variety of commentaries, pieces of literature, historical writings concerning the period, and so forth."¹⁷⁴ The literary plane of the play is also to be analyzed, with its characteristic elements of form and writing style.

We can dissect a play into its component parts, in order to understand its structure, to admire the harmony and combination of its various parts, its elegance, smoothness, logic of development, the scenic quality of its action, the

¹⁷² According to Op. cit., 9.

¹⁷³ Op. cit., 10.

¹⁷⁴ Op. cit., 18.

inventiveness of exposition, the characterization of the *dramatis personae*, their parts, the hints at their future.¹⁷⁵

Stanislavski discusses then the intricate aspects of the phenomenology of artistic endeavor, in particular the theater art. In any such artistic creative process, it is necessary to transform theatrical facts and circumstances from the text of the play into live, human circumstances through the artistic imagination of the actors. They need to develop a rich imaginative life that can assimilate and adapt the life of another person, the one of the character in a play. “Without imagination there can be no creativeness,”¹⁷⁶ Stanislavski writes. He continues by distinguishing between visual and acoustical types of imagination in actors as well as between passive and active imagining.

You can be the observer of your dream, but you can also take an active part in it—that is you can find yourself mentally in the center of circumstances and condition, a way of life, furnishings, objects, and so forth, which you have imagined. You no longer see yourself as an outside onlooker, but you see what surrounds you. In time, when this feeling of “being” is reinforced, you can become the main active personality in the surrounding circumstances of your dream; you can begin, mentally, to act, have desires, make an effort, achieve a goal. This is the active aspect of imagination.¹⁷⁷

Stanislavski cautions that there is a critical difference between the “true feeling of the life of the part and some accidentally imagined emotions,”¹⁷⁸ since the latter can force actors into mechanical acting. In his numerous experiments and attempts aimed toward achieving the state of ‘I am,’ Stanislavski discovers the importance played by a certain inanimate object that is part of the décor of a given scene that triggers feelings specific to the contextual character as well as a sense of living that character and of believing in it.

¹⁷⁵ Op. cit., 19.

¹⁷⁶ Op. cit., 21.

¹⁷⁷ Op. cit., 27.

¹⁷⁸ Op. cit., 28-29.

Stanislavski approaches also the ethereal and esoteric principle of communing with other people. Of particular interest is his attempt to discover the soul of a main character in the play, Famusov, by imagining him in his room and trying to communicate (commune) with him “mainly through the invisible radiations of will, vibrations which flow back and forth between two souls.”¹⁷⁹ The exercise proves to be of extreme difficulty since the soul of Famusov was still to emerge in the process of creating that role in itself. However, the idea of communion with other characters of a play is further pursued by Stanislavski in his process of creating a viable role in his character of Alexander Chatski. He concludes that actors need to imagine inner circumstances for their roles and become involved in imaginary actions that should lead them to a metamorphosis of their existence in those roles.

In the next phase of creating the role, the appraising of facts,¹⁸⁰ actors deal with the concrete circumstances of the play itself but without necessarily departing from the result of the first phase of creating inner circumstances for their roles. Stanislavski reiterates the importance for actors to be keen observers of daily life and to accumulate knowledge, impressions, and memories about everything in order to develop subtleties and broaden and vary the life of their imagination. This may lead to a clear perception of the inner and outer circumstances of the life of a play and of a part.

The significance of the appraisal of facts lies in its forcing people to come into contact, mentally, with each other, making them take action, struggle, overcome, or give in to fate or to other people. It uncovers their aims, their personal lives, the mutual attitudes of the actor himself, as a living organism in a role, with other

¹⁷⁹ Op. cit., 31.

¹⁸⁰ Op. cit., 37.

characters in the play. In other words it clarifies the circumstances of the inner life of the play and that is what we are looking for.¹⁸¹

Following the preparatory stage in creating a role, the period of emotional experience implies creativeness in the areas of sincerity of emotions, the inner image of a role, and its spiritual life. Beginning with the circumstances of a play that were analyzed in the first stage, an actor can move next to finding inner impulses to become part of those circumstances and consequently to inner actions. The concept of inner action is instrumental in this acting ‘system,’ because Stanislavski came to the realization that there was a misconception in the theater world of his time that artistic value in any play is given by the amount of actions produced by an external plot. Thus, he emphasizes that “scenic action does not mean walking, moving about, gesticulating on the stage,”¹⁸² and that ‘action’ does not mean ‘miming.’ Acting must be understood as “something internal, nonphysical, a spiritual activity,”¹⁸³ the result of successive independent processes of desires and impulses to accomplish an objective.

Scenic action is the movement from the soul to the body, from the center to the periphery, from the internal to the external, from the thing an actor feels to its physical form. External action on the stage when not inspired, not justified, not called forth by inner activity, is entertaining only the eyes and ears; it does not penetrate the heart, it has no significance in the life of a human spirit in a role.¹⁸⁴

It is important to understand that in order to fully experience their roles, actors not only must accept the indications of the playwright and of the director, but make them a part of their own being in those roles. Stanislavski reiterates that creative objectives are essential in generating emotions and desire to act in certain ways on the stage. Intellectual

¹⁸¹ Op. cit., 45.

¹⁸² Op. cit., 54.

¹⁸³ Idem.

¹⁸⁴ Op. cit., 55.

achievements of theatrical objectives without any emotional foundation lead only to a report on the role and not to the creation of the role. The structural function of creative objectives is revealed when Stanislavski makes another parallel with music.

Life on the stage, as well as off it, consists of an uninterrupted series of objectives and their attainment. They are signals set all along the way of an actor's creative aspirations; they show him the true direction. Objectives are like notes in music, they form the measures, which in turn produce the melody, or rather the emotions—a state of sorrow, joy, and so forth. The melody goes on to form an opera or a symphony, that is to say the life of a human spirit in a role, and that is what the soul of the actor sings.¹⁸⁵

Creating these physical and psychological objectives becomes a crucial process in itself. It involves the full participation of the triumvirate of inner motive forces of an actor: the emotions (feeling), will, and mind (intellect). All these three forces must work in tandem because any interruption in their participation may lead to clichés and conventionalism. “When violence to our spiritual and physical natures is present, when our emotions are in chaos, when we lack the logic and consecutiveness of objectives, we do not genuinely live a part,”¹⁸⁶ writes Stanislavski. On this basis and in the context of the play, *Woe from Wit*, Stanislavski exemplifies how creative physical and simple psychological objectives can be constructed and be logically put in a consecutive order to form major objectives, units, scenes, and acts of a play. Essentially, this is what he calls the score of a role.¹⁸⁷ It is intended that, once established, this score of a role becomes habitual for the actor through frequent repetition, a very important aspect of creativeness. Quoting Volkonski, Stanislavski reiterates that the repetition of the complex score of a role makes it become habitual for the actors, the habitual easy, and the easy beautiful.

¹⁸⁵ Op. cit., 57.

¹⁸⁶ Op. cit., 63.

¹⁸⁷ Op. cit., 68.

“Habit creates second nature, which is second reality. The score automatically stirs the actor to physical action.”¹⁸⁸

However, Stanislavski writes that the score only shows the way but without producing life.¹⁸⁹ In order to add life to their roles, actors must find objectives that stir strong feelings summed up into passions. Thus, the actors’ inner state adds a complex of color and depth of meaning to the life of their characters. He calls this changed inner state (or mood) of an actor the inner tone or the germ of feeling.

When depth is added to the score of a part, the facts and the objectives are altered only in the sense that inner impulses, psychological intimations, an inner point of departure—all the things that constitute the inner tone of the score and give it a firm basis of justification—have been added.¹⁹⁰

Stanislavski considers that including the actors’ passionate emotional life into their roles is essential for the creation process of those roles, because it brings to life the human side of their characters through the contribution of the actors’ individualities. With respect to the human passions, they are a complex of many individual and oftentimes contradictory feelings, experiences, and states.¹⁹¹ They also develop gradually and slowly. Any sudden exhibition of a passionate state on the stage may appear artificial if it hasn’t been logically built in a normal succession of various individual feelings and emotional stages. This is why Stanislavski encourages actors to observe, study, and know “the psychology of the human soul and nature”¹⁹² in order to understand in detail the complex and varied human passions as well as the sequence of human feelings that constitute them.

¹⁸⁸ Op. cit., 69.

¹⁸⁹ Op. cit., 70.

¹⁹⁰ Op. cit., 71.

¹⁹¹ Op. cit., 75.

¹⁹² Op. cit., 79.

Next, Stanislavski brings into discussion the concept of super-objective of a play, which represents the gravitational center for all the objectives of the score of a role. “The super-objective contains the meaning, the inner sense, of all the subordinate objectives of the play,”¹⁹³ writes Stanislavski. The concept of through action is also described here as being for an actor the active attainment of the super-objective.

The actor must learn how to compose a score of lively physical and psychological objectives; to shape his whole score into one all-embracing supreme objective; to strive toward its attainment. Taken all together the superobjective (desire), through action (striving), and attainment (action) add up to the creative process of living a part emotionally. Thus the process of living your part consists of composing a score for your role, of a superobjective, and of its active attainment by means of the through line of action.¹⁹⁴

Finally, Stanislavski brings back the role of the intangible unconscious creative intuition, which he calls the superconscious. Drawing ideas from the yogis of India, Stanislavski postulates that the only way to put to work the hidden realm of the unconscious is through conscious preparatory means. He reiterates the importance for all actors to accumulate a wide variety of knowledge, information, and life experiences. All of them together develop unconscious mental and emotional processes that generate the potential to be used in various artistic situations in a very creative way. “That is why an actor must be constantly filling the storehouse of his memory by studying, reading, observing, traveling, keeping in touch with current social, religious, political, and other forms of life. And when he turns over these handfuls of thought to his subconscious he must not be in a hurry; he must know how to wait patiently.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Op. cit., 86.

¹⁹⁴ Op. cit., 89.

¹⁹⁵ Op. cit., 92.

Stanislavski names the third large period in the creation of a role the period of physical embodiment. Continuing with the description of his personal attempts to create the role of Alexander Chatski in Griboyedov's play, *Woe from Wit*, Stanislavski dissects in detail his thought process in preparation of the first reading in the rehearsal room. Even though he feels prepared and can say 'I am' the character Chatski, when it comes the time to proceed with the first reading together, he comes to the strange realization that the text of the play stands in front of his need to act as Chatski; old habits and theatrical clichés return while forced intonations and muscular anarchy impede the natural acting. To this phenomenon, rather than continuing with the first reading, the director of the play invites the actors to engage in a series of improvisations, "preparatory exercises in finding physical expression for feelings, thoughts, actions, and images analogous to those of our parts."¹⁹⁶ Stanislavski emphasizes the importance of an actor's eyes when trying to express feelings. "Our eyes are the most responsive organ of our body. They are the first to react to the manifestations of internal or external life. The speech of the eyes is most eloquent, subtle, direct, and at the same time least concrete."¹⁹⁷ It is in finding this exquisite outlet of human expression that actors should rely on when trying to avoid unnecessary muscular tensions in the rest of their body. After this is accomplished, actors should engage the face to convey the messages of their subconscious. This must be done with careful consideration since "Facial tension and artificiality can distort an emotion beyond all recognition."¹⁹⁸ Only after this sequence of engagements can actors begin to use their voice through sounds, words, intonations and speech. In order for the voice to

¹⁹⁶ Op. cit., 107.

¹⁹⁷ Op. cit., 110.

¹⁹⁸ Op. cit., 113.

serve the expression of emotions, actors must avoid any kind of tension when they pronounce their words and lines. Finally, Stanislavski states that engaging the whole body follows in this sequence and also the same principles. The actions of the body should also be free of tension and loyal to the expression of inner feelings, in accord with the visual, facial, and vocal elements, in order to avoid cliché gestures and acting. “A gesture which is made for its own sake is a piece of force perpetrated on one’s inner feelings and their natural manifestation.”¹⁹⁹

Stanislavski ends this first part of *Creating a Role* with the reiteration of the main principle governing the external technique for a role, namely that actors must put their body expression on the stage completely at the service of one’s inner feelings. He also writes briefly on the principle of communion among actors on stage and with the audience “by means of invisible inner currents, radiations of their spirit, compulsions of their will.”²⁰⁰

The remaining of *Creating a Role* focuses on practical applications of the principles of acting that Stanislavski presented in detail in his first two books. His interest is on William Shakespeare’s *Othello* and on Nikolai Gogol’s *The Inspector General*. A short note by the editor points out the author’s shift of emphasis in these analyses to his novel approach on acting that focuses on “releasing the inner life of a role by first creating its physical life.”²⁰¹

For Stanislavski, the first encounter with a part, most of the time being the first reading, is of utmost importance because it represents the first stage of creativeness.

¹⁹⁹ Op. cit., 115.

²⁰⁰ Op. cit., 118.

²⁰¹ Op. cit., Editor’s Note, 121.

During this first acquaintance, actors have their first impressions about the play and their roles, impressions containing the element of surprise that influences intuitive creativeness. Stanislavski says that it is in this first reading that actors should become infused with enthusiasm, the first sign of a natural, intuitive bond between them and their parts. Another benefit from the actors' first reading of a play together as a group is that they must not only become familiar with their respective individual parts, but also with the details of all the aspects of the play. Following this principle should place all the individual characters in the context of the entire play as a whole. This idea is fundamental in the process of ensemble work of the entire company. Also in this first step of reading the play, actors should come around the table with open minds and hearts so that genuine emotions occur rather than artificial or anticipated reactions destroy the initial image about the play. Prejudice is banned from the 'system.' "You should read every new play remembering, during your first acquaintance with it, to guard against acquiring a wrong or prejudiced attitude about it."²⁰²

In his demonstration on how to proceed with the first reading of a play, Stanislavski-Tortsov doesn't show that he is moved by what is read, but he gives hints at places that require the participation of emotions. The reader should carefully point out the literary beauty of the text, can stop and repeat phrases or expressions, makes comparisons, marks the main phases of the play for clarification, reveals conflicts, and gives a feeling of the potential of the play. Finally, the reader asks the actors to discover the factual sequence of the play (the plot), the proposed circumstances of the author that must be remembered from the very beginning of the work on a role and a play.

²⁰² Op. cit., 136.

Stanislavski's next step in creating a role is to move from the first reading stage to acting physically on the stage. The "new and unexpected method"²⁰³ of his 'system' is described in detail as Tortsov's acting students approach their respective roles from Shakespeare's *Othello*. When asked to go on stage and play the first scene after only their first encounter with the play, the actors discover that even though they don't know the words yet, they can still act "in accordance with the play."²⁰⁴ They figure out a series of simple physical objectives in a logical sequence for the score of their parts. It is in these objectives that actors seek physical truths that can be sensed and can trigger a sense of faith or belief in their physical acts. "And faith, in our kind of work, is one of the most powerful magnets to attract feelings and help you experience them intuitively."²⁰⁵

Obviously, the inexperienced young actors in Tortsov's class are struggling with this new approach and their mentor points out several major problems in their attempts. He refers to their excesses: the actors demonstrate a great anxiety to entertain instead of carrying out specific objectives; they also show over-exertion, an unnecessary increase in activity, so they are asked to cease putting so much effort into their acting, in other words "to cut three-fourths of it."²⁰⁶ In this process, actors should work out the right stencils for the score of their parts, but Stanislavski cautions that this process is not to be identified with the non-artistic rubber-stamp conventional acting. "If you school yourself to a mathematically exact execution of the score of your parts and carry this to the point of its

²⁰³ Op. cit., 147.

²⁰⁴ Idem.

²⁰⁵ Op. cit., 151.

²⁰⁶ Op. cit., 153.

being a stencil, I shall not protest. I do not object to a stencil which reproduces true and genuine feeling in a part.”²⁰⁷

Stanislavski is also basing his method of physical actions on the principle that the line of a role comes from the subtext of a play, saying, “You have thoughts and feelings which you can put into your own words. The point is not the words. The line of a role is taken from the subtext, not from the text itself.”²⁰⁸ This is why this new approach avoids focusing on the words in terms of mechanically memorizing them and then trying to create the roles.

The words would have lost their active, vital meaning, they would have become mechanical, gymnastic exercises for your tongue, making noises to which it was trained. But I was too forehanded to let that happen. Instead I have deprived you of the text for the time being, until the line of your role is fixed; I have saved up for you the author’s magnificent words until such time as they will have better use, so that they will not be just rattled off but employed to carry out some fundamental objective.²⁰⁹

Even the extras in a crowd scene from *Othello* are asked to conceive a clearly defined role to play while on the stage and to establish a series of physical objectives to accomplish that are in accordance with the particular moment of the play. The actors should establish the main divisions of the score of physical actions, then execute these fundamental objectives and actions that are characterized as having physical and simple psychological nature. With each repetition of a scene, actors should not be afraid to act out the details of these objectives differently in order to keep a fresh sense of creativity aiming though at deepening the truthfulness of one’s acting.

²⁰⁷ Op. cit., 154.

²⁰⁸ Op. cit., 156.

²⁰⁹ Op. cit., 157-158.

At this point, Stanislavski concludes that the “creation of the physical life is half the work on the role because, like us, a role has two natures, physical and spiritual.”²¹⁰ He compares the physical approach with a “storage battery for creative feeling,”²¹¹ because the physical being of a role would store the corresponding inner emotional part in its structure.

Next, Stanislavski describes the process of analysis, which he calls the process of studying the play and the role.²¹² Of the many facets of analysis, he mentions, in an attempt to define it, the roles of dissecting the material, discovering and examining its elements, uncovering the direction and thought of a play, its super-objective and through line of action. The analysis of a play has the purpose of searching for “creative stimuli to attract the actor” and “the emotional deepening of the soul of a part.”²¹³ Stanislavski sees analysis as an intellectual process that is not merely a dry mental exercise but one that is filled with genuine emotional capacities in order to discover and understand the essence of a play. He enumerates the components or methods of learning through analysis:

We can re-tell the content of the play, make lists of facts and events, given circumstances proposed by the author. We can divide the play up into pieces—dissect it and divide it into layers, think up questions and provide the answers, read the text with exactly proportioned words and pauses and glance into the past and future of the characters, organize general discussions, arguments, and debates. We can keep track of the appearance and merging of areas of light, weigh and estimate all facts, find names for units and objectives, and so forth.²¹⁴

It is very important for the actors to understand the context of the play to be analyzed. The elements of time and location (when and where the action takes place) set

²¹⁰ Op. cit., 166-167.

²¹¹ Op. cit., 167.

²¹² Op. cit., 169.

²¹³ Idem.

²¹⁴ Op. cit., 173.

the foundation for the entire play. Historical factors and the social status of the characters usually have an impact on the unfolding of the story of the play. In their analysis of the subtext of a play, placing its characters on the timeline of their existence as human beings, with a past, present, and a future, should guide the actors to present their roles at a logical stage of their life.

Stanislavski brings the elements of discussion, controversy, and debate in the process of analysis. Tortsov and the other teachers set the stage for an open discussion with the student-actors about *Othello*, which sparked long and passionate debates among them. In Stanislavski's vision, these fiery debates were very beneficial because they raised the enthusiasm level of the actors for spots of the play that had not been intuitively discovered by the regular analysis of the text. He elevates the actors' enthusiasm to more than a stimulus for creativity, "it is also a wise guide leading us to the secret wellsprings of the heart, it is a keen and penetrating searcher, a sensitive critic and appraiser."²¹⁵

Tortsov spends quite some time focusing on the details of a scene from *Othello* so that his actors analyze the plot by means of appraising and justifying the facts. This complicated process involves not only the intellect but also the feelings and the creative will of the actors.

In order to appraise the facts by means of your own feelings, on the basis of your personal, living relationship to them, you as an actor must put yourself this question: What circumstances of my own inner life—which of my personal, human ideas, desires, efforts, qualities, inborn gifts and shortcomings—can oblige me, as a man and actor, to have an attitude toward people and events such as those of the character I am portraying?²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Op. cit., 187.

²¹⁶ Op. cit., 202.

Next, Stanislavski as Tortsov follows the top layer of analyzing a play, its plot, with the level of characterization of the various circumstances of the play and its main characters within the context of their interrelationships. This complex analysis of *Othello* puts in perspective for the actors all the depths, intricacies, motivations, and actions of the characters in the play. With these elements communicated to the actors, they are now equipped with an incredible amount of information necessary for the natural bringing to life of their roles.

At the end of the second part of *Creating a Role* that focused on the actors' work on Shakespeare's *Othello*, Stanislavski recapitulates the creating process and draws several important conclusions about his acting 'system.' First, he reaches the conclusion that actors need to be given the opportunity to find their own physical actions in the given circumstances created by the author, the director, or even by the actors themselves through their own imagination. "The objective of the actors is to remember, understand, and determine what they should do at such a time so that they can live as if the things described in the play had happened to them, that is to say to living human beings, and not just to characters in a play."²¹⁷ Stanislavski emphasizes that clearly defined physical actions can be easily executed by actors and they will trigger specific feelings for their roles.

Then, he recollects all the steps that actors followed in their process of creating their roles. This process not only established and put in order a chronological series of physical actions of the actors in the given circumstances of their roles, but also made the spiritual life of their parts grow into being their own. Stanislavski concludes that the

²¹⁷ Op. cit., 224.

physical being and the spiritual being of a part live and grow side by side. “They cannot be alien to one another by nature; on the contrary their kinship and congruence are mandatory. I have laid particular emphasis on this law because that is the basis of our psychotechnique.”²¹⁸ He sums up that the purpose of the actors’ physical actions on the stage is to “evoke conditions, proposed circumstances, and feelings.”²¹⁹ Conveying these feelings to the audience reaches a higher artistic value in the work of the actors.

The last part of *Creating a Role* presents the study of the application of Stanislavski’s findings on acting in the case of Gogol’s play, *The Inspector General*. In a similar way, Tortsov guides his students step by step through the process of infusing true life into their roles, emphasizing again the necessity of pouring both the spiritual and the physical sensations into their inner creative state.²²⁰ He reminds his actors that they should always be themselves in the roles of a play, in other words bring out elements from their own being and make them part of the characters according to the instructions from the writer and the director.

So play every part in your own right in the circumstances given you by the playwright. In this manner you will first of all feel yourself in the part. When that is once done it is not difficult to enlarge the whole role in yourself. Live, true human feelings—that is the good soil for accomplishing your purpose.²²¹

Actors are urged to live their roles in themselves, grasping those roles with their own minds, feelings, desires, and not only within the context of a purely reasoned analysis, which lacks the emotional vibration of a living human being. Stanislavski re-emphasizes the fundamental principle that supports his acting ‘system,’ namely the fact

²¹⁸ Op. cit., 230-231.

²¹⁹ Op. cit., 233.

²²⁰ Op. cit., 238.

²²¹ Op. cit., 240-241.

that “In every physical action, unless it is purely mechanical, there is concealed some inner action, some feelings.”²²² Based on this assumption, actors need to work on fine tuning both their bodies and their souls with each other so that their whole being is engaged in their artistic endeavor. Stanislavski’s intricate methods and principles of acting that are summed up in his so-called ‘system’ can be described as the “psychotechnique for creating the spiritual life of a role through the physical being.”²²³ He presents a picturesque parallel between his psychotechnique and the concept of traveling by train on a long railway. While the scenery and people change and new experiences occur along the trip, the rails are the same all along the path of the train. Similarly, actors must find the sequence of concrete, palpable physical objectives on the stage that would become their sound ‘rails’ in their experiencing of a play and its characters.²²⁴

Stanislavski also stresses out that his psychotechnique is an internal and external analysis of the actors on themselves as human beings in the circumstances of the life of their roles. This process is simultaneously intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical in nature. In their shift of focus on immediate physical actions, actors become unaware of the complex inner process of analysis that takes place inside of them. This “naturally induced self-analysis”²²⁵ is a great quality of Stanislavski’s approach on creating a role. According to his theory,²²⁶ when actors are drawn to a physical action, they set free their subconscious, which in turn can be drawn toward creative work. Even the actors themselves cannot realize that this hidden process takes place inside of them.

²²² Op. cit., 253.

²²³ Op. cit., 259.

²²⁴ Op. cit., 260-261.

²²⁵ Op. cit., 266.

²²⁶ Op. cit., 267.

A characteristic of Stanislavski's 'system' is that it intends to "preserve the freedom of the creative artist."²²⁷ While many directors either rely on their own habitual experiences, or study the play and present its intellectual line with no appeal to the actors' creativity, or even show the actors how they are to act based on his personal demonstration, Stanislavski thinks that good directors should foster the actors' appetite for guidance about how to execute their parts based on simple physical actions.²²⁸

The final paragraph of the book, *Creating a Role*, sums up some important characteristics of Stanislavski's 'system.'

Thus my method of creating a physical being automatically analyzes a play; it automatically induces organic nature to put its important inner creative forces to work to prompt us to physical action; it automatically evokes from inside us live human material with which to work: it helps, when we are taking our first steps toward a new play, to sense its general atmosphere and mood. All these are the new and important possibilities of my method.²²⁹

It is important to note that during the time of this research, author, translator, and acting personality Jean Benedetti has just published a newly revised translation²³⁰ of *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character* in one book, as originally intended by Stanislavski himself. The title of Benedetti's new edition, *An Actor's Work*, is closer to the original Russian title, which translates as *An Actor's Work on Himself*,²³¹ and adds the subtitle *A Student's Diary* due to the nature of the literary style chosen by Stanislavski. Jean Benedetti's revival of the Stanislavski's writings on the 'system' of acting is an attempt to restore the unity of his work in a single volume with a fresh and accessible

²²⁷ Op. cit., 271.

²²⁸ Op. cit., 270-271.

²²⁹ Op. cit., 277.

²³⁰ Konstantin Stanislavski and Jean Benedetti, ed. and transl., *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

²³¹ An English transliteration can be found on the bibliographical page of the Benedetti edition cited above (*Rabota aktera nad soboi*). In the same resource, Benedetti references the English translation of the Russian title in the Translator's Foreword, xv.

English translation. Benedetti points out some key issues regarding Stanislavski's use of terminology in his activity as actor, director, and pedagogue that permeated through his writings and into poor English translations.

The reasons for the difficulties of Stanislavski's style go deeper than his personal foibles. His was a pioneering effort. He was attempting to define the actor's processes (mental, physical, intellectual and emotional) in a comprehensive way that had never been undertaken before. His problem was that there was no available language or terminology to which he could turn. Many concepts which we now take for granted such as non-verbal communication or body language did not exist. Even the notion of comprehensive, systematic training did not exist. [...] Stanislavski wanted to develop the actor-creator. He was driven, therefore, to cobble together a 'jargon' that was unknown outside the Art Theater.²³²

At the end of the book, Benedetti presents a comparison of terms used in his and Hapgood's translations. The differences may seem minor, but the fact is that word adaptations of various terminology and editorial interpretations and cuts of the original Russian texts have influenced in a negative way the accurate understanding in the English-speaking world of the Stanislavski 'system' and set the course of much of the Western theater on a different path (i.e., Method acting, Lee Strasberg, etc.).

II.1.5 *Stanislavski on Opera*

Of particular interest to the musical subject of this research, *Stanislavski on Opera* represents a book compiled by Pavel Ivanovich Rumyantsev, a gifted leading Russian baritone and opera director, about Constantin Stanislavski's work in the training and productions of the Opera Studio of the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow. Rumyantsev began working with Stanislavski in his early twenties while still a student at the Moscow Conservatory. When he entered the Opera Studio, he decided to take detailed notes about

²³² Op. cit., xvii.

Stanislavski's remarks and conversations with his students. His very informative book becomes, after having put together all his notes as well as various related documents and notes by his colleagues in the Studio, one of the key resources about the implications of the acting 'system' of Stanislavski in the world of music and opera. The book is a resourceful reflection of the cultural and artistic realities in early twentieth-century Moscow placed in historic perspective. The dated acting techniques of the Russian theater were still in the process of being infused by Stanislavski's novel techniques, while the opera field remained behind, within the old style of musical productions for the sake of mere entertainment through vocal exhibitionism. Purposeful scenic movement and any kind of deep emotional component were still missing from the operatic stage. Opera singers were just that, singers without any connection to the meaning of the texts and subtexts or without any formal training in acting techniques.

Being published outside the Soviet Union only in 1975 in Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood's translation,²³³ *Stanislavski on Opera* represents a first encounter of the Western world with a valuable resource for the study of the integration in music and opera of the approaches, principles, and techniques already applied by the Russian theater.

Seven of the operas produced by the Opera Studio under Stanislavski's direction are presented in this book, each in a separate chapter: *Eugene Onegin* by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *The Tsar's Bride* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *La Bohème* by Giacomo

²³³ "It is doubly fitting that the English version of this important book should be the last fruit of a quarter century of collaboration between the late Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood and Robert MacGregor, who brought Stanislavski's legacy to the English-speaking world in the first place. A tribute to their memory, his and theirs, *Stanislavski on Opera* is a valuable work—and timely." Excerpt from: William Kuhlke, "Book Review: *Stanislavski on Opera* by Constantin Stanislavski and Pavel Rumyantsev," *Educational Theatre Journal* 29, no. 2 (May 1977), 282.

Puccini, *A May Night* by Rimsky-Korsakov, *Boris Godunov* by Modest Mussorgsky, *The Queen of Spades* by Tchaikovsky, and finally *The Golden Cockerel*, Rimsky-Korsakov's last opera. "In the Opera Studio," the opening chapter that precedes these operas, is enlightening in itself because it provides the foundation of the new approach. It contains an explanation of Stanislavski's 'system' and how it was supposed to work in the operatic art. From the very beginning, Stanislavski emphasizes the importance of clear and expressive diction for all the singers. "Fifty percent of our success depends on diction. Not a single word must fail to reach the audience."²³⁴ Then, he devises simple gymnastic exercises for his students for the purpose of relaxing their body muscles from ordinary tensions and acquiring plasticity of movement. The subjects are urged to find inner purpose for these exercises, any imaginative action or reason for a given pose or gesture. This is how, in the process of introducing his singers to the 'system,' Stanislavski 'translates' the concepts of objectives and 'magic if.'

It's a good thing to have an objective, you cannot come out onto the stage to do something 'in general.' On the stage we must have life but not only that, it must be the life of your imagination which you make real for us. An actor himself must create that life, produce it through his fantasy. To be an actor you must in the first instance possess a developed, rich sense of fantasy. Your creativeness will begin only when you have in mind the words 'if it were so.' Without that 'Magic IF,' without fantasy, there can be no creativeness, no matter how well you execute simple physical actions on the stage.²³⁵

The important role that music has in the language of the operatic art is prioritized in the next set of moving exercises of the singers-actors on improvised music. The rhythm of such music is the first in line to stimulate the subjects' improvisation; they

²³⁴ Constantin Stanislavski, Pavel Rumyantsev, and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, ed. and transl., *Stanislavski on Opera* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 1998), 4.

²³⁵ Op. cit., 9.

need to “seize this rhythm, live with it, let it permeate”²³⁶ their entire being. The inner rhythm of a singer must adapt to the external rhythm of the music and this by itself should generate emotional response.

Supporting his teaching with his personal musical and vocal training and expertise, Stanislavski focuses on developing the vocal expressivity of the singers through the use of art songs.²³⁷ He is searching for true artistic results and guides the singers in their pursuit of understanding the subtext and the underlying components of the composer’s intent in which they bring their own creative emotions. In a given art song, singers are to define clearly for themselves the object of attention and must instantaneously concentrate on their performance. Stanislavski acknowledges the students’ choices of good texts and rarely performed art songs for their demonstration, because this way they avoid imitations of some great performers’ mannerisms in the case of better known songs and so they can discover their own interpretation of the music.

Of the two kinds of nervousness, creative and panicky, Stanislavski urges the singers to foster the creative excitement and overcome that panicky stage fright by means of concentration on some object. “Even a button on your jacket can save you from unnecessary and harmful nervousness. It can put you into a state of ‘public solitude.’”²³⁸ However, all jokes aside, Stanislavski considers that singers have the advantage of potentially holding their attention in the music itself, by allowing themselves to immerse

²³⁶ Op. cit., 12.

²³⁷ “Later, he had them prepare art songs (here mistranslated ‘romantic ballads’) to develop the vocal expression necessary for a synthesis of words and music.” Clarification from Lyn Stiefel Hill, “Book Review: *Stanislavski on Opera* by Constantin Stanislavski and Pavel Rummyantsev,” *The Musical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (July 1976), 448.

²³⁸ Stanislavski, Rummyantsev, and Hapgood, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 19.

in the meaning and the subtexts of the composer's creation, including during an instrumental introduction.

It is important to note that Stanislavski finds the need for a larger and more complex context, as if in a larger piece of music, even in a vocal miniature that has a relatively limited length. He finds valuable human ideas and emotions, an “artistically achieved statement,”²³⁹ in any well-conceived art song and the way to bring them to vibrate in the singer and the audience is to make the singer understand through the power of imaginative analysis the circumstances of that song and find ways to reproduce them with the right vocal colors.

Stanislavski points out to his singers the fascinating relationship between rhythm, melody, and words in any vocal music, which are interconnected to ease the work of the singers in expressing their inner feelings.

How lucky you singers are [...]. The composer provides you with one most important element—the rhythm of your inner emotions. That is what we actors have to create for ourselves out of a vacuum. All you have to do is to listen to the rhythm of the music and make it your own. The written word is the theme of the author but the melody is the emotional experience of that theme.

You must come to love the words and learn to bind them to the music. An opera actor is only creative when he produces sound in visual form. Make it a rule for yourselves: not to sing a single word to no purpose. Without the organic union of words and music there is no such thing as the art of opera.²⁴⁰

On these premises, the demand to “sing each word, and consequently each phrase, to the very end”²⁴¹ as well as to work on perfecting the diction of the singers becomes the natural byproduct of the training process. The expressivity of the words chosen by the poet and melted into musical discourse by the composer should create vibrant images in

²³⁹ Op. cit., 26.

²⁴⁰ Op. cit., 22.

²⁴¹ Op. cit., 25.

the singer's imagination in order to convey then their emotional content to the listeners. If on the surface a certain art song may seem inexpressive or dull, singers need to use even more imagination to create their own inner circumstances that would attract their soul and project the poet's feelings. Singers need to also exercise control over the words and melody in order to consciously enunciate them, giving power to their work and performance. While picturing vivid given circumstances in their minds and then believing in them, singers can transmit believable feelings to their audiences who, in turn, can visualize their own imaginary pictures and feel emotions under the impact of creative inspiration.²⁴²

The Opera Studio production of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* is incredibly documented, scene by scene, by Romyantsev in over one hundred pages of the book. About this chapter in particular, book reviewer, Lyn Stiefel Hill, writes the following remarks:

Along with his discussion of the performance Romyantsev carefully describes the exercises and improvisations Stanislavski devised to help the singers get into their parts. Perhaps the most fascinating detail about the rehearsal of this opera concerns the preparation of short 'biographies' for each of the forty-five chorus members who took part in the Larin ball scene. These were drawn by one of Stanislavski's associates from images suggested by Pushkin, but they were fleshed out by the performers, themselves. The first group of singers to play these parts became so associated with them that when they were assigned to others, the roles were known by the names of the singers who had originally created them.²⁴³

In Stanislavski's opera rehearsals, the singers-actors begin with improvisations and gradually work on polishing their roles through a guided training that continues beyond their presence in the rehearsal room, into their daily life. There should be no separation from daily activities, including waiting or preparing offstage, and the moment

²⁴² Op. cit., 30.

²⁴³ Stiefel Hill, 448-449.

actors come onstage and step into their roles. Stanislavski says, “You must always come onstage having begun to act your roles in the wings, before you reach the audience.”²⁴⁴

In ensemble singing, one of the issues discussed by Stanislavski with his singers was that the complex interweaving of voices may hinder the clear understanding of the words. He introduces the concept of ‘word control’²⁴⁵ through which individual singers in an ensemble should know precisely when and where in their vocal lines to bring out the exaggerated diction necessary to perceive and understand the message of the text or to subdue their diction when their stage partners have more important words. In fact, Stanislavski placed the concept of ensemble work on the highest place in his amalgam of acting principles and this fact is even more visible in the case of the opera singers. His opposition to individualistic attitudes among fellow actors and musicians of his time is a reflection of his distinct philosophy on the role of artistic endeavor.

Then Stanislavski, devoted to a struggle against the old opera conventions and the visiting-star system, created a new theater which asserted the principle of ensemble acting and refined artistic taste. He demonstrated the way in which the theater can exercise a cultural training force when it really makes an effort to reveal ‘sincerity of emotions, verisimilitude of feelings,’ as Pushkin described them, or to serve the purpose of ‘showing the life of a human soul’ on the stage, as Stanislavski put it.²⁴⁶

In order to re-train the opera singers not to sing at the public, to address it directly, Stanislavski suggests that singers must address a chosen object with their thoughts, entire attention, and their singing. The negative aspects of singing at the public are obvious distraction away from the action on the stage and a lack of truthfulness regarding the life of the character portrayed by the singer-actor.

²⁴⁴ Stanislavski, Romyantsev, and Hapgood, *Stanislavski on Opera*, 51.

²⁴⁵ Op. cit., 53.

²⁴⁶ Op. cit., 54.

Stanislavski states the singers' obligation when singing to communicate full-length thoughts and not destroy phrases in its component parts, separate words and syllables. Mechanically-produced words and chopped syllables are to be avoided completely by singers because, "The more clearly the thought behind the words is revealed in your singing, the better your voice will sound, because it will evoke your emotions, and backed by real feeling your voice becomes ten times as effective."²⁴⁷

Emphasis on rhythm is a key factor in the training process of singers. Thorough study of rhythmic patterns in the score should allow independence on the stage for the singer-actor who would switch focus to important elements of the performance and to physical actions. "All a singer has to follow is the general rhythmic structure as set up by the conductor."²⁴⁸ However, in the precision of a rhythmic framework, singers should look for the freedom to utilize fine, minute deviations in order to create expressive interpretations of their musical lines and operatic roles.

Special mastery over the sung word derives from the singer's keeping within the exact framework of the musical rhythm while at the same time he plays with his words by almost imperceptibly holding, speeding up, or expanding them. When he does that, each phrase seems to come to life, to breathe and be a whole entity. If these words could be measured by a super-metronome of microscopic discrimination, the quarter notes would show up as being uneven: some would be longer and others shorter. Infinitesimal pauses would be revealed yet the singing would coincide with the orchestral beat.²⁴⁹

The concept of plasticity of movement was also implemented in the rehearsals with opera students. Lightness in movements and elegance in the general appearance on the stage were desired elements, in particular for the characters in discussion from *Eugene Onegin*. "As we walked about we had to feel our toes and especially the

²⁴⁷ Op. cit., 60.

²⁴⁸ Op. cit., 63.

²⁴⁹ Op. cit., 73.

springiness of the big toe as our weight shifted from one step to the next. This gave us a certain plasticity, a fluency, a legato of movement as musicians call it.”²⁵⁰ Stanislavski continues to point out the realization that relaxation of muscles is critical in performance. A constant reminder to relax helps the singers return to true acting, the truthfulness of the theatrical context.

In order to help convey the message of a literary text set on music, singers need to carefully emphasize certain important words in each phrase, no matter if the composer indicated or not a similar rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic accentuation in the music. A common mistake for some inexperienced singers is to sing “all of the words with equal force. This makes the phrase boring, flat, and above all incomprehensible.”²⁵¹ They should be concerned with rounding up the phrase, with finishing each word, pronouncing final consonants, and with increasing the word stress in the case of repeated words. Furthermore, when repeating a similar musical phrase,²⁵² the subsequent phrase must be iterated in a stronger manner to show insistence or an affirmation of a thought or desire. Stanislavski demonstrates²⁵³ how singers stumble with their oral recitation of a text that they know very well to sing because of the habitual and mechanical way of learning. Such an approach is criticized by Stanislavski who urges singers to really penetrate the meaning of the text to be sung by studying it, recite it first, and then place it in the musical context. Here is how he describes the relationship of words and music from an artistic perspective:

²⁵⁰ Op. cit., 65.

²⁵¹ Op. cit., 68.

²⁵² Op. cit., 89.

²⁵³ Op. cit., 74.

You must love words and know how to interweave them with the music. An actor is creative only when he uses sound to paint an image he visualizes. Make it a rule not to sing a single word without a purpose. Unless there is an organic relationship which binds the words to the music there is no art in opera.²⁵⁴

With regard to dynamics in music, Stanislavski notes the relativity of various degrees of loudness or softness. Musical dynamics are not absolute or standardized, but constitute the result of the situation (the dramatic and musical context) to be presented to the audience.

Several additional critical and artistic elements stand out of Rumyantsev's detailed documentation of the work on *Eugene Onegin*. First, opera singers need to remember to always fill their roles, their presence on the stage, and their musical performance with rich content. Stanislavski asks for their whole selves, all their capacities to play a factor in their impersonation of a role in an opera.²⁵⁵ Second, he reminds orchestra players that they too are active participants in the opera production and need to connect their performance with the events on the stage. Their accents, nuances, articulations, phrasing and so on must reflect the action of a scene or the feelings of a character. "The whole orchestra is the prompter for the emotions of an operatic artist."²⁵⁶ Third, from an acting angle, which is naturally characteristic to Stanislavski, the expressiveness of all body parts of an opera character on the stage should be in accordance and in relation with the line of actions, scenery, other characters, and the moment of an opera production. Stanislavski uses visual references to reflect this

²⁵⁴ Op. cit., 75.

²⁵⁵ Op. cit., 92-93.

²⁵⁶ Op. cit., 101.

principle. “The actor should look upon himself as an artist painting his own figure within the framework of the whole scene.”²⁵⁷

Then finally, Stanislavski links all his assertions with the natural laws of existence and of human beings, encouraging his singers to have perfect control over their creative nature. His ideal operatic performance would be characterized by the singers’ multi-directional artistic gifts that enrich the portrayal of human emotions in an opera. He criticizes unilateral opera singers who focus only on training their voice and ignore any other aspect of a valuable performance, which includes the emotional, factual, contextual, and psychological backgrounds.²⁵⁸ It is without doubt that the artistic scene of his time was intrigued and appreciative of Constantin Stanislavski’s implementation not only of new acting techniques but of an entire philosophy of art in the Opera Studio and its productions, since Pavel Romyantsev cites the following press note at the end of his chapter about the opera, *Eugene Onegin*:

The work of Stanislavski appears not only as a substantial reform in opera production but is also of profound significance in the training of our young opera singers, who frequently are put on the stage without preparatory training for it. This work harbors within itself the renaissance of Russian opera theater.²⁵⁹

The description of the work on Rimski-Korsakov’s opera *The Tsar’s Bride* is also very detailed. One challenge for this particular work was the ensemble moments that were part of an unbroken line of movement. “At these points the action usually slowed down or stopped entirely as the actor-singers seemed to become unrelated to one another and attempted to convey their thoughts only by their singing.”²⁶⁰ Stanislavski’s approach

²⁵⁷ Op. cit., 124.

²⁵⁸ Op. cit., 130.

²⁵⁹ Op. cit., 149.

²⁶⁰ Op. cit., 157.

was to treat these duets, trios, and so on as unbroken links in the creation of each role in order to support the dramatic integrity of the entire opera. He also considers that the composer's score may suggest the character of the music, but singers must also determine what they need to do on the stage in order to avoid the unnecessary static state through various justified physical actions of the inner line of a role.

It is important that singers understand the need for a close, even personal relationship with the words of their sung roles. In order to do that, they have to focus on the key word or words in a phrase and mentally create an image of the whole idea of that particular phrase, avoiding mechanical accentuation. Diction must prevail at all time in order to preserve the correct audible sensations of the phrase. Only after this process is satisfactory can singers move on to singing the musical phrase without the text, but trying to convey the subtext of the lyrics. Isolating in this way the numerous artistic elements of operatic singing constitutes that ideal work on a role that Stanislavski taught his singers so that they can grasp the essence of their artistry. Singers always need objects of attention to evoke the necessary emotions coming from their own life experience and enhanced through the powerful musical context. The focal point of their attention should always be on their partner or anything else on the stage. Then, Stanislavski reiterates that each member of the chorus "has to figure out a character for himself which has a mutual relationship with his partners; he should make a pattern for the past and future of his role and be involved in the present surrounding circumstances."²⁶¹ The 'Magic If' principle should also be applied in the development of each role. In addition, in the context of the opera it should also connect with the musical context.

²⁶¹ Op. cit., 162.

The concept of tempo-rhythm should become second nature for singers who will have to go beyond the musical line and express through the melody of their voice a variety of objectives, actions, expressions, and feelings. When singers find the right objectives of their roles connected to the rhythm of the music, true feelings should occur.

You may not sing a single note that is unrelated to your inner course of action without having prepared for these sounds a sort of prelude composed of your relationship to them. The feelings are in the music, they do not listen to the sound of your voice... You must understand the music because it is the expression of your own feelings. You must know why this or that note, this or that rhythm, this or that timbre, has been assigned to you and what it suggests to you. Music is the guide to all your conduct on the stage.²⁶²

On the same note, Stanislavski adds later in this chapter, “Singers tend to think about a sound, a note, and not about the essential meaning of what they are singing.”²⁶³ He demanded his singers to carefully reflect each musical idea, phrase, note, or even rests in their stage presence. He postulates, “Singing is beautiful only when it is natural and expresses something. But singing made up only of pretty sounds is anti-artistic because it is not sparked by inner feelings.”²⁶⁴ Stanislavski’s rehearsing baggage of artistic interpretation of an opera included “many repetitions of sounds, words, thoughts, psychological shadings, physical relaxation, facial expressions and gestures”²⁶⁵ in order to reach an expressive simplicity of artistic value.

Again, Rumyantsev concludes his chapter on *The Tsar’s Bride* with a journalistic review after the premiere of this production, which points out the possibility to consider Stanislavski’s approach on opera as valuable and plausible in other fields of the performing arts, a fact that supports the current research on the topic of choral music.

²⁶² Op. cit., 163.

²⁶³ Op. cit., 178.

²⁶⁴ Op. cit., 187.

²⁶⁵ Op. cit., 188.

The Opera Studio of Stanislavski carries within itself the pledge of a great future and leads us to believe that its achievement will not only forward the perfecting of operatic art but will as well provide many practical ways of instilling qualities of inner musicianship in many other fields of contemporary theater.²⁶⁶

Stanislavski included the production of Puccini's *La Bohème* in his Opera Studio only three years after the composer's death in 1924. Rumyantsev's chapter on the master's undertaking continues to reveal some critical elements of Stanislavski's work with the opera singers. Associating Puccini's need to first see with the eyes of his mind the characters and their actions, Stanislavski urges singers to envision with the power of their mind and imagination what they are singing about so that vocal expressivity becomes naturally enhanced through the imagery created in their minds. He knew the importance of focusing on producing meaningful operas and plays because in them his singers and actors could find valuable ideals that emerged from every segment of the work. "He knew how to find great thoughts in what appeared to be simple scenes and he always guided each play and all of his actors along the high planes of thought and feeling."²⁶⁷

Based on the principle that "every new role, in all of its physical actions and objectives, must be studied afresh as if it were one's first part,"²⁶⁸ Stanislavski criticizes operatic singers who learn how to simply replicate the same rubber-stamp effects of human emotions in various roles and operas. Instead, singers need to build a logical sequence of physical actions that are part of the score of the role and gradually become second nature, an integrated part of their subconscious.

²⁶⁶ Op. cit., 210.

²⁶⁷ Op. cit., 212.

²⁶⁸ Op. cit., 217.

Stanislavski realized that because of their specialized or almost isolated process of learning their musical lines, singers do not usually possess the more comprehensive idea of what is happening with the rest of the music (i.e., accompaniment, instrumentation, interludes, and other vocal solos), which holds back the creation of a logical physical line of action for their roles. Consequently, he oftentimes would invite the singers to listen carefully, sometimes over and over, to the evolution of the music in the instrumental parts so that they can assimilate it and let themselves be carried away by the direction of that music intended by the composer. “This close listening on the part of the singers bred in them an entirely new relationship with the music, something which a singer who works only on his own role does not usually have, as he devotes the bulk of his attention to learning his own measures, pauses, and cues.”²⁶⁹ In the same time with the music learning process, singers must consistently be knowledgeable of what their role should look and be like on the stage. The musical and the acting elements of their creating of a role interact and influence each other.

Make it a rule: When you are learning the text and music of a role, be extremely careful not ever to go over it by rote, but always combine it with the inner course of your part. Relate the enunciation, the text, the music, all to the through-line of action that goes through your whole role. Your artistic creativeness lies in your showing us: This is how I interpret this thing. A role is not made interesting by words alone but by what the actor puts into them.²⁷⁰

There are several factors that may hinder the creative freedom of singers on the stage. Stanislavski mentions that frequent repetition of learned words leads to mechanical utterance without any understanding of the meaning of those words. Singers and actors alike have to comprehend and follow the sense of the thoughts when they deliver the

²⁶⁹ Op. cit., 220.

²⁷⁰ Op. cit., 293.

words of their roles. He also refers to the enchanting power of beautiful melodic lines of their roles that could make singers shift their attention from the words to their singing voices. For singers on the operatic stage, it is instrumental that they follow the “*musico-dramatic* line,”²⁷¹ in which they discover first the meaning of the words, then reinforce that through their imagination and finally let the music enhance the whole artistic context. They should never let go of their diction, because “The audience must hear every word uttered by a singer. Half of the success of opera comes from perfect diction.”²⁷² In addition, Stanislavski considers that the words of the opera must stir singers to act. “Opera suffers for the very reason that one character sings and does not act, while the others onstage just look on.”²⁷³ This is the case of a total lack of creative imagination and unnatural (non lifelike) behavior. Here is how Stanislavski encouraged his singer-actors, especially those in a larger group, to propose interesting objectives for a chain of actions on the stage.

‘What is the course of your life on this evening?’ was the question Stanislavski put to each participant. ‘Who are you? What is your name? Did you come here on your own or were you invited? Who are your acquaintances here? What will you do while here? What objectives do you, as an acting participant in the scene, have? Use your fantasy! Without fantasy you are not an actor. You need a good imagination and interesting objectives. To carry them out you will have to choose an appropriate tempo-rhythm which the music will suggest to you. But you will be unable to find the right tempo-rhythm for your life if you are not exactly aware of what you are to *do* on the stage.’²⁷⁴

Stanislavski’s directorial work was aimed at the words of the roles, always trying to polish the singers’ diction and word stress, always reaching out for the richness of the

²⁷¹ Op. cit., 233.

²⁷² Op. cit., 234.

²⁷³ Op. cit., 239.

²⁷⁴ Idem.

phrases by suggesting “sub-texts with unexpected qualities of lightness,”²⁷⁵ in a continuous effort to attain spontaneity on the stage. He focused also on the vocal colors that his singers could achieve while singing their parts because music is equally important in the operatic discourse. “Your words carry your thoughts and the music carries the feelings behind them”²⁷⁶ was one of his artistic principles. Stanislavski interpreted the artistic phenomenology of the operatic art equally through its fundamental elements, music and drama. The audience synchronizes with the composer’s intentions by feeling the driving force of the music that must be clearly understood and conveyed by the singers and all the other musicians. The organic relationship between words and music generates minute connections between the thoughts and emotions present in the literary text and the musical interpretation of that text. Stanislavski said that a pianissimo is not a formal requirement anymore, a simple marking in the music score, but must evolve “out of the depths of your emotions.”²⁷⁷

Stanislavski’s approach on the phenomenology of the operatic event, which can as well be extrapolated in the case of any performing art in front of an audience, goes beyond the physical end of the stage and into the audience. The public has, in his vision, a “part in the musical action.”²⁷⁸ Their interest and attention span need to be kept alive and engaged in what is happening and what is said and sung on the stage. The production members must use all their abilities to help their audiences fully comprehend the music and its messages. The audience must assimilate the emotions generated from the stage through music, words, and acting in order to reverberate a profound and long lasting

²⁷⁵ Op. cit., 244.

²⁷⁶ Op. cit., 253.

²⁷⁷ Op. cit., 260.

²⁷⁸ Op. cit., 297.

impression on their souls and in their lives. Stanislavski encourages singers to analyze the component parts of the music to better reflect them in their actions and to create visual pictures of what they must do as characters in an opera. “The aim of our Studio is to fight operatic routine and the idea that one only *hears* opera.”²⁷⁹

A major difference between the work of dramatic actors and that of opera singers consists of the constraints that music imposes through its predetermined rhythm and tempo. While actors can concentrate their entire attention on other characters on the stage and on the actions they take, opera singers must rigidly follow clearly defined intervals and rests and the conductor who, in turn, is guided by the written musical rhythm in a particular tempo. However, Stanislavski’s view is that “The art of an actor in an opera consists in his achieving, despite these limitations, a sense of being free and maintaining the unbroken line of his life as the character he is portraying.”²⁸⁰

Again, the acting world of Constantin Stanislavski intersects with the choral topic of this research when author Pavel Rumyantsev describes the director’s involvement with a crowd scene from Mussorgsky’s opera *Boris Godunov*. Breaking the routine of his time, in which a choir master would sectionalize the opera chorus by vocal parts and would place those sections in various locations on the stage, Stanislavski would look for exposing the various facets of a crowd by mixing the members of the chorus in order to be in contact with one another as in real life. The extra effort in practice should aim toward the overall blending of the choral sound in this new mixed formation.

²⁷⁹ Idem.

²⁸⁰ Op. cit., 301.

Regarding how singers should express true feelings on the stage, Stanislavski references his acting ‘system’ and Method of Physical Actions. “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.”²⁸¹

Part of the process of learning a new work, the element of affirmation and excitement for this new artistic production is emphasized by Stanislavski as being the seed of success. How many times producers, directors, conductors, or teachers receive in their face a blunt *laissez-faire* attitude and the modern *I don’t care* reply from the part of their so-called artists, musicians, or students? Stanislavski considered that the role of the director of an opera is to make his singers fall in love with each new work. “If you are not carried away by a new production in the theater it will not amount to anything.’ [...] He would never tolerate indifference to a new role or to a whole new production: He felt that was the most harmful thing that could be.”²⁸²

At the very end of the book *Stanislavski on Opera*, author Pavel Rumyantsev distills the essence of Stanislavski’s lifetime artistic enterprises and achievements on the stage. The complexity and the various conceptual turning points of his acting ‘system,’ which arguably became the most influential theory and praxis of acting in the history of theatrical arts, are merely the effect of a passionate desire to capture the simplest and

²⁸¹ Op. cit., 312.

²⁸² Op. cit. 337.

most righteous way of enriching the spirit and soul of people through profound and true human emotions conveyed by actors on the stage.

Before reaching the point of embodying a production in the movements of the actors onstage, a director must first conceive in his imagination the shape of the production. Stanislavski's genius lay in his capacity to make everyone engaged in a production active co-creators with him in his directorial concept. All dividing lines were wiped out between what he himself suggested or demonstrated and what the actors did on their own creative initiative or because of the logical necessities inherent in their parts. This is the overriding significance of Stanislavski's method of work in bringing forth an expression of collective art—which is the aim of theater.²⁸³

II.2 Relevant Literature About Stanislavski's Acting 'System'

The second category of relevant materials for the current research consists of select writings by various authorities in the acting field about the Stanislavski 'system' and his legacy in art. The focus of this section will be on works by Dr. Bella Merlin, actress, writer, and Lecturer in Drama at the University of Exeter, who was trained both in England and Russia and directed her practice and research in Stanislavski; Dr. Sharon Marie Carnicke, Professor of Theater and Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Southern California; and Sonia Moore (1902-1995), the late founder and leader of the American Center for Stanislavski Theater Art and the Sonia Moore Studio of Theater—Moore was originally from Russia (in a region that today belongs to Belarus) and studied in the Third Studio of the Moscow Art Theater.

²⁸³ Op. cit., 374.

II.2.1 *Beyond Stanislavsky*

From the very beginning of her book, *Beyond Stanislavsky*,²⁸⁴ Bella Merlin defines what psycho-physical training represents in the performing arts field, namely a training in which the body and the psyche (outer expression and inner sensation) are integrated and inter-dependent.

The brain inspires the emotions, which then prompt the body into action and expression. Or the body arouses the imagination, which then activates the emotions. Or the emotions stir the brain to propel the body to work. All the components—body, mind, and emotions—are part of the psycho-physical mechanism which makes up an actor: psychology and physicality are part of one continuum. ‘Psycho-technique’ was a term coined by Stanislavsky and developed by Michael Chekhov; it was the complete integration of psychology and physicality which formed the basis of the Russian actor-training as I experienced it in Moscow.²⁸⁵

While discovering the lore of the Russian acting methods and traditions coming down from Stanislavski through two generations of acting practitioners, Bella Merlin became familiar with the practical aspects of the ‘system’ that Stanislavski and his successors developed in their dedicated work. She particularly mentions that the legacy of Stanislavski continues in the art of the contemporary Russian theater; his Method of Physical Actions opened a new horizon for actors and directors. Merlin calls the current stage of the acting method in the Russian theater as Active Analysis, which she describes as presenting similarities and differences with Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Actions.

In many ways, the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis are very similar in their rehearsal techniques: rather than using sedentary textual analysis or imaginative visualizations, the actor now accesses a character through experience. In other words, by getting up and doing it through a process of improvisation. However, there is a crucial difference between the two approaches. The Method of Physical Actions is concerned with finding a logical line or ‘score’

²⁸⁴ Bella Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky: The Psycho-Physical Approach to Actor Training* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

²⁸⁵ Merlin, *Beyond Stanislavsky*, 4.

of individual actions through a scene, while Active Analysis is a holistic system integrating body and mind, and most importantly spirit.²⁸⁶

Of the many aspects of the ‘system’ that Merlin digests in her book, affective memory is investigated in particular. She considers²⁸⁷ that this concept represents only a small part of the intricate Stanislavski ‘system’ and that he developed a process in which experiencing emotions is an inevitable by-product and not an end-product of the acting technique. As opposed to the American Method of Lee Strasberg, which embraces the use of affective memory during the performance itself, for Stanislavski, affective memory was “a means of triggering an actor’s enthusiasm for a role, enabling him or her to connect truthfully with a character’s inner life,”²⁸⁸ but was done in the preparatory work, in rehearsals.

Merlin describes how in the training process of working ‘on your self,’ actors need to re-learn how to produce natural human motions and actions in preparation of being able to express later the spirit of any chosen character. The Russian actor-tutors devised a series of simple physical exercises for their students to help them rediscover their bodily mechanisms. Music was employed in dynamic meditation exercises²⁸⁹ as a means to experience physical responses to varying melodies and tempo-rhythms, which in turn would generate inner sensations.

In the discussion about free improvisations, Merlin refers to the concept of Psychological Gesture, which is a “self-contained combination of one physical posture—followed by a transition—followed by a second physical posture. [...] To be most

²⁸⁶ Op. cit., 4-5.

²⁸⁷ Op. cit., 15.

²⁸⁸ Op. cit., 156.

²⁸⁹ As described in Op. cit., 45-47.

effective, a Psychological Gesture should combine form and movement using varying tempi, amplitudes, directions and speeds as you move from the first static form to the second.”²⁹⁰ Merlin also describes in detail her personal experience with exercises devised by her Russian tutors that awakened her sense of non-verbal communication. Based on the yoga concept of *Prana*, Stanislavski was developing in his ‘system’ the principle of Communion or irradiation of emotional energies and Bella Merlin recollects²⁹¹ her unsettling but exhilarating sensations through such radiated currents of energy that opened up for her new avenues of consciousness.

Merlin addresses then the work of an actor in the ensemble. The early ensemble exercises start with the focus on one’s self and continue with the permutation of Circles of Attention, gradually switching the focus from the inside of an actor to the outside and the various elements of the environment in the present moment. A simple way²⁹² to bringing actors in a group in contact with each other in an uninhibited way is by temporarily taking away speech as a means of communication. With eyes closed, student-actors complete the Circles of Attention exercise and then produce sounds (i.e., a wail, a whistle, a hiss, a murmur, a shriek, a sigh, etc.) that express the way they feel in that particular moment; subsequently, they pay attention to each other’s sounds and then move toward a particular one that attracts them individually in order to establish a simple physical contact. This is an easy exercise that helps actors in an ensemble establish common reverberations virtually instantaneously.

²⁹⁰ Op. cit., 64.

²⁹¹ Op. cit., 74-76.

²⁹² An exercise described in Op. cit., 109-110.

At this stage of Merlin's training in Russia, a series of exercises were guided toward dramatic action as well as toward dramatic text as part of the psycho-physical ensemble training through the elements of play, spontaneity, and attention to partner-actors.

Next, Merlin takes her readers inside the process of working on specific roles. After explaining in great detail the context of this part of her training and the personality of her Russian acting tutor, Albert Filozov, Merlin summarizes the main principle of the real Russian school of acting as being "concerned with awakening the spirit."²⁹³ The four projects of her teacher's program of study represent four stages of the layers involved in building a character. The first stage focused on awakening the actor's own creative personality through the work on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Merlin's personal emotional inhibitions on the stage that were pointed out by her teacher Filozov were addressed in the second stage, in which emotional and physical obstacles were to be removed; in rehearsals, actors are to face these obstacles and find a way of working through them creatively, especially through the use of appropriate affective memory. During the third stage, the actors focused on finding concrete physical actions; in this process, physical activity becomes physical action when a psychological or dramatic effect is involved and the resulting action is intended upon the acting partners on the stage. Finally, through the exploration of a dramatization of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the fourth stage proposed by Filozov shifted the emphasis on characterization, the so-called stage of releasing the character. Actors make a transition from their own personality to the creative individuality of the character through technical adjustments of physical or vocal

²⁹³ Op. cit., 161.

characterizations, through tempo-rhythm of language, and through contradictions (i.e., smiling in fear), to name only a few techniques.

II.2.2 *Konstantin Stanislavsky*

Bella Merlin's second book on Stanislavski²⁹⁴ represents an introductory handbook that was intended for theater researchers and practitioners alike who wanted to gain knowledge about fundamental elements of the Russian director's lifetime work. Some of the biographical data that Merlin presents in the first part of her book as well as her detailed synopsis and analysis of Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* constituted the premises for earlier discussions in the current research. Merlin continues with a detailed interpretation and analysis of Stanislavski's production plan for Anton Chekhov's play, *The Seagull*, presented relatively early (1898) in the development of Stanislavski's methods, but still showing fascinating traces of the 'system.' In the last part of her handbook, Merlin presents a series of exercises that introduce the reader to the three major techniques of rehearsing developed by Stanislavski, namely the 'round-the-table analysis,' the Method of Physical Actions, and Active Analysis.²⁹⁵ Merlin notes the difficulty of relating some of the practical idiosyncrasies of the 'system' when she writes, "Unpacking the components of the Method of Physical Actions is rather tricky, as it's a rehearsal method, and—as with all rehearsal methods—its success or otherwise is hugely dependent on the director's imagination!"²⁹⁶ With regard to Active Analysis, Merlin makes a clear distinction between this rehearsal approach, which is indeed grounded in

²⁹⁴ Bella Merlin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

²⁹⁵ Op. cit., 117.

²⁹⁶ Op. cit., 126.

the psycho-physical training of the actors, and the actor-training itself. She also points out the major role of the director of a play in this unusually modern rehearsal technique. Her conclusion at the end of this handbook is generalizing and opens the horizon to other performing disciplines to what Stanislavski envisioned primarily in the theater arts.

By using his writings as a springboard into our own experiments, we can prevent them from stagnating into history books. Whether our preferences lie in physical theater, postmodern dance or the realism of film and television, we'll never escape the fact that we are nothing but body, imagination, emotions and spirit: acting will always be psycho-physical to a greater or lesser extent. There can be no question that Stanislavsky was the first twentieth-century practitioner to investigate it seriously.²⁹⁷

II.2.3 *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*

Bella Merlin's third major work on the topic is intended to capture the essence of the hands-on work process of actor-training and rehearsal. Written in a format that neatly arranges the elements of the 'system' described by Stanislavski himself in his convoluted writings, Bella Merlin's *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit*²⁹⁸ describes an actor's artistic endeavor as a kind of workshop of formation and creation. In the Introduction for example, she gives away the key to the Stanislavski toolkit in a parallel with his six fundamental questions (who, when, where, why, for what reason, and how). Drawing fundamental ideas from Stanislavski's artistic philosophy expressed in his trilogy, such as psycho-physicality, discipline, and stage ethics, Merlin references elements of the 'system' (relaxation, breathing, and concentration of attention), as well as goals or 'conditions' of performance such as inspiration, spirituality, inner creative state, and creative atmosphere, all of them grouped in so-called 'trays,' as if in an actor's toolkit.

²⁹⁷ Op. cit., 156-157.

²⁹⁸ Bella Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (Hollywood, California: Drama Publishers, 2007).

The focus shifts then to the rehearsal processes. Here, Merlin defines tools that are creative elements of script analysis, either collectively under the guidance of the director or independently. An overview of this textual analysis entails a conscientious first reading and appreciation of the raw material, followed by its mental assessment on seven levels: the external plane—its structure; the social context; the literary plane—language, ideas, styles, etc.; the aesthetic plane—the writer’s theatrical devices, along with scenic and artistic choices; the psychological plane; the physical plane—the characters’ actions and their external characterizations; and the plane of personal creative feelings—the actors’ connection and reverberation with the play and its characters in the process of textual analysis.²⁹⁹ This initial stage of working with the text also includes establishing the given circumstances of the play and of the production.

Merlin refers next to the process of breaking down the structure of any given scene, which involves known elements of the ‘system,’ such as bits (units), objectives and counter-objectives, subtext, punctuation, and the six fundamental questions mentioned earlier.

In the section about the process of embodying the role, Merlin discusses the principle of truth, in particular scenic-truth, which is developed through imagination, observation through the five senses and emotion memory, and the ‘Magic If.’ Her ‘tools’ of action, tempo-rhythm, emotion memory, and emotion are also presented in relationship to the psycho-physical aspect of creating a role and all or only part of them can be used at different times when they are needed in the rehearsal process, depending on the situation. The last group of four tools that Merlin describes in the process of texturing a character

²⁹⁹ Based on *Op. cit.*, 61-65.

consists of the inner motive forces (the thought-center, the emotion-center, and the action-center), the so-called ‘heroic tension’ of contrasts in a role, the *emploi* or what a character does for a living and how that affects the objectives and actions throughout the play, and the objects or more specifically how stage props may present an emotive potential in the process of creating a role.³⁰⁰ As Stanislavski approaches the topics of the subconscious and inspiration as major players in the theatrical art, Merlin emphasizes impracticality of any kind of exercises to arouse the subconscious as it is “a product of your overall psycho-physical technique, combined with your physical relaxation, your mental and imaginative playfulness—enhanced by a good script and a collaborative ensemble.”³⁰¹

As expected, the section about rehearsal approaches focuses on the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis. Merlin discusses the importance of the director for both these principles as rehearsal techniques.

The director was still a vital cog in the rehearsal machine, but his responsibility shifted from being that of a puppet master: instead, he was something like a photographic technician, who slowly allows the negative film to emerge as a positive image by adding the right chemical solutions at just the right time. In this way, the film image develops into the most appropriate, brightly colored, and sharply focused composition imaginable.³⁰²

In their work, directors should think of how to work with the authors (if they are still living), with the actors, and with all those involved in the production.

In her description of the Method of Physical Actions, Bella Merlin defines the idea that actors can “work from simple physical actions to complex emotional and

³⁰⁰ Based on Op. cit., 162-173.

³⁰¹ Op. cit., 176.

³⁰² Op. cit., 180.

psychological experiences”³⁰³ as long as their actions have definite objectives in a logical and coherent sequence. She spends more time revealing the components of Active Analysis. In short, the five-step sequence of rehearsal proposed through this technique involves reading the scene, discussing the scene, improvising the scene without reference to the script, discussing the improvisation, and comparing the improvisation with the actual text.³⁰⁴ The intricate process begins with *étude* rehearsals that are based on the sequence described above and that include a series of events that define a scene, silent *études* incorporating the techniques of grasp and communion with a general sense of immediacy (described as ‘here, today, now’³⁰⁵), as well as the principles of justification and adaptation. Next, Merlin brings into play the tools of super-objective of a play, which unifies the components of the ‘system’ and sets a certain direction for the improvisational stage in Active Analysis, and through line of action (or through action), which is the physical manifestation of the super-objective. The subject of verbal action is also described in great detail as being equally important as physical action in the process of characterization. Emphasis is placed on the necessity for the actors to focus first on “unlocking the inner workings of a scene” and “getting inside the part”³⁰⁶ that gradually urges them to make-up their own lines, in the spirit of their roles and scenes, until they are given the actual words of the author and will render a precise verbal action. Merlin mentions the critical importance of both the logical and the psychological pauses in the actors’ speech.

³⁰³ Op. cit., 194.

³⁰⁴ Based on Op. cit., 197.

³⁰⁵ Op. cit., 214.

³⁰⁶ Op. cit., 230.

Merlin concludes her section on rehearsal approaches with four more tools that give depth to a role through Active Analysis. The dimension and the texture of a role can be perceived by an audience if the actors create a second level for the life of their characters and employ the process of inner monologue, which is an internal ‘discussion’ or processing (as people do in real life) through “expanding, justifying, debating, deflecting whatever’s going on externally,”³⁰⁷ especially what the other characters do. Investing their words with their own images (envisagings³⁰⁸) and always observing that very first moment of orientation on the stage in a particular scenic context are fine touches that enhance the actors’ characterization of their roles.

There is only one more ‘tray’ in Bella Merlin’s toolkit of acting based on Stanislavski’s ‘system,’ the performance. The major element that needs to be considered in a performance, in addition to the well-prepared and thought-out delivery of the characterizations and of the play, is the audience. Stanislavski “put the audience right at the fore of theater’s ability to transform people.”³⁰⁹ His idea of a ‘fourth wall’ of the stage, the one toward the audience, does not imply a total ignorance on the part of the actors with regard to their audience, but a shift in their objective, from pleasing or entertaining the audience to grasping them through contextual objectives of the play and the interaction with their acting partners on the stage. Merlin talks about two “mutual and simultaneous dialogues—the exchange of live currents between actor and actor, and between actor and audience,” which engage the actors’ dual consciousness and

³⁰⁷ Op. cit., 237.

³⁰⁸ Op. cit., 238.

³⁰⁹ Op. cit., 250.

perspective.³¹⁰ The principles of creative individuality, inner creative mood, and scenic speech are also included in Merlin's discussion on developing performance awareness.

Bella Merlin concludes her third book on Stanislavski's 'system' with an overview of her well-structured 'toolkit' of acting, which includes a series of innovative exercises designed for specific 'tools' or elements, principles, and techniques that she described in her writings.

II.2.4 *Stanislavsky in Focus*

Of great importance to the better understanding of the Stanislavski approach to acting and art in general, Sharon Marie Carnicke's book *Stanislavsky in Focus*³¹¹ presents pertinent historical contexts, facts, and theories that shed some new light on the subject. Divided into three major parts, the book presents first the phenomenon of transmission of Stanislavski's ideas to the United States through the 1923-24 US tours of the Moscow Art Theater and the consequent truncated adoption of his 'system' by the American Group Theater and the Actors Studio. Second, Carnicke discusses the linguistic translations and the cultural interpretations of Stanislavski's works; she reveals that in theater many of the theoretical elements were and still are transmitted in the classroom or rehearsal rooms, where gifted actors and directors pass on their knowledge and technical terms and practices to the new generation of artists through an oral tradition. Coining theatrical terminology in writing usually comes later in the masters' lives, as in the case of Constantin Stanislavski and many of his Russian and American followers. Consequently,

³¹⁰ Op. cit., 251.

³¹¹ Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge/OPA, 2003).

American actors were first exposed to Stanislavski's ideas through the teachings of Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya, or better through their personal interpretation of the 'system.' Carnicke also mentioned the cultural adaptations of any kind of translation, in particular for American actors.

Linguistic translation always involves simultaneous cultural translation, which, more often than not transforms ideas into hybrids. Even when we think we understand a translated word, we may still not comprehend its underlying cultural assumptions. This process of cultural displacement played a significant part in the oral transmission of Stanislavsky's System. Listeners in the United States actively filtered Russian ideas through their own social expectations and backgrounds, with cultural contexts sometimes transcending individual interpretation. This subtle form of miscommunication turned Stanislavsky's System into Strasberg's Method even more dynamically than the linguistic barriers of awkward English.³¹²

Carnicke presents an existing debate between the value and reality of the practitioners' knowledge, rooted in their daily activities in the theater, and the written documentation of this practice (or the theory) of the theater art. This tension has always been present in the works of theater personalities and authorities, including in Stanislavski's 'trilogy.' "By fictionalizing his books, Stanislavsky admits the necessity of lore for actors. By writing, he acknowledges the need for definitive statements on the many facets of the System. Thus, in his books Stanislavsky reproduces the tension between oral and written sources about acting, each type vying for greater authority and credibility."³¹³

With regard to the English translation and publication of Stanislavski's works, Sharon Carnicke confirms that the original Russian manuscripts have been drastically altered.

³¹² Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, 57.

³¹³ *Op. cit.*, 69.

The most striking difference between the two published volumes, *An Actor's Work on Himself, Part I* and *An Actor Prepares*, is length. While the Russian volume is 575 pages, the English numbers 295 pages of much larger typeface, created from a typescript of approximately 700 pages. Even allowing for variation in syntax, word length, typeface, and Stanislavsky's own obsessive revisions, the numbers suggest how the editing differs between the two. The abridgement, demanded by Theater Arts Books, resulted in an English version about one half as long as the Russian.³¹⁴

In the third and last part of her book, Carnicke devotes a great deal of analysis to three defining concepts from Stanislavski's 'system' in what she calls both "their Russian and English transformations."³¹⁵ First, she considers Stanislavski's most elusive concept of 'experiencing' (in Russian, *perezhivanie*) in the context of performance in the theater. Of its many interpretations that translator Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood used in her edition of *An Actor Prepares*, Sharon Carnicke mentions 'the art of living a part,' 'to live the scene,' 'living and experiencing,' and 'emotional experience.'³¹⁶ However, Carnicke's analysis sheds a much clearer explanation about what Stanislavski really meant with this concept.

In sum, Stanislavsky uses 'experiencing' in two senses. On the one theoretical hand, art communicates the artist's personal experience; in this sense, he travels toward Tolstoy, bringing to mind Romantic notions of sincere self-expression and the fusion of actor and character. On the other practical hand, acting generates its own experiential dimension in performance; here Stanislavsky accepts the alternation of actor and character. When he suggests evaluating performance on its own terms and seeing 'truth' as relative to the play, he travels away from Tolstoy and anticipates developments in modernism that embrace the formal media of art: visual artists who create abstract art by drawing attention to paint and canvas, theatricalists who destroy realistic illusion unabashedly to show an actor on a stage, etc. Janus-like Stanislavsky looks backward to nineteenth century traditions in art and forward to the twentieth.³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Op. cit., 83.

³¹⁵ Op. cit., 8.

³¹⁶ Based on Op. cit., 109.

³¹⁷ Op. cit., 121.

Second, Carnicke unveils the facts about the ways practitioners and theorists in New York and in Moscow interpreted Stanislavski's concept of Affective (Emotion) Memory. While the American Method heavily gravitates around this principle as generating motor in the work of an actor, the Russian school of theater art tends to stay more in line with what Stanislavski suggested in practice; for them, affective memory is included in the larger, more comprehensive principles of communication, through line of action, and creative ideas as well as part of concentration, relaxation, and imagination.³¹⁸ Sharon Carnicke also presents the ways Yoga elements influenced Stanislavski's perception on life in general and the life of an actor on the stage in a creative state, even though the inclusion of such esoteric spiritual elements in his writings about the 'system' was heavily censored by Soviet Russia. Discovering his deep understanding of Yoga concepts about the rays of energy, subconscious, and superconscious, Carnicke concludes how complex and varied the philosophies that influenced Stanislavski in his practice were. "The content of art, for Stanislavsky, is indeed emotion, but not only in a Western psychological sense, but in an Eastern transcendental one as well."³¹⁹

Third, Carnicke approaches the concept of action as being chronologically embraced by Stanislavski through his Method of Physical Actions, after tackling affecting memory in the First Studio. The debates among theater personalities in Russia and in the United States about the supremacy of the Russian school over the American Method or vice versa with regard to the best representation of Stanislavski's 'system' are addressed by Sharon Carnicke from social, historical, and political contexts. Her

³¹⁸ Based on Op. cit., 125-126.

³¹⁹ Op. cit., 142.

opinion³²⁰ is that in reality many actors and directors who worked with Stanislavski in his latest years clarify that both concepts of ‘affective memory’ and ‘action’ were considered integral parts of the same ‘system’ of acting, all the debate about this issue being only a matter of emphasis over one technique or the other and ultimately a matter of perspective. Finally, Sharon Carnicke presents the latest ‘device’ that Stanislavski began to share with his actors while working on his last project (Molière’s comedy *Tartuffe*), namely Active Analysis, and draws a parallel with his Method of Physical Actions. In a selected glossary of terminology associated with Stanislavski’s ‘system,’ Sharon Carnicke defines Active Analysis as...

...Stanislavsky’s late rehearsal method for exploring dramatic structure, conflict, and the dynamics of interaction between characters. Analysis is ‘active’ because cast members examine the play ‘on their feet,’ testing their understanding of how characters relate to and confront each other through improvisations of scenes that occur in the play and paraphrases of the text. These exercises serve as successive drafts for future performance of the text.³²¹

II.2.5 *The Stanislavski System*

In her book, *The Stanislavski System*, Sonia Moore, the late prominent promoter of the true Stanislavski school of acting in the United States, discusses the importance of the ‘system’ in the context of theater ethics and actor training. She considered that the ‘system’ “teaches professionalism, and through professionalism theater becomes art.”³²²

Then she adds...

Through the Stanislavski System actors learn to make conscious use of the laws of their organic nature; they learn their means of expression and become true

³²⁰ Based on Op. cit., 151.

³²¹ Op. cit., 169.

³²² Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of the Actor. Digested from the Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 15.

professionals. The System teaches them to function on the stage automatically as live human beings. In mastering this technique, actors will not have to depend on chance. For chance, as every artist knows, is the enemy of art.³²³

Having worked under Stanislavski and his assistants, Sonia Moore became familiar with his Method of Physical Actions and underlines the fact that his approach was supported by scientific discoveries. In her discussion on the phenomenology of psycho-physical actions, Moore understands, like Stanislavski, that a simple physical movement is only a mechanical act, while physical action is done with a purpose, having its own psychological load. A physical action must be “carefully selected on the basis of the play’s circumstances. It must be the indispensable physical action connected with the emotion which the actor must bring out. Only when the actor finds the correct physical action will he achieve psycho-physical involvement.”³²⁴ With each performance, actors are to re-stir in themselves true emotions for their respective characters.

Moore discusses to a certain extent and provides a series of improvisation exercises related to the elements of the ‘system’ that are involved in the concept of action, namely the ‘magic If,’ ‘given circumstances,’ ‘imagination,’ ‘concentration of attention,’ ‘truth and belief,’ ‘communion,’ ‘adaptation,’ ‘tempo-rhythm,’ and ‘emotional memory.’ She also presents the principles of analyzing a script through events and actions, super-objective and through line of actions, as well as the importance of the training of the physical apparatus (the body) of an actor in order to be able to embody a variety of characters on stage. About the process of building a character, Sonia Moore considers that an actor “must complete the life of his character in his imagination and see

³²³ Op. cit., 16.

³²⁴ Op. cit., 19.

a continuous, logical, unbroken chain of events,”³²⁵ because according to Stanislavski, a character is “the flesh and the soul of the actor and is born of the union of all spiritual and physical elements of the role and the actor.”³²⁶

Moore makes the following reference to the performers of a musical comedy, including the participation of the choir:

Actors in musical comedy, besides being musical, rhythmical, and knowing how to move lightly and to control their bodies, must be able to justify each event, even the most improbable situation, and know how to change easily from one state to another. There is no difference between the truth of existence in dramatic scenes and in dancing or vocal scenes. An actor must behave as if it were indispensable to sing or to dance through the logic of his character. Vocal and dance training should include definite actions. In a chorus, as in crowd scenes in a dramatic play, each performer must determine his behavior and know his attitude toward other characters and the events in the play.³²⁷

These considerations draw another close parallel with the topic of this research through its appeal to accept the Stanislavski ‘system’ as being applicable to many or all performing arts, including choral rehearsals and productions. Moore implies that in a vocal ensemble, the individual performers must find their own inner justifications and external interpretations for their embodiment of their respective *personae* (imaginary or actually present in the text or subtext of the piece) in the context of the music of a particular production. Moore’s fairly brief chapter on the role of the director in a dramatic production will lead this researcher in the next chapter to a phenomenological parallel with the role of the music director and in particular that of the choral conductor when working with a choral ensemble.

³²⁵ Op. cit., 60.

³²⁶ Idem.

³²⁷ Op. cit., 64.

II.3 The Stanislavski ‘System’ and Choral Music

The final category of references brings the present discussion closer to the topic of choral rehearsal methodology through the use of various elements of psycho-technique from Constantin Stanislavski’s ‘system’ of acting. During his formative years as a musician in his native Romania, this researcher had the privilege and opportunity to study choral conducting and choral music with a remarkable and gifted group of Romanian choral pedagogues and practitioners. Through their teachings, he became familiar with some of Stanislavski’s principles that influenced the Romanian school of choral singing and conducting and in particular the artistic activity of Dr. Marin Constantin (b. 1925) and his world-renowned Romanian National Chamber Choir *Madrigal*.

The history of this celebrated choral ensemble begins in 1963 when Professor Marin Constantin, a faculty member at the “Ciprian Porumbescu” Conservatory of Bucharest, Romania, selected a group of singers from among the students and graduates of the conservatory for his project to create a new vocal ensemble of smaller numbers, the *Madrigal* Chamber Choir. In only a few years, Maestro Marin was able to bring this new choir to a level of professionalism and artistic quality that impressed audiences both in Romania and abroad. National and international tours, participation through concerts at important choral festivals, and numerous international awards together with the recognition of their achievements by great musical personalities of the time have provided the choir’s activity with a long list of accomplishments. The difficult socio-economic and political contexts in which the choir functioned under the Communist regime represented a harsh and unfortunate reality in the life of this fine choral ensemble and of their musical director. Behind the accolades presented in the two monographic

works which I will reference below, a more accurate image of the politics that gravitated around the existence of the *Madrigal* Choir during the Communist regime in Romania, which ended in December 1989, can be found in the research and writings of Sabina Păuța Pieslak.³²⁸

II.3.1 *The Mastery of Choral Structure and Performance*

In parallel with the busy performance schedule as choral conductor of the *Madrigal* Chamber Choir, Marin Constantin was active both as pedagogue and as music theoretician. The synthesis of his research and discoveries in the phenomenology of the performing field is constituted by a unique approach to scholarship, his ten-disc audio treatise *The Mastery of Choral Structure and Performance*.³²⁹ The history of its publication is revealed by Romanian musicologist Grigore Constantinescu:

This work comprises ten LP records and was mastered by Electrecord in 1983, initially in Spanish, because it had been commissioned by the Academy of Music of Tolima (Colombia), where Marin Constantin led the Conducting Department and was named Honorary Director of that Conservatory. The work was subsequently edited in Romanian [...] and in 1985 brought him a PhD in Musicology at the ‘George Dima’ Conservatory of Cluj (Romania). In 1993, the work was re-issued on ten compact discs.³³⁰

After a fairly short explanatory introduction of the work in which he also lists the chapters to be addressed, Marin Constantin presents the first topic, titled “The *Madrigal* Touch in Choral Structure.” Here, the Maestro explains the process of selection of singers

³²⁸ Sabina Păuța Pieslak, “Romania’s Madrigal Choir and the Politics of Prestige,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 26 (2007), 215-240.

³²⁹ Constantin Marin, *Arta construcției și interpretării corale (The Mastery of Choral Structure and Performance)* (Boxed set of 10 compact discs in Romanian with English translation. The Romanian National Chamber Choir *Madrigal*, performer. Bucharest, Romania: Electrecord, 1993).

³³⁰ Grigore Constantinescu, *Madrigal sau magia sunetelor (Madrigal or the Magic of the Sounds)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1995), 20. Researcher’s translation from Romanian.

who have “high quality voices which possess musicality, sensitivity, intelligence, memory, strong will and dedication.”³³¹ Because no human being can possibly have all these qualities at the highest level necessary, the process also entails that the director selects several vocal quintets that each displays a prevailing quality, thus creating a balanced group of people with which the conductor works. Marin was looking not only for vocal excellence, but also showed concern for the human factor, considering it essential in the life of an ensemble.

Its members should always be ready to participate in the life of the group and to work hard in order to attain those qualities which are important to the ensemble. They are to be good friends and colleagues, highly ethical in their motivations, noble and eager to promote general interests before individual ones. [...] Given this spiritual homogeneity, a most comprehensive feature of our activity, one might be tempted to approach psycho-technique first and only then vocal technique as such.³³²

Marin agrees though that vocal technique always comes first, but that the two facets, technique and psycho-technique, are constantly interacting with each other as two complementary aspects of the same reality. He then presents a series of vocal exercises for the choir with the help of the *Madrigal* Choir itself. These exercises address, though not exhaustively, issues such as individual breathing techniques within the ensemble (staggered breathing), correct vocal placement, various ways of articulation in singing, vocal agility, expansion of the vocal range, octave tuning, and timbre equalization and homogeneity among all vocal sections. Marin Constantin emphasizes the importance of diction and clarity of pronunciation in any language. The tongue twister examples that he gives as part of the diction training “are not to be purely technical but also and

³³¹ Constantin Marin, *Arta construcției și interpretării corale (The Mastery of Choral Structure and Performance)*, 10.

³³² Idem, 11.

necessarily psycho-technical,³³³ because a purely mechanical approach leads to “formalism, meaninglessness, even into doubtful taste.”³³⁴ Choral music has the advantage of the wealth of semantic values through the possibilities given by the textual connotations through musical colors. These colors and the tensional elements of the musical discourse are also influenced by the texture of a piece. This is why Marin Constantin tackles the vocal aspects of the ‘*Madrigal Touch*’ through the four textural elements in music, namely monody, homophony, polyphony, and heterophony. Mastering rhythmic precision and the knowledge of polyrhythmic complexities represent in Marin Constantin’s vision about choral technique an inevitable necessity for choirs of great artistic quality.

The second chapter of Marin Constantin’s treatise addresses the spiritual homogeneities of the choral ensemble and the importance of this phenomenon. The central component for Marin’s approach to the phenomenon of creating a psychologically unified ensemble of singers is represented by what he calls psycho-technique.

This is a method through which one achieves that fabric of qualities both conductor and singers should possess in order to sense and apprehend the different moods requested by the repertory as well as a common capacity ‘to live,’ to assume efficiently and sincerely such hypostases as might be deemed necessary. For example, in order to achieve choral elasticity one has to practice continuously and to improve upon one’s capacity to sense, identify and accomplish the conductor’s intentions, conveyed by means of various attitudes, gestures and mime. We all know music cannot comprise inert states or moods: music is life, mirrored and transfigured. Through music one becomes increasingly aware of the universal truth, unlikely to be comprehended by any interpreter, no matter how great, unless he continuously improves upon his own capacity to give up all individual pride, hence acquiring that sort of conscience which enables one to identify one’s self with the eternity of vibration.³³⁵

³³³ Op. cit., 12.

³³⁴ Op. cit., 13.

³³⁵ Op. cit., 15.

Through this philosophical definition of the concept of psycho-technique, Marin Constantin identifies key points of the artistic phenomenology, namely the necessity for the artist-singer and choir conductor to experience ('to live') on the stage the emotional and psychological connotations of the music and the text within the message or the super-objective of the choral piece; also, these personal experiences of each individual member of the ensemble should always be connected to the greatest consciousness of life itself; finally, the means of communication in psycho-technique between the conductor and the choir and even between the choristers themselves has to acquire a high level of awareness in order to facilitate a clear transfer of emotional and psychological content. Marin Constantin declares that "Every technical exercise must necessarily be psycho-technical,"³³⁶ because according to his approach, singers need not only to train their voices, but also their spirit. He demonstrates possible changes in the vocal expression of the singers within the context of various semantic developments (changing of texts or just the atmosphere) of the same musical segment. Various exercises are also presented in order to cultivate "sensitivity, attention, power of concentration as well as reaction speed, spontaneity and ensemble participation in the accomplishment of the musical contour."³³⁷ The benefits of this kind of focused work for the ensemble are illustrated in several dramatic real-life situations to which Marin Constantin and his *Madrigal Choir* were exposed in their impressive performing career, situations that the ensemble overcame through their consistent psycho-technique training.

³³⁶ Op. cit., 16.

³³⁷ Idem.

Marin Constantin mentions that the artistic endeavor of choral music is aimed toward the audience and thus it must be considered on a social level. From this angle, he describes three other key elements of his psycho-technical approach to choral singing. First, the concept of ‘reflex attack’ with regard to the preparatory gesture of the conductor is central to the concomitant engagement of the conductor (through suggestion), the audience (through their consensual adherence), and the singers (through bringing music to life). Thus, the ‘reflex attack’ has the role of “achieving the three-dimensional status of absolute coincidence and togetherness”³³⁸ of all the participants. Second, Marin Constantin presents the concept that, in the artistic presentation of the choral experience, there is a tensional flow or flux that follows the pattern, conductor—choir—audience—choir.

The conductor is originally the transmitter and the choir is the receiver. Yet the ensemble is not limited to a passive role, turning at the same time into a relay and a conscious transmitter with regard to the public which, in its turn, changes—by listening to the choir—from a receiver to a transmitter of the feedback effect, thus communicating the state of coincidence or of non-coincidence, of adherence or non-adherence, eventually captured by the conductor who, at the end of the process, is turned into a receiver himself. Due to the intrinsic complexity of this process, to the inherent hardship and obstacles, the commands transmitted by the conductor must be strong and powerful enough, clear enough just because, apart from gesture and attitude, the main means employed for communication is suggestion highly charged from a psychological point of view.³³⁹

Third in relationship with the audience, the mixed arrangement of the singers (named the ‘stereo’ stage layout) is a matter of conveying to the audience an accurate representation of the textural structure of the music. More than any other arrangement, the ‘stereo’ layout of the choir implies “a multilateral assimilation of scores by all singers

³³⁸ *Op. cit.*, 18.

³³⁹ *Idem.*

at almost the same level with the conductor, a highly distributive attention and a soloistic responsibility voluntarily integrated into the compact unity of the ‘tutti.’”³⁴⁰

Principles of psycho-technique are extended in the third chapter as elements of “Conception, Style, Interpretation.” The knowledge and understanding of the entire musical vocabulary in the context of various musical styles from all historical periods is imperative in the work of a respected choral ensemble. After the analytical elements are in place and well studied, the human, emotional and psychological factors of the contemporary performers must bring to life the intentions of the composer, filtered through their own experiencing (living) on the stage, that ‘here’ and ‘now’ element of creativity.

Real music can only be there for people with an entire range of affective and intelligent relationships based on their life experience and on that which resourceful ‘mother-nature’ helped shape. [...] The satisfaction derived from this acknowledgement comprises not only the feeling of accomplished duty but also that through knowledge of human nature and psychic peculiarities, of adaptability, will, understanding and thought that the choir has come to treasure; essentially the satisfaction thus derived is that of a major psycho-technical accomplishment.³⁴¹

Marin Constantin also embraces the principle that any choral opus is always re-created with each reiteration of it, even by the same ensemble under the same conductor. He says that this re-creation is based on new emotional routes, consciously chosen by the conductor, as well as on the “knowledge of the score, on the singers’ love and confidence, on intelligence and spontaneity.”³⁴²

The following chapters of Marin Constantin’s treatise, *The Mastery of Choral Structure and Performance*, turn to the historical part of his dissertation, which revolves

³⁴⁰ Op. cit., 19.

³⁴¹ Op. cit., 21.

³⁴² Idem.

around the several directions that the *Madrigal* Chamber Choir has pursued in their reportorial choices. Given the specificity of the foundation of the *Madrigal* Choir, the journey begins naturally with the “Virtues and Servitudes of European Renaissance,” discussing trends, approaches, and representative composers of the Flemish, Italian, French, Spanish, German, and English Schools. Then, Marin turns to the Romanian folklore, as well as to Byzantine and Gregorian chant, and finishes with the specificity of the Romanian Classicism, Modernism, and the language of contemporary music. In his final considerations about his artistic ‘credo,’ Marin Constantin mentions, among other aphorisms, that “A choir is an instrument full of life. Such being the case, psycho-technique should be regarded as the technique of construction.”³⁴³

II.3.2 *The Madrigal Constellation and Madrigal or the Magic of Sounds*

Given the importance of Marin Constantin’s new approach to choral music and choral interpretation through the complex process of psycho-technique, clarifications or re-iterations of its principles appear in two monographic works by Romanian musicologists, Iosif Sava and Grigore Constantinescu.

In Sava’s book *Constelația Madrigal (The Madrigal Constellation)*, written in an interview format, Marin Constantin emphasizes the importance of memorization for both the singers and the conductor. This allows a permanent connection with each other through sight and through suggestive conducting gestures. He adds, “The need to communicate directly with the ensemble. Let’s not forget that not only the arms are the conductor’s tools in the performing process, but his whole being and presence, and

³⁴³ Op. cit., 45.

especially his eyes!”³⁴⁴ Through psycho-technique, Marin Constantin understands “a way of psychological engagement of each singer in the choir so that he or she can perceive and present promptly the emotions required by the repertory. [...] It is about the singers’ ability to perceive and adhere, the way the same emotional intensity builds up inside them through inter-communication.”³⁴⁵

Also in a dialog form, Grigore Constantinescu’s book *Madrigal sau magia sunetelor (Madrigal or the Magic of Sounds)*³⁴⁶ elaborates some of Maestro Marin’s tools of psycho-technical preparation of the choral ensemble. He describes that after several minutes of vocal warm-ups on legato, staccato, accents, and so on, all of which being connected to life aspects, he works with the choir on exercises that focus on emotional states that a certain melodic contour and a given verse can create through semantic variations. When they work on repertory, the focus is on details and they “cultivate the patience to not leave anything to chance in any direction, working hard on what we want to say, like in a role, in a theatrical play.”³⁴⁷ Here is another example of artistic congruence between the art of the theater and the choral music as the current research is trying to explore.

For Marin Constantin, the physical nature of the sound is transformed when it is filtered through the human perception, “it stops being just a physical entity and becomes bonding agent, human vibration, a living being.”³⁴⁸

³⁴⁴ Iosif Sava and Marin Constantin, *Constelația Madrigal (The Madrigal Constellation)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Muzicală, 1993), 53. Researcher’s translation from Romanian.

³⁴⁵ Idem.

³⁴⁶ Grigore Constantinescu, *Madrigal sau magia sunetelor (Madrigal or the Magic of Sounds)* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1996).

³⁴⁷ Op. cit., 69. Researcher’s translation from Romanian.

³⁴⁸ Op. cit., 262.

The following represents a more elaborate definition of the concept of psycho-technique that Marin Constantin used in his work with the *Madrigal* Chamber Choir and definitely the key explanation of the connection with and the influence of Constantin Stanislavski and his ‘system’ of acting.

Unlike most definitions of psycho-technique that are found in new dictionaries, such as ‘the discipline that studies the issues of people’s activity in their professional orientation or in the organization of domains on the basis of psychophysiology and of the experimental psychology,’ I use this notion with another sense, taken in part from the one given by Constantin Stanislavski. Psycho-technique is for me a concept, a principle, a method, a complex of procedures; in any case, it is the only appropriate way of the work on performance, because it subordinates all that is involved in the preparation of the artistic act, consciously and subconsciously, to vibration and the sensitive interpretation.³⁴⁹

Marin Constantin also admits³⁵⁰ that he had studied and reflected upon the writings of Stanislavski when developing his own practice as conductor in the choral field. He considers that in a choral setting, the psycho-technique forces the ensemble to train on how to live and place themselves in the psychological and emotional states demanded by the selected musical repertory. It also saves the performers from the negative consequences of naturalism, in which personal affectation by situations, content, or emotional baggage in a choral piece or another may influence negatively the singers’ behavior on stage and the quality of the performance itself. Ultimately, the Maestro places the responsibility of the psycho-technical process of self-training on the individual singers, because through this process they become more accustomed to this approach to rehearsal and performance of any choral piece, in which it facilitates the attuning of the ensemble with the affective itinerary of the composer.

³⁴⁹ Op. cit., 267.

³⁵⁰ Op. cit., 275.

III

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHORAL REHEARSAL TECHNIQUES

Constantin Stanislavski's acting 'system' as described in great detail in the previous chapter, based on his own writings, determined this researcher to find valuable applications to the choral field that are founded on artistic principles transcending the art of the theater and penetrating all performing arts. A parallel with the unique historical context surrounding the development of the 'system' itself leads us to believe that a definite solution, or 'recipe,' for applying its findings in the choral field requires more than the limitations of this research. After all, it took Stanislavski himself a lifetime to continuously discover and perfect elements and principles of artistic interpretation that are true to the nature of the theater. In this chapter, the discussion proposes areas of intersection between the acting 'system' of Constantin Stanislavski and choral rehearsal methodology and any associated techniques.

We begin with Stanislavski's goal to create believable characters on stage that would inspire audiences and mark them with long-lasting emotional impressions about the theatrical experience. This becomes a principle for all performing arts, including choral music—the purpose of producing captivating and, most of all, believable musical performances must become the driving force for choral conductors and their vocal ensembles. Stanislavski's psycho-technique is a powerful complex of individual training

and ensemble rehearsal techniques that is intended to access the performers' subconscious in order to facilitate inspiration in their work.

The 'system' provides that actors must live in a creative mood when they are performing on the stage. This concept of experiencing is critical for any choral ensemble and its conductor, since the artistic value of a choral performance is the result of the singers' direct involvement in this process with their whole intellect, will, and emotions under the conductor's personal interpretation of the musical score.

The principle of concentration of attention that is an integral part of the 'system' becomes of great value for the choral field. Too often singers are either "lost" or "buried" in their scores or even disconnected from the musical expression because of the attraction of the auditorium space and various external factors. Choristers need to train themselves to shift their focus of attention on the stage and what better and more necessary an object of attention for them than the conductor? They should concentrate their whole attention on any method of communication of emotions that the conductor deems necessary for the correct and efficient transmission of the tensional flux in an artistic performance. Both Stanislavski and Marin emphasized the primary importance of the performers' eyes; their expression represents a natural reflection of an intense activity, their inner life and emotions. This visual aspect together with the conductor's facial and bodily expressions, postures, gestures, and attitudes represent routes of communication through which sequences of inner feelings are transmitted to the choir. The vocal expression aspect is used by conductors only in rehearsal contexts, while in performance the voice as a means of artistic expression is primarily the realm of the choral instrument, the singers, as both a

remote reflection of the conductor's feelings and a transmitter of the choristers' own experiencing of the artistic process.

The technique of circles of attention is helpful to choral singers. The average chorister relies on a crowd psychology that gives him or her confidence that by situating themselves next to a leading voice in their section they will be able to cover deficiencies in their own limited technical skills. Through psycho-technique, a singer is not excused from acquiring the necessary vocal and musical skills; on the contrary, technique and psycho-technique merge into a complex approach to artistry in which the interdependency of the two represents the key to succeed in the field—one element cannot exist without the other in the process of creating a valuable artistic output. Consequently, singers in a choir must follow similar processes described in the 'system' with regard to circles of attention. In rehearsal first, then in performance as well, they must focus on their own body and their technique to produce sounds and music, their small circle of attention. This should also give them a sense of solitude in public, that paradoxical but beneficial creative state that makes the performers aware of their own experiencing factor and puts them individually in the state of 'I am.'

A medium circle of attention may be a singer's equivalent to focusing on the other partners on the stage, the singers in the choir, from the immediate neighbors to the extremities of the ensemble. The importance of this medium-range focus inside the vocal group is multi-faceted. This focus gives the individual singer a powerful tool to communicate with and react to all the other singers in the same section as well as across all sections in the choir. It creates awareness of the complex technical and emotional

interchange inside the ensemble, prepares the path for spiritual communion with other singers, and fine tunes the diverse channels of individual expression among all singers.

The large circle of attention is the resonance of the performance space. Its conditions, circumstances, physical parameters including acoustics, the time of the performance, and so on are important factors for the singers. Variations in any of these aspects regarding the performance space influence the large circle of attention of the singers and consequently the element of adaptation comes into consideration. Singers are constantly adjusting their experiencing while performing on the stage. They need to learn to adapt to minute changes and specific circumstances of the performance itself, of the auditorium space, of the acoustics of the room, and especially to each individual person—all singers must be aware at all times of their partners-singers' feelings, attitudes, and ways of expression and simultaneously react (or adapt themselves) to these.

Any artistically valuable choral work has a story to tell, whether it is an idea, a message, an attitude, or emotions. These are structural elements that are imbedded in any particular piece in the compositional process of its author. Performers need to be true to the nature of such a work and its conceptual load and find the resources to convey it to an audience so that the performance experience leaves a profound impression on them. Through elements of psycho-technique, choristers may set conscious parameters to access and facilitate subconscious creativity.

First, they need to engage their imagination with the help of the six fundamental questions mentioned by Stanislavski. *Who* are they on the stage in the context of a particular choral work? If the answer is hard to extract from the work itself, singers and their conductor could imagine circumstances for themselves based on the musical and

textual context or character of a choral work. They can continue by imagining themselves in a certain physical location (*where*), again which can be either required or not necessarily specified in the work. In addition, discerning *why* and *when* as well as *for what reason* and *how* should determine the performers' presence and activity on the stage at any moment as a result of the rich life of their imagination. To clarify, as Merlin points out,³⁵¹ the remarkable linguistic similarity between *why* and *for what reason* in the English translation is in fact misleading. The Russian language distinction between the two questions is more defined; *why* refers to the information already present in the given circumstances of the work as presented by the author; *for what reason* appeals to imagination, deals with possible future developments, and consequently guides the performers to more complex psychological objectives.

In order then to spark their imagination, singers need to use three elements of the 'system' which may not necessarily be specific to the traditional choral field: action, magic 'if,' and given circumstances. From a different angle, these non-specifics can be approached and interpreted accordingly to the nature of the choral art. For singers, action is represented primarily by the aspect of vocal interpretation (singing) and less through external movements in the traditional sense, unless the choir is part of operatic or musical theater productions. A more profound aspect of the element of action in a choral concert setting is the singers' inner activity, expressing their great inner intensity of experiencing. Psycho-technique implies the interaction of the three human faculties that Stanislavski calls inner motive forces, namely feeling (emotion), mind (intellect), and will. Their complex but harmonious mutual influence on each other puts the performers in their

³⁵¹ Bella Merlin, *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (Hollywood, California: Drama Publishers, 2007), 105.

inner creative mood that becomes the germ of the creative process on the stage. The performers' reverberation with the choral work through this kind of psycho-technique emanates artistic energy, power, and inspiration. This intense inner activity, even though it may be oblivious to the audience, is of great importance to the artistic process of conveying the true message of a choral work through that 'personal touch' of the singers' personality and human experience.

More eloquently from this point of view, the conductor's art embraces much more of the element of action through the physical manifestation of posture, attitude, movement, gesture, facial expression, pantomime, and visual communication (eyes). The conductor must focus on and display both internal activity and external action. Based on constant observation and study of daily life experiences that make lasting impressions in their minds, the conductors' careful and fine-tuned awareness, their inner attention, and their rich imagination must generate great inner activity in their artistic process of interpretation of any choral work. This intense internal action must become the agent that favors the engagement of their subconscious to produce inspiration in their artistic process. This active force from within should then be able to create the external physical representation of the conductor's leading role in its traditional sense.

The sense of truth is as important in choral music as it is in theatrical productions. One way to strive to achieve this sense of truth is through what Stanislavski calls 'magic If.' The stage phenomenology in both theater and choral arts may seem artificial in nature in comparison with real life experiences, but the role of artists is to bring a sense of truth when performing on stage through justification of their presence and performance. In order to do that, even though the immediate reality is conventional, performers should

challenge their perception by questioning themselves *what if* this particular situation, idea, or character were real or happening in their real life? The sense of truth on the stage represents what must be real in the imaginary life of the actor. On the stage, truth “consists of something that is not actually in existence but which could happen.”³⁵² The conditional approach (i.e., ‘magic If’) is a powerful tool to access the artists’ imagination, which in turn will stir their subconscious inspiration and creativeness. I strongly believe that introducing early in the rehearsal process the conditional existence of a given subject of a choral work by putting the singers and the conductor in the area of possibly experiencing the given subject should increase the awareness and personal engagement in the work of all individual performers. Examples of specific situations on this topic will be presented in the following chapter of this research.

The ‘system’ of acting requires that the authors’ given circumstances of a play be identified and understood by all actors. Similarly, choral singers and their conductor must name the specificity of any choral piece, from the plane of the literary text and its subtext to the complexity of the musical language and style. The beauty of choral music is that through the addition of the literary text, traditionally abstract or non-verbal musical elements of melody, rhythm, harmony, tempo, dynamics, form, and so on gain deeper meaning and are transformed into a more defined complex of expression of human emotions.

Psycho-technique does not eliminate the need to rely on the musical and literary elements of any choral score and focus only on creating imaginary worlds of expression

³⁵² Constantin Stanislavski, and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, transl. *An Actor Prepares* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 2003), 140.

instead. Correct and concrete analysis of both text and music is an integral element of the process, its starting point, in which the performers discover the authors' intentions. Stanislavski and Marin emphasize the law that performers should be faithful to the dramatic or musical work and present it accurately. Similarly to the acting 'system,' the analysis of a choral work should include the basic process of dividing the piece into clearly defined sections. This process should resemble dividing a dramatic play into units (bits), labeled by a noun, that are governed by individual objectives (tasks), expressed by a verb. Sectionalizing the musical discourse of a choral work should observe textual divisions of ideas, images, or feelings as well as musical form based on melodic, harmonic, and textural elements. Ideally, a well-conceived choral piece is characterized by the organic merger of text and music, so this process that combines the textual and musical analysis, respectfully, should result in sectionalizing the choral work precisely in points of intersection between words and musical expression. What the 'system' adds is the fact that each of these musical divisions should be governed by specific objectives, translated in the nature of singing as particular ways of delivering the subject of a section (idea, emotion, or both) through vocal production. Like actors, conductors can establish physical and small psychological objectives for the various sections of a choral piece and focus on expressing them in physical form. For conductors, these set objectives are expressed in physical form through gestures, body postures, meaningful movements, and facial expressions.

Stanislavski describes the actors' warm-ups in detail. The twist of his 'system' is that it goes beyond the mere physical preparation and readiness prior to a performance. The artist needs to tune all his or her human faculties to the phenomenon of experiencing

an artistic event on the stage and in front of an audience. Singers in a choir need to begin their inner preparation between one and two hours prior to their concert, depending on the complexity of the program. It should include relaxation of their body muscles in order to eliminate any unnecessary tension or stiffness accumulated over the day. They should then move on to stimulating their mind and imagination. Focusing on an object in the room using circles of attention may eliminate distractions and put on hold any personal problems or affecting situations experienced lately in their daily lives. Focusing on imagination and gradually directing it toward the repertoire to be performed should facilitate a sympathetic attraction to it and an affinity or connection to the emotional and ideological components of the concert program. Singers should gradually bring into play all the elements of their psycho-technique, should go over the fundamental parts or aspects of their 'role,' and observe how they react or reverberate in that moment within the parameters of the choral music that they will perform.

Of particular interest to the choral field, ensemble warm-ups must be constructively conceived to address all these steps as well as the last one, the vocal exercises. Marin Constantin underlines the importance of devising vocal and choral warm-ups that are not only technical in nature, thus being purely mechanical, pre-conceived to simply awaken the singers' voices, but psycho-technical so that they experience individually and as an ensemble the fullness of true artistic creation. Vocal exercises must have a definite objective, whether they address timbral unity, homogeneity, breathing, ensemble balance, intonation, vocal agility, or diction.

The role of the choral conductor in ensemble warm-ups becomes one of controller that not only proposes a set of vocal exercises, but also supervises the process itself and

corrects deficiencies, shaping the relationship between the ensemble and its conductor. In this process, a check-up of the communication channels among singers and between them and their conductor should take place. Conductors are also subject to individual psycho-technical warm-ups. Muscle relaxation through controlled concentration of attention on their body must begin the psycho-technical sequence of events in order to produce natural conditions of expression of the immense emotional and physical demands of a choral concert repertoire. Then, conductors may transfer their attention to purposeful physical activities in order to engage their apparatus. These activities are set objectives to awake the subconscious and are realized through a series of simple actions, motions, gestures, and facial expressions in any given circumstance. As an actor in preparation, the conductor must mentally envision through the power of imagination realistic contexts for the variety of artistic elements in the program. Going over key aspects in each choral work to be performed, conductors should ignite their imagination to create new conditions for experiencing (living) to the fullest those fundamental contexts, given circumstances, objectives, and messages that were pre-conceived in the composers' creative processes. This conscious psycho-technique is the process of finding appropriate means in rehearsal, in warm-ups, and in public performances on the stage to lead the performers, conductors and singers together, into the realm of their subconscious, which will eventually inspire them to present the contents of their choral music in an external form (i.e., conducting gestures, singing) and their honest belief in such a presentation.

Communion as an acting technique described by Stanislavski as part of his 'system' represents an instrumental element of psycho-technique for the choral singers and conductors. It is too often in today's busy world that individuals come together as a

group for a certain conventional function and there is a general sense that they don't connect on multiple levels of human existence. So too in choral ensembles, members are rarely in contact long enough to experience a deeper human connection with each other. Ironically, choral music in itself is the one that brings them together. However, making music together in a choir should have the finality of opening the path to natural inter-human relationships between the conductor and the singers, among the singers themselves, and between all of them as performers and their public. Consequently, Stanislavski's principle of communion in an artistic environment and Marin's correlated tensional flux in the choral performance phenomenology are invaluable resources to utilize in choral rehearsals and performances.

Ensemble training must openly and sincerely approach the technique of communion, that constant connection and communication among all performers through a wide variety of methods. Of primary importance, the communion between the conductor and the choral ensemble involves all external means of direct communication, namely conducting gestures, facial and visual expression, body postures and attitudes, as well as verbal instruction in rehearsal. While Stanislavski unveils potential silent communication between people through 'irradiation' or 'sending out rays' of information as energy from the emotional center in the area of the solar plexus, Marin acknowledges the power of suggestion, oftentimes through the conductor's eyes. Esoteric as it may be, this technique cannot be ignored in ensemble training. The limitations of the physical ways of silent communication through typical conducting gestures cannot provide the full spectrum of human emotions and inner activity that conductors need to communicate to the choir. In this context, Merlin refers to the concept of psychological gesture in actor

training. Through conscious psycho-technique, conductors must embrace this concept in their artistic vocabulary. While for Merlin the psychological gesture implies a self-contained combination of two different physical postures connected through a transitional movement of various amplitudes, directions, and speed, the choral conductor's arm movements become gestures when they express an idea, a sentiment, or attitude. Furthermore, by actually living (experiencing) these ideas, emotions, or attitudes in their rich inner activity, conductors' gestures become psychological in nature because they truly express their own range of emotional resonance with the musical content. Conductors' arms movements, sometimes deridingly coined as 'waving,' elevate from mere physical activities to physical actions when they are charged with psychological and dramatic inner vibrations that need to be communicated to the choir.

It is extremely important for a choral ensemble to cultivate a spirit of openness and train themselves to allow a sense of communion with their conductor to take place at any time. The singers' concentration of attention on the conductor's expressivity should facilitate his or her efforts in the direction of artistic communion. Choristers must know how to 'feel' a conductor.

On the other hand, members of a choir should also 'feel' each other in the same sense of communion. In addition to their concentrated attention on the conductor, all choristers must be in communion with fellow singers. Constantly sensing the others' actions in terms of generating a variety of emotional expressions through their singing must represent a necessary aspect of ensemble training.

Marin Constantin and his *Madrigal* Choir developed an approach called 'reflex attack' with regard to the initial moment of singing together. The conductor's preparatory

gesture is not formal or mechanical, but the result of his intense inner emotional activity based on the context of the choral work. Due to the complexity of the external outcome, the vocal response of the choir cannot be concomitant with the conductor's prep, but follows it in a timely manner that reflects the heavy load of information transmitted by the conductor through that initial gesture. This phenomenon known as the 'reflex attack' requires simultaneity of emotional and technical response from the choir (after the preparatory gesture of the conductor), which can only be achieved through constant training using communion. This process is required because singers need to learn to 'feel' each other, place themselves on the same level of suggested emotional reverberation, and begin singing, technically by themselves, altogether in the same instant.

Last but not least, the concept of communion has a role in the transfer of 'artistic information' between the stage and the audience. The public is a silent partner for the performers in their communal exchanges of emotions and ideas. The resonance of a choral performance through the reactions of adherence or non-adherence of the audience represents the conductor's barometer that controls the tensional flux of the performance, namely from conductor to choir to audience and back to conductor. This is not to be confused with the idea of performing to the audience, of entertaining them in order to capture their immediate praise. It is important to note that the role of the public's response is mostly a byproduct of the true artistic experiencing of life and aspects of life by the choral singers and their conductor on the stage, and that the public's silent communion with the performers represents their human reverberation with the emotional charge transmitted in live choral performances.

The systemic concept of emotion memory has great potential in the art of choral performance. Representing a psychological quality of recalling past experiences from the personal life of the artist that trigger certain feelings and emotions, emotion (affective) memory can certainly produce remarkable results in the performance of individual singers and of the choral ensemble as the sum of these personalized feelings. Like any other artist, the choral singer and the choral conductor perform their art in their own way, 'playing' themselves in the 'role' required by any choral work. It is only natural to engage in the creative process their own emotional experiences by stirring past personal impressions, putting them in perspective, and certainly making the correct association between them and the situation or the 'scenario' dictated by the choral opus. It may be the case, though, that, given the huge variety of choral music, personal life experiences to match perfectly the 'scenario' may not be recalled. It is less important for the outcome of this process to find a 'match' for the situation than it is to use emotion memory in order to stir similar emotional response to the one implied by the choral work and use it in performance. However effective this technique of emotion memory may be, the historical context of its usage in the theater art, especially through the extremism of Method Acting, cautions us as to its use on a large scale in choral music. Stanislavski never rejected emotion memory, but noticed how unreliable a technique this was for actors who needed something more concrete to bring out repeatedly the necessary emotions in their acting. Similarly, choral music can benefit from emotion memory as long as the participants in the process can really call forth personal feelings from past occurrences in order to truly experience the life of their part on the stage.

The 'system' provides a list of stimuli that can be used by actors to prompt emotional responses. For the same purpose, conductors and choral singers can employ as well such elements as imaginative suggestions based on given circumstances, concrete objects of attention, and intellectual and emotional connotations of the text and music. External elements of the physical environment on the stage, in particular the focus on the director and his or her conducting gestures as representations of physical actions, as well as the various structural units of any choral piece together with their respective objectives are also included as possible emotional stimuli for the choir. The conductor's main role in the artistic creative process is to define the equivalent of a super-objective in any particular choral work, its main topic of discourse or of artistic representation. It is only then that the conductor establishes a continuous inner line of effort, the equivalent of the through line of action, which finds a physical form of expression (gestures, singing) serving the theme (super-objective) of the choral discourse and directs all its small units and objectives toward this theme.

Paraphrasing Stanislavski, the long and perhaps tedious process of arduous preparation as conductor, chorister, and choir (ensemble work) is aimed at the conception and birth of a new being—the person (or the ensemble) in an artistic role embedded in the essence of a choral opus. To create that unique artistic image that the composer 'prescribed' in the musical score in order to convey messages and emotions to the audience represents an effort compared to the intense labor of new birth. All performers including choral artists must engage in this creative process with all their being, they must personally and directly experience (live) in the 'role' or 'character' of their 'score.'

Stanislavski leads us into the furnace where the process of molding (building) a character reaches high degrees of creativity and artistry. Actors are asked to focus in their training on the expressivity of the human body, to follow the path of general physical development, and to become aware of their own musculature and its capabilities. He asks actors in training to take up dancing classes and go through their routine physical exercises to correct deficiencies and learn how to control the movement of various parts of their bodies in order to produce natural physical actions.

Similarly, the choral conducting art must take into consideration the need for developing natural body movements. Conductors are physically engaged in the creative process on the stage and in rehearsals. Their body posture, movements, and gestures, their entire physical apparatus must be prepared and ready to instantly resonate accordingly to the musical and semantic connotations of choral pieces. Conductors in particular, but singers as well—as an extrapolation of the concept of physicality in choral art, must develop through constant training a sense of harmonious physical expression, be it conducting gestures or vocal production (singing). The components of the conducting gesture, typically described simplistically as a downward movement or the arm, ictus (stress or point of impact), and the upward movement (rebound), however definite they may be in themselves, engage continuous motions of various body parts in harmony. The ‘system’ requires the development in actors of a sense of plasticity of the body. It is precisely the same plasticity that conductors must organically employ in their gestures and their art. The exercises prescribed for actors in the realm of plasticity of body motion are valuable in the training process of conductors as well. They should become psycho-technical in the sense that developing natural body movements must be done in

concordance with specific given circumstances, often required by the contents of the choral score. Thus, conductors learn to transform disparate body motions into meaningful gestures, postures, and body attitudes that are capable of communicating their artistically justified, inner activity. The conductors' sense of activity transmitted to the choir through their external physical manifestation of gestures represents real, experienced, lived actions that are full of purpose and content.

Moreover, the acting 'system' experiments with the concept of emotion of movement, recognizing the power of suggestion of physical gestures. The active complex emotion-will-intellect generates an unbroken line of energy that is transferred into artistic forms of fluent, plastic body movements. The fact that acting students were often asked to experiment with music as a stimulus to provoke certain body movements as result of their physical reaction to sounds represents Stanislavski's intent to discipline his students' movements, including eliminating superfluous gestures from their 'repertoire' under the principle of restraint and control. As a parallel, choral conductors can also resort to experimentation with physical responses through gestures to study their own bodily plasticity of movement and the power of emotion of movement. The connection with music in Stanislavski's exercises reveals kinesthetic relationships that choral conductors can use in their performances.

Emotion of movement represents also a practical way to engage singers into experiencing various creative responses based on the music they are performing. Provided that the rehearsal space is adaptable and that the singers can rearrange the room to create various conditions for their experiments, allowing the singers to move around and express freely in a physical way any reaction to their singing should provide a fresh

new psycho-technical foundation for inspiration and creativity. Focusing only on correct vocal production, as valuable as it may be, should be enhanced in this novel creative environment with the experience of freeing up the body, releasing unnecessary and undiscovered physical and mental tensions, spiritual liberation, and elimination of conventional constraints, thus creating the foundation to re-discover oneself as a person and as an artist engaged in the creative process. Paraphrasing again one of Stanislavski's ideas, the physical, external technique of a choral conductor and the vocal manifestation through singing of the choral ensemble must be "flexible, receptive, expressive, sensitive, and mobile."³⁵³ Emotion of movement provides the basis for these high artistic standards.

Stanislavski's approach to vocal production demonstrates the utmost care that the acting 'system' places on diction, singing, vocal resonance, intonations, pauses, semantics, and textual imagery. Given the close relationship between vocal production in theater and choral music, most of these elements and the accompanying technical connotations described by Stanislavski are also instrumental for the choral art. In acting as in singing, verbal communication addresses both intellect and emotions (mind and soul). The treatment of this artistic component must again be done through a psycho-technical perspective. Technical deficiencies such as a disagreeable timbre, limited range, lack of volume or expressivity, and inflexibility should be major concerns to be addressed immediately from both physical and psychological points of view. Like actors, singers in a choral ensemble must learn to properly place the sounds. Singing 'in the mask' designates a technique that improves the singers' vocal resonance by placing their

³⁵³ Constantin Stanislavski, and Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, transl., *Building a Character* (New York: Routledge/Theatre Arts, reprinted 2003), 312.

sonorous vibrations in the facial area around the nose, under the eyes and the top of the teeth. The sinuses and the bone areas (upper part of the face and forehead) have great resonant capabilities and should be used in singing to a great extent. This area of the face called the 'mask' will amplify the resonance of the voice and will produce a round, pleasant, and forward tone that can easily project across the performing space. Singers should also be concerned with unhealthy pressures on the voice, unnecessary muscular tensions, forcing, and wrong breathing techniques and improper articulation.

The natures of intonation and pauses have slightly different connotations in singing than in speech. The musical score of any choral piece provides detailed information for singers and conductors regarding pitch, duration, dynamics, timber, and much more. For singers, intonation and pauses refer to precise musical elements required by the score to reflect the composer's intentions. Apparently, there would be no leeway for singers when it comes to intonation and pauses; however, the entire phenomenology of choral interpretation revolves around slight variations and artistic liberties that choral ensembles, conductors, and individual singers use when performing their music. These 'intonations' or specific vocal inflexions as well as these 'pauses' or intentional micro-variations in tempo-rhythmic patterns should be employed in choral music to allow feelings, imagination, thoughts, and the subtext to come to life and to give life to the empty sounds of words, transforming them into true, living vibrations of the soul. For example, a conductor can ask the singers to stretch the duration of marked rests for psychological effects in the context of the dramatic construction of the performance of a certain choral work. Logical pauses can clarify meaningful divisions of the literary text or of the musical form. Breathing pauses are always present in singing as in speech.

However, oftentimes a conductor must decide if breathing pauses interfere with the contextual flow of musical and emotional expression and may opt for a longer, uninterrupted phrasing in which trained singers must utilize the technique of staggering or staggered breathing. This implies that they need to breathe individually, alternatively, at various time intervals, sometimes by simply observing when the next singer needs to breathe or by assigning individual breathing spots in the music, so that the length of the musical phrase and thought is not artificially sectionalized by conventional pausing and keeps its organic flow.

Choral musicians' study of the poetic content of any choral work is very important in the creative process. It allows words to create inner images in their minds that can be accessed and referred to in the middle of the performance through visual memory. These images can stir emotions appropriate to the choral piece and can provide greater stability and power to the meaning of the musical and emotive spectrum. It is then important that, like actors, musicians are encouraged to nurture the desire for what is fine and elevating in life, to continuously search for great thoughts and feelings, and to fully experience life. Their own real-life experiences and elements should help singers and conductors be inspired in their artistry and better understand the deeper meanings of the choral works they present in front of the public. "Love art in yourself and not yourself in art"³⁵⁴ was one of Stanislavski's famous aphorisms.

The idea of tempo-rhythm that brings both speed and intensity to the complexity of Stanislavski's acting 'system' is fundamentally related to music and choral music in particular. Stanislavski himself used musical examples and rhythmic patterns (through

³⁵⁴ Stanislavski and Hapgood, *Building a Character*, 276.

the use of several metronomes) to teach this concept to his actors, to help them define and internalize a certain tempo-rhythm. One would argue that rhythm and tempo are intrinsic elements of music in general and that they are pre-established by composers in their work at the time of creation. However, one should not forget that tempo markings have not always been in practice. The modern choral conductor would not be able to establish a correct tempo and even metrical relationships in the majority of works by Medieval, Renaissance, or Baroque composers without the principles of tempo-rhythm as described in the 'system.' Furthermore, conventional tempo markings in Classical and Romantic music and even in modern compositions that come with mathematical 'precision' of metronome clicks per second represent nothing more than parameters in which performing artists find their own temporal existence based on their complex inner activity and on their own experiencing of the creative act.

Of the many factors that influence the tempo-rhythm of a choral piece, the given circumstances found in the musical score are a priority. Musical elements such as rhythmic complexity, melodic patterns, timbral character, metric intricacies, dynamic variations, texture, structure, style, etc. together with non-musical elements such as textual complexity and comprehensibility, room acoustics, and many so-called performance intangibles must be inter-connected with the human reverberations of the performers as artists as a result of their individual contribution to the interpretation of the choral work, their own psychology, and their own level of understanding of the work, their vocal skills and technical capabilities to perform it at a certain moment in their lives.

Since for singers music making is physiologically related to breathing, tempo-rhythm at a micro-level may help them find well-grounded answers to the ubiquitous

questions of where, why, and how they should breathe in the context of musical expression, establishing a logic to the process. Tempo-rhythm should also guide singers and conductors alike about organic ways to use the air and kinetic energy efficiently in singing or conducting.

Tempo-rhythm is more than just another link between inner and outer expressions. Maintaining the correctly established tempo-rhythm of the 'action' (i.e., the act of singing for choristers, gestural motions for conductors) is also a generator of emotions, a method to maintain the concentration of attention, as well as an important element for spiritual communion within the ensemble, that synchronization of emotions and sounds. Tempo-rhythm anchors the singers and their conductor in a sense of awareness as well as of truth on the stage because it activates their creative faculty and does not allow individual rhythms to compete with each other, but rather facilitate a harmonious coexistence in the wholeness of musical experiencing.

Similarly to an actor's pursuit of creating a role, the work of the choral conductor and his or her vocal ensemble can be divided into the period of studying a choral piece, the stage of establishing its emotional experiences, and finally the enacting of its life in the physical form of conducting and singing, respectively. As Stanislavski underlined in the case of actors' encounter with a new role, it is important that the first contact of the vocal ensemble with a choral piece and its constituent elements must be fresh, without external influences or prejudice. The artists must be given the opportunity to perceive the new work through their own artistic senses and to note their first impressions and emotions because this may be the closest way to experience genuine reverberations with its content. The great advantage of choral music is that traditionally all the vocal parts are

written together in the choral score, an important feature in the process of learning the music. Singers are at all times given the opportunity to study and understand the choral work in its entirety, all vocal parts together. It is instrumental that choristers become familiar with all the other musical lines for a comprehensive and organic integration of their own line of singing into the wholeness of the choral sound, similarly to the actors' process of becoming familiar with all aspects and all characters of a play.

As we noticed in the previous chapter, Stanislavski's shift toward his later innovation of the Method of Physical Actions becomes more explicit in the third book of his acting 'trilogy,' *Creating a Role*. As he describes the process of studying a role through this new method as well as through Active Analysis, actors go relatively fast through the first acquaintance with the work (the first reading) and through a brief analysis of the plot and its proposed circumstances in order to proceed with acting physically on the stage in accordance with the play. At this point, the words of the play are far from being memorized. What this method does is studying the role from the point of view of its external circumstances by infusing real experiencing into it and consequently generating inner circumstances. This process is beneficial to artistic creation in the performance world from many perspectives. Bypassing the sometimes painful memorization process, actors are spared the build-up of the feeling of antipathy to their roles or the play itself and a sentiment of artistic enthusiasm is fostered instead. Stanislavski discovered that the deep study of the text of a play eventually blocks the actors' ability to act their role in a physical form. That is why in the end his theory focused on the actors' physical improvisations as part of 'finding' or defining their characters in the physical embodiment stage. However, the study and understanding of

the play on social and literary levels as well as the mental re-creation of the characters' history (their possible past, present, and potential future) represent analytical steps that must not be ignored.

Based on this process, we can extrapolate that the choral rehearsal may become a laboratory of exploration of new works through similar techniques. Introducing new choral works to a choir may be nerve-wracking and emotionally exhausting. Conductors, no matter how friendly or familiar they may be with their choirs, always wonder if the singers will find the right stimulus to create in them enough enthusiasm for a new work. However, the parallel with the acting 'system' makes us believe in the potential of this approach.

If actors, without initially knowing from memory the words of a play, can search for the physical actions that put them closer to their characters, a choir cannot completely ignore the score and move to action, which is singing—that would mean a lot of vocal improvisation on the part of the choristers. The choir definitely needs to have an initial contact and to sight-sing the new piece, while the conductor can point out, like the director of a play, its structure and key points as reference for further study. However, the conductor can also ask, after this first acquaintance, that the singers set aside the words and start over the piece on a neutral vowel or simply by humming their parts. Ignoring the text for a while in the learning process, in particular if the text is in a foreign language, and focusing on singing as the external manifestation of the choir could be interpreted as the choral rehearsal equivalent of the actors' engagement in physical actions.

Since it is generally agreed that the choral composition represents a semantically and emotionally indivisible bond between music and text, the focus of attention for a while only on the musical construction should not alter the understanding of the choral piece as a whole. With this assumption in mind, singers are free to explore their parts, to sing them in sections and all together, to listen to all the other vocal parts, not improvising the notes and rhythms (the composer's 'text') but playing with contrasting variations of the character (or atmosphere) of the music, searching for other possible imaginative circumstances until they eliminate invalid or unacceptable interpretations. In this imaginative process, singers should rely on and record their emotional response that the music produces through the qualities of melodic contours, rhythmic combinations, harmonic progressions, and so on. These elements and the singers' emotional feedback should urge them all to convey true feelings by putting back the words and continuing with the study of the literary text and how it fits over the already experienced musical expression. Through this kind of psycho-technique, choral singers establish a complex, two-directional process of artistic expression, both from its outer manifestation through singing (experiencing) their parts to their intense inner activity (non-physical, spiritual) as well as from the internal emotional life of their souls to the external physical form (from feelings to actions).

Phenomenologically, by extrapolating the function of the each individual vocal line in a choral score and promoting that melody with lyrics to a function similar to the dialogue of an actor in a play, one can notice how the entire perspective of choral art changes and how singers' artistic function overlaps to that of an actor in a drama. Thus, choristers can see their music lines as the 'text of their role,' which they must interpret

from an artistic point of view through the direct participation and experiencing of their whole being, in order to emanate truly living emotions in front of the audience. The ‘text’ of their role engages their intellect; discovering and understanding its subtext should set the premises on which imagination engages their subconscious, the realm of inspiration and creativity, the guide of their vocal (singing) expression of emotions in performance. This is the singers’ process of bringing to life the living side of their ‘role’ or ‘character’ in a choral piece by organically infusing in it their own, direct human experiencing.

Oftentimes in music, an analysis of a work is a dry ‘at-’ or ‘round-the-table’ type of process that may dissect the printed musical notation in great detail, from formal structures and their relationships to harmonic structures and progressions, rhythmic combinations, melodic construction, timbral juxtaposition, use of articulations and phrasing, tempo and dynamic markings and so on. All these elements are important for the intellectual appraisal of the piece. However, understanding of a work only through a dry analysis of musical facts and events prescribed by composers in their scores is only half of the process that musicians need to do in order to create a valuable artistic interpretation of the composition in performance. The second half of the process must connect that detailed analysis with its purpose, namely the search for appropriate or correct creative stimuli to engage the singers’ physical and emotional deepening of the essential meaning of what they are singing, the soul of their part as if it were a role in a dramatic play. The singers’ resulting reverberations with the content of their parts must gradually become second nature, an integrated part of their human existence.

Finally, an additional parallel should be mentioned with regard to the role of the choral conductor in rehearsal and performance. As indicated in the previous chapter,

Moore's brief assertions about the function of a drama director based on Stanislavski's 'system' are inspiring and truly applicable in the case of choral conductors. If singers master the psycho-technical approach in choral singing, a conductor can avoid extended discussions and explanations during rehearsals and focus instead on the work with the ensemble on searching the necessary stimuli of inspiration and artistic interpretation of any particular choral music. Paraphrasing Moore in defining directorial functions, choral conductors interpret the musical opus and transpose the printed information of the score through their own personal and artistic senses into the active, physical forms of conducting gestures and vocal expressions (singing). Imagination, inventiveness, culture, knowledge, taste, sensitivity, tact, understanding, principles, and honesty are only some of the characteristics that Moore lists as necessary requirements for directors; these and more are imperative for choral conductors as well. Similarly to drama, choir rehearsals should focus on singing and musical expression as physical manifestation of the work on a piece. Choristers must be allowed to discover by themselves their own emotional responses to the music by experiencing it through singing. Conductors should be able to guide the choir by specifying possibilities of singing a certain musical section. Then, they should ask the choir to try out various ways of expressing that musical phrase and make a logical decision about the appropriate way of singing it. This decision should be determined based on both the continuity of musical ideas and textual meanings (the concept of 'through line of actions' in acting) and the cumulative totality of these events of musical expression (the 'super-objective' of the piece).

Within the same parallel with the dynamics and interactions of drama rehearsal processes as mentioned by Moore, we can assert that there may be times when a choral

conductor may encounter situations in rehearsals when singers are incapable of executing tasks set by the conductor. In such situations, Moore advises that it may be that the tasks were wrongfully conceived by the conductor or were lacking justification in the context of the work. Revising them and infusing them with proper justification are the conductor's responsibility.

Moore encourages directors to maximize the clarity of the idea of a play by bringing to life every single scene and phrase; the audience must be infused with the organic composition of the artistic spectacle so that sets, music, lights, costumes, every pose and *mise en scène*³⁵⁵ should continuously reflect the inner content on the stage. An extrapolation of this scenic reality, the choral performance experience would be greatly enhanced if the protagonists employ a similar artistic syncretism. This eclecticism of expression should be carefully thought out by the conductor in the parameters and as a result of the ideological and emotional context of any given choral music. It should not become a goal in itself for exhibitionistic purposes and false immediate success. I will conclude with the following quote from Sonia Moore that epitomizes the intrinsic parallelism between the role of the choral conductor and that of the drama director.

The form of the production will be found when the director has his super-objective—his need to contribute to society—has his artistic views, and knows *what* he wants to say and *why* he wants to say it. When the director knows the answers, the form he finds will express the inner content of the play. The director's solution is senseless if he does not understand what he wants to say and why. He must find the unique form for each play. 'Directing,' said Stanislavski, 'is a precise science, not vague thoughts and fantasy.'³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Arrangement of actors and scenery on a stage for a theatrical production; the physical setting of an action.

³⁵⁶ Sonia Moore, *The Stanislavski System: The Professional Training of the Actor. Digested from the Teachings of Konstantin S. Stanislavski* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 75-76.

IV

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The focus of this chapter will be on my practical experimentation with psycho-technical elements from Constantin Stanislavski's acting 'system' in several choir rehearsals. In December 2004, I was granted permission by the choral faculty at Ball State University to work with the school's Chamber and Concert Choirs during their last week of the Fall semester.

The limitations and other special conditions of this practical study include the repertoire selection (only three pieces chosen from their semester repertoire), the short period of direct contact that I had with the two student ensembles (four one-hour daily rehearsals with the Chamber Choir and two one-hour rehearsals with the Concert Choir), the unfamiliarity with the majority of the choir members on a personal level and of their capabilities, their age group (college age and young adults), the timeframe of this collaboration in the academic year (one week prior to their finals), and the lack of an audience for the final 'performance.' The fact that we worked on pieces that the choirs had already studied and performed in public did not allow this collaboration to include the essential step of 'period of study' (as in learning a new work), which is crucial to the process of psycho-technique. However, the benefit of this circumstance was that we did not have to struggle with the traditional process of learning the music, since the choir had

already prepared it. This allowed us to focus in a relatively short time on interpreting the pieces using a handful of elements of psycho-technique.

In addition, the following represents a description of the study through my personal observation and does not necessarily measure and record scientifically the degree of improvement of the choirs' performance due to the subjectivity of the choral interpretation in general and limited perspective of this short endeavor. However, the collaboration transpires the potential of successful implementation of elements pertaining to Stanislavski's acting theory to choral music and choral rehearsals. It reflects a fraction of a rehearsal process that is in itself psycho-technical, which intrinsically requires a longer period of time and work for a complete understanding, assimilation, and implementation on the part of the choral singers and conductors.

The choral pieces selected for the work on practical psycho-technical approaches in choral rehearsals were:

- *Kasar mie la gaji* ("The Earth is tired") for mixed choir, composed in 1990 by Venezuelan composer Alberto Grau (b. 1937) and published by *earthsongs* in their Música de Latinoamérica series, edited by María Guinand (b. 1953);
- *If Music Be the Food of Love* by David C. Dickau (b. 1953) for mixed choir with piano accompaniment, on a well-known text by Henry Heveningham (1651-1700), which was published by Colla Voce Music in 2001 in their Jo-Michael Scheibe Choral Series; and
- *There Will Be Rest* by Franck Ticheli (b. 1958) for mixed choir (SATB *divisi*), on a poem by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933), published by Hindon Publications in 2000 as part of the John Alexander Choral Series.

The first two pieces were the subject of my rehearsals with the Chamber Choir and the last one with the Concert Choir at Ball State University.

IV.1 *Kasar mie la gaji*

Leading composer on the contemporary Venezuelan and international music scene, Alberto Grau wrote this choral piece “For an international mobilization to save THE EARTH and a conscientious effort regarding the problems of the environment.”³⁵⁷ Grau chose to use a simple, short, but powerful text that is in the language of the inhabitants of the African Sahel. “Kasar mie la gaji” (pronounced [kasar mje la gahi]) is translated as “the Earth is tired” and represents the entire text of the piece. The message of the text, though simple in form, is intensely existential in nature, addressing the deteriorating condition of the Earth and of the world, and is treated through a wide range of striking compositional techniques to delineate an artistic imagery through musical and vocal expressions.

The shortness of the text is paralleled by the compactness of the generating musical motive that accompanies it, a leap to the fourth below the initial note and back, followed by a step above it (see Example 1). The syncopated and highly repetitive melodic-rhythmic formula is masterfully processed throughout the entire piece to preserve the main idea of the artistic message but in the same time to exhibit its logical, temporal, and psychological evolution and emotional connotations. A contrasting motive develops from the ascending step of the main motive into a straight-forwarded but short scale, ascending at first in the women’s parts (see Example 2), and then descending

³⁵⁷ Alberto Grau, *Kasar mie la gaji (The Earth is tired)* (earthsongs, 1991), 12.

(Example 3). In order to preserve the spirit of the text as well as its geographical origin, Alberto Grau employs complex rhythmic patterns in varying tempi that resemble the character of African dances.

Example 1: Alberto Grau, *Kasar mie la gaji*, m. 1, tenor and bass parts

Andante. Molto legato ♩ = 80 *mp*

Tenor

Bass

la ga - ji,

Ka - sar - - mic la ga - ji,

Detailed description: This musical score shows the first measure of the piece. The tempo is 'Andante. Molto legato' with a quarter note equal to 80 beats. The time signature is 8/4. The tenor part (top staff) begins with a rest for 4 measures, then enters with a half note 'la', a quarter note 'ga', and a half note 'ji,'. The bass part (bottom staff) begins with a half note 'Ka', a quarter note 'sar', a half note 'mic', a quarter note 'la', and a half note 'ga - ji,'. Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano) and accents (>) are used throughout.

Example 2: m. 35, soprano and alto parts

poco a poco crescendo p

Soprano

(mm)

ka - - - sar mie

Alto

p

ka - sar mie la ga - ji, ka-sar

Detailed description: This score shows measure 35. The soprano part (top staff) has a rest for 4 measures, then enters with a half note 'ka', a quarter note 'sar', and a half note 'mie'. The alto part (bottom staff) begins with a half note 'ka', a quarter note 'sar', a half note 'mie', a quarter note 'la', and a half note 'ga - ji, ka-sar'. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *poco a poco crescendo*. Accents (>) and a slur are used.

Example 3: mm. 52-53, tenor part

crescendo sempre

Tenor

(oh) oh

(descending scale)

Detailed description: This score shows measures 52-53. The tenor part (top staff) begins with a half note '(oh)', a quarter note 'oh', and a half note. The notes in the second measure (oh) form a descending scale. Dynamics include *crescendo sempre* and accents (>).

Suggestive elements of vocal production, such as sliding voice (descending glissando) at the end of notes, expressive glissandi between two pitches, vocal imitation of blowing winds on the consonant 's,' whisper, talk, and screaming, as well as body

percussion (hand clapping and feet stomping) represent various means of expression. This conglomeration of effects is mixed in the musical mélange of ostinato rhythms, syncopations, strong accents, extreme dynamics, but with both gradual and sudden dynamic and character changes, and of the modal, dissonant harmonic language. The resulting mixture of sound creates a surreal and desolate musical landscape that describes the world's weariness and reveals a message of awareness with regard to the many problems of the humanity and of the environment.

From this brief description of the piece, one can notice the technical difficulties that such a composition poses to a choral ensemble. Unfortunately for the purposes of this study, the circumstances of the collaboration that I explained earlier did not allow it to make use of the psycho-technical approach specifically for the period of learning this as a new piece by tuning the inner life of the singers to its powerful emotional subtext. From a psycho-technical perspective, the challenges of *Kasar mie la gaji* consist of the singers' true understanding of its message, processing its emotional context through their own being, establishing connections on a psychological level with the magnitude of the real situation in the world, their use of imagination to create circumstances that would stir specific emotional responses, and experiencing these feelings through external, physical actions, through their singing.

In warm-ups, singers were asked to engage in 'sliding' vocal exercises to physically experience the sensations of such vocal production. Beside the scope of placing the voice 'in the mask,' the exercise was mentally associated with the actions of tobogganing, coasting down a snowy hill on a sled, and skydiving so that the singers create the vocal glissandi in a natural way and carry through the exercise to a logical

closure (the end of the particular ‘trip’). This imagery was also intended to stir personal affective memory, if possible, and to cast off any mental restraints, nervous tensions, or anxiety. Singers also shared verbally with the group some personal thoughts from their imagination with regard to the suggested circumstances—they started to create by themselves unique circumstances for the exercise. This ignited their imagination and brought them closer to establishing a creative mood.

The exercise and the accompanying discussion indirectly led the singers toward the topic of the choral piece to address in that rehearsal, *Kasar mie la gaji*. By making the connection with the origin of the language of the piece, Africa, I asked the singers to reflect on the possibility that these vocal glissandi could be seen from a different angle, namely the expression of weariness of so many African people who are affected by poverty, harsh living conditions, diseases, and social and political injustice, to name only a few. Suddenly, the intentions of the composer’s compositional device not only became clear in these given circumstances from a theoretical point of view, but this perspective also needed to be processed inside them using the three motive forces, their intellect, emotions, and will. Only then, they would find the means to express outwardly, through their whole being and not only through the technical elements of vocal production, their own reactions to the powerful message of the piece. Achieving a spiritual reverberation with the degrading condition of the world did not have to be done in general, with no temporal immediacy or geographical connotation. It was important to reach that ‘here’ and ‘now’ elements of the personal experiencing process. Consequently, singers were asked to specifically imagine a character for each of them individually in the created mental picture of a deserted, remote African location.

The first run of the first section of the piece was immediately followed by my pointing out several characteristics of the music. The insertion of certain non-textual melodic bits (on neutral vowels, *uh*, *oh*, and *ah*) in some vocal parts as expressions of overwhelming hardship, articulation specifics, effective accents, and rhythmic precision were only a few elements that the singers would need to take into consideration when personalizing that music through the new semantic vision of my conducting.

After a second run of the opening section, the singers' feedback denoted that the image was still unclear in their minds, without a precise form and shape. The next suggestive idea was the image of a black adult male stooping under the heaviness of his loaded water buckets, transporting them from a great distance through the arid desert to his thirsting family. In today's civilized society, the image of such hard primitive work is striking and resonates with the harsh realities of human condition in many places around the world. A new reiteration of the first section was not strikingly different, but showed infusions of these thoughts and imagery—the most important was the achievement of a sense of heaviness and roughness in their singing (non-academic, traditional vocal production), as if the singers were inwardly experiencing those feelings of weariness and affliction specific to their 'character.'

The fast, contrasting second section had structural points, textural elements, articulations, and expressive markings that required singers' attention. The percussiveness of its beginning ostinato rhythmic formula, which is eventually passed around from paired women's to paired men's vocal parts, is enhanced by the effect of stomping feet and clapping hands. This prominent feature resembles the warriors' call to arms through incantation rituals.

The soprano and alto sections should emphasize the mourning character of their melodious dialogue (that contrasting motive presented in Example 2 above), superimposed over the basses and tenors' ostinato rhythmic formula, which in turn needs to be placed in the background. The agitating spirit of the music in this section requires a gradual buildup through acceleration of tempo, increase in intensity, and accentuation. This tensional flux requires ensemble communion of expression of emotions and experiencing through careful observance and suggestive conducting.

When asked for feedback on this second section, singers agreed on the given circumstances of crisis, people suffering, and briefly-presented parental feelings of sympathy and compassion (see Example 4).

Example 4: mm. 31-34

The musical score for Example 4 (measures 31-34) is presented in four staves. The Soprano part begins with the tempo marking "Poco più mosso" and the mood "mysterioso", followed by a dynamic marking of *mf*. The Alto part has a dynamic marking of *mf* in the final measure. The Tenor and Bass parts feature a rhythmic ostinato with lyrics: "ka - sar mie la ga-ji,". The Tenor part includes dynamic markings of *p subito* and *sempre cresc. simile*. The Bass part also includes *p subito* and *sempre cresc. simile*. The lyrics for the Tenor and Bass parts are: "ka - sar mie la ga-ji, ka - sar mie la ga-ji, ka - sar mie la ga-ji, ka - sar mie la ga-ji,". The Soprano and Alto parts have lyrics: "mm", "mm", "mm", "mm" and "ka - sar", "ka - sar" respectively.

This latter element is ingeniously placed in the middle of the tumult as a contrast to the rising tension of expression. The effectiveness of this sudden change in character would be accomplished by picturing little children realizing the terror of such conflicting

events and asking in a subdued tone what is happening, while their mothers are trying to gently reassure them that there is no imminent reason to worry.

Without a logical evolution of the tensional line through these psycho-technical devices (similar to the idea of a through line of action), the intense dramatic effect of the climax of this second section, with all its loudness, accentuations, harmonic clusters of sounds, and a sense of despair, would lack artistic truth and the singers' belief in it. The magnitude of the contextual message delivered through the musical subtext of this section should engage the performers in experiencing vibrations of powerful energy throughout their delivery, but only if all the psycho-technical elements are used to the highest points of their potential.

In the subsequent rehearsal dedicated to this piece, physical warm-ups were intended to induce a sense of calm and peace. The former was needed for the contrasting atmosphere of the third section, *Lamentoso*, while the latter for the singers' state of mind (their sanity) in the context of these disturbing messages of the choral work. As Stanislavski was emphasizing in his writings about acting, artists need to have a sense of truth and believe in what they portray on the stage, but also, at all times, remember that it is a scenic truth, in the parameters of a well-conceived form of artistic expression, and not an immediate reality for them as human beings. The technical elements included a light, simple vocalization in *legato* style, which engaged peaceful facial expressions (smiling)—representing that channeling of positive energy exchange of inner feelings through physical activity.

Another vocal warm-up exercise focused on range extension, tuning, and vocal cohesion within the choral ensemble. To achieve a smooth transition from one note to the

other in a major ascending arpeggio that spanned over the interval of a perfect twelfth, the choir was divided into two sections and the singers gave feedback on the opposite group's execution and results. Furthermore, singers were paired together and facing each other tried to observe their partner's intentions during the same vocal exercise. This was intended to increase the sense of communion in artistic expression through a unified emotional and physical response to the music. In the same area of communion, still using the same vocal exercise, I asked all the singers to form a large circle and to face the surrounding walls of the rehearsal room and away from each other's visual span. In this formation, they were asked to experiment coordinating the simultaneity of their vocal attack and singing style of the exercise without any visual cue, verbal coordination, or any other audible indication. This approach would proliferate the singers' focus on their own state of being and experiencing during their performance by constant awareness and observation of each other (that sense of 'feeling' each other when singing), that ensemble communion technique from Stanislavski's 'system.' This is also what Marin Constantin referred to as 'reflex attack,' that capacity of the choral ensemble to react to their conductor's gestures in a unified spiritual and emotional explosion of sound. In this context, the conductors' physical means express their own intense inner emotional activity and creativity, shaped in an artistic form, and are not just empty tempo and dynamic reflectors of the musical notation.

The results of these psycho-technical warm-up exercises cannot be labeled as a success or failure because of the limitations of the study. Only a long-term relationship with a choral ensemble would prove the validity of the psycho-technical processes in choral rehearsals. However, the choir members' willingness to cooperate and learn new

techniques of choral rehearsal and interpretation was remarkable, appreciated, and successful to some degree.

To help the assimilation of sense and consecutiveness of events in this choral piece, I introduced the choir to the theory commonly known as the five stages of grief in the case of terminal diseases or death. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D., refers to these steps of mourning in her 1969 book, *On Death and Dying*.³⁵⁸ Extrapolating the idea to the larger scheme of human existence, I could identify the sequence of these five stages by drawing a parallel with the formal structure of *Kasar mie la gaji*.

The first fourteen measures may represent the denial and isolation stage; the shock, the disbelief of the Earth being ‘tired’ or ‘weary.’ By definition,³⁵⁹ the word ‘weary’ means exhausted in strength, endurance, vigor, or freshness as well as having one’s patience, tolerance, or pleasure exhausted. Accordingly, the message of this work may as well be “the Earth is dying,” an even stronger statement that would impact the performers even deeper.

The next fifteen measures may re-emerge the painful reality of the situation, the crisis itself, representing the anger stage of grief. This is suddenly interrupted by a section (measures 31 through 46) that corresponds to the bargaining stage, in which a person imagines potential actions that he or she could have done to prevent the dramatic situation or would do should the situation be reversed. The psychological tension in this section builds up to its desperate, climactic point in measure 46.

³⁵⁸ Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

³⁵⁹ “Weary,” *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* 2009, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weary (October 19, 2009).

Another change in the character of the music initiates the third section where desolated sounds settle in an atmosphere of sadness and regret, specific to the fourth stage of mourning, depression. This section is a quiet, lamented preparation to bid farewell.

Finally, the last section, which begins in measure 64, would normally represent the acceptance stage, a gift not attained by every person that goes through a grieving process. It would normally be marked by withdrawal and calm, not by happiness or by depression. In my interpretation though, this final section of the piece denotes a slightly different twist. While its rhythmic drive and elements of body percussion return abundantly, possibly suggesting severe measures and the final destruction of human existence, one may also see this final stage as non-acceptance of a tragic fate for our Earth. Consequently, the real message of *Kasar mie la gaji* could be that it is not too late to save the world we live in through the combined effort of the entire humanity.

IV.2 If Music Be the Food of Love

David C. Dickau's setting of the poem by Henry Heveningham reveals a romantic style of the music. The love poem exhibits multiple metaphors of which the main one refers to the poet's love as music of his passion. The importance of the text for the composer is manifested in this piece through text painting techniques, which is implied in the composer's note at the beginning of the octavo where he urges performers to use a full palate of tonal colors in response to the text. This represented one of the main elements to address during my rehearsal with the student ensemble on this work, one in which psycho-technique could be employed for artistic interpretation.

Since the choir had already known this piece and performed it in concert, I asked the singers and their piano accompanist to perform it at first without any of my own instructions and without a conductor. As they were singing the first couple of phrases, a few unsynchronized moments triggered their attention on the need to establish a common ground of tempo, rhythm, dynamics, text, consonant endings, musical phrasing, and so on. It was imperative for all the singers to engage elements of communion in their performance. During the accompanied sections, the piano gave them a set tempo and a sense of certain dynamic ranges. However, during the unaccompanied phrases the choristers almost naturally established an involuntary relationship of cooperation and communication through careful listening to each other and through the action of singing in itself.

The first notable element at the end of this first ‘test’ was the fast tempo. The established routine of performing the same piece over and over in rehearsals and on the stage pre-determined the choir’s choice of tempo. Additionally, the fast pace of daily life, especially for a college student, may also have been a considerable factor. This first ‘run’ of the piece happened right at the beginning of a rehearsal, when many students usually rush in at the last moment from a remote classroom or even from across the campus.

Consequently, I pursued a process of re-establishing the correct tempo-rhythm of this particular choral piece. I asked the singers to walk around in two circles on the beat of the metronome for a little while in order to physicalize the audible sensation of the slower tempo, forcing their body to synchronize its movements with the clicks of the so-called ‘instrument of torture’ for musicians. In order to avoid the dryness of the exercise, the piano accompaniment was added. Based on the premises of romanticism and

passionate lyricism that the work's atmosphere emanates, I asked the singers to search for smoothness in their walk (the idea of plasticity of movement from Stanislavski's 'system'), to achieve a sensation of relaxed fluidity of motion similar to the large gestures of the musical phrases of the piece, as well as to engage facial expression. By suggesting to the singers that they isolate the memory of a beloved person or an enjoyable event from their past, an atmosphere of peace and happiness was instilled by the simple fact of graciously smiling at each other as result of their inner joy. Paraphrasing one of Stanislavski's ideas, I also explained to them the fact that singers do not have the option to choose the tempo of a piece—it is given to them by the composer's indications of tempo and character. The singers' responsibility is to accept it and to make it their own, to internalize it accordingly.

The second run of the first pages of the piece was done with the help of my conducting gestures. Following the walking exercise, which established the correct starting tempo, the resulting effect on the musical discourse was the impression of a more relaxed vocal production through a more lyrical approach. The achievement of a relatively relaxed physical state was made possible by engaging only working contractions and by eliminating superfluous tensions while singing. The new tempo generated longer phrases as perceived in time length, which affected the singers' air support and required the adaptation of their breathing techniques to accommodate the new musical context. The side effect of this adaptation was a gradual sense of dragging the tempo, which at this time wasn't supported by the metronome.

Returning to the walking exercise in order to re-establish the tempo-rhythm and its constant pulse was less successful. After singing and walking in a circle for a little

while, the students began dragging the tempo again, even through their walking pace. The conclusion is that the steadiness of a relatively slow tempo can lose its accuracy in time, anywhere in the musical work, because the ‘routine’ settles in the performers’ minds and determines their loss of focus on the temporal sense or perception. Boredom is the biggest enemy of art and destroys the performers’ manifestation of experiencing their role, let alone the audience’s interest in the performance. This undesirable phenomenon must be eradicated through a conscious internalization of the tempo-rhythm of a piece through psycho-technical processes. Singers have to find the will and reasons to justify the composer’s choices for a choral setting, to accept them as their own in the creative process, and to allow them to make roots through their personal inner reverberations generated by the subtext of the piece. Psycho-technique requires the singers to engage all three creative forces, their emotional plane, their intellect, and will—they needed to find the specific emotional state for this love poem, emphasizing the sincerity of emotions as if they were actually living the role of a person in love; to mentally process the thoughts and to envision the descriptive elements of the literary text through their imagination; as well as to find the appropriate stimuli to engage their desire to sing this choral piece artistically.

In *If Music Be the Food of Love*, composer David Dickau uses suggestive text painting techniques through lyrical melodic contours, lush Romantic harmonies, unexpected harmonic changes, a brief section of vocal imitations (echoing), and a fluid piano part. In order to use these compositional devices as intended by the composer to embellish the message of the poem, a new exercise was required of the singers. They were asked to sing their parts in various imaginative contexts that change the character of

the music. First, by eliminating the words and using instead the short nonsense syllable ‘doot’ (with a muted ‘t’ at the end), the staccato articulation and shortness of note durations of the melodic lines (all note durations were replaced by eighths) generated a *giocoso* or silly style of singing. In effect, the singers’ attitude changed to merriment while their physical expression gained a more childish charm. The second style was a continuous legato humming of their parts using staggered breathing techniques. In this contrasting exercise, the piece became a pastel of light, delicate colors of sound suggesting a dreamy, pleasant, and ethereal state of being. Finally, another contrasting expression was achieved by utilizing the words, “My country, ‘tis of thee / I sing, I sing, / Sweet land of liberty / Of thee, sweet land, / Of thee I sing!” paraphrasing the well-known lyrics of the patriotic song, *My Country ‘Tis of Thee* (also known as *America*), written by Samuel Francis Smith in 1831 (see Example 5).

Example 5: David C. Dickau, *If Music Be the Food of Love*, mm. 68-80, soprano part, original poetry and alternate text (in parenthesis)

Soprano

mf

If mu - sic be the food of love, Sing on, sing on, sing on till I am
 (My coun - try, 'tis _____ of thee I sing, I sing, Sweet land of lib - er -

rall. *sempre rall.* *f a tempo* *rall. al Fine* *cresc.*

filled with joy. Sing on, sing on, sing on _____
 ty Of thee, sweet land, Of thee I sing!) _____

All of a sudden, the singing of the same music lines with a patriotic text became solemn, generous in volume and intensity, climactic. The singers engaged a strong vibrato style, exaggerating the placement of the voice in the forehead region of their singing apparatus. Some over-singing was also present in the exercise.

The purpose of this exercise was to change the semantic element of a choral piece, either by the complete elimination of its words, in combination with a change in the musical element of articulation, or by introducing a new text of a strikingly different nature. By presenting the piece in this way, singers are exposed to invalid interpretations in order to establish a better, more solid connection with the actual text of the piece and the validity of its musical setting. Through this process, singers may be able to naturally eliminate superfluous elements that are not justified by the choral work from their singing, which in psycho-technique represents that external, physical representation of their inner artistic resonance to music and words.

A last demonstration of the semantic variety of a literary text and the implications on the singers' artistic performance was accomplished by eliminating the music and asking several individuals to take turns reciting the poem. The results, sometimes monotone, other times infatuated and illogical, based on the conductor's experimental suggestions, demonstrated again the singers' need to engage their mental and emotional capacities in order to filter the essence of that poem through their own artistic personality, a process that would eventually trigger in them the urge to express themselves through those words and that music.

Finally, I summarized for the entire choir the emotional content of the piece, pointing out certain key words of the poem (i.e., *music, love, sing, joy, soul, move, fierce, wound, perish, charms, save, arms*), contextual ideas, and metaphorical images that the text and the music reflect in various moments of the work. At the end of the rehearsal, I asked the choir to sing the whole piece one more time and to focus on this emotional content, with special emphasis on specific ideas and images from the text. Singers would

allow their experiencing of singing this music to reverberate in their being, in their subconscious, in their inner imaginative world, stirring a series of emotions from their own past that would artistically influence their musical interpretation.

IV.3 There Will Be Rest

American poet Sara Teasdale exhibited a lyrical style in her poems by expressing a state of mind through her own process of perception. Her poetry is largely associated with music through direct references to the musical language, her preference for iambic meter that creates a lilting sensation almost demanding a musical tune, and her artistic sensibility that emanates evocative emotions.

Sara Teasdale, through the cadence of consonants and the euphonious succession of vowels, transformed her lyric poetry into musical language. With the additional consideration of the gentle yet persistent rhythm of her stanzas and her simple, direct diction, her poems have become natural vehicles for choral expression. Her poetry has become standard fare for composers like Kirke Mechem and David Childs [...].³⁶⁰

In addition, other composers, such as René Clausen, Dale Warland, James Mulholland, David Dickau, Libby Larsen, Z. Randall Stroope, and many more, wrote choral settings on Teasdale's texts.

Sara Teasdale's literary output is an expression of her personal struggles in life. She grew up as a child of the late Victorian era, in a devout Baptist family that "reared her to be obedient and docile,"³⁶¹ while her spirit was striving for a "Romantic interest in nature and love."³⁶² This internal conflict, often manifested through bouts of depression

³⁶⁰ Natasia Sexton Cain, "Sara Teasdale at 125: Her Lyric Poetry Still Inspires Lovely Music," *Choral Journal* 50:4 (November 2009), 9.

³⁶¹ *Idem*, 10.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

that eventually led to her suicide at age 48, is reflected in her literary style. Her natural refinement in choosing simple but intense words and poetic ideas is the result of conflicting forces that tormented her spirit. “While Teasdale maintains a sense of distance in the love poetry, she participated more heartily in the poetry of nature and beauty. Images such as the sea and stars embody her joy in nature’s beauty, and the moon and snow symbolize resignation and melancholy.”³⁶³

“There Will Be Rest” was included at the end of her last collection of poems, *Strange Victory* (1933), which was published posthumously. In only two quatrains, the poetess expresses the reassurance found in nature. “Imbuing the natural world with religious imagery in phrases like ‘crowned with snow,’ ‘reign of rest,’ and ‘stillness holy and low,’ Teasdale affirmed a divine transcendence but recognized it throughout all nature—and in particular the stars as a divine force and giver of light.”³⁶⁴ In the second quatrain, confident in her loneliness, she accepts peacefully her final destiny.

There Will Be Rest, Frank Ticheli’s choral setting of Sara Teasdale’s final work, is “designed to capture the poem’s purity of spirit and delicate lyricism.”³⁶⁵ Writing in a Romantic idiom, Ticheli paints the sound landscape of the literary verse with suggestive compositional techniques. Slow harmonic gestures in the beginning in soft, ethereal nuances reflect the poet’s peaceful assurance (see Example 6). Rich harmonies infuse the sonorities with affection and a sense of well-being. Mostly subdued dynamics support the poet’s personal, somewhat intimate expression of thoughts. However, the climactic moment of reaching peace in the stars above is defined through the amplitude of the

³⁶³ Op. cit., 11.

³⁶⁴ Idem, 16.

³⁶⁵ Franck Ticheli, *There Will Be Rest* (Hindon Publications, 2000), 2.

higher vocal registers and the intensity of the loud dynamics. Musical texture plays a descriptive role as well. The dense and warm abundance of vocal parts, due to the fact that sometimes the choir splits into six and seven parts, is intended to denote the paradoxical “music of stillness” (as in Example 7). Also, the echoing points of imitation in the second half of the piece reverberate the message of personal determination to embrace existence in any form (“I will make this world of my devising”) and to define the place of peace in the stars (“above me,” see Example 8).

Example 6: Frank Ticheli, *There Will Be Rest*, mm. 1-6

Tempo Rubato ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 50$)

pp *p* poco più mosso

Soprano
There will be rest, _____ and sure stars shin - ning _____

Alto
There will be rest, _____ and sure stars shin - ning _____

Tenor
There will be rest, _____ There will be rest, _____ and sure stars shin - ning _____

Bass
There will be rest, _____ and sure stars shin - ning _____

Example 7: mm. 17-21

pp *rit.*

Soprano
The mu - sic _____ the mu - sic of still - ness _____ ho - ly and low. _____

Alto
The mu - sic _____ the mu - sic still - ness _____ ho - ly and low. _____

Tenor
The mu - sic _____ the mu - sic of still - ness _____ ho - ly and low. _____

Bass
The mu - - - - sic still - ness _____ ho - ly and low. _____

Example 8: mm. 65-74

più mosso ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 72$)

Soprano
a - bove me a - bove

Alto
a - bove me a - bove

Tenore
a - bove me a - bove

Basso
a - bove me a - bove

6
S
me a - bove me a - bove me

A
me a - bove me

T
me a - bove me

B
me a - bove me

In my psycho-technical approach on Ticheli's *There Will Be Rest* during the study-rehearsals with the Concert Choir, the preparatory warm-up exercises focused on three key elements. First, achieving physical relaxation and tranquility through exercises that released unnecessary muscular tensions was instrumental to the whole rehearsal process. Second, a state of mind of self-confidence was necessary in anticipation of the emotional activity specific to the process of 'playing the role' of the distressed poet in

search for personal peace. This second step was addressed through suggestive imagery; the singers were asked to hum and mumble low-voiced pitches as well as to picture themselves, at the same time, as solidly rooted trees of a forest and to gently swing side to side on their feet, slightly apart, until they reached a sensation of heaviness of their bodies when they became aware of the center of gravity. This exercise was psycho-physical in nature because it involved the students' will to engage in the process and to use their imagination; it started with a suggestive image of a real, natural element (the tree); it directed their concentration of attention on their own physical body helping them to experience the resulting sensations; and it stirred an emotional response manifested through their free vocal expressions.

The third preparatory set of exercises focused on vocal production in the context of ensemble singing. In order to unify the quality of vocal emission in sections and as an ensemble, students were asked to focus on unison tuning. One exercise used the opening tetrachord (the three consecutive full steps, A-flat, B-flat, C, and D) of Ticheli's choral setting on the actual pitches. Singing non-vibrato on a neutral vowel and in a soft voice, the four sections were asked not only to tune the components of the cluster, but also to listen to the neighboring voices for the quality of their emission and to try to match that in their own singing. Psychologically, the singers had to focus on the meaning of the opening textual idea ("there will be rest") and perceive a sensation of spiritual elevation that transcends the immediate reality. The acoustical manifestation was the creation of the sensation that the choir became a single instrument, an 'organ of voices.'

Another correlation where the choir was treated as an instrument was apparent in the 'xylophone exercise.' First, over a span of two octaves, the choir was asked to slowly

sing an ascending scale starting with the basses and continuing by gradually adding new upper voices while the lower ones would drop out, all the way to the top notes in the soprano section. The exercise continued in reverse order, on a descending scale. The focus was on the achievement of smooth transitions between sounds, individuals, and sections that required a unified vocal emission across the entire ensemble, on awareness and active engagement in the exercise, on adaptation to the immediate deviations of the unfolding process of singing, as well as on control and finish of the process. The second half of this 'xylophone exercise' implied the breaking down of the choral spectrum, namely the double-octave sounds used in the first half of the exercise, among all individual members of the choir. Each small group of singers was assigned a certain pitch so that each sound of the spectrum was covered. In this distribution, the conductor would 'play' the choral instrument as if it were a xylophone, randomly pointing at various groups of singers who in turn would intone their assigned sounds. Elements of concentration of attention and tonal memory had to be actively engaged in the process while careful consideration was given to the idea of fluidity of sound. The conductor's improvisation of any kind of a melodic contour had to preserve the unity of ensemble, while the small groups of singers had to produce a sense of *legato* between all their notes by slightly delaying the stop of their own sound until after they perceive the following group singing the new pitch. The unity of the vocal production was achieved by asking the singers to use a similar, light, and neutral tone color.

These three major key elements of preparation of the choir were organically linked to the choral piece to be rehearsed. They were intended to place all the singers in a creative state, both mentally and physically, but also from a technical and emotional

perspective. The beauty and artistic qualities of Sara Teasdale's poem and of Frank Ticheli's musical setting are the given circumstances for the artists-singers of the choral ensemble to assimilate and filter through their own personality in order to create something new and fresh, the result of their own experiencing of the performance of the piece.

Together with the choir, we analyzed briefly the emotional content of the poem and of the music, pointing out several key images to guide the singers as they engaged in the performance. Serene quietness and suspended time characterized the opening, while a little more descriptive or emphatic vocal inflections were required for the following phrase, which describes that religious transcendence of the crowning snow and 'serene forgetting.' Places where the composer used text painting techniques also had to be brought to the singers' attention in order for them to consciously use them as stimuli for emotional responses.

In the second half of the piece beginning in measure 49, the points of imitation in the upper three voices were intended to stir the singers' inner activity even more because of the strikingly personal way of expression ("I will make this world of *my* devising"). The multi-faceted reiterations of this idea needed to be carefully layered in the context of the musical texture.

Example 9: mm. 49-51, soprano and alto parts

♩ = ca. 60

Soprano *p* *mp* *mf* *rit.*

I will make this world of my de - vis - ing, of my de - vis - ing,

Alto *p* *mf* *rit.*

low. I will make this world of my de - vis - ing,

A gradual build-up begins in measure 59 with the three-fold incantation of the formula “I shall find the crystal of peace” that leads to the climax of the piece as described earlier (see Example 8). For this, the singers had to correctly establish the tempo-rhythm prescribed by the composer’s tempo markings as well as by the melodic-rhythmic flow of each individual melodic line, supported by dynamics and literary text (“above me”). Superimposing the *stretto* of floating vocal contours emanates a positive flux of creative energy—this represents the climax of the piece, shaped in an arch form over ten measures (65 through 74). The beauty of this climactic section consists of its convoluted, constant evolution, without stopping to reflect on a specific climactic moment—the singers experience this in a natural, realistic, temporal way rather than through an artificial, conventional mannerism of interpretation spurred by the ‘typical’ high note held ‘forever’ in *fortissimo*.

The ten-measure coda reveals the unexpected resolution of the inner conflict inside the soul of the poet, transposed through the musical medium into the being of the singers (“Stars I shall find”). The harmonic unsettling of the previous climactic section suddenly dissipates with the surprising establishment of the new tonal center. The modulation from the key of E-flat Major to the key of G Major in the coda reinforces that Romantic emotional reverberation of the chromatic-third relationship between these two keys; it uplifts the soul and brings it to a final state of ideal peace in an ideal place, the stars.

It is obvious that the time constraints of my study-collaboration with the Concert Choir did not allow for a full assimilation of the piece through a comprehensive psycho-technical approach, which was reflected in the final ‘performance.’ Both Constantin

Stanislavski and Marin Constantin emphasized countless times in their writings that the work of the actors or choral ensembles on themselves, in order to absorb the necessary psycho-technique in their artistic endeavors, takes will, understanding, patience, and most of all a lot of time; it is in fact an ongoing evolution of the artist as a person, a lifetime super-objective. Consequently, my limited collaboration with both these choirs and its particular circumstances was far from being representative for this theory. However, in both cases my attempts to implement several psycho-technical concepts in the minds of the choral students and to draw parallels with various elements from Stanislavski's 'system' of acting had a series of benefits. I am summarizing the conclusions of this research and of its practical applications in the following chapter.

V

CONCLUSIONS

The present research focused on the potential of transferring concrete and valuable elements of artistic interpretation, rehearsal methodology, and performance phenomenology from Constantin Stanislavski's acting 'system' to the field of choral music. This approach was founded on the principles of interdisciplinary relationships and common ground between the two performing arts, theater and choral music, and on practical implementation and results of psycho-technique in the work and artistic outcome of Marin Constantin and his *Madrigal* Choir of Bucharest. Identifying the need of this research is the result of an ongoing process of personal observation, study, and understanding of the practical aspects of psycho-technique and its effects on choral interpretation as expressed in the performance practice of the Romanian *Madrigal* Choir.

The premises of this research necessitated a deeper understanding of the 'system' of acting as described in great detail by Stanislavski in his writings. While many factors influenced the accurate understanding and assimilation of his theories in the English speaking world, the available translations of these works reveal to a great extent the essence of Stanislavski's work as practitioner, theoretician, and pedagogue of theater arts.

Though difficult to summarize because of its complexity and the necessary interconnectivity of its components (i.e., one cannot leave out one element without negatively altering the effectiveness of the other ones), Constantin Stanislavski's 'system' consists of several key concepts that I will outline below. The intricacies of these elements as well as a vague esoteric connotation in the case of some of them—possibly because of the linguistic adaptations of the terminology in the English translation and of various social, cultural, and artistic nuances between the Russian and the Western worlds—made the 'system' somewhat difficult to be assimilated naturally by many important acting schools. The need for clarification led to interpretation and adaptation of the theory. However, the reality is that Stanislavski came to his conclusions based on a lifetime of acting and directing experience, observation, study, and experimentation that reveal the necessity of practicality in the performing process by going beyond the theoretical approach.

Throughout his life, Stanislavski gradually arrived at a series of conclusions after striving to understand and conceptualize the mechanisms of acting on the stage as practiced by himself and other great artists of his time. He then analyzed and synthesized these mechanisms by defining and explaining them in a written theory of acting. Discerning the elements of the modestly self-named 'system' in a literary form became the foremost objective of Stanislavski's career and materialized in what became known in the Western theater as the 'acting trilogy.'

The 'system' revolves around the idea that actors need to engage their subconscious through conscious processes in order to be creative or 'inspired' in their work in the theater. This involves the actors' human faculties of feeling, will, and

intellect, called creative forces. In this process, actors must focus on both their inner and outer work on themselves as well as on their work on a role. The training of an actor reflects the duality of that person as an artist in control of the emotional content and as an instrument of theatrical characterization in the context of a play. Actors employ the psycho-technique to allow psychological processes associated with acting to engage their whole being into a true artistic performance.

To stir their imagination and determine a better understanding of a role, actors have a wide array of stimuli that potentially trigger the activity of their subconscious into creating an original personification of the role through their own experiencing phenomenon, that act of 'living' the character or 'being' in character. In order to facilitate this transformational process, Stanislavski introduces the concepts of given circumstances of a play and 'magic if.' The former refers to all the conditions that must be taken into account with regard to the plot of a play that are expressed by the author and interpreted by the director and the actors. All of their acting must be justified by the given circumstances of a play. The latter concept is intended to develop circumstances for the characters that are plausible but not necessarily provided in the script, which lift the actors from actuality into an imaginary world where the life of their character can unfold its existence.

Stanislavski's concept of emotion memory represents a revolutionary element of inestimable value for the performance practice. Even though it was wrongfully 'imported' in the American theater as the unique essence of Stanislavski's theory and generated Method Acting that placed a unilateral emphasis on the inner work of the actor, emotion memory remains a technique that enables artists to assume a complex of

emotions specific to their portrayed characters. In order to do so, actors must engage a mixture of procedures, including concentration of attention, imagination, conscious mental access to past personal experiences that might have generated a certain emotional response, and the feelings generated by sensory perception of various objects present in the scenic environment.

Stanislavski also mentions that in the creative process, actors need to develop a sense of truth and believe in what they are portraying. Even though it is not real in the sense of daily human reality or existence, the theatrical act is 'real' in the context of the stage and the play and actors experience the true emotions of their characters and act accordingly as if all is happening in real life.

Other critical elements of the 'system' were analyzed in detail throughout my research. The list includes the concepts of units and objectives (bits and tasks), inner action, tempo-rhythm, communion, logic and coherence, ethics and discipline, and control and finish, all of them employed in the process of reaching an inner creative state by activating the subconscious through the conscious. On the other hand, the inventory of elements that build the external creative state of an actor comprises relaxation and elimination of unnecessary muscular tension, vocal technique, diction, language, scenic movement, dance, fencing, and even acrobatics. All of these elements of the 'system' must be employed from the perspective of the role and to follow the through line of action of a play toward its super-objective.

Ultimately, from Stanislavski's perspective, the actors' interactions with each other on the stage generate a sense of ensemble work through communion, concentration of attention on each other, and adaptation. These techniques shift the actors' attention

from merely pleasing the public by addressing them directly to focusing their attention on the action on the stage and reacting to that in the process of living a role.

This research also pointed out Constantin Stanislavski's latest findings that placed a new light on the rehearsal process, his Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis. These approaches facilitate an organic creation of the characters embodied by the actors. Physical actions are in themselves stimuli that access the subconscious of the actors to produce emotions. Because of the definite character and repeatability of these physical actions, Stanislavski concludes that they represent the only concrete reference when actors need to experience certain emotions on the stage. The validity of this theory is confirmed only when the physical actions are established correctly based on the active analysis of the role and play through improvisation techniques. This series of logically-set, justified simple actions constitutes the score of physical actions that guides actors through their characters' physical and emotional existence.

From the complex vocabulary of Stanislavski's acting 'system,' this research identified several conceptual elements that apply to the choral art. The principle of involving feelings (emotions), will (action), and intellect (thought) in the interpretative process in order to convey a complete and true imaginative representation of the musical composition in choral performances forms one of the major preoccupations of the conductor and the choral ensemble.

Communication is of a primary concern in the practice of choral music. Ensemble work requires the full range of psycho-technical processes, such as communion among singers and with the conductor, including non-verbal communication through an exchange of energy 'rays,' concentration through circles of attention, and suggestive

choir warm-ups. From this perspective, this research analyzed Marin Constantin's theory of choral interpretation and phenomenology that reveals the idea of a certain tensional flux in the performance process that 'transports' the conductor's inner emotional experiencing to the choristers who interpret this information and respond physically and emotionally through singing. What emanates from their music reverberates in the minds of the audience, which in turn transpires a response of adherence or non-adherence that the conductor eventually captures, thus enclosing a full circle of emotional exchange between the performers on the stage and their public.

The conductor's art was also the subject of this presentation. The physical aspect of conducting involves psycho-technical processes, from the typical warm-up routine of relaxation of muscles to concentration of attention, mental and emotional preparation, and activation of imagination before contact with the ensemble in rehearsal. During rehearsals and performances, conductors employ visual communication through the expression of their eyes and face, body posture, and physical gestures using their arms. These physical gesticulations become psychological gestures when loaded with an emotional content that reflects the musical context.

Other important elements of psycho-technical applications to choral rehearsals that were analyzed in this research include emotion memory, imaginative suggestions based on given circumstances of the choral work, through line of action, plasticity and emotion of movement, tempo-rhythm, and more. An adaptation of the rehearsal technique known as Active Analysis was suggested here through the suppression of the text and the focus on singing the music with the scope of experiencing the singers' emotional

reverberations to the musical vibrations of the choral piece without the direct influence of the words.

Another significant chapter of this research focused on the practical applications of psycho-technique and of various elements of the 'system' in choral rehearsal and performance. Based on my collaboration with two student ensembles, detailed in chapter four, I can describe several psycho-technical approaches to various elements of choral rehearsal techniques. The three choral pieces chosen for this study are valuable standards of the repertoire and my psycho-technical applications on them were justified.

One finding of this study is that the choristers' true understanding of any work's message, especially if it is based on a minimal text, plays a major role in the interpretative process. The analysis of the literary text is always necessary when studying a new choral piece in order to identify its artistic values, its structural elements, and how they influence the musical composition. In the same time, it was also discovered that singers should process the emotional contexts of the piece and of the subtext through their own being. It is their responsibility to find the right psycho-technical means, under the guidance of the conductor, to really experience emotions correlated to the musical piece in the process of singing.

It is also found that conductors and singers need to carefully consider their psychological involvement. In the artistic process of creation, they have to establish connections with possible or real situations that are similar to the ideas and the given circumstances of the literary text. When personal involvement through conscious psycho-technique happens and when singers relate in real life or in their imaginary life with one idea, place, feeling, and so on, their singing changes in style, vocal attack and production,

articulation, diction, dynamics, etc. This transformation is oftentimes beneficial to the choir's performance by shifting the singers' focus from the technicality of the singing processes to the semantics and emotions of the text and music. However, the present study raised the question of practical implementation in time of this psychological involvement. The conclusion is that it takes a lot of work and experimenting with this concept in choir rehearsals so that artists reach an adequate proficiency level in which they are able to correctly identify what elements work in their analogies and which should be retained.

The results of this research emphasize the role of imagination in choral methodology and performance. From simple thoughts to vast imaginary worlds, ideas that come from singers represent the barometer of their personal adherence to the creative process through the activation and involvement of their will as well as their intellect. It is important to analyze a choral piece, to discuss it, and then to establish imaginative points of reference that would guide the singers and conductors in experiencing certain emotions along the musical discourse. The artists' inner activity generates the process of experiencing emotions through physical actions, namely conducting gestures on the one hand and singing on the other hand.

The practical side of this research resulted in the creation of a series of vocal exercises that are designed to prepare singers not only vocally, but also mentally and emotionally. Exercises that are psycho-technical employ carefully crafted musical, textual, and imaginative elements that create an artistic mood inside the ensemble, molded from the nature of a given choral piece.

Elements of group dynamics were manifested and are observed throughout the study, being characterized by an increased level of interaction and openness. The nature of the psycho-physical exercises employed in this study helped release anxieties and mental restraints, ‘social nervousness,’ or individual shyness.

This research finds that the choristers’ physical expression of singing in a certain way (as in vocal exercises employing for example legato, moderate tempo, medium dynamics, long phrases, etc.) must be done with purpose and have inner justification in order to germinate in the process a state of emotional experiencing by each individual in the ensemble. The practical study reveals that it is important for ensemble training to employ exercises and situations that develop the technique of communion. From small groups to medium-size and large ones, the singers’ training in finding non-verbal ways to communicate ideas and emotions among themselves is a key element in the creative process. We discovered that the idea of ‘feeling’ each other while singing represents for the choral singer a constant sense of awareness and a continuous observation of each other.

Another finding is that even though choirs have the advantage that most of the time composers indicate specific tempo markings, the performers still need to establish the tempo-rhythm of the choral work. The concept involves much more than just speed, in particular the character of the piece, the density of its rhythmic formulae, melodic and harmonic challenges, the textual meaning, the text and subtext, and so on.

The study also presented the danger that routine and boredom may easily settle in during the rehearsal process if the psychological involvement of each of the singers is interrupted. Conductors and choirs must work hard against routine and cliché singing and

interpretation. Engaging all three creative forces—will, intellect, emotions—should prevent it from happening. In the same direction, the element of variation is a useful tool in the rehearsal process. Introducing a new text with strikingly different connotations or nonsense syllables or even altering the articulation of the notes represents possible techniques to explore. These and other exercises aim at the choir's power of adaptation to various demands of the choral repertoire as well as to the conductor's gestures in the process of interpretation. Their instant adaptation to fresh new ideas and directorial commands eliminates superfluous elements from their artistic creation.

Under the circumstances of the study, I can conclude that generally, the student-singers were open to trying, learning, and experiencing this new approach. However, it is hard to predict to what extent they would be able to actively and honestly sustain their interest in this type of process on the long run without questioning its validity and results. Further study in this direction may clarify this hypothesis.

I personally envisioned the collaboration with the two student choirs as a laboratory of creation. I was aware from the beginning of the particularities of this process due to its limitations. The duration of my direct contact with the groups, with which I was fairly unfamiliar, was extremely limited (four sessions with one choir and two with the other). The time frame was relatively unfavorable as well (the last week of the semester, prior to finals week). Also, the level of technical expertise of the students, including vocal and ensemble training, was average; they definitely had no knowledge of psycho-technical training—we have to remember that an important aspect of the Stanislavski 'system' is the focus on the artists' work on themselves, inwardly and outwardly, that preparation of their mental, spiritual, and physical apparatus, even before

any work on the repertoire and on creating a role takes place. The fact that both groups had already known the pieces to be rehearsed was both a positive and a negative—because of the limited time, the fact that the singers did not have to ‘learn the notes’ was a positive aspect, while their prior knowledge of the music eliminated the possibility to test the stage of learning a new piece through psycho-technical methods.

The findings of this study reveal the fact that choral singers and conductors are subject to similar creative processes that are specific to actors as described by Constantin Stanislavski in his writings. Consequently, a psycho-technical approach to choral rehearsal and performance should include mental, emotional, and physical preparation over a prolonged period of time in order to ready the musician as a whole person for true and valuable artistic creations through the choral performance. The conductor and the singers must place themselves ‘in the role’ of the piece. This should not be done ‘in general,’ leaving the details of interpretation to chance or as if inspiration will descend upon the performer through some kind of divine grace. The process has to take the artist through a thorough assimilation of all the aspects of the choral piece, with focus on its given circumstances—notes, rhythms, textures, harmonic context, text, subtext, semantics, ideas, imagery, message, etc. When there is need for more concrete or defined elements for the singers to justify their ‘character’ while experiencing it through the physical act of singing their parts, they should mentally create circumstances for themselves in the truthful reality of their imagination through ‘magic if.’ These imaginative circumstances must be proper to the subject and context of the choral piece and should stimulate the singers’ inner activity, which in turn should engage their subconscious for creative artistic inspiration. However, similarly to what Stanislavski

points out in his acting theory, inspiration should not be a goal in itself for the choir member, but the result of conscious psycho-technique that provides the means to a creative state in the performer, as opposed to the regular existential state of daily life.

Finally, this research opens a new chapter in the phenomenology of choral rehearsal and performance. It brings clarification to the mechanisms and processes of producing artistic choral music through concepts of inestimable value that are drawn from the art of the theater as codified by Constantin Stanislavski in his monumental literary works on acting. The relevance of this approach is demonstrated by the practical study that this researcher conducted with two choral ensembles and by its results as well as by the substantial contribution of Marin Constantin and his implementation of psycho-technique in the artistic activity of the Romanian National Chamber Choir *Madrigal*.

My hope is that this research represents an inspiration for fellow choral conductors and for their choral ensembles to pursue new methodologies and techniques in rehearsal and performance, such as the one presented here. I urge them to promote in their work further practical study on the use of psycho-technical approaches over a long period of time. Significant work on the applicability of key elements from the Stanislavski 'system' to the choral art is needed especially in the areas of formation of individual choristers as true artists by focusing on shaping their inner and outer creative state, on building ensemble unity of expression of emotions that are in 'unison' with the ones of the conductor, and on developing an effective and meaningful vocabulary of conducting gestures.

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