

The
Method
Acting
Exercises
Handbook

Lola Cohen

The Method Acting Exercises Handbook

The Method Acting Exercises Handbook is a concise and practical guide to the acting exercises originally devised by Lee Strasberg, one of the Method's foremost practitioners. The Method trains the imagination, concentration, senses and emotions to 're-create' – not 'imitate' – logical and truthful behavior on stage, film and television.

Building on her years of studying with Lee Strasberg and other Method Teachers and her significant and continuing teaching career, Lola Cohen details a series of specific exercises in order to provide clear instruction and guidance to this preeminent form of actor training. By integrating Strasberg's voice with her own tried-and-tested-style of teaching, Cohen demonstrates what can be gained from the exercises, how they can inform and inspire your learning, and how they might be applied to your acting and directing practice.

As a companion to *The Lee Strasberg Notes*, a transcription of Strasberg's own teaching, *The Method Acting Exercises Handbook* offers an unparalleled and updated guide to this world-renowned technique.

Lola Cohen has thirty years of teaching internationally and at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute in New York and Los Angeles, as a member of the NYU Tisch Strasberg Studio faculty, NYC, as an Associate Adjunct Professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School, Brooklyn, NY, and as a guest lecturer at The American University, Washington, DC. She is the editor of *The Lee Strasberg Notes* (Routledge, 2010).



1 Lee Strasberg and Lola Cohen in class, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute New York, 1978. Photo by Sylvia Plachy.



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The Method Acting Exercises Handbook

Lola Cohen

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Foreword

Marlon Brando
on
Lee Strasberg and the Heart of The Method

“Acting – and living, and everything else, for that matter – is compassion. What Lee and Stella [Adler] and Mira [Rostova] and Herbert [Berghof] were all espousing was compassion, an amplification of humanity, which is all that will save a scene or a play or a relationship or the world. The world is so inordinately tiny – not geographically, but spiritually. We shuffle along, happy to do the least amount of work, the least amount of exploration, perhaps because we feel we don’t deserve all the riches that surround us.

Movies and plays and art and music and interaction with other people who sought compassion and understanding saved me. They will save us all. What is at the heart of The Method is compassion, empathy. Go into your private moments and private spaces and realize all that you’ve felt and all that has been given to you and taken away. We will never murder; we might never give birth; we were not Napoleon. But within us are similar emotions, drives, feelings that can place us within an adjoining heart – of a murderer; of Napoleon. Of anyone. What the teachers were telling us – what Lee was telling his students – was to empathize with your own history and to merge with the histories of others. Art means nothing if it does not connect with an audience – even it might be an audience of one. An honesty with our emotions will find a connection with the honesty of someone else with their own emotions. Otherwise, it is performing, which is not to be confused with acting. Call it Method, call it acting, call it art – it is the painful, glorious compassion that joins us all, shared in one space at one time.”

(Continued)

* * * * *

“His knowledge of the theater was vast – he was a walking encyclopedia – and he traveled the world to see and to study what was done and what was good. Lee then shared this with his students, and almost anyone who asked him questions. This cannot be underestimated. Imagine yourself in, say, 1952, and you think you want to be an actor, and all you know about are the few productions you’ve done in high school or college – not to mention what you’ve seen on film – and you find yourself in the presence of this man, who can tell you what the Russians, the French, the Italians are doing; who can quote virtually any playwright or critic or philosopher. That was valuable, and it was very cheap – often free – to attend the Studio. This cannot be discarded.”

Interview conducted by James Grissom, 1990

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Author's Note and Acknowledgments

What this book stands for is in its content and practice. The reward is the surprise of self-discovery for your artistic process. I was faced with a challenging legacy in presenting clear descriptions of The Method Exercises for future actors. I give my heartfelt appreciation in memoriam to Lee Strasberg for sharing his extensive knowledge and experiences with his students in his mission to solve the problems of the actor. His groundbreaking work and his passion for all the arts has inspired generations of Method Actors.

A debt of gratitude to my editor, Matthew D. Rudikoff, for his sustained encouragement and insights in the preparation of this manuscript during every stage.

Special thanks to Anna Strasberg, Co-Founder and Artistic Director and Victoria Krane, President of the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute for their commitment in keeping Lee Strasberg's legacy available for future generations of artists. To my editors at Routledge, Talia Rodgers, for her kindness, encouragement, and expertise and Stacey Walker and her staff for their support. To James Grissom, author and raconteur, for his wit, and prodigious knowledge of the theater, and for permitting me to use the Marlon Brando, Tennessee Williams and Kim Stanley quotes.

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Lola Cohen
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Introduction

The Method Acting Exercises Handbook is a practical guide to the exercises taught to me by Lee Strasberg during the last five years of his life when I studied with him in New York and Los Angeles. These physical and emotional exercises will help you to achieve a level of excellence and truth in your acting. You will also expand, nurture, and train your imagination, the use of the senses, and your concentration. I continued my training with Jose Quintero and Kim Stanley, incorporating their ideas into my own work during my thirty years of teaching at the Institute and internationally – to further develop what Strasberg taught and shared with us about The Method and the exercises.

Acting isn't a solitary art, and it cannot be taught and absorbed from a book alone. My hope is that the *Handbook* can be used as an introduction to The Method, an accompaniment to your class work, and as a reference for planning future work. The specific descriptions, instructions, and photographs included are designed and offered for you to practice at home or to supplement whatever you are working on in your classes.

Regardless of whether you are investigating a specific character, interpreting a script, or developing a precise vision for a production, this book is a shared experience – for actors, teachers, and directors who want to explore if working with The Method and the exercises can help perfect their craft and refine their work.

The exercises are procedures for activating each of your senses, one by one, in detailed explorations of imagined objects, people, activities, and places. This conscious, sensory process demands concentration and focus. It is a technique to access feelings and behaviors for your characters.

Everything offered here honors Strasberg's philosophy of training your mind, body, and senses in an effort to create a truthful presence on the stage. Strasberg told his students that he believed that being truthful isn't a state achieved by discussion or by a description from an instructor or director. He told us that actors must understand their own nature and how to respond *sensorially* before transforming into a character. He used the word *sensorially* to convey the necessity of experiencing life, the world, people, and objects through the five senses: what you see, smell, hear, touch, and taste. The time and intensity devoted to practicing the exercises trains your concentration and will by utilizing the all-powerful senses to act as gateways to feelings, behaviors, and responses. By re-living sensory experiences when creating a role, the

actor can gain the capacity to fully breathe life – their own and that perceived by the playwright – into the character. As you move forward in your work, characters will emerge organically and unanticipated. Each of these exercises will act as a catalyst for you to discover different sides of your personality, as well as to initiate new and original ideas that ultimately lead to thinking and behaving like the character.

The dynamic is initiated internally. Memories experienced through the five senses will shake your subconscious mind, bringing impulses to the surface. These personal memories triggered through the exercises, where you explore events, places, and people from your own life, ignite your creativity – offering up a limitless range of feelings, actions, behaviors, and gestures needed for your character.

The actor must choose those exercises that give the intensity of feeling called for in a scene. Cultivating your intuitive mind and your emotional intelligence will result in an elevated sense of belief in what you're doing.

Ultimately, the exercises make it possible for you to experience and re-experience every conceivable combination of traits, habits, feelings, and actions at will. One of the greatest gifts you can possess is the ability to switch effortlessly, moment to moment or comedy to drama, for example, as well as remembering the behavior, dialogue, and cues for a scene. This entails discipline and intellectual control. Having this ability – switching from one extreme to another effortlessly – will contribute many unexpected moments that touch audiences deeply.

To prepare for the creation of any role, either in a class or in a performance, you must do the Relaxation Exercise detailed in Chapter One. Strasberg called relaxation and concentration the “two sides of the acting coin.” The many demands made upon the actor throughout a performance call for the elimination of fear and tension, and Strasberg believed that actors must relax their bodies in order to concentrate and have control over their minds.

As you regularly work on the Relaxation Exercise, you will find that your concentration and your will are solidified to enable you to relax and stay relaxed. Stanislavski said that relaxation is the emotional and physical state required to enter into what he called the “creative mood.” It is in this mood that great acting is achieved. Relaxation allows for fluidity, seamlessness, focus on the task at hand, and the merging of action and awareness which are essential conditions for good acting.



0.1 Lee Strasberg, circa 1979. Courtesy Photofest.



0.2 Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavski. St. Petersburg Theater Museum.

The Foundation Sense Memory Exercises described in Chapter Two adhere to the same sequence that Strasberg followed in his classes and which I continue in my classes – moving from simple to more complex tasks. Initially, you practice non-emotional and basic daily

activities and situations, such as having a breakfast drink or looking in the mirror and putting on make-up or shaving. The sequencing progresses with the more physical exercises called Overall Sensations, which require active movement and are an “all-over” or enveloping experience and might include taking a shower or bath, responding to weather conditions such as extreme cold and heat, rain, or strong wind, or the disorienting condition of being drunk. This series of exercises trains you to engage areas of the body that are often ignored or which you might not even be conscious of.

The Foundation Sense Memory Exercises aren't for the purpose of evoking emotional responses, but to activate and train your imagination and the individual senses for optimal use. It's natural that real and potentially strong emotions may unexpectedly bubble up during the exercises, but you are not to go along with those emotions. In the course of doing these exercises, be aware of the feelings that do arise and note the senses that triggered the emotion. This will be placed in your acting inventory, but let it go and continue with your work.

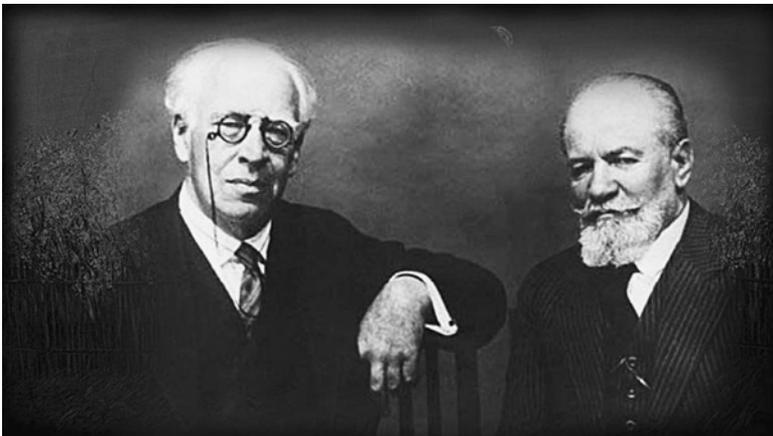
Once you have a good grasp of the Foundation Exercises, you will move on to the more Advanced Sense Memory Exercises, found in Chapter Three, including Personal Objects, Place Exercise, Private Moment Exercise, and, the jewel in the crown, the Emotional Memory Exercise, which has tremendous value in the area of repetition and intensity of emotion.

Eventually, you will perform multiple exercises simultaneously, learning to do what is known as “Combinations.” Divergent activities and behaviors will train and strengthen your will and stimulate a level of acute awareness. The complexity of the exercises will increase as we focus on the Script and Character Development described in Chapter Four. This area of development includes Improvisation, Spines, Substitution, Need, Private Moment for the Character, Painting, Animal, and Music Exercises.

To help you understand and use the exercises, I include several guides to incite a keener sense of detail by giving you examples of sensory observations that can expand the boundaries of your imagination – a state that leads you to dig deeper into the character's world. The guides will inspire you to reach beyond ingrained habits, stereotypes, and self-limiting beliefs, helping you play characters unlike yourself and to discover your own individual strengths by developing a strong sensory life.

You need to connect with your scene partners on stage and listen, letting their responses affect what you feel, think, and how you react – not just relying on your memorized lines or behaviors. To strengthen this interconnectedness, I've introduced the process of Improvisation into several of the exercises. In *Painting, Animal, and Private Moment for the Character Exercise*, the improvisations force you to respond to the other actors, verbally and nonverbally. The technique of Improvisation is also used with some of the other exercises to further assist you in overcoming your limitations.

Lee Strasberg told his classes that he formulated his ideas in response to the great Russian director and actor Konstantin Sergeyeovich Stanislavski, co-founder with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko of the Moscow Art Theater (MAT), Yevgeny Vakhtangov, visionary actor/director, member of the MAT known for “Fantastic Realism” and founder of his own theater, and Vsevolod Meyerhold, prolific actor/director, member of the MAT, who created his own acting system called “Biomechanics.” Both Meyerhold and Vakhtangov were students of Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko. Strasberg learned the Stanislavski “System” from Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya, esteemed MAT actors who immigrated to New York City and formed the American Laboratory Theater where Strasberg eventually enrolled. Although the lives of Strasberg and Stanislavski overlapped, they never met. They were kindred spirits who shared a heartfelt immersion into the world of art and the mystery of creativity.



0.3 Konstantin Stanislavski and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. St. Petersburg Theater Museum.



0.4 Yvegeny Vakhtangov, Russian actor/director (1883–1922) after whom the Vakhtangov State Theater is named.



0.5 Vsevolod Meyerhold, Russian actor/director (1874–1940). Courtesy HIP/Art Resource, New York.



0.6 Richard Boleslavsky in *The Mistress of the Inn* by Carlo Goldoni. MAT. Photo by K. Fisher. Moscow, 1914.



0.7 Maria Ouspenskaya in *Dodsworth*, directed by William Wyler. 1936. Courtesy United/Photofest.



0.8 Moscow Art Theater, Yalta, 1900, including most notably – standing in the rear on the extreme right is writer Ivan Bunin, third to his right is Maxim Gorky, second to his right is Anton Chekhov, to his right is writer Alexander Kuprin, to his right is Konstantin Stanislavski and second to his right in a top hat in front of three women is Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Seated second to Danchenko's left in front of Stanislavski is Stanislavski's wife, Lilina, seated second to her left is Olga Knipper-Chekhova, to her left is the actress Margarita Savitskaya, and seated on the ground in front of them is Vsevolod Meyerhold.

Building on Stanislavski's System, Strasberg's Exercises highlighted Relaxation and the elimination of pernicious and unconscious habits, while demanding that actors engage their imaginations and passions by utilizing Sense and Emotional Memory. It was Stanislavski who best made the connection of the senses to emotions, expressiveness and identified the pitfalls of mechanical speech. In America that System became known as The Method, and it better enabled actors to overcome obstacles that might prevent them from responding truthfully to the imaginary circumstances of a play. This freedom – to create an illusion arising from a strong connection to the emotions – greatly helped actors connect viscerally with their audiences.

Initially, the exercises are taught in a four-hour class that encourages collaboration, teacher instruction, and critiques. Typically, the class is divided into two parts: Two hours given to the actors to work on themselves through the exercises, and then two hours to work on characters and scenes. You will do each exercise for approximately one hour. This continued practice of the exercises will reward you when your imaginative powers become more easily available to you.

During the exercises you may encounter distractions, such as extraneous thoughts, the intrusion of everyday worries or problems, the sensation of being bored or complacent, or feeling unclear about what you should be doing, all of which stop you from going further. If you're distracted, stuck, or unexpressive, you can work through the problem by using the procedure known as the Abstract or Additional Movement which allows you to make physical moves and sounds that forces you to concentrate. You can also use another procedure, known as Speaking Out, during which your frustration is proclaimed out loud with a committed voice, for example, saying "I feel stuck" or "I'm panicked" or "I forgot my lines" or "I'm so frustrated right now, it makes me want to hide." The use of the Speaking Out procedure makes the teacher aware of your problem by declaring that you feel blocked and how that makes you feel. While performing, you still use "speaking out" but it is done silently to yourself. Articulating the problem releases your frustration and prevents you from becoming static and unexpressive. The acknowledgment of a distraction or any creative block allows you to let it go and take command of the circumstances, freeing you to restart the exercise. The confessional nature of the declaration releases you from its hold and alters your frame of mind.

Whether you are working alone or in class – and particularly if you're a teacher, director, or any practitioner who is responsible for supervising actors – it is vital that you stop work immediately when you observe a potential loss of control. Tell the actor to do Relaxation, to breathe easily, and to gain control of their emotions and continue with the work. You must believe that failure or frustration isn't permanent and with a strong will, change is possible. It's a procedure like rebooting the computer – cleaning the slate and returning to the exercise or scene refreshed, perhaps working with renewed vibrancy and confidence. When you face and move through the moment of feeling tense, stuck, or out of control, you can break through to something new and deeper in your acting. The same tools are used during any exercise when an intensity of emotion or physical sensation arises that has the potential to overwhelm you.

Strasberg often reiterated in classes that, "Art is in the choice; the choice is that which conditions art." These exercises become your personal arsenal whose use will generate the behavior of a character in any given imaginary circumstance. In time, you'll have many exercises to choose from to define a role.

Chapter Five, Practical Use of the Work, presents how to integrate the knowledge of what you have gleaned from practicing the exercises and how to apply those results to auditioning, rehearsals and performances. You are able to use your sensory awareness for developing characters in preparation for auditions and to relax and concentrate to maintain the level of your work during the rehearsal process and in performances. Learning to work with commitment and confidence to connect with an audience and yourself is explored in Chapter Six, Developing the Actor's Presence, which contains the Evolution Exercise which I also call Dance the Song of Your Life and the Song and Dance Exercise. The Evolution Exercise is designed to stimulate memory, encourage freedom of movement and creativity as you move to and experience music. By strengthening self-awareness and helping to eliminate habits, the Song and Dance Exercise provides the teacher with information about the actors' problems in order to help them break those mannerisms and be able to do multiple activities simultaneously while performing in front of the class.

What can be learned from this book about the artists' process of working on themselves and their characters will be valuable whether you're an actor, director, or teacher. Comments about teaching and

directing are included in the exercise descriptions and in Chapter Seven. This material has the added benefit of helping actors understand the directing and teaching process. For example, like the director, the actor must understand all the characters and circumstances, not just their own.

Directors, by using the exercises, can learn how to be more inventive and creative in forming their vision of a production and achieving the desired results. The exercises will lead to a more intuitive sensory awareness of people, places, and objects. An effective director can use the exercises to develop a precision in interpreting a script, working with the actors, envisioning sets, lighting, music and discovering those transitional moments or beats which delineate the drama by marking changes in the script.

Teachers use The Method Exercises to strengthen their own sensory skills, communicate better with actors, and to be insightful with scene breakdowns and the critiquing of the actors' work in class. Strasberg in his classes and as I do in mine, ask the actors questions about what they were working on partially to stimulate and train their ability to express themselves verbally and be clear, compelling, and have their audience want to hear and believe what they are saying.

Both teachers and directors can make use of the several exercise guides to shape ideas that will give their work form and substance. Teachers will learn important evaluation techniques to help actors' break their habits and harness their concentration. Directors and teachers can suggest which exercises could create the desired physicality or psychological state of the character within the given circumstances which most simply is the who, what, why, when, and where of the story.

SUGGESTIONS FOR APPLYING THE EXERCISES

- I recommend that actors repeat the exercises done in class when at home in the same sequence and for the same duration. It's important that you continue to practice daily to keep fresh. Investigate the senses in your everyday life, on the street or bus, out for a meal, with friends, and so on. Your commitment to practicing consistently is necessary to grow and get the most out of your efforts.
- You're the one who chooses and decides which exercises and sequences work best for you. After the completion of each exercise

and scene, you evaluate what worked or didn't work. It will be constructive if you make notes in your actor's Journal of those objects, places, people, and senses that are most powerful and reusable. Keeping track of your responses and emotions achieved during your exercise sessions will create a reference document to use for future work.

- The choice of exercises you pick for a role or production is a result of trial and error. Benefitting from this work can happen quickly, but perfecting the techniques and building your craft can take years and a lifetime of work. Be patient with yourself.
- Strasberg encouraged actors to be familiar with all styles of theater for versatility, and he urged actors to immerse themselves in all of the arts and fields of human inquiry for inspiration. He taught that a knowledge of theater and film history, literature, poetry, dance, painting, and music would build a connection to life, nature, and art. Your engagement with the arts will keep you curious, most childlike and will foster your creativity.
- You should be well-read in the field of psychology and understand the ideas and failings of former and modern psychological thought. Read about current brain research that sheds light on which functions influence our emotions and our behavior.
- You should have an intuitive sense of other people's circumstances, understanding the eternal issues of life, love, and loss and be able to make astute observations about human nature attuned to the inner experience of sensing, thinking, and valuing.
- A sound mind and body are required for you to have the imagination, endurance, and concentration to act well. Strasberg encouraged actors studying with him to do Yoga or Tai Chi for both physical strength and concentration.
- The exercises aren't set in stone. Employing them encourages each actor, director, author, or teacher to formulate and use their own individualized way of working with The Method.

Throughout the *Handbook* I include comments from beginning, advanced and professional actors made after their completion of an exercise. Actors themselves often give the best examples of the effectiveness of the exercises, as well as the challenges they faced doing them. At the end of an intense and engaging class, where several exercises were practiced, an actor who was new to The Method made the

following comment. In its simplicity it expresses what can be experienced by learning and using the exercises in the *Handbook*.

Actor comment

What most surprised me about doing the exercises, is how I was able to focus for so long, so intently, so slowly, and in such detail. I never was very detail-oriented, and I'm easily distracted. I also rush around and do everything rather quickly, often haphazardly. When you said we'd be doing each exercise for one hour, I thought to myself there'd be no way I could ever sit in one place for so long and do that. But by using one sense at a time, I was amazed at how relaxed and acutely aware I became of the moment. Emotions, sensations, and old memories came into my mind. And then when you told me to add a monologue, I knew in my heart that it was the most truthful piece of acting I'd ever done and I want more of that feeling of being connected.

The Method can inform your artistry and nurture the ability to:

- **Create characters** in their own emotional and sensory worlds for each circumstance as the play unfolds.
- **Access** a vast array of truthful behaviors to build your characters.
- **Switch or flip** frames of mind and motivations between different circumstances and values at will.
- **Re-create** – don't imitate – what went well in each of your performances.
- **Work equally well** in any genre or style of theater, film or TV whether you are an actor, director, author, or teacher.

I have encountered talented actors who have worked with the ideas and techniques of Lee Strasberg, Michael Chekhov, Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, Elia Kazan, Uta Hagen, Robert Lewis, and Kim Stanley, all highly regarded, who have made indelible contributions to both The Method and the craft of acting. I believe there are more similarities between these artists than differences in their search for authenticity and truth. You will find threads connecting their words and methods to the work of Konstantine Stanislavski, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and their trailblazing creation of the MAT. Explore the different approaches and take from each those things that resonate most with you to illuminate the precarious human condition by making conscious artistic choices in your work.

You will learn resilience, perseverance, experimentation, and investigation experienced through the lens of the senses. This work can mold your spiritual and intellectual life and give it profound meaning. It tests you and your ability to handle chance encounters and accidents and, it's said, that those not tested can't know enough about themselves and the world to act well.

It is my hope that your lifelong dedication to acting and the arts grows exponentially as you gain discipline and confidence in your own work. Your burning curiosity and drive in learning The Method and reading the works of Stanislavski, Strasberg, and others will foster discipline and a steadfast preparedness to face the many challenges involved in acting. Finally, act in plays and films which propagate spiritual and human values that incite you to rise above the present moment and enchant yourself so that you can enchant the audience. That is the true goal of The Method and the *Handbook*.

Relaxation Exercise

Chapter 1

ABOUT THE EXERCISE

Strasberg often said in class that actors need a warm heart and a cool head to gain control over the body and mind, freeing them from the pervasive problems of tension, habits, and distractions. In solidarity with Stanislavski, Strasberg championed and taught the significance and importance of being able to relax at will, entering into what Stanislavski called the “creative mood,” which is described as a state of being aware, as well as knowing how and where the senses and emotions can function fully and expressively. You can achieve the creative mood by doing the Relaxation Exercise.

You will benefit enormously from the Relaxation Exercise, because it is restorative. It’s also the exercise that precedes all the Sense Memory Exercises. Relaxation is very precise and is done at the beginning of every class, and it should be practiced every day. You can rely on relaxation in many situations, and not just before scenes, but in meetings, auditions, rehearsals, performances, or any time you lose concentration or become anxious or tense.

There are certain people who are naturally relaxed, but they are the exception. Strasberg rhapsodically spoke of the magic of Eleanora Duse and what he referred to as her “uncanny degree of relaxation.” Duse was renowned for being inwardly intense while outwardly expressive. Her hands conveyed a deep expressiveness when still or when holding, taking, or throwing an object. It was said of her that she became that object. As she moved, her body exuded a mysterious, internal grace and power.

The Relaxation Exercise will strengthen your concentration and is a major preparation for the work by eliminating tension, which can stop the mind and body from responding and functioning fully. Think of the Relaxation Exercise as taking control of yourself physically and emotionally, which every actor must do. When you are fully relaxed, you can nourish your mind and soul, because both are open, calm, and receptive. You are able to regain your focus whenever distractions or unwanted feelings arise.

Strasberg told us that tension is divided into two parts – mental and physical. During Relaxation you make an effort to search out areas of the body that hold the tension which impedes the flow of impulses and is inhibiting you from controlling your behavior. The more you practice this exercise, the better you will become at identifying those areas

that repeatedly produce tension. Discipline is required to achieve results, so practice the exercise every day at home, before other exercises, performances, rehearsals, and auditions. Relaxation is not to be confused with meditation. You don't go inward and remain static, but there are similarities in the use of breathing and sensory awareness to remain in the present moment.

The Relaxation Exercise is not intended to induce or indulge an emotional response, although that may occur. You must master the ability to start and stop emotions at will, and never be swallowed up by them so that you're unable to speak or respond to your fellow actors. If you become overly emotional during Relaxation and feel out of control, "speak out" to acknowledge the problem and get the teacher's attention. You may be in a scene where you must be hysterically crying and upset, while moments later, you must produce a different emotion. The repetition of the exercises will become a skill in itself, and Strasberg often used the metaphor of the body as a musical instrument that needs regular tuning to be able to play all the notes reliably and passionately.

The Relaxation Exercise permits you to identify and break self-sabotaging unconscious habits that impede your expression. Strasberg emphasized in class that when you eliminate these physical or emotional habits, the muscles and nerves relax and the body becomes more sensitive and responsive, freed from its own limiting, reactive patterns. Your imagination is unleashed as a result. Strasberg taught that eliminating these habits gives you access to new forms of expression. Deeply ingrained patterns of tension will define you – often negatively. Habits can be distracting and develop into ineffectual physical mannerisms that only allow you to play yourself. The Relaxation Exercise can make you aware of your habits, as well as how to break them, accessing new forms of expression.

By studying your own actions closely, you become aware of those confining habits that can control you. It's likely that your characters won't have your mannerisms or habits, so it's incumbent upon you to be able to get rid of them in order to consciously take on the mannerisms of the character.

Verbal habits are especially difficult to break, like unconsciously saying the memorized line the exact same way over and over – using clichéd emphasis or copying the way other actors have performed

the same famous lines. Don't let the punctuation marks of a script – a period, a comma, a semicolon, or a dash – thwart the potential for how the lines are said. This is the reason why The Group Theater (1931 to 1940), which was founded by Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman, and Cheryl Crawford in New York City, used The Method in their work and retyped their scripts without the punctuation, allowing the actors to be freer to feel, understand, and express the lines. Additionally, you may have a regional accent and habitual rhythms that can limit your own possibilities unless dealt with professionally.

To me, if you're always making a pointing gesture, it can be particularly stifling. I recently had the misfortune of watching an excellent actor, and one of my favorites, point his way through an entire performance. Every time he said "I" he pointed to himself and likewise for "you" as he pointed to his scene partner and elsewhere. It didn't mean anything. It's natural to use pointing some of the time in life for certain practical things or for occasional moments to add an emphasis, but doing it all the time becomes meaningless. You may be playing a character who wouldn't point at all. Head-shaking can be particularly distracting. Moving the head up and down with "yes" or back and forth with "no" is pure indication and can frequently send an unintended message. You must be able to take on your character's habits, and stop your own, which may be in conflict with the character.

If you have any physical ailments or weaknesses, there will likely be habitual behavior associated with your accommodation to the condition. It's conditioning which formed the habit in the first place. For instance, if you were hit repeatedly as a child, you likely moved or tensed the body in avoidance or pain. The body remembers the physical trauma of childhood emotional events, and you carry those patterns around in your body for your whole life. Once you recognize the habit and try to eliminate it, you can lessen its grip and bring on changes and new pathways to expression.

For teachers, the sequence of steps in the Relaxation Exercise is clearly presented for you to be able to teach it. You test the actors for tension, observe the actor's movements, and make recommendations when there are visible indicators of tension, habits, mechanical speech, or superfluous movement – or no movement – which are pointed out by you.

Teachers should make sure that actors don't become wooden or static, distracted, or disconnected during any of the exercises. The

teacher should have you go back to Relaxation for a few minutes to reorient yourself – to regain control and then continue the exercise.

For directors working with actors who are clearly not relaxed, it is good to instruct them to take fifteen minutes and go off to the side and practice Relaxation. Even for actors without Method training, a simple moment of instruction from the director about how to relax can yield an immeasurable improvement in the acting. It may also trigger an interest in The Method as a way for that actor to work. When the director has enough time, having the whole cast participate in a short Relaxation before rehearsal is optimal.

Tai Chi, Yoga, and other mind/body work such as Feldenkrais, Alexander Technique, meditation, and bio-feedback will help you become more aware of your body. However, Relaxation was conceived specifically for acting, and it's the procedure that you have to do daily to continue to grow and improve.

Both teachers and directors should keep the practice of Relaxation active in their work at all times, continually reminding actors to return to it when there is a distraction, a block in expressiveness, a loss of control, or an inability to break out of limiting habits – in class, rehearsals, or pre-performance.

EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS

- When you sit in the chair and begin the exercise, ask yourself how, on a scale of one to ten, you feel that moment, both emotionally and physically. It will be an overall number, with ten being best and one being worst. Identify unhelpful thoughts and let them go. How long you relax depends on where you are in the work and what's happening in your life at that moment.
- Ideally, sit in a straight back chair which doesn't have arms, in a place where you've enough room to stretch out your arms and legs and not touch anything or anyone else. If your neck and shoulders are above the back of the chair, slip down on the seat and hang your neck gently back, slightly supported by the back of the chair, if possible. Hang your arms down loosely at the sides of the chair with your shoulders relaxed, legs flopped out, knees bent, and your feet on the floor. Don't sit with your limbs in a parallel position in the chair. Never cross your arms and legs during Relaxation. Having the arms crossed is like a shield of protection that stops the flow of expression and creates distance.



1.1 Relaxation Exercise, TELL to JOY Theater, Copenhagen, DK.

- At the beginning of Method training, you do Relaxation for thirty or forty minutes, during which you'll be moving all the different parts of your body one by one – moving each finger, arm, leg, toe, back, and making specific sounds.
- Be conscious of breathing slowly but not deeply. Breathe in through the nose for a count of "one," with an equally long exhale through the nose, if possible. It's perfectly okay for you to breathe out through the mouth, but be careful that it isn't audible or visible. The breathing is extremely important and places you in the present moment.
- Strasberg taught us to distinguish between the different areas of the body that hold mental tension. He referred to the areas around the eyes as the "blue nerves." The muscles around the nose, he called the thick muscles. The muscles around the mouth, jaw, and the tongue are the most conditioned through the habits of speech and expression. The muscles and nerves contained in the back hold the traumatic experiences from childhood and can be very tense and are more difficult to make contact with. Be aware of all physical sensations such as tingling, burning, twinges, or cramps.
- You begin a detailed tour of your body to search for tension by moving each part separately, slowly, and deliberately. Tension moves

around, so be vigilant in your search. Your movements should not be general. The exercise demands that you know the specific part of the body on which you're working, when you're focusing on it, and when you relax it. You don't just flail around arbitrarily or have your arms and legs in continuous motion.

- Ask yourself questions to elicit a response. Is your brow furrowed? Is your neck tight? Are your shoulders up? Are your fingers jiggling or moving unconsciously? If you're a leg shaker or incessantly touching your hair or face, stop the behavior. Breathe and let go of the tension.
- Explore parts of the body you don't normally make contact with, such as your abdomen, back of the knees, ears, scalp, and so on. Bend forward in the chair and check the back muscles. Work on the tension in your neck by doing gentle head-and-neck rotations – all the way around one way and then the other, practically in slow motion. Try to move the neck toward the back but don't force it. It takes time to loosen up those muscles. If you feel any discomfort or tightness, stop. If you experience any areas of chronic pain don't try to work it out. Pass over it and move on to a different area. Face your own boredom and distractions.



1.2 Relaxation Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

- Acknowledge any problem by moving and making sounds, then continue with the detailed exploration of your body. You can make the specific committed loud sounds during Relaxation when there is tension. If the number you picked for how you're feeling is five or below, it can be because of a general malaise, or it can be more intense and about a specific issue. In that case make a long deep "HA!" or "AH!" sound. The sound should be loud, committed, and elongated for five or ten seconds. Stretch your arms out from the side of your body at shoulder level, opening up the chest area and move the legs. Then lean back into the chair and let go of the tension, collapse, and breathe. The bad feeling stops you from going further and the movement and sounds break you through.

The explosive "HA!" sound can help you deal with specific, troubling issues, such as anger. Stand up, make a short loud staccato "HA!" or "AH!" sound, and punch and kick the air three, four, or five times, then collapse back into the chair, relaxing, breathing easily, and letting those feelings dissipate. Making these types of sounds and movements when necessary – that you don't make in life – asserts the will and helps to eliminate tension and frustration.

Both sounds and movements acknowledge and help let go of difficulties and blocks. The sound is not made gratuitously, but only when there is a need for an emotional release. When I observe a physical habit such as touching your hair or face, furrowing your brow, biting the lip, talking with your hands, breathing loudly, always smiling, always saying "yes" or "I know" or swaying – I know you're often totally oblivious of doing it and unaware of how it limits expressiveness. Strasberg, for example, told his classes that the common habit of fist clenching holds in energy and stops the flow of expression.

- The teacher checks your relaxation to point out where you're holding tension. During the "Check," the teacher lifts each of your arms and legs, moves the head and jaw pointing out where you're tense. I can feel when the actor is moving their limbs with me, or tenses the part of the body I'm testing, rather than relaxing and allowing their arms and legs to be dead weight. Sometimes, I can let go of an arm or leg in midair and it just hangs there suspended in space. Any such muscular activity or tautness is exactly the opposite of being relaxed, which is the point of the exercise. After I've checked the actors and determined that they're relaxed, I tell them to start their exercise.



1.3 Testing for Relaxation, Theater High School Rødkilde, TELL to JOY Theater Copenhagen, DK.

- Practicing Relaxation at home, you follow the same instructions as provided for doing Relaxation in class. Shut off all electronic devices. You must work extremely slowly. Since the teacher won't be there to check for tension, you must be aware of tingling, knots, tightness, and any other physical or emotional indicators of tension anywhere in your body.
- If you have neighbors within earshot of where you're doing the exercises or you're in a public place, avoid making inappropriate movements or loud sounds. To deal with that, establish the time for when you'll do the exercise and commit to it. In the beginning of training – the longer the better. With practice it'll take less time to relax.

Actor comment 1

I've had teachers and directors tell me to just go off and relax and come back and then say the lines. None of them ever told me what technique to use or even how to know if I was or wasn't relaxed. Having learned the Relaxation Exercise, I now know how to recognize where my tension is held, release it, and attempt to function at my full capacity. It's a relief to know that I can always do Relaxation for scenes, auditions, in performance, and in my life. For me this exercise was a total game changer.

Actor comment 2

When I was doing Relaxation, you told me not to touch my hair. I realized I was continually touching my hair, and I stopped it, and I relaxed my arms. Five minutes later, you told me again not to touch my hair, and I had no idea I was doing it again, and I stopped and when I relaxed my arms I felt tingling in my hands. When, a few minutes later, my hand was heading up to my hair again, I noticed it first and stopped my hand before it got to my hair. I never really noticed it as a habit before, and seeing that I could stop it was very liberating.

Foundation Sense Memory Exercises

Chapter 2

ROLE OF THE SENSES

Lee Strasberg reminded us in his classes that all acting takes place in the character's present moment, as well as in the actor's own present moment. This duality must be merged, and can be achieved by activating each of the five senses so that they are receptive to interpreting the reality of your character. It's for this reason that I stress – as Strasberg did – the importance of planting yourself into the *now* of the situation. In being fully present in the *now* – Strasberg taught us that an actor was more likely to give a performance full of sensory awareness and capable of fulfilling William Gillette's concept of the "Illusion of the First Time in acting".

Engaging and strengthening the senses builds both your stage presence and the ability to have the audience believe in what you're doing. In each exercise, you do a sense-by-sense exploration of imaginary objects, activities, places, people, and physical realities for approximately one hour as described below. Your goal is to experience the inner landscape of your sensory life arousing your subconscious as an agent of change and the basis for your artistic choices.

Strasberg urged his students to adopt a daily habit of asking themselves what sensory experiences they had and then noting down those detailed memories about weather, sounds, people, sights, activities, or food. This increased our power of observation, as well as our ability to share with others unfamiliar with our methods what we had seen, smelled, heard, touched, and tasted. We would also look at one simple object like, say, a matchbox, and using each sense to memorize everything about it, then test our memories to see how much we had remembered, with no detail thought of as irrelevant. Actors are students of humanity, and practicing the exercises will make you more observant and better able to recall, re-create, and invent behaviors for your characters. This will give them the imprint of believability because their characteristics are forged from first-hand sensory knowledge. A failure to use all the five senses diminishes the rich textures of reality.

Whether it's because of personal and cultural habits, physical or emotional incapacity, or our fast, digital lifestyle, we are all less reliant on our sensory perceptions than we might be. The exercises are a vehicle for you to consciously stimulate the senses and sharpen the mind by learning to react to imaginary and invisible stimuli. Are you a visually oriented person? Or are you more inclined to respond to sounds or tastes? Do you look at things closely? These are important

questions to ask of yourself before you begin the exercises, knowing that the right question becomes an answer. You will notice the changes in your perceptions.

Building on Stanislavski's continually evolving System, as well as the illuminating work of his most brilliant student, actor, and director, Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Lee Strasberg designed and taught his own exercises and procedures to give actors a unique language to explore life's complexities through the senses and apply it to their acting. Having an encyclopedic knowledge of theater history and lore, Strasberg existed in an exalted world of ideas and the imagination and sought to solve the actors' problems through a rigorous training of the mind and body, helping actors turn static behavior into dynamic action.

It was Stanislavski who most clearly made the connection between expressiveness and the senses, and he vigorously warned against mechanical empty speech. Stanislavski was a beacon of light and a true inspiration for Strasberg and they shared a fascination with the mystery of the creative process that fully utilized all of the senses.

In Stanislavski's *My Life in Art*, in the chapter titled "The Beginning of My System," he details the emotional circumstances of the time when the idea of the role of the senses became clear to him. Stanislavski describes it as if it were an epiphany: While in Finland during the summer of 1906, he and the entire company of the Moscow Art Theater, still reeling from the recent death of their beloved Chekhov, continued to doggedly evaluate their dissatisfaction and anxiety with their work. Stanislavski pondered how the inner truthful content of a role – borne in his soul and so strong in the beginning – becomes weaker, fossilized, imitative, technical, and habitual as the role is repeated over time.

Stanislavski said he finally understood that the favorable conditions for the actor to be in a strong "creative mood" are irrevocably tied to how the actors themselves are feeling that day in their own lives and situations. Aware that even geniuses like Eleanora Duse could not retain the intensity of a creative mood all the time, Stanislavski worked toward strengthening and protecting the conditions for creating and sustaining inspiration, which can "no longer be a matter of mere accident," but a matter to be created at the "will and order of the actor." Stanislavski recounts that, later in the year, back in Moscow, seeing the performance of a visiting unnamed star of the time, he observed that the actor's creative mood included a "freedom

of muscles” and a “strong general concentration.” However, this concentration was directed at the world on the stage and not toward the audience, which was more the style at that time. Stanislavski also observed that the actor’s concentration did not focus only on what the actor was seeing and hearing as part of the scene, but that he used all of the senses to create the behaviors from which the excellent performance emanated.

Taking all of this history into account, Strasberg created the Sense Memory Exercises, which are designed to help actors develop and then use their senses. The Foundation Sense Memory Exercises aren’t designed to provoke emotional responses – that will be dealt with in the Advanced Sense Memory Exercises.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION EXERCISES

The Foundation Sense Memory Exercises, their sequencing and combinations, were designed and taught by Lee Strasberg to enhance concentration and sensitivity through a sensory approach that stimulates the imagination, eliciting impulses, gestures, and behaviors that feed the creative process rather than a more phony, mechanical imitation of reality.

You build a physical and mental discipline with these exercises by engaging your will and senses. The exercises also provide a way to engage the mind and body for extended periods of time by exploring imaginary objects and activities. An engaged mind uses each sense to understand more. As you become rooted in each exercise, you begin to feel the complex beauty of everyday objects and this understanding will deepen your work and allow the senses to become the gateway for feelings and emotions. When you practice the exercises, your attention is firmly planted, with a Zen-like quality, in each present moment. With commitment and dedication, you can use the exercises to repeatedly evoke feelings and sensations that will infuse your characters and the script with meaning.

Each of the Sense Memory Exercises will enable you to provide an effective and imaginary reality through your observations of what you see, smell, hear, touch, and taste. The senses are unequally developed or relied upon by each individual for interpreting and experiencing life, and these exercises will help to make clear which ones are strongest or weakest, as well as which ones you most readily call upon for use.

The training requires you to make choices and judgments of what works and what does not. The ultimate test of your use of the senses will be revealed during scene work, where your goal will be to perceive the world of the character by fully utilizing your remembered and imagined sensory and personal experiences. The use of these senses cannot be rushed: Awareness demands time and patience.

Strasberg frequently pointed out distinctions between external and internal acting styles, and he preferred the internal way of working, in which an actor re-creates and re-experiences an actual, remembered reality, not an imitation. A common misperception of Strasberg and The Method is that no importance was given to the significance of the external aspects of the performance. This is not true, as you will learn.

The external style of acting was sometimes good, Strasberg told us, embracing a declaiming of the line, acting out the meaning of the word, with the lines in the script being the primary motivator. However, The Method's internal approach which has you rely on the situation and its subtext in all of its vivid sensory details and meaning rises and merges to give the lines a richer reality. While an author's words are sacred, it is the actor – you – who must give the force of meaning.

Be bold in your use of the Sensory Exercises, mining your own feelings and sensations to give life to the character. Be inventive while doing the exercises and seize the opportunity to build qualities that may be new or undeveloped within you. Qualities being sought include empathy, curiosity, courage, daring, self-awareness.

While the Foundation Sense Memory Exercises are aimed at activating the physical senses, it's natural that emotional responses will come up, perhaps strongly. In the beginning of training, don't work for the emotions or dwell on them. Acknowledge the existence of the emotions, and the triggers that evoked them – but don't go with them. Return to your work on the senses. The Advanced Sense Memory Exercises are designed for you to stimulate both physical and emotional responses.

It is possible – and even natural – that you can become blocked or lose focus. You may find that even Relaxation has not helped you to re-connect with what you're working on. For those situations Strasberg developed the two previously mentioned procedures known as the Abstract or Additional Movement and Speaking Out. When any self-judging or disorienting habits take hold, you can utilize these techniques to break through and find clear expression.



2.1 Abstract or Additional Movement, Accademia Zero Nove, Milan, IT.

The Abstract or Additional Movement enables you to maintain control of your acting instrument and face the reality of the moment – to deal with the problem by physical movement and concentration. The idea of adding this particular movement is to train your mind to obey multiple commands while maintaining your focus. You make a specific movement – the arms go out to the side at shoulder level and the hands and fingers hang loosely and are relaxed, not rigid. You also move the legs – one at a time, up and out to the sides. You do this sideways to break the habit of how you usually raise your arms and legs. At the same time you make the loud sound from the chest, the same sound that you use during Relaxation, the deep “HA!” or “AH!” The sound and movement run counter to what you have been working on in the exercise, and this allows you to break through the obstacle, release the tension associated with it, then return to your exercise. When you break the habit of non-expression by making the sound and movement you’re regaining control. It’s liberating both physically and emotionally and strengthens your will.

The procedure called Speaking Out, which deals with problems and obstacles you’re experiencing, is used during both the exercises and the scene work. When you speak out, you must say how you feel with a strong voice and then use your will to return to your exercise

or scene. By using the Abstract Movement and Speaking Out, self-examination and self-reflection will bring about greater awareness. The confessional nature is a declaration and is good for the soul. You have taken conscious, concrete steps to face and eliminate any problems that prevent you from continuing truthfully. Teachers and directors must be observant of non-expressiveness or blocks in actors and direct them to break through with these procedures.

In your home-study of the exercises, begin by using and grasping real objects to discern sensory qualities. While in class, you will work only with imaginary objects. Each specific exercise has instructions on how to do it, whether it be with eyes open or closed, standing or sitting and for how long. After completing each exercise, take the time to be aware of which senses generated impulses and behavior that can be of use in your future work. Make a note of it in your Journal.

In the exercise descriptions and throughout this *Handbook*, I stress the importance of focusing your awareness on one sense at a time. This creates a thorough, detailed, patient sensory exploration, which may not feel normal to you but is crucial during the training. The act of slowing down has the added benefit of cultivating graceful movements which lend themselves to actually feeling and not imitating life. The exercises act as a catalyst for you to discover different sides of your personality and initiate new and original ideas that ultimately lead to thinking like the character.

Actor comment

I always thought I was terrible at observing details and keeping my mind on something without tons of distractions. What surprised me during the beginning exercises, and I'll always remember this, is how after I did the relaxation, I was able to focus so easily observing every detail. The time went by so fast and with way less of my usual distractions. My mind listened to itself, and I felt barriers of resistance fade away. At one point I realized I wasn't smelling anything, and I felt frustrated, but kept trying and then all of a sudden I started hearing actual sounds from my childhood. I never thought of experiencing everything so closely before, and through each particular sense. It was an epiphany to know that a re-imagined reality using the senses can lead you into the world of the character.

Playwright comment

As a playwright who first trained as an actor at The Strasberg Institute, I think about my writing in the same way that I would develop a character I was going to be acting. I try to find the emotional truth that connects to my own personal experience and I use my knowledge of sense memory to write those specific details which can only be recalled through the senses. This work helps personalize characters, and allows me to access them outside of my realm of day to day experience. When writing, I also use the exercises to find what aspects of myself still hurt or have joy and I long to explore. This sort of training helped open me up as an artist in a more general sense and to get in touch with my own beliefs and desires. Strasberg training has a level of specificity that can be applied to more disciplines than acting.

The Foundation Sense Memory Exercises included below are:

- Breakfast Drink Exercise
- Mirror/Make-Up/Shaving Exercise
- Sharp Taste Exercise
- Sharp Smell Exercise
- Three (3) Pieces of Material Exercise
- Taking off and Putting on Underclothes, Shoes, and Socks Exercise
- Sunshine Exercise
- Sharp Pain Exercise
- Sound Exercise
- Overall Sensation Exercises
 - Shower and Bath Overall
 - Extreme Heat and Extreme Cold Overall
 - Strong Wind Overall
 - Drunk Overall

EXERCISE DESCRIPTIONS**Breakfast Drink Exercise*****About the exercise***

Practicing the Breakfast Drink Exercise you'll use each of your five senses to imagine and explore every detail of having your usual



2.2 Breakfast Drink Exercise, Theater High School Rødkilde, TELL to JOY Theater, Copenhagen, DK.

morning beverage in the cup or glass with which you're most familiar. Strasberg always reminded us to not imitate what you did with the real cup at home. You re-experience the sensations afresh and learn not to fall into the bad and limiting habit of physically imitating how you normally deal with the object. It's not a miming of the activity but a detailed imaginary exploration using each of the senses one by one.

Strasberg was emphatic about actualizing your will and making the effort to keep working, which is more important than the results. With each exercise, persevere, revise, and continue. Brecht's observation that, "Those who try may lose. Those who don't try have lost already" – applies here.

Exercise steps

- At first practice at home with the real cup and liquid for a substantial amount of time – a half hour to forty-five minutes. Then switch to the imaginary cup for about an hour to test your senses and concentration.
- Don't use a cup that you think may have a particular emotional value, such as one given to you as a present or that you used in emotionally charged circumstances.

- In class you do Relaxation first and only practice with an imaginary cup in your present location.
- The drink should always be exactly the right temperature and the way you like it. You don't mime the preparation of it. It's just there with you at your command.
- Start the exercise with the cup already full. Don't stop because you finished the drink. Keep going until the teacher says to stop or, if working at home, for the time you have allotted for the exercise.
- Question yourself about the drink: What is the weight of the cup? How does the handle feel? What's the shape of the cup and what's it made of? Listen to the sound of the liquid as you swish it around in the cup. Hear the scraping or clinking of the glass.
- Sip the drink. Can you feel the heat or coldness against your lips? Be aware of swallowing and the feeling as it goes down your gullet or into your empty stomach. Smell the drink; inhale it. Allow it to permeate through your body. Lift the imaginary cup to your face. Feel its texture and temperature against your cheek or temples like a child experiencing something for the first time with a curious and inventive nature.
- The cup doesn't always have to be in your hand. It can float in mid-air or be placed anywhere you like. Experiment with the cup by doing out-of-the-ordinary things like having the cup fly or placed on your shoulder.
- Your actions and how you experience the cup don't have to be literal or logical. Anything you can think to do sensorially will help you stay connected and concentrated.
- At some point you may think you've run out of things to do, or you may feel distracted or bored. This must be acknowledged and dealt with. As with any distraction, speak out the problem, make sounds, do relaxation, then continue your work exploring, perhaps switching to another sensory aspect of the cup and using your will to stay with the exercise.
- After you've learned the exercise, continue to practice at home with your imagined daily beverages.

If the exercise leads you to an emotion, a memory of a person, or a specific place, be aware of it, but don't focus on it or go with those feelings. Bring yourself back to the exercise.

Actor comment

In the morning I'm always in a rush and make my cup of coffee on autopilot and don't pay much attention to what I'm doing – usually thinking ahead to my whole day while I'm just gulping down my caffeine fix. I often have little spills, and the area where I make the coffee looks like a hurricane hit the kitchen when I'm through. But, when I did the exercise and drank the coffee slowly, it was incredible. I saw the whole experience in slowed-down, small, detailed actions, and it was easy to be neat and precise. Also the anxiety about the impending day left my mind as I simply focused on the cup and its contents through the senses.

Mirror/Make-Up/Shaving Exercise

About the exercise

The Mirror/Make-Up/Shaving Exercise is more personal than the Breakfast Drink Exercise in that it specifically involves your own visual sense of yourself. Strasberg told us that actors must understand themselves before they can understand and become a character. By cultivating an ethos of attention, concentrating on the details of the various tasks during the exercises, you aren't just going through the motions, imitating or miming the behavior, but truly re-experiencing it sensorially.

You may have trouble seeing yourself in the imaginary mirror, which can be reflective of an inability to truly see yourself in real life. If there's difficulty with this exercise, don't repeat it over and over, as this can lead to frustration. Move on and come back to it at another time.

As in the other Sense Memory Exercises, if your concentration veers off with any distraction (self-consciousness, boredom, worries, and exhaustion) go back to Relaxation for a few minutes, regain your concentration, and continue.

Another benefit of practicing the Mirror Exercise is that you'll begin to use real or imaginary mirrors and reflections as a regular piece of stage business or cinematic technique to achieve a certain mood or value. Having learned and practiced this exercise, you will be able to imagine anything you might need by looking in a mirror or out an imaginary window.



2.3/2.4 Mirror/Make-Up/Shaving Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

Keep notes in your Journal on the results of the exercises and responses for later reference and use.

Exercise steps

- When you're at home, you can prepare for the Mirror Exercise with your eyes open by staring at your face from the neck up in a real mirror, studying your mouth, lips, nose, ears, eyes, hair and brows. Be unafraid to search for and study imperfections, discolorations, scars, freckles, beauty marks, blemishes, the line of your beard or mustache, hairline, and wrinkles for about half an hour. What are the things you like and don't like about your face? Consider what you'd change. Look more closely and in more detail at the parts of your face you don't normally study.
- If you're bearded and don't normally shave, consider actually shaving it off at home to experience the shock of awakening to new and unfamiliar sensations and reflections.
- Pay attention to subtleties such as how your bottom or top lip or the right side or left side of your face may have different and totally independent sensations or shapes.
- Actually put on your real make-up or shave in your real mirror, going much slower than usual. I sometimes say proceed "in slow motion" to make that point. Rushing leads to imitation and generalized movement.
- What is the weight of the compact or lipstick, the feel of the lather and the razor, the texture of the make-up brushes or cream?

- To practice the exercise in class, you do the same activities again but only with the imaginary mirror and objects with your eyes open. Work slightly away from the body, not touching yourself. After completing the Relaxation, sit in a chair in front of the imaginary mirror and stare at yourself silently. For about ten minutes, imagine each of your facial features as you did at home in the real mirror. You know your own face well and what you like and don't like about it.
- Begin to methodically, slowly, and deliberately go through each imaginary task involved in putting on make-up or shaving for about an hour. To fill that time, force your attention into the minutest details, focusing on each sense, experiencing what you see, smell, hear, touch, and taste. Ask yourself sensory questions about each object you deal with. How does the blush-on brush feel in your hand, against your face or cheeks? Imagine the 'pop' sound of pulling the mascara brush out of its holder. What's the smell, weight, texture, and the color of everything being used? Start applying the imaginary make-up very slowly, but don't touch your actual face.
- If you are shaving in the exercise, imagine feeling the weight and smell of the shaving cream, brush, container, and razor. Imagine the sound of the razor or the brush against your skin, the smell of



2.5 Mirror/Make-Up/Shaving Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

the shaving cream, the water from the faucet, the sloshing sound as the water is going down the drain, the feel of cleaning off the razor under the running water, the sight of the cut whiskers in the shaving cream, the temperature of the water and the sting or soothing feel of the after-shave lotion or cream you use, the red color of the blood from a cut on a white towel or against the porcelain sink.

- Proceed slower than you would in real life. You're going to be working for an hour, so take your time and continue to relax in addition to what you're doing. Don't mime picking something up. When you want it, imagine having it in your hand or in mid-air. Rushing is a huge mistake and leads to imitation. I can't say this enough: *Do not rush*. If you're someone who usually feels rushed, this methodical, slow, and specific work is very hard, especially in light of our high-tech world. You'll be quite surprised at your responses when you take your time, and you will also be empowered as you change the habit of rushing.

Since the Mirror/Make-Up/Shaving Exercise is intrinsically personal and deals with your own visual image and sense of yourself, it's natural that emotional feelings about how you look and feel about yourself are automatically brought into play. Some people may weep, which isn't unusual. The complexities of how people feel about themselves are embodied in their behavior, but this is not the purpose of the exercise. Be careful not to indulge yourself and become overwhelmed emotionally and out of control. If that happens breathe, make sounds, move, go back to Relaxation, and then return to the exercise and soldier on.

Actor comment

I shaved this morning for the first time in a long time and I noticed that after doing the Mirror Exercise, my movements and my mind slowed down unbelievably, as if I was in a slow motion video of myself. I felt and heard the razor against my face, and I smelled the shaving cream. I was shocked at how relaxing it felt. Without touching my face at all, I felt tingling and itching sensations on my nose and the right side of my face and my hand actually moved to scratch it. It felt so familiar. I resisted the impulse, and the tingling got stronger. As I resisted, while staring at myself in the imaginary mirror,

and still feeling the impulses, I realized I always am touching or rubbing my face in life. Through the exercise, I was in a battle to break free of that habit. A minute or two after the Exercise, I realized that I was unconsciously doing it again. This time I was conscious of it and moved my hand away. I felt strong, like I stood up to an evil force, and I won the battle.

Sharp Taste Exercise

About the exercise

With this exercise we're concerned with enhancing your sense of taste, not in reaching for or anticipating a result or an emotional response. While working on your sense of taste, you will involve the other senses as well. If you're working, for instance, with a lemon, ask yourself, what is the weight of the lemon? What is its smell? What is the true color? Does the thought of a lemon set your teeth on edge?

You'll find yourself working on many scenes in which you're required to eat or drink something strong or sharp, and you will want to fully respond. It must be done so that the audience perceives it as real. If, as a character, you need to portray an acidic bitterness, you can prepare by imagining biting into a lemon, if that's how you'd react – then speak the lines. The bitter lemon serves as a trigger for creating the quality of disgust or embitterment that can work very powerfully. If the response weakens over time, substitute a different sharp taste to generate the desired intensity.

You may or may not like the taste of lemon, but that doesn't matter. Lemon is not always meant to be a bad taste, but it is meant to be a strong or sharp taste, liked or not liked by different people for their own reasons. An actor doesn't have to know how he'll be affected, so don't anticipate a result. Be as inventive and as fully engaged as possible in the moment. If you get bored or your attention switches over to extraneous thoughts, re-focus by going back to relaxation. Use your will to let the distracting thought slip away and continue exploring the sharp taste of the lemon.

If you don't like lemons, and you get agitated or physically upset, see it as an opportunity to explore an unpleasant sensation that might be of use in certain acting situations. Don't engage in the difficult task of going against the preconceived associations you have with the lemon or any object, its taste, or its texture. Remember how the discomfort felt and what made you feel that way. Remember which senses and

actions evoked the strongest reactions and make notes in your Journal for future use and reference.

Exercise steps

- To prepare for the exercise, do Relaxation first, then work with the real lemon at home for at least half an hour.
- At home and in class, work with the imaginary lemon for an hour.
- How does the lemon juice affect each part of your mouth? What happens to your teeth and gums when you swallow the lemon juice? What would it feel like if you had a cut and had the juice in your mouth? Explore the lemon with the same kind of detail used in the Breakfast Drink Exercise.
- There are endless things to do with the lemon. Use your imagination and engage your mind and think of cutting the lemon, biting it, chewing it, then swallowing it. Imagine the smell, what it feels like on your skin, what biting the rind might feel like. Does it feel differently on your top teeth as opposed to your bottom teeth? Where do the pieces of the lemon go inside your mouth? Do you gag or grimace? Do you like or hate to feel the pulp as you chew it? Roll the seeds around in your mouth. When you squeeze the lemon, what sound does it make? Go slowly and be very specific.
- If a grimace or tightening sensation occurs, maintain relaxation by moving and letting go of the tension in the facial muscles, then breathe.
- If the lemon actually makes you sick or nauseous, maintain sufficient control to stop the exercise immediately so you'd be able to say your lines clearly, if need be. Otherwise, the work with the lemon has no value.

Actor comment

You told us yesterday to prepare by going to buy a lemon. I don't usually shop, so going and buying a lemon was quite a new sensory experience in and of itself. I paid attention to everything in the market, and I must've picked up twenty lemons, then imagined slicing into them before I bought the right one. Today the exercise with the imaginary lemon was amazing to me because of how many sensations and reactions came from it. The yellowness, weight, texture; imagining the smell and taste. I salivated. I grimaced. I got a pain in my stomach, my teeth

ached, my eyes teared, and the acid stung a canker sore in my mouth and a paper cut I had on my hand. I was astonished by my responses, because when you assigned and described the exercise, I couldn't see what it had to do with the work.

Sharp Smell Exercise

About the exercise

Smells – like tastes – can bring up vivid sense and emotional memories, both good and bad. Smells evoke people, places, and a range of physical sensations. For example, some smells are a direct link to a limitless gold mine of memories and behaviors – all of which can help you to create and inhabit a character. You can focus on the smell of a particular food, or something being cooked, a perfume or after-shave, the smell of cleaning materials. You will be amazed at which smells link you back to a particular person, time, or feeling. The sense of smell is very unique to each person, and we all have different levels of development in relation to our olfactory sense. For those of us who aren't very aware of smells, the Sharp Smell Exercise is excellent for building that awareness. Activating the sense of smell broadens your perceptions and will help you to create new opportunities for expression.

The Sharp Smell Exercise focuses primarily on the sense of smell, but it's surprising how many other senses kick in so quickly and powerfully. In the same session I have my students do opposite smells to compare and contrast their reactions.

Exercise steps

- To prepare for this exercise, first work at home with actual smells with your eyes closed for about thirty minutes, then use only the imaginary smells.
- In class, work with the imaginary smells separately for about thirty minutes each. Close your eyes and sit in a chair, then imagine your chosen smell. Inhale and make an effort to re-create the smell. Stay conscious of any physical or emotional reactions associated with the smells.
- If there is enough time, go back and forth between the two smells for a few extra minutes to compare them.
- Does your chosen smell make you smile or laugh? Does the smell make your stomach gurgle? Do you feel the urge to sneeze? Do you salivate, get anxious, or become aware of your breath or of your

heart pumping? You may also have lovely feelings of warmth, love, or happiness with this smell. Or do you feel suffocated or in pain?

- If you should feel faint or experience an extreme emotional or violent reaction during the exercise, stop the exercise and go back to Relaxation.
- Make a note of what your experiences were, what you tried to do, and what kinds of results you achieved. Be aware of thoughts and feelings that might arise along with the physical sensations. Also observe and note in your Journal those memories, feelings, emotions, places, or people that came to mind.

When you work with the Sharp Smell Exercise, remember that it isn't intended to be either a pleasant or unpleasant experience, but discomfort may arise. This discomfort can be managed. Teachers, directors, or anyone responsible for supervising actors should provide careful supervision during these exercises. Good smells tend to be sensual and joyful experiences. Enjoy them with their rich aromas, and let the sensations transport you. It should be pleasurable, but as with every exercise, unexpected or opposite reactions can occur. A delicious smell of food may bring to mind a particular person or a traumatic event in your life. Don't get carried away with that memory, but acknowledge the emotional connection, then stay true to the exercise and keep exploring any sensory details that may emerge.

Actor comment

I was working on a Place Exercise, imagining the lush vegetation, soft lights, designer furniture, art, muted sounds, and I wasn't really getting any strong sensations or reactions. Then I was struck by a buried memory in that place: It seemed vague, yet I caught a distinct whiff of the lilac blossoms wafting across the deck from the gardens, and that smell kicked the whole exercise into gear, bringing back the beauty to me so powerfully. It shook me up. I haven't been very aware of my sense of smell, and working with powerful good and bad smells opened up new doors for me in acting and in my everyday life.

Three (3) Pieces of Material Exercise

About the exercise

In the Three (3) Pieces of Material Exercise, you use all the senses, focusing particularly on the sense of touch. In doing this exercise,

you will become aware of the fact that the sensation of touching and exploring a fine piece of cotton, as opposed to a rough piece of wool, has a radically different feel on your hands or face and other parts of your body. This may be something of which you were aware intellectually, but you may not have been aware of it sensorially.

Exercise steps

- In your homework select three real pieces of material, each having very different physical qualities. Work with each for at least fifteen minutes, then switch to working with the imaginary materials. In class, you will work only with the imaginary materials, sitting in your chair with your eyes closed. During your early stages of training, don't pick a piece of material that holds any emotional meaning for you.
- Pick up each piece of material, examine every inch of the fabric through your senses. Be inventive and think of things to do with each piece. Questioning is the best way to elicit ideas, so ask: Is the material scratchy? How does it feel against your hands, face, or other parts of your body? What does it look like? Does it have a smell? What is its weight or stiffness? Does it make a sound when the material is rubbed or crinkled? Ask yourself what sensations you experienced. The itchy material may not have bothered you as much as the squeaky polyester.
- Don't decide to change the material in the middle of the exercise if it isn't working. (This is true, incidentally, of all the exercises.) You must stay with your original choice of material and fully investigate.
- The material may inadvertently have emotional value, as it may remind you of a present you received, or it may be the fabric of your favorite article of clothing. Whatever emotional reaction occurs can be useful, but if it is too intense or distracting, it becomes more of a Personal Object Exercise, which will be discussed later on.

While the evocation of strong emotions isn't the purpose of the exercise, experiencing an emotional response to an imaginary object shows a good working connection between the senses and emotions. However, don't go with the emotion. Go back to Relaxation or make sounds and move to help you retain your focus. If you experience a strong emotion, remember as much as possible about the sense and the particular piece of material you were using and note it in your Journal.

Actor comment

I'm really into clothing, and I'm super aware of how certain fabrics feel against my skin. I'm aware if it clings or itches; if it's heavy or light. So doing this exercise was right up my alley. I just never looked at every aspect of a piece of material so closely before. I did better with this Exercise than the others. I realized I always pay attention to the feel and touch of things. I even like and don't like certain foods because of their texture, like raw fruit, or if food is mushy, which I don't like, or crunchy which I do like. I realized that my senses are wildly unequal, and I think it's because I don't pay close attention to visual cues and sounds.

Taking off and Putting on Underclothes, Shoes, and Socks Exercise**About the exercise**

In Taking off and Putting on Underclothes, Shoes, and Socks, you perform an everyday activity automatically, and one that's often rushed and done without any awareness of what you're doing. It eventually becomes habitual, and you pay little attention to the sensory details, such as how your muscles move or how the material or the air feels against every part of your body as you put on and remove your shoes, socks, and underclothes.

Since the activity is done normally on autopilot while your mind is thinking of other things, forcing your attention toward every detail through each sense can be a revelation, and you will discover the sensory reality in every moment.

As with Three (3) Pieces of Material, the Taking off and Putting on Underclothes, Shoes, and Socks Exercise is an activity focused on a range of movements. One of the most useful functions of anyone supervising the actors' work is to slow the actors down and make them comfortable with taking the time to notice every detail.

Strasberg assigned this exercise for times when the Sense Memory Exercises didn't work completely, or when there was great difficulty in generating or maintaining the patience, concentration, or sensory awareness the exercises demand. We don't force you to repeat an exercise if you don't "get it." You move on in the sequence unless a teacher feels you should try it again for some specific reason. Some senses take longer to develop, and this depends on your natural sensitivities.

When the Foundation Sensory Exercises are not working well, or if there's difficulty evoking a response from Three (3) Pieces of Material or Taking off and Putting on Underclothes, Shoes, and Socks, Strasberg would have those actors jump ahead to one of the more advanced exercises to improve their concentration and get their sensory life activated and under their control. This might involve a Private Moment Exercise or an Animal Exercise (discussed later in Chapter Four, Character Development).

Exercise steps

- Prepare for the exercise by working at home, putting on and taking off your actual underclothes, shoes, and socks very slowly for thirty minutes, observing the details of all things experienced sensorially. In class you work only with imaginary objects.
- With your eyes closed, slowly and specifically explore every object and be inventive. Give yourself things to do that you don't ordinarily do. Don't imitate what you did with the real objects at home. Approach the activity with fresh eyes and a single-minded commitment and effort to do it as fully as possible.
- Ask yourself sensory-driven questions such as: What is the weight, smell, or texture of everything? Feel if it's heavy, light, scratchy, smooth, thick, thin, sheer, or silky. What color is it? How thick are the materials? Your hands, feet, fingers, and toes are either working to put on or remove them; to tie or untie laces; to work zippers, straps, elastic, or fasteners. Straighten and adjust everything so they're on correctly. See if the shoelaces are made of cloth or leather as you untie or tie them. Are they smooth or rough? As you cover or uncover each part of your body, how does it feel? Are your feet squeezed or comfortable?
- Be aware of how each foot, each leg, and each toe feels. Separate them in your mind and with your senses. Strasberg told us daily that each part of the body is capable of independent sensation. As you move, remember to pay attention to what your muscles are doing. Does your back hurt when you bend over? As always, make a note about which aspects of the exercise caught your attention or evoked a notable sensation or response.

Actor comment

I didn't like staring at myself in the Mirror Exercise, and I kept being distracted by remembering that as I was growing up, we

only had one bathroom, and if I took extra time at the mirror there would be knocks on the door about hurrying up. It was a relief to shift to the Shoes and Socks Exercise, which was much stronger for me. I imagined picking out socks of the same color, making sure that the toes and heels of the socks were straight, and that places where my mother had darned holes would not rub my feet uncomfortably. I put on my shoes, which I like polished, and I love the smell of the fresh polish. I was a bit too concerned about how neatly the laces were tied. I know that's a little compulsive, but the idea of those details was so strong. I didn't feel like anyone else was in the room with me. I felt so unselfconscious and involved during this exercise.

Sunshine Exercise

About the exercise

The Sunshine Exercise is intended to test your sensory response to an imaginary sun, as well as to practice awakening every area of your body. Each person has different physical and emotional reactions to the sun. You re-create the sun through your senses. It isn't meant to be an unbearable or scorching heat, but a tolerable and comfortable warmth. Experiencing an unrelenting and burning heat is a different exercise, and that will come later in the Overall Sensation sequence.

Past personal memories of times spent in the sun, as well as the people with whom you shared the time, may come up. Don't go with those stories, or to any recollections you may have, but always come back to how the sun feels on each part of the body. You're training your mind to stay with the assigned exercise, so don't veer off to whatever comes into your mind.

This exercise can be easily done anywhere – indoors or outdoors – and because the sensations of the sun can be so calming, you can use this as a relaxation tool while waiting for auditions. Strasberg in class recommended using this exercise to help regain your composure in a scene if your emotions become overwhelming. This exercise can be quite pleasurable, and students are often sorry it's over.

Exercise steps

- Prepare beforehand by being in the actual sunshine, feeling it on all the different parts of your body.

- In class or at home, place an imaginary sun in one spot of the room. Don't imagine being in the place where you experienced the real sun, as that would be more of a Place Exercise.
- After Relaxation, close your eyes and feel the sun specifically and in detail on your skin, your face – cheeks, nose, eyes, ears, mouth, and forehead – and on every other conceivable part of your body.
- Notice the strength of your reactions and how the feelings may vary from one side of your body to another. Compare and contrast how the different areas are affected. Feel the warmth on each of your hands, fingers, feet, and toes. Feel the sun on your shoulders and back and front of your torso, arms, and legs. Feel the strength of the heat through your clothing.
- Be inventive. For example, imagine the feeling of the sun on places you rarely think about or where the sun doesn't normally shine, such as the palms of your hands or the bottoms of your feet or your tongue.

Experience where on a particular part of your body the warm sun generated the strongest impulses or sensations and note them in your Journal.

Actor comment

I saw the other actors basking in their warm, delicious sunshine, but I once had a bad case of sunstroke, and doing the Sunshine Exercise brought back blisters, pain, and desperation so badly that I had to go splash water on my face. After some relaxation, I went back to the exercise, and I was able to remember when I loved the sun, and some of those pleasurable sensations came back. Now I have this Exercise for getting me to either that trapped, desperate, and painful place by using a burning sun beating down on me or basking in a warming sun. I was able to regain the additional positive sensory response to sunshine.

Sharp Pain Exercise

About the exercise

The Sharp Pain Exercise requires you to work with a remembered and actual episode of intense physical pain that you experienced on any specific part of the body, preferably below the head. It should not be a re-enactment of what occurred in the past or an imitation of how you

behaved. It should be a moment-to-moment search for the truth, so you can discover how you experienced that pain sensorially. People have different degrees of sensitivity to pain. As you perfect this valuable exercise, you can develop a reliable skill to convincingly re-create anger, fear, injury, weakness, or any value for which instant, physical pain would be a perfect motivation.

There are always pivotal moments in a scene that will require you to have a revelation of a spontaneous physical pain or the sense of emotional anguish. The Pain Exercise, with its ability to evoke powerful results and gestures, is useful in its application. The sensations you stimulate from imagining past pain will probably not be pleasurable. If the exercise works well for you, it can be used very effectively in a scene in which you need to create an explosive moment, but you don't have a strong emotional object or event to call upon.

Human beings have a natural desire to avoid physical and emotional discomfort, so we take medications, do Yoga, meditate, or have regimens of all kinds to avoid, cease, or delay pain. There's a natural inclination for you to not want to do what the Pain Exercise demands, which is to embrace and remain in control of the pain.

Teachers and directors need to be vigilant in observing actors during the Sharp Pain Exercise because the reactions can be so intense. If an actor appears to be losing control, stop the exercise, help the actor regain control by relaxing, then continue with the work.

There will be times when you will be asked to do something you feel uncomfortable with or unable to do, but you must find a way to carry on and do it. The avoidance mechanism that kicks in toward pain makes this exercise very complex, but you must commit and overcome any disinclination to create pain at your command.

Exercise steps

- Complete the Relaxation Exercise, then stand up, eyes open, and begin to imagine the chosen pain as it moves through different parts of your body and be aware of how it radiates within you.
- Ask yourself questions to give you a firm idea of what you're working with. Is the pain throbbing, dull, burning, pulsating, stinging, or sharp? Do you have trouble breathing? Make sure to breathe easily so you don't hyperventilate. Do you feel like stamping your feet or beating your hands in response to the pain, or is there frustration in not feeling anything? Do you feel weak or madly

energized? Trapped, sick to your stomach, dizzy, depressed, or angry? Do you cry, moan, grit your teeth, scrunch your face, or curse to yourself about the pain? Are you sweating or shivering? What does the pain do to your sense of smell? Is your sight blurred by the pain?

- If the pain is overpowering or debilitating, stop the exercise, sit back down in the chair, and go back to Relaxation. You can also make the sounds or speak out if needed to gain control and then begin again. Express the pain by making the long “HA!” or “AH!” sounds from deep inside the chest, not the throat. Strasberg’s coda was that it’s the effort you make to do the exercise that’s important, not that you get it.
- Experiment with how to increase the pain by moving in ways that differ from what’s normal for you. You can lie on the ground with your feet up in the air. Don’t imitate the position you were in when you had the pain in real life. Don’t touch yourself. If you have the impulse to touch the spot where you feel the pain, use your hand but keep it slightly away from the body and try to imagine the feel of it, not just imitate the action.
- Is there tensing or tightening around the muscles? Become aware of and let go of the tension. The places where you most clearly feel the pain are places where your body may hold locked sensations, which is energy that may be stuck and needs release. If you don’t get a strong response, don’t switch to another pain. Deal with it by continuing the effort.
- Work slowly, no matter how intense the pain is, and remain in control. You can’t indulge yourself during the exercise, and you must be completely prepared to drop the behavior yet maintain the attitude and the values so that you can play the scene or assume the character.
- If the pain is really strong, direct those intense feelings and responses into adding gibberish, singing a song, or saying a monologue. You may be experiencing different states of anger, frustration, and hopelessness, all of which will give meaning to the words. Don’t focus on the lines, but where on the body you feel the pain, and pay no attention to the literal meaning of the words. Learn how to speak and feel the pain simultaneously. Let the words be enveloped by the pain even if the result, for now, doesn’t go with the sentiment of the lines.

- If the pain evokes a rash of memories of a place, people, or objects, stay with the pain, but don't go with the memory. Let the distracting thought slip away and then get back to working on the pain. Make a mental note of the related feelings, places, and objects and record them in your Journal to re-use in other work.
- At the end of the exercise, you'll find relief in the knowledge that the pain wasn't real, that you were in control, and you were able to move on. Allow your breathing and your muscles to relax. This act of letting go is part of craft.
- Notice what triggers allowed you to immerse yourself in the pain, and how the pain colored the lines of the monologue. Which elements of the pain were surprising and could bring certain believable values to your future work?

The connection between pain of all types and strong emotions makes this exercise very useful, and you will learn which specific pains can be used to elicit different feelings.

Actor comment

The Sharp Pain Exercise I used was a very badly stubbed, probably broken, toe. This happened in high school, and I literally saw the flashes of pain in my eyes from the instant it happened. When I imagined that pain and really got it going, I was able to use it for my character, who had to walk with a painful limp, as if he were a very old man. The better thing, though, was that in my monologue, the anger, which came from experiencing the imaginary physical pain, was shockingly real, because when I stubbed my toe, it was my own fault because I was rushing on the morning of a running race I should have been able to win. That pain will also bring back an emotional memory of real regret and loss.

Sound Exercise

About the exercise

To work on enhancing your sense of hearing and to connect it to your other senses and emotions, I have started using a Sound Exercise. During this exercise, you listen to a wide array of sounds, one at a time, using a digital Sound Application. The exercise is very effective for giving you physical and emotional responses that you can use over and over in your work.

Initially, you choose a sound to concentrate on that you hope will have a strong effect. Try to eventually work with all the sounds. At home work with any actual sound for about fifteen minutes before shutting it off, at which point you will work on re-creating it with your imagination. Keep track of each sound and note any reactions. Powerful sounds can be used to access a specific quality for a part. By practicing it many times, you put it under your control. Be aware of and work with real sounds that you encounter in your everyday life that enhance your experiences.

Exercise steps

- Consider those sounds that you believe will give you very strong positive or negative reactions, such as thunder, roaring fire, strong wind, ocean waves, gentle rain on the roof, distant fog horn, the jungle, traffic, or sirens.
- Chose one sound and play it for a few minutes from one of the on-line digital sound applications. While you are listening, be aware not only of what you are hearing, but of all your sensory reactions.
- Listen to each sound intently with your eyes open or closed, trying to feel any sensations that arise within your body. Get up and move around. Each sound that you hear may generate impulses, both physical and emotional.
- Does a specific place from your past come to mind? Do you laugh, sweat, shiver, get tense, or fearful? Or are you bathed in warm and comforting sensations? Does the sound of crashing waves or a roaring ocean make you frightened or relaxed? Does the sound of pouring rain bring out fears of flooding, or does it make you feel safe in a dry house? Does the sound of a crackling fire make you warm and relaxed, or does it remind you of tragedy and danger? Is the sound of strong wind poetic or like a droning and unbearable weather condition?
- After working with the sounds, pick the one which resonates the most, then re-create it in your imagination.
- Using only your imagination, keep the sound going in your mind. Eventually, practice further by adding a monologue to the sound and explore how the words come out in keeping with what the sound evoked in you.
- Keep track of your sounds and your reactions in your Journal.

Overall Sensation Exercises

About the exercises

Lee Strasberg said in class that if you're not exhausted after doing the Overall Sensation Exercise, then you didn't work hard enough. I like to say it's an aerobic workout for the actor, because it demands so much movement. The Overall Sensations (known as the Overalls) are actually a series of exercises intended to provoke a response in you to an imaginary physical condition. They include Sunshine, Shower or Bath, Extreme Heat and Extreme Cold, Blizzard, Strong Wind, Drunk, Fatigue, or any other physical or weather condition you can think of. The Overalls are indispensable for you to be able to truthfully communicate your character's physical state to an audience.

Kim Stanley, the gifted actress and renowned acting teacher, offered an exercise in which her students were asked to enter the stage saying the same line, but each time being in a different weather condition. Actors learned to come on stage from the teeming rain, a blizzard, broiling heat, strong winds, falling-down drunk, or escaping from a swarm of insects. The objective of Stanley's exercise was to compel the actor to develop, off-stage, the feelings, the sensations, and the behavior of a particular physical sensation. The Overalls can be crucial in shaping the action and scene you're performing.

By practicing and perfecting the Overalls, you expand your knowledge of your physical self in relationship to external circumstances. Your goal with the Overalls is not to simply imitate a condition by hugging yourself or stomping your feet to imply cold weather, but to methodically activate the sensations truthfully resulting in organic behavior and gestures. The Overalls are a technique for evoking imaginary extremely pleasurable and painful circumstances such as in a burning hot sauna or a gale force wind where you learn to battle the discomfort or experience the pleasure, going further than you thought possible.

Before pursuing your work with the Overalls, it's important for you to become aware of how Chekhov, for example, was known for using the weather to help drive home his dramatic intentions. Story and weather are synchronized to add sensuality and atmosphere. Scenes where hopefulness abounds may be in the spring, rich with blossoms and, therefore, possibility. In other scenes the grim weight of thwarted lives is as frigid as a January in a bleak Russian winter – isolated, far from Moscow with its full animated life and activities as in *The Three*

Sisters. Or, for example, in Chekhov's short story, *Enemies*, where a ruined woman is alone in a dark room, "brooding over memories of spring and summer and apathetically waiting for the inevitable winter."

I attended a performance of an adaption of Nikolai V. Gogol's *The Inspector General* on a hot summer evening, during which the theater's air-conditioning system was under repair. In a scene meant to convey a bitterly cold time on the barren, wintry Russian plain, a small group of men were supposed to be shivering around a small fire, cloaked in heavy sheepskin coats and fur hats. In the heat of that theater, no amount of foot stomping could have convinced the audience that the characters were freezing. There was no reality created to help build the idea of the coldness in the mind of the audience to believe in the situation.

Directors may tell you to just "act out" being freezing cold or sweltering hot, but they may not have a clue as to what kind of a process or technique to use for you to achieve the desired state. The Overalls can give you this control. They're valuable in developing a sense of yourself and in making discoveries about your inhibitions and insecurities. As you become more adept and expressive with the Overalls, you combine them with the other exercises to train your mind to do multiple tasks simultaneously while still maintaining the overall.

Exercise steps

- To prepare for each exercise, practice at home with any actual condition that's available such as your own shower or bath, hot sauna or jacuzzi, outdoor sunshine or wind. For those conditions which don't presently exist, try to remember a time when you experienced those sensations. However, you don't get drunk to practice the Drunk Exercise. That would alter your sense of what you're experiencing and your ability to accurately perceive or remember those sensations – not to mention dealing with lines.
- In class, first go into Relaxation and then work with the imaginary condition for at least an hour until it's etched in your mind and is at your command.
- Strasberg suggested that you practice at least six or seven different Overalls, working on one per week every day at home for an hour.

- When the Overall is strong and going well, you can add a song, gibberish, or a monologue to check to see if the sensations and feelings are pouring into the words.
- You will eventually be required to add the Abstract or Additional Movement, which forces you to move, keep active and alert, by adding an additional task so that the exercise doesn't become static or imitative. This procedure is also used during most of the exercises to break a bad pattern or a block and to re-focus your attention and trains your concentration to take control of the moment.
- If any exercise becomes frustrating, intense, or emotional, make the committed "HA!" or "AH!" sound, while at the same time moving your arms out to the side and up to shoulder level. The sound is used only when there's a powerful sensation or emotion that needs to be released through movement and sound.

Coming to class once a week and practicing an exercise can get you off to a good start, but you must do the nuts-and-bolts work at home and research and repeat all of the various physical conditions until they are fully at your command. Make a conscious point of noting those senses that provided you with the strongest impulses and where on your body the greatest sensation occurred. One of the interesting things you'll notice is how the Overalls stimulate sensations on parts of the body not normally thought of, such as your abdomen or the back of your legs. The ability to master the senses by focusing on specific parts of the body leads to a greater expressiveness, and opens the door to creating new behavior and authentic gestures.

Few things are as shallow as an actor trying to imitate the behavior of being cold or hot or drunk. What's needed for those and other behaviors is a reliable and repeatable technique. To maintain authentic behaviors through an entire scene, while performing activities and saying lines, and relating to one or more scene partners requires craft.

There are numerous Overalls you may think of. The Sunshine and Pain Foundation Exercises can also be considered Overalls, and below I include descriptions and steps for the ones done most regularly in class.

Actor comment

The Overalls were so hard for me, because I'm not that physically active, and during the exercise we never stopped moving. I became aware of every part of my body in each

extreme condition. It was focused, intense, and exhausting, and at a certain point, I felt like I reached the end of my rope and couldn't go on. But I did go on, and I shocked myself. I was exhilarated and full of good ideas, feeling more connected to my body than ever before. The exercise made me realize that I live so much in my head with little physical self-awareness.

Shower and Bath Overall

About the exercise

Whether you unconsciously rush through your shower or linger luxuriously in your bath, the Shower and Bath Overall is an opportunity for you to fully explore the use of all your senses over the different parts of your body. This exercise will allow you to create a truthful physical reality, not an imitation.

Whenever you practice at home with the real shower or bath, or in class with the imaginary activity, be aware of the special circumstance that you're sensorially "naked." Even though you're working with imaginary nakedness in class, you may be very surprised



2.6 Shower Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

at the awkwardness, vulnerability, or self-consciousness you may experience doing this exercise in front of others. Ask yourself, how does it feel imagining being “naked” in this moment? Are you feeling somewhat blasé, ashamed, powerful, embarrassed, or provocative? Logically, those feelings may jump from one to another, moment by moment. The feelings you have may also be about the particular parts of your body that you like, don't like, or would like to change. In class you must acclimate to having other people around you. Anytime you are making sounds, doing activities, saying your monologue or singing can be awkward and distracting. It's a test of your will to stay with your own exercise and chosen activities. Strasberg said repeatedly that you must think that what you are doing is the most important thing – more important than what anybody else is doing.

Exercise steps

- Before the Shower and Bath Overall, complete Relaxation, whether at home or in class. The first step before you enter the shower is to undress very slowly and consciously.
- As you take your actual clothes off at home or imagine undressing in class, feel the air on the exposed parts of the body. Remove one article of clothing at a time, one layer at a time, methodically, feeling the material, seeing the color of each object on your skin, then unbuttoning, unzipping, unclasping, or just slipping or pulling something off. You should then be aware of your nakedness.
- The water in the shower or bath should be the exact temperature you prefer. Have all the objects there you want – soap, shampoo, razor, and so on. Your eyes are open during this exercise. If you need a moment during the exercise where you prefer your eyes closed, that's fine, but do this only for a moment. Otherwise, your eyes stay open. You're going to be on stage with your eyes open, so practicing the exercise with open eyes is the way we prepare.
- When practicing in class, you don't imagine yourself in your own shower. Place the shower in the room in which you find yourself. Step into the shower or bath very slowly and with the conscious purpose of re-creating a physical experience.
- Notice which part of the body enters the bath or shower first, such as your hand, shoulders, or toes, and experience feeling the water on each different part of the body. Ask yourself questions and

engage your mind to connect with the different areas. How does the water hitting your back, toes, scalp, torso, and face feel? If you shave in the shower, ask how the razor feels in your hand, and its weight. How does the blade glide over each part of your body? How does the lather smell?

- Be experimental and daring. Feel the water on places that you normally don't focus on, for example, having the shower pulse against your eyes, the palms of your hand, or the bottoms of your feet. Establish the water's temperature and intensity. Distinguish between your right and left feet and hands. Compare and contrast how the water feels on both sides of your face and body. Remember not to touch yourself. How do your feelings change with warmer or colder water?
- What sounds does the water make? Feel the weight of your soap and smell it. Wash each part of your body and rinse. Wash your hair and feel the shampoo between your fingers and smell its fragrance. Make choices of what to do and continue to try new or atypical activities. Always be curious and committed. Don't imitate what you usually do in life.

Make notes in your Journal about the experiences and sensations that came to you.

Actor comment

I don't normally have time to dawdle in the shower, so doing each thing from undressing to washing to drying off slowly was so difficult for me. I never gave much thought to what I did in the shower. I certainly don't think about the water or soap or the feeling of being in the shower, although it does feel good. I think about things I have to do that day, my schedule, my life. Slowing down was painful, and I realized my complete obliviousness in the shower. When I practiced taking my time doing things I'd never done before, I felt so alive and more connected to my body.

Extreme Heat and Extreme Cold Overall

About the exercise

If a key value in the script is that the character must be freezing cold or boiling hot, then there is very little truth if these extremes are

not evident in the actor's performance. The Overalls of Extreme Heat and Cold are conditions you feel both indoors and outdoors. They can be momentarily exhilarating, and they can then very quickly become quite strong, painful, grueling, unbearable, and sometimes overwhelming.

By using an Extreme Overall of Heat or Cold, you're able to elicit emotional responses when you don't have a personal experience to work with to evoke a level of intensity. You can take the same lines and they will convey different values and colors depending on whether you are freezing cold or suffocatingly hot.

Exercise steps

- At home try to remember when you felt unbearable degrees of extreme heat or cold – either outdoors or indoors – and go through the exercise steps below. Practice every day to prepare for class. Don't imagine yourself in the place where you were actually hot or cold. Place yourself in the room you're currently in, re-create the feelings through your sensory recollections.
- After having done Relaxation, you can start with your eyes closed, for a moment and then open them.
- Focus intently on the unrelenting heat or freezing cold on your face, forehead, cheeks, nose, teeth, ears, skin, eyes, lips, throat, hands, feet, spine – on every inch of your body, separately.
- Take your time. Breathe and feel the heat or cold as you inhale both through the mouth and through the nose. Does the inhaled air burn your throat? Are you parched? Imagine the feeling of dryness in your mouth. Is your skin burning, cracking, or blistering? What does your breath feel like on your hands? Are you sweaty or damp? Are there actual pains, feelings of tingling, throbbing, or pulsating? Are you choking? Is the air and atmosphere thin and un-breathable? Do you gasp or hyperventilate?
- Do you feel immobilized or is your sight disrupted? Are you unable to focus or blink? Are there smells associated with the heat? Do you feel trapped, angry, or desperate? Do you want to rip your clothes off and run away? Does one side of your face or one hand experience the heat or cold more profoundly?
- What gestures do you make organically? Do you wipe your brow, fan yourself, want to dive into cold water, stick your head in a

freezer, or stand near the fire or heater? Evaluate which senses are the strongest and on which parts of your body.

- Do you feel doomed, furious, desperate, or amorous? Do you feel emotionally exhausted and at your wit's end? Do you just want to sleep, perhaps never to wake up? Are you listless, depressed, feeling hopeless, sighing deeply, or do you want to cry or scream? If any emotion feels unbearable, stop and relax for a moment, make sounds, then return to the exercise and stay with the senses. Add lines, a song, or gibberish if it's going well.

If the exercise isn't working, don't change to a different one. Speak out your problems or what's stopping you. Make the effort and forge ahead, committing to the exercise.

Actor comment (Heat)

The hottest place I picked to work on was also the place where a very unfortunate thing happened in my life, so I watched how that might affect me. What I realized right away was that when I occasionally thought about this event, I never really focused on how hot it was at the time, only on what had happened and its impact. Using my senses and focusing on the heat gave me a very clear memory of what happened. I remembered some people and things I had forgotten and must have buried. It became an Emotional Memory Exercise for me.

Actor comment (Cold)

I live in the mountains, so I'm used to the cold. I keep my house cold, and I hike in the mountains, and sometimes I'm exposed to serious coldness. I don't mind the cold so much, and I never thought about having to act out being cold. The Exercise gave me ideas for behaviors that could show extreme cold – accurately not imitated. Also, I observed the way other people who might hate the cold acted or moved, which helped me to feel real coldness, as well as an empathy with those who can't bear the cold.

Strong Wind Overall

About the exercise

You can observe and experience the nature or personality of the wind as tempestuous, fickle, cruel, harsh, or overbearing. The wind can be

mesmerizing and hypnotic, often offering chant-like intonations. This is an extreme wind, not a nice cool or balmy wind.

Exercise steps

- Remember when you experienced the strongest, most relentless wind. Don't imitate how you felt when you previously experienced it. Truly feel it. Stay in the current moment, and be in the place you're practicing in.
- After doing Relaxation, stand up, eyes open, and feel the wind on every separate part of your body. The wind can be cold, blizzard-like, hot and dusty, swirling like a tornado, or howling with hurricane-force gusts. Make an effort to hear the wind blowing, roaring, whipping, or banging around.
- Are you panicked, frustrated, or sick and tired of the ceaselessness and pitilessness of the wind? Does it burn your face and other exposed areas? Does it puff out your cheeks if your mouth is open? What happens to your skin? Is it chilling, freezing, tingling, drying, or burning? Does it hurt your teeth, or blow into your ears? What do you taste or feel in your mouth – dust, sand, or fumes?
- Turn or bend your body over, lift your arms, or turn your hands so the wind blows against your palms. Does your head ache and are you exhausted by the enormous power of the wind? Try moving against it or holding on to something for dear life to not be blown over. Stay relaxed at the same time. When the exercise is going well add a monologue, gibberish, or a song.
- If a memory comes up, make a note of it for future use, but don't go with the story. Stay with the physical sensations that the wind produces. Keep track of reactions and responses in your Journal.

Actor comment

As a young teenager, I went on a summer family vacation to the beach, where it was cloudy and stormy. The wind was continuous, and I thought I'd go out of my mind. I remember the ocean spray stinging my face, the blowing sand in my mouth, under my clothing, and the constant, strong droning sound. What really surprised me was how focusing on the wind brought such vivid memories of my family being together, and the closeness that I felt towards them was palpable.

Drunk Overall

About the exercise

This exercise is indispensable for you because portraying a drunk character convincingly lends credibility to the performance and if not done well can suspend the audience's belief and ruin a performance. Far too often I've seen an actor drink imaginary alcohol on stage to the point of falling-down drunkenness, and then after a few lines of dialogue their behavior is inexplicably stone-cold sober. Their first slurred lines or feigned dizziness become merely a fading memory. As Strasberg warned us students, the lines can be a trap – just an abstract set of words that become the major incentive, rather than the drunkenness required for the scene.

In performing the exercise, don't anticipate or have a result in mind. Whatever behaviors and sensations occur should be organic, fluid, and without judgment. There are numerous Overall Sensations that you may be called upon to re-create, and many of them are alcohol- or drug-related. Each has its own physicality and emotionality. Research the condition and employ intense questioning to understand the psychological and physical aspects.

Don't go out and try alcohol or drugs if you've never been under the influence. That's not the sort of research we condone. Ignorant people have accused The Method of working that way, which is ludicrous. Willfully abusing oneself or being in direct peril is not creating art, acting, or The Method. You can get a specific result in many different ways without having done the literal deed. For example, by doing a burning hot sauna or freezing cold, you can create extreme rage or move like an addict in pain.

Exercise steps

- Choose the type of alcohol you'll be drinking, as well as the glass you'll use. Do this prior to your work, and don't imagine yourself in a place where you were actually drinking and got drunk. You're working wherever you're practicing the exercise.
- The alcohol is already in the glass – whether for a shot, a flute for Champagne, or the appropriate glass for a cocktail, highball, or wine. You can also work with a bottle. You're not opening the bottle or pouring the drink into the glass: Your drink is automatically in the glass, as is each refill. It never runs out.

- Begin with any one of your senses and continue, one by one. How do you hold the glass and with which part of your hand? Can you feel the weight of it? What does the glass feel like against your lips or cheeks, and how does the liquid taste and smell? Does it make you sneeze? Do your eyes tear up? Do you hear the swishing in the glass, or ice cubes clinking, or the sounds of your sipping? What is swallowing like? Feel the liquid go down into your throat, to your stomach. Does it burn? Is your tongue thick and is there a foul taste in your mouth?
- Do you feel warm or flushed? Do you get tipsy? Do your mouth and face sag? Are your lips numb or droopy? Does your body's posture change or slump? Are you slurring your words or becoming loud or tired?
- Do you get nauseous, gag, feel things spinning out of control, or do you just feel stupid? Don't become static by just thinking thoughts of when you were drunk in the past. The whole body must be involved. Strasberg always said you must continually subject yourself to the Overalls to see where they take you.
- Keep drinking, getting drunker and drunker as you go on. However, you must stay in control because eventually you'll have to say lines and add activities. Don't rush or chug the drink, because that's just an imitation or the miming of an activity.
- Let it affect every part of your body. When you're getting good results, add a song, gibberish, or a monologue to see if the sensations, feelings, and movements are going into the words.
- We also add the Abstract or Additional Movement to force you to move and accomplish an additional chore or task, so that you can improve awareness and concentration. Stay with the drunk when you add the Additional Movement. You can also eventually add Daily Activities, such as sweeping the floor, folding laundry, washing dishes, or having a conversation. Do all the activities from the vantage point of being drunk, and observe how your behavior is affected and dictated.

As with the previous Overalls, an emotion shouldn't be sought. It's clear that being very drunk can intensify and magnify feelings in numerous ways. You may begin to feel sad, weepy, and regretful, or you may remember a forgotten time when you were too drunk to function well. Again, don't go with your narrative of an event. Stay with the senses at

all costs. The Overalls are also physically demanding because you are having to move constantly, checking and testing each part of the body. If it becomes too much, stop immediately and go back to Relaxation to regain control. More importantly, don't be external and imitate what you think a drunk person acts like.

Actor comment

I don't drink, so I had no idea how to play a drunk character except by imitating how I've seen drunks behave in bars and parties, or how other actors have played drunks, with their weaving and slurring of their words, and how stupid they sometimes seem. None of that helps me know what they feel or how to gradually get drunker, or how to stay drunk through a whole scene, or how to sober up. Sometimes I would speak and forget to still be drunk. But when I did it in class and slowed down, I could actually experience what the drink tasted like in different parts of my mouth, and that led me to actually believe in what I was doing and feeling. I got the sense of how the room looked and spun around, and I began to feel nauseous. I got sweaty and shivery. This stunned me but I felt totally in control.



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Advanced Sense Memory Exercises

Chapter 3

ABOUT THE EXERCISES

The Advanced Sense Memory Exercises are performed in the same way as the Foundation Sense Memory Exercises – through a full and detailed exploration of each sense. The difference is that the Personal Objects, Places, Private Moments, and Emotional Memories you choose to explore are chosen particularly because they're deeply personal and significant to you, and therefore may likely evoke emotional responses required for a role. The exercises included below are:

- Personal Object
- Place Exercises
 - Guided Childhood Place
 - Childhood Room
- Private Moment
- Emotional Memory
- Combining the Exercises

The object, place, or situations you choose to use in each of these exercises is intended to generate emotions and feelings, as well as physical sensations. You pick something to work with because it has loaded positive or negative emotions associated with it.

Actors, teachers, and directors have to be conscious of never letting emotional impulses go too far, or to even approach getting out of control. With all of the Sense Memory Exercises, it's required that there be a level of self-awareness. You can't be overwhelmed by an emotion, as that can prevent the lines from being said clearly. If you feel you have to acknowledge those overpowering feelings, stop the exercise, go back to Relaxation, and then continue with the assigned exercise once you have taken control. The psychological resilience you build is grounded in the senses, strengthening your resolve in the face of the various challenges associated with acting, such as repetition, performance anxiety and staleness.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTIONS

Personal Object Exercise

About the exercise

To practice the Personal Object Exercise, you pick a specific treasured object from your own life that is imbued with meaning and connected to powerful memories associated with a person, place, or event that

has impacted you. The object can be animate or inanimate – even a person can be a Personal Object. You don't have to still be in possession of this object. It could be a childhood toy, a letter, or any simple object. What is important and powerful is the significance you attach to the object. Ultimately, you determine the emotional value of the object, and you work to see if it can be substituted and re-created for work on your character.

Strasberg often emphasized to his students that, through the Personal Object, you seduce the senses and are made aware of not going directly toward the emotions too soon. You use the senses as a catalyst to enliven the body to create interesting gestures and behavior in response to emotional objects.

Sometimes actors will bring an actual memento with them to rehearsals or to performances for the purpose of helping them with their concentration and belief. Stanislavski brought a small object with him to certain performances, which he kept hidden in a chest of drawers that was part of the set. It was there as a personal object for only him to know about, which gave him a certain feeling while acting or provided a motivation.

One actor commented that when he added his daily activity of vacuuming to the Personal Object Exercise, he did it with the focus and confidence of how he was experiencing his personal object, and it was amazing how he laughed while doing this activity, freely, with a song in his heart and with such purpose and feeling, so relaxed and concentrated.

Exercise steps

- Work at home with the actual object you intend to use in your class work. If you're not in possession of it, practice with an imaginary replication of the object. With the eyes open and standing up, concentrate on the object, proceeding with a detailed, slow, kinetic exploration through each of the five senses, one at a time, taking about fifteen minutes with each sense.
- Explore the object's size and shape, weight, color, smell, and texture. Always ask questions about its form. Is it hard or soft, heavy or light? Is it fragile, rough, smooth, or bumpy? Is it clear or translucent, or does it shine or reflect light? Does it move? Is there a sound associated with it? If appropriate – what does the object taste like?

- While doing the exercise be creative with the object. Experiment and improvise, trying to do things with it that you wouldn't normally do. Place it anywhere you like or fly it through the air. You can have the object on a table, on the top of your head, or in your mouth if you so choose.
- Observe what aspects or qualities of the object you become aware of during the exercise. Some of these might be things that you hadn't thought of before. Be aware of the feelings that arise in connection with the object, but don't let it be general, and be sure to articulate the feelings for yourself. Envision how re-creating the object can stimulate certain responses and how you could use them.
- The object you choose may transport you to a specific time, place, person, or event. Don't go with whatever experience is evoked, but stay with the object and keep exploring. Your specific memories are important, and you may use them in the future. For now take note of how the object makes you feel and jot it down in your Journal for reference.
- When the exercise is going well, meaning that you're engaged and getting a response, add a monologue, song, or gibberish to make sure the lines are coming out simply, organically, and attached to feelings and gestures inspired by the object.
- If you become too emotional, take a deep breath, do Relaxation, make sounds, and regain control. You must be able to say the words so they're clearly heard.
- If the chosen object doesn't work in engendering strong reactions for you, don't give up on it. Persist and keep exploring. It can take time. Sometimes you get no reaction because a certain object that you remembered being very important may no longer evoke feelings in the present moment. Make sure you've given it your full commitment and best effort.

This exercise demands trial and error. Not every object will work. Practice seven or eight Personal Objects during the training, some of which should be people. Always remember to approach an animate or inanimate object through the sensory process.

Actor comment

It was so simple. I was floored because I struggled with some of the other exercises, but this one just clicked for me. I chose my loving childhood pet, now dead, as the Personal Object.

I imagined her smell, the feel of her fur, the sound of her bark, and her rough licking of my face. The reaction was immediate and automatic, and it felt so real. I evoked both the pleasure and love I had for her along with my first heartbreaking sorrow and tears when she died. I used the sorrow and the longing for a monologue. It was the strangest feeling – not paying attention to the lines, just the object. It was unusual for me to be so at one with the character. It felt other-worldly on a strange level. I've done the same Personal Object several times on my own since I learned the exercise, and I get those consistent reactions each time. I now know how to use it for a character – one I couldn't quite figure out before.

Place Exercises

About the exercises

In the Place Exercises, you will engage all the senses to explore remembered places from your life which were connected to meaningful, memorable, or heightened experiences. Any place where important events occurred is a potential possibility. You create a sense of belonging, of feeling rooted with conviction by concretely creating a place. The various versions of the Place Exercises are all approached in exactly the same way, with your imagination and a methodical sense-by-sense exploration for about an hour.

While doing this exercise, stand up, with your eyes open. You move, reach, bend, touch, and experience objects, walls, furniture, fabrics, or art. Always remember to actively explore and identify everything you experience sensorially.

The Place you choose to work with should be a defined space – indoors or outdoors – which you can explore and describe in great sensory detail. If you pick a beautiful, open place in nature, it can have an expansive vista, but should have a smaller definable perimeter, with a specific vantage point and several perspectives. Observe the smallest details of living that moment in that Place.

It's logical that you may have memories, feelings, and connections to the Place during the exercise. Don't go toward those feelings, but stay in the moment. Take your attention back to that place and continue exploring all the objects sensorially. Make a mental note of what stimulated specific impulses or feelings. The Place Exercises are vital for your use of the Character Exercises, such as Painting, Emotional Memory, and Private Moment, all of which rely on a specific place as a departure point.

There are numerous versions of the Place Exercise: For example, you may need to be frightened or experience a “shock” moment in a scene, so you would imagine yourself in a place where that emotion came to you. When you think of this Place, also be aware of which senses were engaged with each emotion, whether it was fear or joy or elation. If you’re working on a character and exploring multiple frames of mind for them you can use Place Exercises to evoke the different attitudes and atmosphere.

Don’t get caught up in performing an action, like playing a video game, texting, or throwing a ball. Don’t imitate or mime a behavior you experienced with certain objects. The most important aspect of your work is the sense-by-sense exploration of an object or a place, and your whole being should be encouraged and stimulated into believing you are in the Place, alive with thoughts and gestures.

It is invariable that you will be surprised to discover how many details you remembered in the imagined places, including items or aspects of the place that you may have forgotten. You can do six or seven versions of this exercise, building a repertoire of places to have at your disposal. You may remember the security and serenity of your childhood room by smelling a beloved stuffed animal or toy. On the other hand, it may be dread or pleasure in that same childhood room by remembering the sound of a car pulling in to the driveway or the sound of a key in the door lock, or of footsteps in the house heading toward your room.

In all of the Place Exercises, you must be cautious to never approach the point of losing control of your emotions. There can be no loss of control in acting. As you learn to self-evaluate your work, be conscious and practice restraint.

Time may have altered your recollections of the place and events, and re-visiting a place may evoke very different feelings than you expected. You don’t visualize yourself as the person you were back then in that place, but who you are now. Time heals or obscures a great deal, and you must re-experience everything through your current eyes, which hold more experience. What you may have been scared of back then in that place may not make you feel the same way today. You may have developed confidence or you may have resolved issues by now. Note what reactions, impulses, and ideas emerged and with which object and senses you got the strongest reactions.

If you feel the place has lost its power and significance, don’t stop doing the exercise. Persevere and keep making the effort with your

senses even though you're not getting much. Try the exercise at another time, and if it still doesn't work, simply switch to a different place.

As with the other Sensory Exercises, the Abstract or Additional Movement should be used while you are working to further activate your instrument by remembering an additional task and moving at the same time. When your immersion into the behaviors and feelings are working well and you're fully connected, add gibberish, a song, or monologue with no emphasis on the meaning of the lines, only making sure that the lines are washed over by the feelings connected to the place and the specific objects in it. As with the other exercises, note the observations in your Journal for future work.

The material below includes Guided Childhood Place, in which I work with the entire class as a group to give you an idea of how all the Place Exercises are to be worked on. The other Place Exercise detailed below is Childhood Room, which shows you how detailed the sensory exploration should be and how the results are used. The Place Exercise can be practiced for many different places, including a frightening place, a beautiful place, and a safe place.

Guided Childhood Place

About the exercise

This exercise is practiced with an entire class working as a group. Most of the time in our class, the actors lay on the floor with their eyes closed, breathing and relaxing. I take you on a guided tour of your childhood home, teaching you to thoroughly explore each room and every inch of the place and the objects in it with all of your senses. In your mind's eye imagine walking into the entryway or foyer, hallway, closets, and every room in the house, as well as outside and around the house. What is notable and surprising are the buried memories that can pop up, all of which can be potential fodder for your work. When you are involved in this exercise at home, you can follow the instructions below and take your own self-narrated tour through your Childhood Home before you later work with other imaginary Places.

Exercise steps

- Lie down comfortably and begin by imagining that you're standing outside of your childhood home or apartment and observing it in great detail. You are at your current age. Pick a specific time of year. Are trees and plants leafy, or is it snowy and frozen? Do you smell flowers? Do you hear birds, sirens, music, or street sounds?

- Did you have a key to your home? Was it on a chain? Remember what it felt like. Open the front door with your key and enter slowly. Does the house have a familiar smell? Look around carefully. Where do you put your keys down, and what sound does that make?
- Remember to find the light switch, then turn it on and truly feel the flipping of the switch. See yourself taking off your coat and hanging it up in the closet, or putting it wherever you used to put your outdoor things. Do shoes and hats go in special places? What else is in the entryway? What color are the walls?
- With purpose and taking your time, make your way down the hallway, entering each room – kitchen, bedrooms, bathroom, living room, playroom or den, basement and garage. In each space visualize what's on the walls, the floor; what's in the closets and drawers; notice and feel each piece of furniture and all individual objects. The kitchen and dining areas usually contain potent childhood memories, so take your time in those areas. Open the refrigerator and see your favorite foods. Taste and smell them. Remember the details connected to meals at home, such as dishes, glasses, and silverware. Do you see name brands of products in the fridge and pantry? Be specific and slow down to observe and recall.
- Are there secret places in the house? Is music playing? What can be seen through the various windows? Relax and breathe if you become emotional.
- When you've visited every room, go back to the front door and get ready to leave. Retrieve your coat or hat. Pick up your keys, open the door, shut the lights, and lock up. Once you are outdoors, turn around and look at the house one last time.
- After a minute or two, I have you continue the exercise by getting up and opening your eyes to take a slow, imaginary walk around your childhood neighborhood. This is done silently. You remember streets, neighborhood stores, the houses of friends, parks, sounds, and the environs. Are you in suburbia, the countryside, or in an urban neighborhood? Are there animals, fences, signs, street lights? Notice those things that seem different to you with the perspective of time.

You'll be very surprised at the number of memories and images that are generated with this exercise. Note your sensory experiences, ideas, and inspirations in your Journal.

Actor comment

As I imagined walking into and through my childhood home slowly and with each sense, I realized I always ran at top speed through the house, even eating “on the run” and I felt the ache of having a difficult childhood. All of a sudden, doing the exercise, I smelled the roast chicken and baked potatoes in the oven for dinner, heard the sound of grandpa’s radio shows, saw the view out the window, felt the warmth of the fire, touched the curtains, felt the rough carpet, heard my brother’s annoying and whiny voice, petted Sparky and on and on . . . just by imagining the place I felt reactions, sensations – including strife but also love and the pulse of heart and blood in my body as I did the exercise.

Childhood Room

About the exercise

You choose and re-create one specific room from childhood by exploring it sensorially. Make sure you pick a room that is filled with memories forever etched in your mind. As you describe the Childhood Room, the level of detail of what you can see, smell, hear, touch, and taste should be thorough. Explore each object separately and with the same kind of attention to detail encouraged in all the exercises.

Your childhood room is filled with potent memories of objects, people, and events that will evoke feelings both good and bad. Were you not allowed to do certain things in that room? Were there any rules involved? Were there secrets? You may feel joyful from something unexpected or you may find something that you once remembered fondly as silly or worse.

In one of the *Actor Comments*, an actress remembered a childhood object – a box of candy placed very prominently next to her bed. The rub was that she had strict parents who allowed her to eat only one piece a day and they checked daily to make sure. She’d forgotten about the box until doing the exercise. It came as a shock and her reaction was strong. In class she bravely imagined eating a few more of the candies than the “allowed” daily ration, and she felt victorious and empowered as she relished the moment. Remembering that box was a goldmine of feelings she could apply to her work.

The Childhood Room can be one of your most fertile sources for capturing feelings. This is because this room is a seminal place in a child's formative years. Buried memories may rise to the surface depending on how much time you spent there and how intensely involved you were. When unexpected feelings arise, it's your subconscious mind feeding your creativity.

After evaluating and analyzing your character, make choices accordingly to create places from your own life that will give you the required mood or emotional value needed for the scene. For example, if you must be exhilarated or joyful, your childhood room may provide those feelings, while for others, their childhood rooms may evoke dramatically different responses.

Exercise steps

- After practicing Relaxation, stand up, eyes open, and slowly move around in the imaginary room, exploring all the objects sensorially, including the walls, carpets, ceiling, furniture, lights, closets, jewelry, clothing, windows, toys, for one hour.



3.1 Childhood Room Exercise, Act for All, Lisbon, PO.

- Don't just imagine looking at your dresser or closet: Open the closet door and each drawer of the dresser, feeling each item within and the material from which they are made. Do the drawers stick or scrape as you open them? Does the floor creak? Is it carpeted, wooden or tiled and what are the colors? Make the effort to touch every item to discover its weight and texture. Look at what's over and under all things. Find your toys, books, TV, computer, and musical instruments.
- Make an effort to listen to the sounds outside your room as well as inside, such as what you hear on the roof from the rain or the wind roaring, whistling, or howling. Can you hear the TV or any digital devices? Are doors or shutters slamming open and shut? Are there noises from the street or from nearby children playing?
- Can you smell freshly mown grass or the exhaust fumes from traffic outside the room? Do the windows have shades, blinds or curtains? What can you see when you look out the window? Observe your bed (including the linens) and other furniture. Try and smell your favorite food emanating from the kitchen. Did you have secret hiding places? What did you keep in them? Do you hear people talking? They may come in and out of the room. Deal with them as objects to be observed and explored.
- Don't get caught up in miming activities like playing a computer game or bouncing a ball or whatever you may have habitually done in your room before.
- Don't indulge yourself emotionally by going with or following an event that happened in that room. Acknowledge having the memory or sensation and move on.
- When you're fully connected during the exercise, add a monologue, song, or gibberish, and notice if the words come out truthfully. If the exercise is working well, the lines carry the feelings connected to the place.
- Make entries in your Journal of what objects and senses worked.

Actor comment 1

I was using my Childhood Room when a powerful memory came back to me. I clearly recalled the box of candy that my parents kept in my room and from which I was only allowed one piece

per day, if I was a good girl. They counted them before I went to bed to see if I cheated. Looking back it was a horrible, bullying way for them to control me so that I could resist temptation, to torture me, or whatever . . . and when I used it in class, it was obvious that I had very strong feelings about it. But in the exercise, it wasn't my child-like memory: It was through my own grown-up eyes. I imagined I was defiant, and I boldly and recklessly ate a bunch of the candies, which I never could do as a child. I felt very liberated. In rehearsals for a monologue of a submissive wife standing up to an abusive partner, I chose to use that box of candy. The eating of the banned candy was an act of great bravery and rebellion, and the words came out ringing true as a bell.

Actor comment 2

Revisiting my Childhood Room filled my heart with nostalgia and longing. Memories came pouring into my mind. So much of what I did in that room consisted of playing games and making up conversations between action figures, and having introverted, childish day dreams. During the exercise I really felt a sense of playfulness that I hadn't felt since I was a child. I also remembered very clearly some of my childhood toys, things in my top dresser drawer, and sounds from the street that I hadn't remembered in many years. The sounds were so incredibly strong that they brought me back so quickly to a specific, tumultuous time of my life. I tried doing something that I wasn't allowed to do as a child and was even afraid of thinking about, and it made me feel invincible just to think that I could do it now. Then I got sad that I was deprived of that pleasure when I was a child. I felt so many different emotions at once.

Actor comment 3

When I was working on Stella from Streetcar, I picked a place from my own life to get the heat, the squalor, and noises of her and Stanley's apartment in the Quarter, and from that I got her mix of emotions. It gave me a reliable way to access her sensory life and sexuality. After doing the Place Exercise several times and feeling slightly confused, I finally understood that every scene happens in an actual place, each one of which must be

made believable to the audience, and it's my job as an actor to make the audience believe it to fuel the drama.

Actor comment 4

The beautiful place made me feel close to God and I wanted to shout out to the world the full lushness and pleasure that enveloped me. I held on to that and could have used it for just those wonderful feelings. I also remembered the exact spot and circumstances of meeting a strange person and though the beauty remained, I also experienced my feelings transitioning to the sorrow, pain, and the fuming anger that resulted from that meeting.

Private Moment Exercise

About the exercise

Normally you would do the Private Moment Exercise later during your training, unless there's a specific problem with concentration and self-consciousness. Creating a Private Moment roots you in the present, providing a freedom of movement and thought by eliminating the pressures of performing. As a result of carrying out the exercise, you're able to unselfconsciously accomplish all that's required physically and emotionally for a part. Some people are already unselfconscious, committed, and engaged in the moment, so this exercise may not be critical for their development.

Strasberg told us that he devised the Private Moment Exercise from Stanislavski's comment that one of the necessary conditions for acting is to be "private in public." The Private Moment Exercise demands



3.2 Private Moment Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.



3.3 Private Moment Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

a specific kind of intense concentration so that you can deal with the problem of distractions. You will choose a private, personal activity that you would never do in front of anyone. Some activities you may normally do when alone don't qualify as Private Moments for the purposes of this exercise. For example, memorizing lines or rehearsing by yourself, writing in your Journal, or cooking may often be done when you happen to be alone. However, Strasberg emphasized that one of the elements that constitutes a Private Moment is that you would never admit to what you're doing. This system of attention requires our inward thoughts. Actors like to write in their diaries as a Private Moment, but most of the time it isn't that private, because they wouldn't lie about doing it. If you fanatically hid your diary, then it could work.

It's preferable that you have a good grasp of the sensory work before approaching this exercise. Over time you can try several different Private Moments, which you can add to your inventory of exercises meant to create particular values and intensities. Your teacher can usually tell if the required level of privacy is created by how you come out of the exercise. There are many different reactions to facing other people after being so private, ranging from embarrassment to hysterical laughing to crying. Remember which objects and senses created the feelings of privacy for you.



3.4 Private Moment Exercise, Act for All, Lisbon, PO.

There are moments when you'll be totally alone in a scene, revealing your inner thoughts or behaving in ways you would only normally do in private. The audience must feel that they're privy to a never-before-seen reality. It's a specific kind of heightened moment, where the audience is drawn into the character's private musings. Your job is to reveal the intimacy of those moments that enlist the audience's support and empathy for the character.

Exercise steps

- To prepare for the exercise, consider the things that you do when you're alone that you would have great difficulty doing in front of anyone. It's the weighted significance of the action to you that makes it private. Some examples of private activities that could work for you include dancing wildly or examining yourself in the mirror; singing your heart out; tweezing your eyebrows; eating foods in a certain way; reading an old love letter; talking to yourself out loud; asking yourself existential questions about the meaning of life; conducting an orchestra.
- This is one of the only exercises that doesn't require the Relaxation Exercise prior to its execution. The inherent nature of the



3.5 Private Moment Exercise, TELL to JOY Theater, Copenhagen, DK.

exercise promotes having your guard down and being relaxed. If you're especially tense and feel you're not ready to start, then take the time to do Relaxation. It never hurts.

- Begin by first creating the place where you're alone and most private in sensory detail. Your chosen place must be a defined space, such as your bedroom or studio. Be specific, imagining the walls, floors, doors, ceiling, windows, mirrors, and furnishings, replete with objects, sights, smells, and sounds.
- Because what you're doing and thinking during the exercise carries the weight or importance of secrecy and privacy, there may be resistance or difficulty in doing it in class in front of others. Unless the place is concrete and detailed in your mind, there can be no privacy. It may take time for you to do the chosen activity. You don't have to do it constantly. Return to the activity intermittently.
- Don't just sit in one place during the exercise. Get up and be active, re-imagining the sensory reality. Eventually, the teacher can complicate the exercise by adding Overall Sensations, Personal Objects, Emotional Memories, Animals, Monologues, and any number of combinations for you to do simultaneously. Always stay relaxed and in control throughout.



3.6 Private Moment Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

Over time try several different Private Moments and keep a record of usable responses in your Journal.

Actor comment 1

I spent almost a year observing people from afar who were doing the Private Moment. Until I did it myself, I couldn't understand anything about it. It seemed to me that people were just spending time, not doing anything, or pretending to be inspired or listening to some music. On the other hand, I was sweating and crying and working myself to the bone on the Sense Memory Exercises to always dig deeper and make something happen. So for me, the Private Moment was chosen by lazy people who just wanted to rest from the hard work we were all doing in sense memory. One day, an actress started doing her private moment, . . . setting up her clothes, activities and music. I could see she was doing something very personal, unlike anything I had seen before. Everything she had chosen meant something to her. At the end of each class, people who were doing the sense memory would stop first and would watch the other students in their private moment. I watched that actress and could feel that she was behaving as if alone in some private place. There is no way to describe it, she just seemed to feel it. At one point, Lola asked her to stop and walk towards us and something that I found quite amazing happened: the student blushed and started to cry. She was so embarrassed, as if we had just caught her doing something terribly wrong. I found that reaction remarkable.

Actor comment 2

When I prepared for my Private Moment at home, I listed everything that I would do only when I was alone – any activity, clothes I would wear, music I would listen to and private habits I might act out. I'm a very secretive and introverted person and I knew that it would be extremely hard to do those things in class. I extended my list to anything I was doing privately, not only now but also back when I was a kid and a teenager. The first thing I did was to use each of my senses to create the specific place where I felt the most private which was my bedroom. For my first Private Moment in class, I sang out loud which I've never done in front of anyone because I am

ashamed of my voice. It triggers very deep fears in me and I never overcame them. Even when I am alone I don't dare to sing. In class, I created my space and I sang. Lola asked me to walk towards the other students, I thought I was going to faint. Standing in front of them, singing. Lola made me look at each of them. It was so powerful that I started to cry. After that first experience, I chose to do the Private Moment in almost each class. The Private Moment put everything in order. I would create a place that was personal to me, activities, thoughts, and my personal "universe" within safe walls. Then, I would add an overall, an object, or an activity that would belong to my character or something that I was working on. I would live within those walls with what I chose to explore for more than an hour. Doing something that was so personal to me, made me emotionally open and vulnerable and I felt unaware of the audience. It made me work towards something truer and deeper in my acting. It helped me live on the stage as opposed to perform on a stage.

Actor comment 3

Private Moments are most important for me when filming. The controlled chaos of a film shoot – with makeup artists, grips, gaffers, and teamsters lugging heavy equipment around does not really allow for the sort of quiet introspection you have in the theater. What I learned, though, is the ability to make a Private Moment anywhere I have to be. After a few minutes of Relaxation, even in the midst of chaos, a Private Moment will deepen my concentration and create an impenetrable layer of privacy in which I can create and live in the reality of my character – not lost entirely in another world, but with an awareness of what's going on around me, ready for my call.

Emotional Memory Exercise

About the exercise

Much has been written about the use and validity of the Affective or Emotional Memory, as Strasberg called it in his classes. Strasberg said he was introduced to the theory by studying the seminal work of Stanislavski, who was largely influenced by Théodule-Armand Ribot, an experimental French psychologist, who first coined the term

affective memory in his book, *The Psychology of the Emotions*. The revelatory nature of those discoveries inspired Strasberg to build on Stanislavski's work by designing the Emotional Memory Exercise to address the complexities of emotional expressiveness and the problem of repetition.

Strasberg often recounted an Emotional Memory artfully embodied by Marcel Proust in the *Combray I* volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*. The exquisite sensory childhood recollection of tasting the Madeleine cookies dipped in tea evokes buried feelings and profound memories, as told by Proust's narrator.

The idea and purpose of the Emotional Memory Exercise, as taught by Strasberg, is to enable you to consistently recapture and re-live a singular "once in a lifetime" event from the past, and regulate those generated feelings and sensations at will to rise to an explosive, theatrical moment. When you articulate and describe a conditioning event through a sense-by-sense exploration, the whole body is empowered to respond organically, giving way to spontaneous gestures expressive of the feelings you are recalling. You excavate traumatic or joyful memories that have shaped your worldview and relationships, and these can feed the creative process. When properly done the exercise is reliable and repeatable, and can function as a catharsis, turning your wounds or triumphs into a source of ammunition for your work.

Strasberg insisted in class that the once-in-a-lifetime experience shouldn't be a recent one, because the longer the powerful memory persists, the greater the likelihood that it will continue to be impactful for the rest of your life. You are also likely to have fully processed it. He advised his students to use an experience that's at least seven years old. Using events that have happened more recently will usually be less reliable, and your response to them may still not be fully resolved. However, if you're currently experiencing something similar to what the character you're working on is going through, use it.

You won't do the Emotional Memory Exercise until you're proficient with the sensory work and grounded within yourself emotionally. You must do it correctly and with your teacher for the first time. Doing the exercise at home alone requires care and control to be able to stop the exercise at the first sign of a problem, such as becoming overwhelmed.



3.7 Emotional Memory Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York. Photo by Emily Dionisio. Courtesy of Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

Strasberg claimed that the Emotional Memory Exercise is your weapon for creating a complete reality on stage. The reality you create isn't the weeping, the fear, or the happiness that was experienced back at the time of the event, but the sensations you're re-experiencing as the person you are now, with your current perspectives and insights. Don't imitate your behavior and gestures from the time of the event. Have no expectations and do not anticipate the outcome. If you were ecstatic and laughing at that time, you may now cry or feel hopeless. If you were afraid back then, you might laugh or be embarrassed now. It's how you're affected now, in the present moment, that's the important factor in connecting with a truthful emotion.

There's an element of self-evaluation and control that's crucial to your practical use of the exercise. As in all the exercises, should you get distracted or lose control, you go back to Relaxation, breathe, and then return to the exercise. It's up to you to maintain the poise and self-control to activate the emotions and use them at will to adhere to the given circumstances of the play.

That's where the artistry lies, in exerting restraint. If the actor is out of control, the exercise becomes only an emotional indulgence and not what it's designed for. You can't ever let that happen, because those subjective feelings take over and you won't be able to say lines, behave appropriately, or be ready for the next scene, where you may need to be expressing an entirely different value. You re-create the Emotional Memory in addition to relating and listening to your scene partner with conviction, reciting the lines, and performing any other stage business required for the role.

It's true that your experience might be an extremely private one, and no one may know about it. Divulging the story may be difficult or embarrassing, but telling it isn't part of how you do the exercise. You describe your experience in great sensory detail. But you don't go through a who-did-what-and-to-whom narrative using conventional words, places, or names of objects.

You may be shocked at how much you remember about the event and how memories can be teased out by approaching it through each of the senses. What you don't remember about a traumatic event isn't crucial, so don't worry if the memory is vague or foggy. You can still use the memory by focusing on what sensory aspects you do remember. It's the effort you make that's needed to reveal the event and make contact with the emotion.

Some feelings may be pushed down because they're too painful for you. Your own emotions are important factors in your life that influence and control your behaviors and attitudes. For some of you, delving into your own emotional world may be too intense or uncomfortable. Don't use the Emotional Memory Exercise in that case. There are other Method Exercises that can work just as well to achieve a similar response. A Personal Object, a Substitution, an Overall Sensation, or a Place Exercise will allow you to garner equally powerful results. The beauty and practicality of The Method lies in the choices you make.

Strasberg reminded us in class that an Emotional Memory used many times can lose its power. Therefore, it's important as you progress with the work to have several Emotional Memories on hand to implement as needed. You select them for the purpose of having a wide variety of repeatable emotions which in performance are evoked invisibly, with ease and utilized as needed. You should start the Emotional Memory a few minutes before you need it in a scene. After you become proficient, you establish which conditioning objects are the

triggers to work with. It isn't necessary to create the entire event each time you use it, unless that helps you.

Exercise steps

- You do the Emotional Memory Exercise one actor at a time with the teacher serving as the guide. The rest of the class observes you, providing the pressure of an audience. At home and in class, Relaxation is always done beforehand to prepare.
- The teacher's role is to ask you sensory questions that coax out the memory. You don't analyze or describe the event or carry on a psychological exploration about its significance. You don't tell why it's so emotionally significant in your life. For example, you wouldn't say, "I was in a beautiful room; we had dinner; he said this; then we went there, and it was horrible." This type of general re-telling of the story represents a mental memory or a casual conversation, and its lack of sensory focus won't evoke the emotions connected with the experience.
- In the same way that Strasberg taught in his classes, you use a present-tense first-person voice for the descriptions during the exercise by saying "I'm seeing" or "I'm smelling" or "I'm hearing" or "I'm touching." You must be in the present moment. You search for descriptive adjectives to describe the place and all of the objects and people in it. You make the effort to re-imagine the event through the five senses to provoke a parallel response for the desired intensity needed for a particular moment in a scene.
- The old expression "the devil is in the details" applies here. It's those details you want to find and articulate. For example, when describing the objects, it's never just a beautiful room, but a room with every conceivable physical aspect you can conjure up and describe sensorially. For example, the room may have a rug – but it isn't "just" a rug: it's itchy, shiny, plush, red, patterned, tattered, or stained.
- Just like in the versions of the Place or Painting Exercises, you question yourself. You may open a drawer – is it in a chest or a desk? Determine the material from which it's made, its smoothness, what's in it? If it's a door, is it heavy, or squeaky, made of wood or metal? Are there voices on the other side of the door, and are they angry, threatening, or frightening? Describe the tone of the voices rather than what people are saying.

- What is the type of lighting? Is it bright, intense, dull, reflected, sultry, or coming from a porcelain lamp, overhead fixture, or from outdoors? Are there shadows, windows, and curtains? Do you hear raging water, wind, rustling leaves, traffic, or machinery? Is it hot, humid, or cold? Are you tasting or smelling anything? Does it make you salivate or gag?
- Describe what you were wearing in detail, and ask where you feel it on your body, if you remember. Long-forgotten aspects of the event will emerge, as well as new details. It's startling when sensations and emotions flow freely, particularly those that are deeply ingrained and part of a seminal event in your life. Note those sensations and what objects and senses triggered them.
- When the exercise works, and you're in the throes of an Emotional Memory, you don't ignore irony or humor as an added element that may contribute to your experiencing or remembering the event. There may be actual physical reactions. These feelings and sensations indicate that the exercise is working.
- When the exercise isn't working, you don't change to a different Emotional Memory. Persist. If you get bored or frustrated during the exercise, speak out your problem – "I'm feeling so tense and scared" or "I can't catch my breath" or "I'm so frustrated." Go back to Relaxation for a few moments, then return to the exercise, remembering to work slowly and specifically. You can also use the strong "AH!" or "HA!" sound if you feel frustrated – to let go of your tension. I sometimes tell the actor to blurt out things that you were unable to say at the time when the emotional event was taking place. Just a few words can be quite effective in making contact with buried feelings that rise up to find a release.
- Don't rush or push too quickly toward an emotion, because you'll pass over sensory details that might help you respond more fully. It's the articulated and sensorial examination of the event that produces the truest impulses and gestures for you to rely on and repeat.
- Only when you're getting sufficient response, and the event is concretely established should the teacher ask you to add the monologue. When you add the words, they should be a truthful expression of the sensations and feelings evoked by the exercise – otherwise they come up empty and don't touch or move you or the audience.

Actor comment

I was hesitant but excited to try the much maligned and controversial Emotional Memory Exercise. I'd heard of its power, but had never seen it being taught, and I hadn't been through it myself with a Teacher. I immediately knew I would use a shattering memory I have lived with for years from early childhood. It pops up sort of randomly now and then in my life, and it causes me to worry and feel anxious. The most challenging part of the exercise for me was not being able to say explicitly what happened – who said what and why. Being forced not to tell the story and only use sensory descriptions clarified the idea of how to connect with the memory by not going directly to the emotions but working indirectly, through the senses.

Combining the Exercises**About combinations**

Lee Strasberg designed and taught the exercises in a definite sequence for actors to first develop control over their senses before moving on to the more emotional exercises. As you master them, you combine the exercises, which tests your sensory abilities by rising to more complex human conditions where behavior involves multiple activities and calls for emotional depth. The combinations provide you with the scaffolding for the more layered situations where the desired intensity may be found for your characters. Making the effort to do more than one exercise at a time improves your concentration, yielding emotional truths for your characters.

By combining different realities, you give values to the lines, and the resulting work is more alive, spontaneous, and inventive. Your choices of exercises enable you to create characters totally unlike yourself, thereby increasing your range as an actor. For example, if you're painfully shy in life, a combination of specific exercises can transform you into a character with various moods, eccentricities, or an oversized personality. Strasberg's often stated axiom always applies: "Art is in the choice, the choice is that which conditions art."

The sequence is important and there is a preferred order for the combinations. Only after you have gained experience and have completed six or seven Overall Sensations, six or seven Personal Objects, and various Place Exercises, should the combining begin. The groupings

of exercises are referred to as “twosomes,” “threesomes,” “foursomes,” “fivesomes”, etc. Start with twosomes, such as an Overall Sensation and a Personal Object – exercises you’ve previously worked on and which have given you a good strength of response.

Eventually, you progress to combinations that might include a Private Moment, Place, Overall Sensation, Personal Object, Daily Activity (sweeping, folding laundry, brushing teeth), gibberish, song, or monologue. At an advanced stage, and depending on the demands of the character, you can add Animal Exercise, an Emotional Memory, a Need Exercise, or two different monologues, and can even play an entire scene. There are endless Combinations to explore that will give life to your characters.

You also can add the Abstract or Additional Movement, which forces you to be physically active and not static or deep in thought. Don’t anticipate a result, because you have no idea how your efforts will pan out. Merging the exercises can seem like a marathon. However, it isn’t a race to see how quickly you can do them, but a test of your will to stay in the present moment and follow your own commands. It’s challenging to keep everything in play.

Exercise steps

- After Relaxation, for your first Combination, start with an Overall Sensation and get the response in full gear before adding your Personal Object.
- If the Overall and Personal Object are going well, and your concentration is solid, you can add a Daily Activity. If you aren’t going toward a particular role, nothing may seem logical. You may be working on the Overall of freezing cold, and your Place is a sunny warm beach. In the beginning of training, when you’re not working toward a scene, it isn’t important if the Personal Object or Overall Sensation matches the Place. However, the choice of sensory and emotional realities should fit the given circumstances of a scene, and it’s a matter of trial and error to see what will work.
- When you lose your focus on one exercise and realize it, try and get it back. Make the effort to use the senses individually, and work to keep everything going at once. Go back and forth between the exercises.
- If at any time the exercise becomes emotional, add a monologue and let the words come out easily, motivated by your feelings. When adding the lines, forget their meaning. Pay no attention to

the meaning of the monologue, and don't get carried away acting out the words or giving them emphasis. Don't whisper the lines. Be conscious of using a committed and resonant voice, as you would when performing for an audience.

- Slow down when you begin the monologue. If the words come out too fast or you're reciting them as you always do, catch yourself and stop. It means you aren't really connected to how you're feeling. By merging the exercises and using no punctuation in your delivery, you break the power of the stylized and clichéd pattern of the lines and maintain the values needed for the scene.
- Some actors complain that they lose their Overall or Personal Object when they add words. This means that your concentration isn't strong enough, and more work is needed doing one exercise at a time.
- Record those combinations that gave you good results in your Journal.

Actor comment 1

Juggling several exercises allowed me to delve deeper into the character's life. Working on twosomes or threesomes helped to strengthen my concentration in scenes, and allowed me to shift my focus from things I was working on internally, to interacting and listening to my scene partner. When I was working on Edmund in Long Day's Journey into Night, the key was to commit and allow the overall sensation of fever and fatigue caused by the character's tuberculosis along with a substitution for Jamie to affect the behavior in respect to the lines. The combination of those two exercises allowed me to explore valuable aspects of Edmund and make the character my own. I remember one moment in particular, when Jamie goes on a contentious rant about his parents. The combination of my Overall Sensation, substitution and the effect of my partner's lines made me feel the hopelessness and darkness of the circumstances, and my tears flowed. This was not due to sadness, but because of a strong and sudden glow of empathy and love toward Jamie, which in turn gave me another layer of understanding for the complex relationship between the brothers. Working with these exercises became invaluable to me in training my focus and concentration.

Actor comment 2

By combining several of the exercises I began to discover a rhythm for my character which was not always feasible or imaginable when first tackling the role. I found undiscovered paths into the crazily woven mind of Jerry from Zoo Story with the guided structure of a threesome. I began slowly, so that I could pace myself and not completely run dry after what can seem like a marathon exercise. After much preparation, the threesome became my go-to exercise to reveal new information about Jerry's past and his merciless mental pain and fragility. After spending many weeks in one designated place, I switched it up to trick my brain into thinking new patterns and thoughts, mostly to see if this would allow any information to come forward. Not only did switching the place uncover radically different emotions, it spiraled Jerry into a categorized madness as I began recalling past harmful skewed events that made me the man I had become. It was then, with this release of emotion, that I introduced a powerful smell that deepened my experience further. I tried using a harsh, unforgiving, and unrelenting smell. It amazed me that one singular Place, a smell, and a Personal Object would charge my emotions so dramatically. I always viewed the character as a puzzle for me to solve, looking for clues to an incomplete character. I found that combining the exercises became the keyhole through which I could see and create my character's possibilities. My long speeches became layered and were spoken with the resulting emotion as prime intention not emphasizing words in the script to make my points. Jerry, for example, is a psychopathic lunatic with schizophrenic tendencies, but he's also a lonely, frightened man longing for human interaction.



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Character Development

Chapter 4

ABOUT CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

For Character Development, the first step is reading and working with the script to discover the essence of the play. You're told elsewhere in this book that you shouldn't memorize your lines too soon to avoid acting out the part before investigating your character's life and emotions. Gaining that initial understanding, you begin to navigate the complexity of the character's experience, shifting your primary focus from the script to building your character through your sensory work, research, and practicing the exercises.

You claim the character by generating the ideas and impulses that will inspire and motivate you into dramatic action within the context of the given circumstances. The given circumstances are the details provided by the author about the era and way of life, physical setting, people and relationships, previous occurrences, and any other detail making up the special world of the play. The great Russian poet and author, Alexander Pushkin, is credited with coining the phrase "given circumstances" in his *aphorism, 1830* that, "Truth of passion, the verisimilitude of feeling placed in the given circumstances that is what our reason demands of a writer or of a dramatic poet."

Stanislavski worked with the "Magic If" which asks how you would behave if you were the character which sometimes works, although it is not reliable. However, if the scene calls for the character to be aggressive, and you aren't that way in life, you'll have difficulty and may only imitate the perceived behaviors and gestures you're seeking for the part. Strasberg endorsed and worked from Vachtangov's idea that it's not how you would behave but how the character would behave and Strasberg developed the Character Building Exercises to help actors achieve that.



Insights into aspects of your character can be provided through your interpretations, the author's stage directions, and your director's vision. Learning how to analyze and interpret a script, along with finding the character's spine or reason for being, is central to your work. The process of Improvisation, where you will be working outside the script will create behavior to fit the circumstances.

Working with the Script

Working with the script isn't merely memorizing the lines or blocking the action which is when and where you move to on stage. Initially, you familiarize yourself with the narrative from which you thoroughly absorb the given circumstances with a sense-by-sense grasp of the who, what, why, when, and where of the story. Your actor's belief generates solid answers about what happened and why. It's also essential to know the theme, purpose, or the central core of what the author's trying to say to the audience.



4.3 Stanislavski's script analysis and notes of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in which Stanislavski is working on the given circumstances and the relationships between the characters.

The script contains a spine for the entire play, as well as for each character, not only the protagonist, who is the leading character, or the antagonist, who forces change and creates conflict. The actors, each with their spine, play their respective parts in spinning the tale and dramatizing the conflicts. Spines are discussed in a later section.

For Character Development you should understand the author's notion of truth and reality, and you should get a feel for the material, including the author's style and rhythm. The written dialogue, along with the stage directions, illuminates the author's intent and point of view – therefore, every word is put there for a purpose and should be honored. Take not one word for granted. Language, style, and behaviors need to be in harmony with the genre in which your play falls, be it Classical, Realistic, Expressionistic, Post Modern, or Absurdist.

It's up to you to experience the script and the action through your senses, using exercises like Place, Substitution, Painting, Emotional Memory, or Animal to establish your character and a sense of reality, from which moving performances are born. Dealing with the script is an essential yet challenging and potentially treacherous element of the work, as it's easy to be trapped by the clichéd saying of the lines. You don't anticipate or preconceive which emotions need to be evoked and conveyed.

In the initial reading of a play, dissect the story, the characters, and any sensory details that come to mind. You should read the script over and over, as this helps with memorization and allows details to sink in. At first don't act out or assign any particular values to your character until you know enough about the play having learned what the director is trying to achieve. Don't speak the lines out loud or give them pushed or forced meanings. Observe leitmotifs and repeated phrases or behaviors that resurface, as these may suggest a pattern that will illuminate the character's qualities or points of view, and which may also help in identifying subtext.

Subtext is what is inferred between the lines, and is also the unstated story, thoughts, feelings, motivations, and contributing social conditions that exist beneath the dialogue. The subtext may embody what has gone on in the past or may happen in the future, but it is not explicitly said in the minds and attitudes of the characters. Understanding the subtext helps to naturally formulate the spine of your character and the play itself including the inherent basic conflicts of the characters. What are

your character's hidden emotions and veiled motivations? What occurs in the subtext, for example, can include the historical context, off-stage lives and relationships, loyalties, hatreds, prejudices, tragedies, feuds, secrets, hero worship, and so on. It may be conveyed or implied in the playwright's stage directions, what is publicly known about the play, the director's notes, or within the actual script of the play. An example of a simple and obvious subtext could be if you're a trusted spouse or employee, but you secretly loathe the other person. You will betray and hurt them to avenge a terrible wrong they perpetrated long ago, and yet you behave in a perfectly charming way to their face.

Your first readings should help you discover the rising and falling action or beats leading to the climax and the *denouement*, which is a literary device that unknots the threads of the plot, where matters are explained and resolved or questions are left unanswered for the imagination of the audience to consider. Ask yourself what are the three most important moments in the scene for your character to help you define the action and implement choices as needed. In these heightened moments, notable changes in circumstances or significant leaps in the story could occur. What event incited the change? Analyzing and interpreting the script by dividing it into what Strasberg and others called Units of Behavior or Units of Action codifies the sequence of events and establishes the unique language, tempo, and cadence of the author's dialogue.



4.4 First reading of Chekhov's *The Seagull* by the lake where Treplev's outdoor stage was located. Chekhov International Theater School, Melikhovo, RU, 2013.

Visualize and create sensory conditions from information you receive from the script, such as the season, weather conditions, time of day, and other physical descriptions. What era is depicted in the play? What forces are at play in the world that could color the action? Those details feed your creative choices. Discern how characters respond emotionally from moment to moment, and consider what adjustments in behavior are necessary.

Think of possible places, people, or events from your own life which might fit the intensity of a particular moment in the play. Was it the sounds, light, or smell that triggered the memory? Write in the margins of your script. Make notes about your impressions and other ideas of settings that remind you of a painting, a piece of music, person, place, or another object that can work as a Substitution to use in the exercises.

To prepare for a role, you gather information from the script, digest it, and identify the simplest definable components of your character. The Method's goal is to supply unity by fitting together the different elements to create a complex human experience that reveals the character's psychology and meaning in the context of the play.

Improvisation

About improvisation

Lee Strasberg told us that he was fascinated by the preliminary sketches, studies, and drawings done by his favorite artists for their future work, and he likened that process to an acting Improvisation, where an actor builds a work of art – a performance – by expressing preliminary thoughts, which are changed, molded, and finessed until you perfect your work. Improvisation inspires you to face and deal with the challenges of the character by looking at the world differently, taking risks, and making spontaneous connections, all of which can lead to solutions that carve out a path toward the character.

Improvisation is a procedure that you perform extemporaneously without prepared dialogue or action: You're exploring a theme, a relationship, an event, or a situation. When preparing for scenes, monologues, during rehearsals, or throughout the production, you can use Improvisation whenever there's a need for clarification and understanding of a specific moment in the scene.

You act out unscripted scenes with no sequence of behavior at first, sometimes out of context, all in the hope of creating situations that will

shed light on the author's material and allow you to go deeper into your characterization.

You search for behavior without worrying about how to feel or how to say the lines. Be free of any self-consciousness. Improvisation requires imagination and a kind of creativity that allows for some chaos, mistakes, experimentation, and coming upon fresh, unexpected, and unusual behaviors.

Improvisation is a theatrical art form as old as acting itself. In its earliest form, shamans may have acted out their dreams to the members of their clan or tribe. In the sixteenth century, the *Commedia dell'arte* became one of the first professional acting companies to employ improvised scenarios on streets and in market places, using masks with exaggerated features to play a fixed scheme of action with basic stock characters and adapting specific qualities to their own personalities using traditional dialogue passed on by word of mouth. They sometimes broke through the fourth wall that separates the actors from the audience and addressed the audience directly while acting out unscripted scenes for a specific circumstance with references to local and topical events, all while staying true to their exaggerated personas.

By using Improvisation and inventing scenarios that aren't in the play or script, you develop a familiarity with a character. Acting out scenes that may have happened before or after the play's action builds history and strengthens your belief in what you're doing. When the production is from another era with an unfamiliar culture, Improvisations are especially valuable for you to acclimate to the imaginary world of the play.

In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski says that the play, the characters in it, the circumstances, and all art is the product of imagination. He said that for the actor "to turn the play into a theatrical reality . . . imagination plays the far greatest part." Improvisation as a means of exercising your imagination is used in training, in rehearsal procedure, or in production when needed. Harold Clurman, in his book *On Directing* (Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1972), said that Improvisation is not a form of anarchy, and it doesn't mean doing anything you want.

The Group Theater in the 1930s used Improvisations in staging their highly regarded, progressive, political, and innovative work as The Method began to evolve. Stanislavski, who was fluent in French, used

the French term *étude*, meaning a focused improvisation or study, and can also refer to a short solo performance musicians use to perfect their artistry and skills. There's an ongoing discussion about whether the terms, *étude* and Improvisation should be used interchangeably, or if one is more general and the other more specific. Either way, I teach the technique as a means to act with greater self-awareness and inventiveness in order to enhance your performance.

I've introduced the process of Improvisation into several of the exercises, including Painting, Animal, and Private Moment to facilitate a connection between the actors by forcing them to include and respond to each other, verbally or nonverbally. Your actions have a deep impact on your scene partner, and the Improvisations are an excellent learning opportunity for you to listen well and become more responsive to each other.

There are an infinite number of possibilities and sensations for you to explore during an Improvisation. For teachers and directors, the procedure is an excellent technique for expanding the actor's expressiveness and to also observe the dynamics and responsiveness between partners to better understand how to bring out the actors' strengths.

Improvisation Notes

- You can do Improvisations silently (as in the Need Exercise), or use gibberish, rather than the lines of the play, or paraphrased lines, although it should be noted that Strasberg discouraged paraphrasing unless there was difficulty in understanding the material.
- Improvise situations that aren't in the play, as this forces you to retreat from the conventional saying of the lines. When you rehearse by yourself or with a partner, you invent situations that may have happened in the past or may happen in the future. Perhaps a specific event is referred to in the script. You must adapt to it, find the logic of the event and what results from it.
- You humanize the character's experiences. Ideas should pour out of you like a stream of consciousness, but with the purpose of adapting them to the specific scene. You can also improvise when working alone by creating the physical realities and setting up a particular situation to work on.
- To be actively engaged demands concentration and an agile and inventive mind. Strasberg always expressed his belief that being

a good improviser is a sure sign of acting talent and a critical skill in keeping the work fresh and exciting. He commented that comedians make terrific actors because of the improvisatory nature of their work.

- In my classes, I often devise Improvisations that aren't in the context of any play or script, because I want to force actors to think on their feet, turning static thoughts into behavior.
- For example, the Rehab Exercise takes the form of a group Improvisation. The actors sit on chairs in a circle like in a therapy session. A psychologist/group leader is appointed by the teacher. The leader begins by asking each person to state who they are, why they're there, and what their addiction is. Each actor is given the opportunity to tell their personal story. The leader must take control of the group and prevent the session from escalating emotionally or deteriorating into total chaos. Spontaneous reactions, interruptions, accusations, insults, hysterics, disruptions, confrontations, and all other types of behavior erupt because of the emotionally charged nature of addiction. It's the group dynamic and each addict's physicality and emotionality that's at the heart of the Improvisation. The actor picks the addiction they wish to explore and must fully commit to it. Obvious addictions include drugs, alcohol, eating disorders, kleptomania, sex, gambling, or shopping.
- You may know and understand everything about the character psychologically, but Strasberg told us in class that knowledge and intellect isn't enough to help you act the part truthfully and believably. It's through Improvisation, along with rigorous curiosity, that infuses your part with originality.

Actor comment 1

In the past, when I was told to improvise, I never had any idea about what to try, how to get ideas, or what kinds of behaviors I should do. I realized I misunderstood the whole concept. I just stood around thinking, or pretended to be concentrating on an object, acted unpredictably crazy, or I rolled around and tried saying things, doing things, or making noises, and sometimes it was okay. But I felt very self-conscious, and I didn't remember what I did and I had no idea of using the results in my acting. I never really had any dramatic, memorable, or useful moments happen for me consciously and spontaneously. The Method training has turned that around for me. Improvisation taught

me how to listen and connect viscerally to myself and my partner. It's impossible for me work on a part now without the benefit of Improvising. I hear the term 'actor's belief' and try to cultivate it within myself by using Improvisation so that I can liberate myself from the words.

Actor comment 2

Improvisation has become essential for me to understand the heartbeat of the scene. Before studying The Method, I didn't consider Improvisation to be an important tool in acting work. I just thought it was a game, used when first beginning scene work and had little effect on the end result. I learned how to use the procedure to my advantage to find what the scene is truly about. I have a tendency to get caught up in memorizing lines before understanding what is actually going on in the scene, underneath all the talk. Improvisation allowed me to take a step back from the lines and embrace and deepen my understanding of both the character and the scene. It's exhilarating to release myself from the pressures of memorization, and what I've been led to believe the scene should be about, and find it on my own. Improvisation is a huge part of my process as an actor and I would be wooden and boxed -in without it.

Character Guide

The *Handbook* provides several Guides for the Character, Painting, Music, and Animal Exercises. Let them be springboards for your ideas. Your own unique inner creativity and commitment will be set to a high standard as you use the Guides and perfect and practice each of the Character Development Exercises. I have provided references to the other arts from which you can draw inspiration to put into practical use in your acting. It's clearly a step along the path of being an artist to broaden your perspective and experiment with different forms of creative expression to enhance your portrayals.

You should behave like a detective of the human soul in preparation for a role and find out as much about the character's life and times as possible, adding vitality and a depth of familiarity to your performance to form a powerful spiritual connection with the part. I offer a Character Guide, which is a questionnaire or biographical data sheet that can be used to analyze any character. Going through the Guide, you let your imagination soar as you investigate the character's traits and hallmark features. Approach each role as if it were an empty canvas or

a mound of clay to paint or mold by exploring the fundamental questions of the character's existence.

Also explore the larger issues of your characters' conflicts with, for example, the world, religion, power and institutions from their time in history, and their role or obligation to change society. The Guide's most valuable use is to incite curiosity in searching for and defining a character by delving into them deeply, thoroughly, and without judgment. The exploration includes a dialectic approach of examining opposites finding ways of making unpleasant characters sympathetic and finding the sympathetic character's underside in the search for truth. Be cognizant of your character's similarities with yourself, other people you know or knew, and current or historical world figures. If you're similar to the character in life or nature, then obviously you need to do less work on this process.

There is no rule about how you use the Guide. Not every question will be relevant or needs answering. Make note of your ideas and choices for how the character will behave and think. Your purpose is to find authentic physical and emotional behavior that will catapult you into action. Have in your open mind the myriad possibilities that will generate ideas.

Strasberg often said that answering these types of questions about the character is like putting together a mosaic or a collage, helping to form a truthful depiction of a human being. In art and literature the French term *bricolage* literally meaning "do it yourself" conveys the same idea of choosing from a wide array of available values to create a whole work of art.

Use the Guide to illuminate the psychology of the character. For example, if your character has a physical or mental disability, how is that reflected in their physicality, daily experiences, behaviors, humiliations, victories, emotions, and sufferings? The discoveries become the vehicle to express the values of the script as written, and as interpreted by the director and yourself.

By using the Character Guide, every possible type of behavior is accessible for you to envision the life of the character outside the confines of the play. Your preparation is to create elements of the character's persona by making specific choices to form a composite life which will be readily available and used creatively for an artistic purpose. Use the Guide like workbook pages, photocopying and filling it in for each character you assume, then save it as a record of your work.

Table 4.1 Method Acting Character Guide

METHOD ACTING CHARACTER GUIDE®		
Play or Film Name:	Director:	
Character Name:	Style/Genre of Play or Film:	
Nickname:	Role:	
How is the character like or not like you?		Date:
Possible Character Traits	Notes	
	Your Character's Traits	Exercise and Behavior Choices for the Character
Physical Qualities/Traits		
Approximate age		
Height/weight/body type/complexion		
How the character walks/moves/their posture		
Ethnicity/cultural qualities		
Energy level/fitness		
Voice – tonal qualities/style/speed/enunciation/accents		
Breathing patterns		
Sleep habits or patterns		
Habits/mannerisms/tics		
Ailments/real and imagined		

Table 4.1 (Continued)

Personal Lives and Beliefs			
Place of residence			
Status in society/education			
Ethics/morality/spirituality/religion			
Occupation/position/reputation			
Level of success/experience/notable achievements/ failures			
Family dynamics/relationships with parents/ siblings/friends/disputes			
Romantic relationships/sexuality			
Hobbies/interests/sports/travel/favorite food			
Personality and Psychology			
Needs/desires			
Strengths/weaknesses/flaws/contradictions			
Existential view of life and death			
Aggressive/passive			
Narcissist/masochist/sadist			
Violent/criminal/heroic			

Depressed/manic/psychotic		
Outsider/loner		
Funny/sense of humor		
Shy/introverted/extroverted/flamboyant		
Curious/imaginative/creative		
Leader/follower		
Overcomes obstacles		
Bullying/braggart/risk taker		
Gossiper/back stabber		
Warm/kind/loving		
Greatest shame/darkest secret		
Melancholic/vulnerable/self -reflective/timid/sentimental/nostalgic		
What challenges and struggles are being faced and why?		
Historical Period or Era		
Period in history		
Cultural mores and rituals		
Style of language		
Style of dress		

Table 4.1 (Continued)

Style of art/theater/music		
Typical cuisines		
Politics/time of peace or war/time of plenty/famine		
Function of the Character within the Script and Given Circumstances		
The character's Spine (see <i>Handbook</i> , Chapter Four)		
The character's Needs (see <i>Handbook</i> , Chapter Four)		
Character's activities before the scene		
What the character might be doing if the scenes were never written?		
Character's daily activities/"life of the day"		

Spine

Spine is a term used by Method actors, directors, writers, and teachers to interpret plays and characters. The Spine captures what the play is about and what the character wants or needs, which will define motivation.

The Spine has been interpreted or defined in various ways: In Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* (1936), Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood translated the term as "super-objective," while Jean Benedetti translated the term as "super-task" in *An Actor's Work* (2008). Other terms taken from Stanislavski include the "through line of action" as well as "grain." The latter is akin to a germ or a seed, suggesting the essence of a character. These terms characterize and aim to unlock the central theme or motivating force that drives a play and a character, and the discovery of either helps an actor in the quest to find truth and authenticity.

The term *Spine* was passed down from Boleslavsky, who learned about it at the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theater under Yevgeny Vakhtangov. Boleslavsky preferred the use of the term *spine* because he liked the suggestion of the backbone of a skeleton being an analogy to the theme of a play. He taught and used the concept in his work in New York at the American Laboratory Theater, which was continued at The Group Theater, founded by Lee Strasberg, Harold Clurman, and Cheryl Crawford in 1931.

In a short essay entitled "Style and Spine" (1938), Elia Kazan commented on the term:

The study of the script should result in a simple formulation that sums up the play in one phrase, a phrase that will be a guide for everything the director does. He begins with the simple words: "For me, this play is about . . ." The phrase should delineate the essence of the action that transpires on the stage; it should reflect what is happening, what the characters are doing. It must imply effort, progression, transition, movement. The concept must suggest not only the events, but the play's mood and color, its emotional landscape and form. It is to serve as the key to the production, what will give it unity.

It's essential to identify the *spine* of a play first as all the individual "spines" of characters grow directly out of the play's spine. Learning how to define and use the term *spine* is essential when working on the

Character Exercises. The way to do this is to decide whether you think your character is for or against the central theme or motivating action that drives the play. Discovering the spine for a character also helps you to form a personal, emotional connection and identification with your role. When I'm critiquing scenes in my classes I ask the actors to tell me what they intended to do, so as to reveal the character's' underlying purpose and fundamental nature.

Below are examples of spines for both plays and characters including examples of character spines written to give you an idea of the wide variety of choices and combinations that are available.

Group Theater and Method Director Harold Clurman included spines for a number of plays he directed, and you can find them in his book *On Directing* (1972). You will find others in Elia Kazan's *Kazan on Directing* (2009).

Here are examples from Harold Clurman:

- In Clifford Odets's *Rocket to the Moon*, Clurman notes simply that "The mood of this romance is 'loneliness' . . . every element in the play must express the basic loneliness and the spine for the play is to seek love" (p. 179).
- For Lillian Hellman's *The Autumn Garden*, he states that the play has "An atmosphere of unsentimentally expressed regret" and the spine of the play is to "fill out their lives" (p. 197).
- For Carson McCullers's *The Member of the Wedding*, the spine of the play is "to get connected," while the spine for the character of twelve-year-old Frankie Addams is "to get out of herself" (pp. 189–190).

Kazan in *Kazan on Directing* provides additional examples of spines:

- For Clifford Odets's *Awake and Sing!* the spine of the play is "to search for happiness among petty objects" (p. 7–8).
- For Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, the spine of the character Willy Loman is "to need success" and the spine for Willy's wife, Linda Loman is "to protect Willy".
- For Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the spine of Blanche is "to find protection" (p. 46).
- For Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*, Kazan says the spine of the play is "how to live in this age or civilization" (p. 7).

Another Method director . . .

- Francis Ford Coppola in an online interview at www.99u.com gave a one-word spine for *The Godfather*, as “succession,” and for *Apocalypse Now*, “morality”.

I advise my students to read their favorite plays and screenplays to practice creating a spine for the whole story and for the characters individually. Below are a few character spines that I’ve created to give you the idea. Some of them are deliberately contradictory, as not all spines are clear and straightforward.

The examples should be read to complete the sentence: “My character’s spine is . . .”

- to show honesty and loyalty to all my family and friends but to secretly resent them.
- to serve humanity through art and science in order to build a better world.
- to study a subject obsessively and to talk about it at every opportunity.
- to believe that all my choices have been a mistake throughout my entire life.
- to appear humorous and jovial while inwardly feeling sad and vulnerable.
- to charm others while thinking badly of them for not living up to some standard.
- to prove myself to be the hippest person around with or without the actual money and to get everything I can at any cost.
- to toil tirelessly without seeking reward or honor and to love the world’s less fortunate souls for no evident ulterior motive.
- to get even, settle, or avenge the great misfortune or wrong done to my people.
- to lurk at the edges of life and to appear inscrutable to people through an overdeveloped sense of pride.

Actor comment

I was playing Jim O’Connor in Tennessee Williams’s, The Glass Menagerie. For me the spine of “betrayal” seemed to fit the character of Jim. It also seemed to fit the whole play. Everyone, beginning with the father, betrays those who loved and relied

on them. My betrayal might have been the cruelest because of Laura's vulnerability, dashing the whole family's desperate hope, with the outrageous coincidence of it being me that Tom brings home to dinner, to meet Laura, who has secretly loved me since high school. I envisioned all the details of Jim's life – my past high-school glory, studying self-improvement, working in the shoe factory, and accepting the invitation to dinner at the Wingfield's. Then, at their apartment, there was the power outage, plum wine, candlelight, heartfelt talk, music, nostalgia, dancing, kissing Laura, and the shattering of her delicate glass unicorn. All of that set the stage for my monstrous betrayal of announcing that I was already engaged to be married. My abrupt departure was especially heartless. Tom was accused by his mother of knowing that I was engaged, and I, a guest, betrayed Tom. It was by exploring the details of Jim's spine that I was able to feel shallow and dishonest, even though I appeared to have an upbeat can-do demeanor. It may be that Jim didn't even realize how cruel and hateful his behavior was.

ABOUT THE CHARACTER EXERCISES

The departure point for beginning a Character Exercise may be a work of art, a piece of music, an Animal, Private Moment, or Need Exercise. All are designed for you to activate your senses and awaken your mind and intuitive powers to propel yourself into a role. Each exercise sets up a situation where your physical and emotional impulses and behaviors are utilized to develop your character's motivations and to color your every action. It's often said about Lee Strasberg that he didn't just teach us how to act, he taught us how to live.

Substitution Exercises require the use of specific people, places, and significant events from your own life, all of which are intended to produce powerful responses. The Animal Exercise will give you an awareness and understanding of the character's physicality and psychology. The Painting Exercise is used to envision your character's inner and outer world. The Private Moment for the Character Exercise contributes to your creating a specific kind of solitary atmosphere, when you're alone as the character entertaining personal thoughts thereby revealing any secret aspects of the character. The Need Exercise helps you establish those motivating forces that drive your character. Improvisation solves problems of logic and provides spontaneous behavior to nurture the all-important connection to your

scene partners. You stream the character's innermost thoughts and feelings, what Strasberg, in class, called the "character's narrative" or "inner monologue" or simply put, inner speech used to connect you to the present moment. You experiment with various combinations of Character Exercises which may include a Need Exercise and an Overall Sensation like a weather condition if the part calls for it.

For teachers and directors, familiarity with the Character Exercises provides options to convey aspects of the character that need to be developed or emphasized. The possibilities may seem complex and daunting, but this work can't be rushed. Learning the exercises necessitates guidance from a teacher in your initial training. Consistently practicing these exercises in class and at home is essential in helping you assess which work best for you.

A frequent difficulty, often underestimated, is the ability to grasp the cultural or social traits of a character from a different era or a culture with which you are unfamiliar. Creating believable and logical behavior in that situation, without firsthand experience, may be challenging for you, and Method Exercises such as the Painting Exercise or the Place Exercise can help solve that problem by giving you a sensory blueprint from which you can craft a specific place for use with your character. Acting is a collaborative art. Practicing in a unit or group makes a vital contribution to the training based upon the group dynamic of improvising and working together as an artistic community by learning from each other, mistakes and all.

Throughout the *Handbook*, I drive home the idea that you must be vigilant in maintaining a level of control and focus during the exercises. Waves of powerful feelings, emotional and physical, will emanate from this work, and this must be entirely under your control. The Character Exercise descriptions discuss the use of Relaxation, movement, sound, and breathing, all of which can help maintain your concentration. The idea takes on an additional significance when the character you're playing has been written to be on the edge or out of control in their make-up and nature. You must stay true to the part by responding and reacting clearly, enunciating every word, while being emotional at the same time. The line between the execution of compelling and emotionally believable acting and going "over the top" with exaggeration or "hamming it up" with clichéd and gratuitous behavior must be controlled.

In James Grissom's *Follies of God* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2015) actress Kim Stanley states that "It was said that I was out of control on stage,

but, my dear, this is called acting.” Her brilliantly crafted work and her chosen behaviors were repeatable at her command which confirmed her artistry and magnetic emotionalism.

From the perspective of the writer or the director, knowledge of these Method Exercises can create a refined storytelling process that helps give definition to characters, atmosphere, and settings. Having gone through the Character Exercises themselves will create a language to communicate and convey what’s needed and how to get it from the actors. Practicing the exercises as rehearsal procedures can liven up the entire production by influencing style, staging, set design, or casting.

EXERCISE CONSIDERATIONS

- A short Relaxation (five or ten minutes) should precede each Character Exercise, to make sure that you’re physically and emotionally available for the concentrated sensory work required to reveal the character.
- Speak out loud any problems you might be having in facing that reality. The Abstract or Additional Movement is used when needed for breaking through obstacles, regaining focus, and remaining in control.
- During preparation you should research each character in the script using the Guides. Ideas of which exercises resonate with you creates a tapestry of experience, and your character will begin to emerge. For example, what Animal, Painting, or Need best conveys the attitude or mood of your character and the atmosphere of the play or scene? What events and places from your own life translate into a parallel reality of what the playwright intends? You must ask yourself questions in great sensory detail about your character, their dark sides and tragic flaws. What’s the character ashamed of and what might they want to hide? Are they needy, prideful, or depressed? What makes them scowl or ache? What do they fight against? What brings them happiness and joy? Are they opinionated or judgmental? What aspects of those qualities will make the character more engaging and believable to yourself and the audience?
- Think about what piece of music or substitutions of people or events might evoke the desired response. Establish for yourself and note in your Journal the triggers that created specific sensations or impulses. It’s those retained responses that will build the actor’s treasure trove of exercises.

- Anything you don't understand is a potential problem and must be solved. By using your own life and personal memories for inspiration, as well as music, art, animals, places, or needs, and by understanding fully the historical context, you possess the raw material for creating multidimensional convincing characters.
- With so many possibilities to explore, trial and error is essential during training. When working on a specific script, you may need only one exercise to create the reality, or maybe none at all, if there is a strong natural connection with the part. Doing more isn't always better. Strasberg encouraged us to commit to one exercise fully rather than doing several halfway.
- When an exercise is going well, and before the words of a monologue are introduced, you may be instructed to use gibberish or a song instead of the actual words of the play. Any actual meaning or punctuation is de-emphasized or ignored for the purpose of you practicing how to put feelings into the words. You avoid the mere habitual saying of the line. It's important for you not to add the lines before the feeling of each moment has been evoked fully through the chosen exercise. Feelings must be maintained while you speak the lines clearly with a resonant voice intended to command attention and engage the audience.

After each Character Exercise practiced in class, the actors, one by one, recount what they experienced. This is part of the self-evaluation process, where you must clearly articulate for yourself and the teacher what transpired while strengthening your own ability to be clear and compelling verbally. You should note in your Journal what physical gestures, impulses, behaviors, senses, and emotions emerged that may inform your character. As Strasberg said repeatedly, it's most important for actors to evaluate and know for themselves what worked and what didn't. If you do not know this, you'll continue to make the same mistakes. These details are the repeatable triggers to be used for future parts. If any exercise weakens with repeated use, which often occurs, you must have another one ready to replace it.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTIONS

Substitution Exercise

About the exercise

The idea of substitution in acting was articulated by Yevgeny Vakhtangov and is a central motif in approaching the work on a character or scene.

Vakhtangov said, “A notebook isn’t a box of chocolates, but an actor can act as if it were.” Substituting a person or an event from your own life unrelated to the play can justify your actions, give you the value needed in the scene, and enhance the idea of “actor’s belief” without which there is little truth to be found. Strasberg sometimes used the term “Person as a Personal Object,” where rather than using an inanimate Personal Object of importance, you choose an actual person as the object of exploration. Interestingly, in psychology people are also considered objects, as expressed in the psychological theory of object relations, which addresses the nature of each person’s attachments to other people.

In class, I set up a variation of the Substitution Exercise, in which I ask you to choose, for example, the person in your life you most strongly loathe or love. Actors should strive for high ethical and moral standards in regard to their art; however, as an actor, you can’t be uncomfortable with strong negative feelings. You must embrace, understand, and make contact with them. It doesn’t mean that you hate a person more than your actual feelings, or that the person would ever know, or that anyone will judge you for doing so. It’s just an acting exercise, and those feelings come with the territory of being an actor.

If the memory of that person you tried to despise can make you flush with anger or blush with embarrassment reliably and on cue, you’ve learned a valuable skill for your acting when you need to blush or be embarrassed in a scene. The ability to increase the level of intensity of any feeling is available each time you do the exercise. Craft enables you to have the flexibility to be able to repeat your work at will and not rely on how you are feeling on any particular day. Without a technique, you’ll at best just be able to imitate your idea of a hateful or happy person. The artistry comes when you’ve learned to reliably experience those sensations firsthand to evoke for your work.

As with much of your use of The Method Exercises, no one has to know exactly what you’re working on, except by experiencing the quality of your acting and its ability to express different levels of emotional intensity. Strasberg warned us that by talking too much and telling your stories to other people, you give away your power. Save it for your acting.

Exercise steps

- After you do Relaxation, choose a person for the exercise who has made a deep impression on you and may still be significant in your

life. When you think of them, strong responses are evoked, good or bad. It can be someone whose comportment, eccentricities, or mannerisms might fit the character and scene you're working on. The person you chose can be alive or dead and from any time in your life.

- Focus on the imaginary person through each of your five senses. The exercise is done with your eyes open and mostly standing up. If you sit in the chair for too long, the exercise becomes static and only a mental image. On stage our eyes are open. You can't shut everything out. Be active and physically explore the person, working slowly and specifically. Reach out and imagine touching their face or patting their hand. Establish their body type, posture, facial features, style, clothing, hair, what they smell like, the feel of their skin, what their voice sounds like, their breathing, their laughter, or their foot-steps. Explore every sensory aspect of the person to establish their concrete existence.
- You don't go back to imagining the age you were when you knew the person. It's your response as you encounter them now – that's the new reality. With time, you and your reactions and feelings about the person may have changed, and they may not be at all what you envisioned. Therefore, don't anticipate a result.
- During your training, you experiment with different people. You can observe them in real life or you can look at photos of them, although it's not necessary. The impact of the relationship must be consequential and engender feelings that could shed light on the character you're working on.
- Connecting the memories, feelings, and impulses you have about the person using a Substitution can be emotional; however, you don't push for anything emotional to happen. Stay with the senses, and let the feelings emerge organically. It's through each sense, one by one, that the person comes alive to you most directly.
- Your re-imagining of this person may be associated with a special place or other people. Don't let yourself wander off or run a particular story or scenario in your mind. That may be valuable, but, for now, get back to the exercise. Simply recognize when you're straying, and breathe, relax, and focus on the sensory details of the chosen person. Note what senses or objects gave you reactions that you could possibly use for future work. Which details elicited the most revolting feeling or filled you with immense joy? Note them in your Journal.

- Experiment and practice while using all kinds of interesting people you know to build up a rich repertoire to substitute in your work. You must evaluate for yourself if the exercise worked or not. If, for example, you're working on the lost, empty feelings from a break-up, you don't have to use a real break-up to evoke the desired value for the scene. That's too literal. Look for a parallel reality. You can use anyone who makes you angry or sorrowful and fits the particular context. Be careful to not use events and people that are currently volatile in your life. You must be in control, and these things take time to process.
- You can substitute an entire event from your own life in which the circumstances were different from that of the play, but the behavior might be appropriate and logical for the scene. Strasberg called this "personalizing the event."

Sometimes actors will bring in an actual physical object as a reminder of the person to rehearsals or performances to strengthen their connection. I've already pointed out that Stanislavski at certain performances would privately hide a personal object on the set to motivate him or to give him a certain feeling while acting.

Actor comment 1

I had a hard time substituting someone detestable from my own life. I didn't feel comfortable with the idea of focusing on hating someone. It went against my upbringing and culture. There are people I don't like very much, but I felt very guilty imagining that I hated them, and I started to blush terribly. I realize I always blush, laugh, or smile when I feel uncomfortable or self-conscious. It was a relief to actually respond to the person from my own experience through the Substitution Exercise, when in real life I could never respond that way. I felt empowered by doing the exercise.

Actor comment 2

I used my long-dead, beloved grandmother as the Substitution. I remembered so many more details about her by using each sense – smelling her hair, hearing her melodic voice, tasting her baked cookies – than if I just forced myself to have mental pictures of her. During the exercise, I became so moved by how her hand felt on me, the way I touched her cheek, or she touched mine. I got teary-eyed immediately, but I was smiling at the same time. I felt as if I was communing with her. Memories

came flooding back, and I felt her love. It was she who first let me hold my little brother and told me I was beautiful. The smells also led me to a place, the scary basement of her house and the mustiness of her things. When I added the lines of my monologue, it seemed so effortless and true.

Actor comment 3

I automatically remembered the night of that event in shocking, sensory detail: the smell of the fire's smoke which teared up my eyes, its crackling sound, the music, and the taste of the food we cooked over it and the cold air. The senses really kicked in, and what I remembered allowed me to explore the behavior within myself and my character. Substituting that event ultimately transformed my performance and helped me delve deeper. I didn't feel separate from the part. I firmly believed in what I was doing and felt at one with the melancholy I was seeking for the scene and my character.

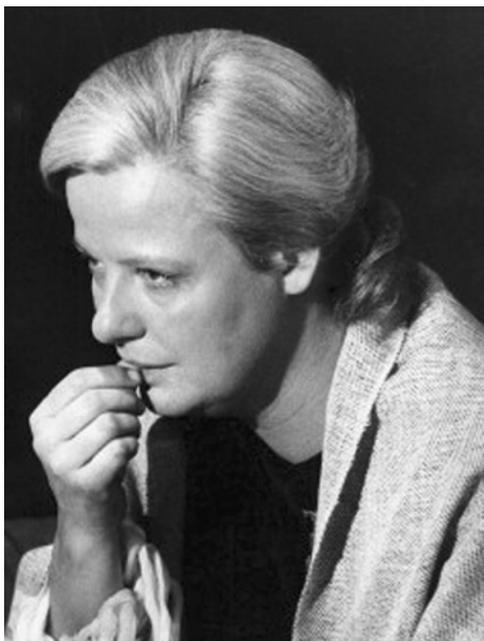
Need Exercise

About the exercise

The Need Exercise is loved by actors for its clear and useful role in making you experience the most basic human needs with improvised behaviors, impulses, and motivations. By acting out the chosen need, you inhabit the character non-intellectually, instinctively, and with ease so that you can connect with an emotional state of being that may change with the transitional moments in the script.

The Need Exercise was taught to me by the acclaimed actress and acting teacher Kim Stanley. Kim put the Need Exercise into practice in her private classes in New York, Los Angeles, and Santa Fe during the years following her phenomenal acting career.

Her iconic work during the Golden Age of Television, on Broadway, and in films led to Tony and Academy Award nominations, two Emmy Awards, and a New York Film Critics Circle Award. Kim dazzled the critics and captivated her audiences, and she was one of the most gifted American Method actresses of her time. Her emotionally expressive work should be studied by actors. When you work with the ideas and techniques built into her Need Exercise, spontaneous gestures and impulses will arise. Strasberg also emphasized that every character in a scene should have one or more distinct needs to fit the emotional beats, not just the lines to lead them through the action or the event.



4.5 Kim Stanley in *Séance on a Wet Afternoon*, 1964. Courtesy Photofest.

As with much of The Method work, the Need Exercise is instrumental in helping you break away from the clichéd meaning of the lines, which prevents truth in expression and contributes to stencil-like behavior. According to Stanislavski, the clichéd meaning of the lines can impair your expression by locking the “muscles of the tongue,” which are deeply ingrained and so susceptible to habit that creativity can be blocked. By learning the nonverbal expression of the Need, you release the reliance on the trap of the lines by creating the feelings before you say the line. Strasberg liked to say that “The thought before the line, not the line, then the thought.” Vakhtangov’s *Lectures* (1919) also addressed the issue of character motivation, using words and ideas such as tasks, desires, actions, and goals as need-like behavior and line inspiration. This comports with Stanislavski’s idea that the best way to handle motivation was to use active verbs to describe intention.

Kim used different Needs in her classes over the years, depending on when you had the good fortune to study with her. She mentioned that, in her own work, she especially liked to use “To seduce” in order “To destroy” (both of which are Needs). There is use of both Needs in the role of Frances Farmer’s mother in the 1982 movie *Frances*, for which both Kim and her beloved student Jessica Lange received Oscar nominations.

During my time of study with Kim, we used the following fifteen Needs, all active verbs and emotional states of being. You express the Need nonverbally at first, through responsive physical and emotional behavior, by which you create greater depth than if you relied primarily on the conventional saying of the lines.

The fifteen needs are:

To love

To comfort

To lust

To seduce

To entertain

To celebrate the nature of the other person

To loathe

To accuse

To plead or beg

To destroy

To charm

To humiliate

To entice

To reveal oneself, and

To amuse.

The Need Exercise differs from the other Method Exercises that start with a specific object, place, overall sensation, a work of art, an animal, or other things to stimulate the emotions. With the Need Exercise, the departure point itself is an inner action or emotional core which justifies the character's behavior and reveals their motivations related to the character's spine. Feel free to use the word "desire" or "want" in place of need, if that helps you. It isn't the word itself that's important, but the intensity of what it means to you. The word "need" is more visceral than the words "intention," "objective," or "wants," all of which can seem vague, more in the mind and less active, while "need" is more consequential, even potentially suggesting a matter of survival.

There may be similarities and overlapping among the Needs, or perhaps there could be other possible Needs on the list. That's fine, but begin by learning these fifteen to fuel an infinite range of spontaneous and expressive behaviors. If you think of one that isn't on the list, try it

and find out if it works for you. In the beginning of the exercise, without speaking, you must use your imagination to develop nonverbal communication and behaviors for you to use to express each Need vividly. It's important to understand that there are an infinite number of choices that can serve as a catalyst to stimulate the intricacies of the creative process.

By applying this technique, you're able to shift between contradictory impulses and behaviors at will. The motivations of your characters





4.6/4.7/4.8/4.9 (continued)

may change from scene to scene and line to line. The transitions are linked by story and subtext. One moment, for example, to entertain can be your need, while next, your need may be to humiliate or be the dominant one in the scene to convey power or in another moment to convey meekness.

As with Kim's "seduce" in order to destroy, there are other Needs that can be contradictions or embody veiled motives which create the raw material for heightened drama. Primarily, the active physical expression of your need gets you out of your head and into your body with

impulses to feed your thinking and the choices you make to motivate the character.

In a related exercise, Kim had us say the same line entering on stage each time using a different need and weather condition. This taught us that there are numerous ways to say the same line. Try saying “I love you” or “I hate you,” motivated by each Need separately, experiencing for yourself the different possibilities. The chosen Need motivates the line and washes it with meaning, not the verbal emphasis, indication, or empty gestures that may come with mere rote repetition. By using the Need Exercise, you discover the behavior and subtext that drives the character.

Exercise instructions

- When you're not working on a specific scene and just practicing the exercise, you may choose the Need to work with or the teacher can privately tell you which one to use. I advise actors to choose Needs that may be difficult or contrary to their own nature. Over time you'll practice all the Needs in combination with many different partners.
- The actors are selected two at a time by the teacher to perform the exercise and are seated in front of the class on black boxes or chairs a few feet from each other, both facing forward toward the rest of the class, which is viewed as the audience.



4.10 Need Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

- You bring a simple object/prop up with you. The prop doesn't have to be selected in advance, and it can be anything as simple as a pen, book, papers, a flower, keys, anything that might help you express the Need you choose.
- When the teacher says to proceed, the actors begin by letting the Need percolate inside them for a minute or two before making contact with each other. Don't rush it. Without speaking or mouthing the words, the actor is forced to communicate their chosen Need only through gestures and behavior. It can't be a mental image, where you're just sitting and thinking.
- The Need Exercise is initially a silent improvisation, with only the body, props, and impulses to express the Need, which should always be directed toward the person you're working with. Since you can't speak, you're forced to internalize the feeling, activating behavior. During the Improvisation, no matter how the other person is acting toward you, don't drop your chosen Need. However, you must acknowledge and listen well to your partner and respond accordingly by including them in your reality.
- You have to be inventive to keep active and not become static. Keep trying to communicate your Need, even though it might be difficult. Remember, your Need is to love the other person, to seduce the other person, or to destroy the other person. It's always an action directed toward your scene partner. You can also direct your Need toward a God, a predicament, the universe, an ideology, or a country, but for now, direct your Need toward the other person.
- When your Need is established, you get up and move around and make actual physical contact as a means of expressing your Need. However, the actors and the teacher have a responsibility in this regard. You must avoid any excessive physical behavior. If I see the behavior is heading in that direction, I'll say "no physical contact." By restricting the physicality, you're forced to find new means of expression for those same impulses. If you and another actor are working together on a Need Exercise outside of class, while preparing for class, or rehearsing a scene without the supervision of a teacher, each of you is responsible for establishing and enforcing the "no excessive physicality" ground rules. There must be trust and awareness among artists.

- While there is a wide range of responses from which you can choose, you can't turn your back on a person, ignore the other person, or walk away, although these occur during real-life situations. We don't engage in these actions during the Need Exercise because ignoring someone is not one of the Needs and limits response. If you catch yourself walking away or ignoring your partner, simply stop, relax, and choose another action to convey your Need.
- Interpreting and breaking down the script and finding the changes or beats and the transitional moments is essential to help you identify when Needs change. As you perfect your use of the exercise, you can incorporate variations of two and then three Needs, if they are called for. Your character's Need can be juxtaposed to your partner's Need to inspire pure improvisations that create the drama. You can use the exercise as a rehearsal procedure by playing the entire scene silently, following the beats and using the Needs to guide you, not the lines.
- If you are in class, the teacher can complicate the exercise further by adding additional circumstances, such as a weather condition, a place, or a physical mannerism. For example, you can be acting out the Need "To destroy" with someone while you're both in a cold place. Each of the added levels of complexity forces a greater concentration. Eventually, three or more actors can perform the exercise all together, switching the person to whom they're expressing their Need(s). The procedure isn't exact, and combinations, adjustments, and what might best suit a teacher or yourself is open if you want to work this way.
- Two partners may coincidentally have the same Need in a scene which, of course, often is the case in real life. Each scene partner must focus on conveying their own version of their Need, and this can sometimes result in the actors trying to out-do each other with re-emphasizing and repeating behaviors. Listen carefully and let your partner lead you to find new ways to behave in pursuit of your Need.
- I once picked a young actress to do a Need Exercise with a slightly nerdy guy who had good acting ability. She chose "To seduce" as her Need. He later told the class that he was so flustered he was unable to convey his Need. He totally froze, panicked, and was embarrassed, but he seemed to be enjoying himself with her seductive behavior. After a moment I whispered to him that he should do the Need "To entertain," and I told him to relax and take

a few easy breaths. He got himself back together, and he was able to entertain her as she continued doing a very convincing job of trying to seduce him. He had the ability to spontaneously shift his focus and gain his composure and not be made incapacitated or swallowed up by what she was doing. Your commitment is the operative idea here – the necessity of staying with your Need at all costs while adapting to your scene partner.

- When the exercise is going well and both people are actively expressing their respective Needs, I'll direct them to add gibberish in order to use the voice as part of the expression. Gibberish is unintelligible or meaningless speech. While the very idea of 'gibberish' seems, and is, funny, it's also an important Method training procedure used in place of actual words. Using gibberish provides the opportunity for vocalizing pure impulses to express the Need of the character. When working on a scene, you can slowly start to add the lines when you are completely filled up by your chosen Need.
- You can practice the Need Exercise outside of class, in rehearsals, or if you're at home alone by using an imaginary partner and determining what Needs are most prominent and could work for your scene.
- Once learned, you can use the exercise quickly when you may have a limited amount of time to prepare, such as for auditions, or in major transitions or beats, where a complete change in emotional intensity or demeanor needs to spontaneously occur. For example, if a director wants you to try the character using three dramatically different personalities, the Need Exercise is a technique that can be used to shift moods quickly and effortlessly, say, from comic to serious to psychotic. By choosing three very different Needs such as "To love," "To accuse," or "To humiliate," the acting for each could achieve strikingly different values and behaviors. The director can become aware of your versatility and be provided with possible insights about you and the part.

The Need Exercise is excellent for directors to help actors psychologically understand the things they're being directed to do. A director can simply ask an actor, whether Method trained or not, to focus on what Need motivates the character. The scene partners can be told to go off and do an Improvisation expressing their Needs without words. That prompt alone may help you shed light on what Needs have to be

conveyed to create the drama. The Improvisation will almost certainly result in you being more expressive in your acting for that scene. As the director, you may also suggest privately what Need they should each work with.

Strasberg would make the distinction for us between needs and objectives, saying he rarely used the term *objective*, because he said if a director supplies you with an objective, such as telling you to get angry, it could translate into a very mechanical portrayal of the anger. For example, Blanche, in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, has a character spine that includes being desperate to be protected from life and the world. That characterization of Blanche could be fed by one or more Needs such as to charm, to plead, to seduce, or to entertain depending on how the characters are played, at what moment during the play, and what the director is after. Contributing to the expressiveness was the New Orleans heat, humidity, and social prejudice permeating everything.

For the playwright, the Need Exercise has an interesting potential. Having developed a vision for the story and characters, the playwright can use the Need Exercise to go through the exploration for character spines, possible dialogue, behaviors, and story line. The author, too, is limited to the words, lines, and stage directions to create the full power of the scene, and relies on the actors to bring it to life. Having taken the playwright's work one step closer to fully defined characters by using the Needs helps add the human elements as meaningfully and powerfully as they are intended by the playwright.

In Kim Stanley's classes, the Improvisation could last as long as an hour before adding gibberish. The bar was set high by Kim to embody the Need fully. Only then were the words of the scene or monologue added. Kim also reminded us to pay special attention to the Needs most unlike our natural personality. In my classes scheduling does not permit a full hour, however, ultimately each actor can only try and evaluate which Need works for their specific character in any given moment.

Actor comment 1

I've always thought of myself as a bit restrained as an actress and not very good at improvising. It seemed intimidating. But in the Need Exercise I selected To Destroy, which is very different from myself and difficult for me because I'm

a non-confrontational type person. Acting out “To destroy” toward my partner gave me a different attitude about myself – powerful and courageous – and I was pleasantly surprised that it felt so natural to be strong and aggressive. I stood up for myself. I acted out a wicked hard-hearted, man-eater type woman, and I truly felt it. What was funny was that my scene partner had chosen the Need “To plead or beg” to act toward me. That Need is more normally how I am in real life, and I saw that frame of mind in a very unfavorable light. I discovered something about myself in the process. The realization that I had such an easy time using “To destroy” was a revelation – that I could tap into those feelings so quickly was ironic in the face of my own timidity.

Actor comment 2

The Need is the most important exercise for me, because at the root of every character is a desire or a need. From the Need I got impulses, behaviors, and I was able to be consistent and driven. I’m able to match the character’s Need to mine, and I let go of abstractions and get out of my head and just act out the feeling. I think of my character’s Need and the behaviors are there instantly. That’s just how my brain works. I also practice at home with imaginary scene partners and use each of the Needs. The only way to find what works best is to experiment and then add the lines to see if the feelings are embodied in the lines.

Private Moment for the Character Exercise

About the exercise

The Private Moment for the Character Exercise provides you with a method of introspection to connect with the character’s innermost yearnings, thoughts, and feelings so that you can fully experience being alone and in private outside the confines of the script. This exercise is similar to the Painting Exercise, where you choose a character in a Painting to inhabit, while imagining their world using the senses and emotions to search for the psychology and physical life of the character.

It’s necessary to find out as much as you can about the play, and sometimes exhaustive research is required to establish the character’s psychological profile to understand what their life is like from



4.11 Private Moment for the Character Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

every angle. If the era is a different time, you find out what was going on in the world at that time politically. Determine what the culture, food and style of clothing is like. What music is being listened to. It may be helpful to look at the Character Guide to provide biographical aspects of the role.

Directors can ask you to improvise a Private Moment for your character to add additional values and colors that will enliven your portrayal. Responses will emerge that can move an audience and serve the play.

Exercise steps

Since this exercise is conducive to being relaxed, it's not necessary to do Relaxation beforehand, unless you feel especially tense.

- Choose a place where you feel private and uninhibited. Dress to develop a style that symbolizes the character's attitudes. Bring in a few props to help you believe in the place and the moment. You may add a piece of music establishing the character's mood, atmosphere, and rhythm.



4.12 Private Moment for the Character Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

- When working in class, stay in your designated space as the chosen character and actively explore details of the place through each sense separately. Reach out and touch the walls, ceiling, fabrics, furniture. Look out the windows, eat, hear sounds, and smell.
- How does your character behave in that place? What are their private thoughts, desires, and needs? Try to do something you'd never do in front of anyone else. Do you talk to yourself, cry, rant, rave, look at yourself in the mirror and dance, or do you eat with a vengeance? Act in an uninhibited fashion as if no one else was around.
- After about thirty minutes of working alone, I sometimes have you improvise with the other characters by breaking out of the privacy and entering into each other's Private Moments while staying in character. You improvise by talking about your character's life, describing in sensory detail who you are, why you're there, confiding your problems, and sharing your stories. You switch partners about every ten minutes.
- Staying in character is a test of endurance and commitment. Stick to your convictions, but also absorb and respond to what the other

actors are saying or doing, either verbally or nonverbally. You must let yourself be affected by the other characters.

- After the Improvisations, you go back to your original place alone more engaged and broadened by the re-telling of your story and by experiencing the other characters' stories. Allow the influences to penetrate your character, deepening your personal narrative. At that time, after having established the place, behaviors, and psychology, you experiment with saying the lines and even acting out an entire scene.
- At home the Private Moment for the Character Exercise is practiced the same way, but without the pressure of being watched and without the benefit of interacting with the other actors. After you've established your place at home, work with meeting imaginary characters to talk to and share your insights and lives with them the same way you do in class. The singular aim of the Private Moment for the Character Exercise is to invent behavior and imagine a full authentic life for the character, which will build faith in your portrayal.



4.13 Private Moment for the Character Exercise, Chekhov International Theater School, Melikhovo, RU.



4.14 Private Moment for the Character Exercise, Accademia Zero Nove, Milan, IT.

For example, a Private Moment for Hamlet could be him walking alone and talking aloud to himself in his massive and forbidding stone castle, or it can be Treplev thinking to himself right before his summer evening's lakeside performance in *The Seagull*, or Laura fantasizing in her threadbare living room with her fragile collection of glass miniatures in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Actor comment 1

For my Private Moment – as Claire in Jean Genet's The Maids, I set up a situation in Madame's bedroom using clothes and make-up as props. After having created the Place, I chose the objects to work with and explore with each of my senses. I started cleaning up and moving around the bedroom without feeling self-conscious or concerned about being observed. This was very liberating and allowed me to explore the psychological and physical state of the character. It brought out specific reactions and behavior that felt normal for Claire. The make-up and clothes I brought weren't just items that I could entertain myself with. They became meaningful objects with a

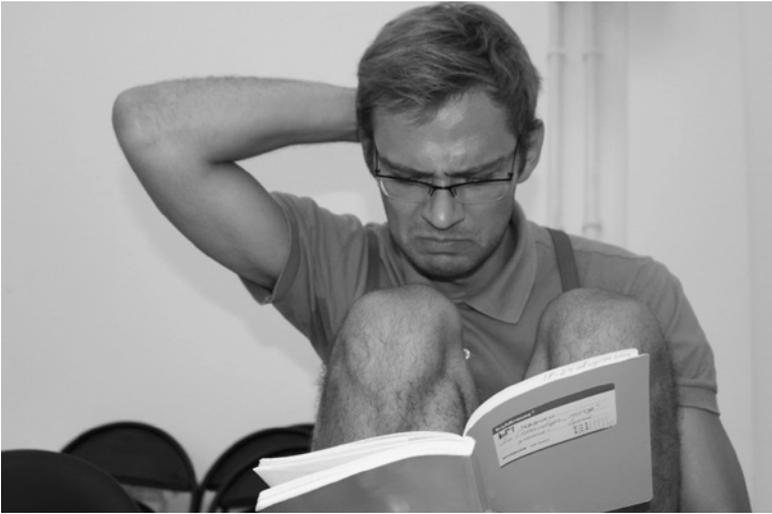
history that inspired very specific reactions. The lipstick had meaning because it belonged to my Madame, and as I picked it up, the activity of putting it on my lips didn't occur to me at first. Initially, I acted on an urge to just explore the object. I began to smell it, and it reminded me of Madame, which then inspired me to apply the lipstick and imitate her, which became highly amusing and private in that moment. In the play, Claire frequently engages in role-playing as her Madame. I discovered that my interaction with the lipstick – a physical object – supplied an emotional jolt and the natural instinct to pretend to be the Madame.

Actor comment 2

As Shakespeare's Hamlet, I created a damp, cold place in the dark forest, alone with my private thoughts and longings, searching for my father's ghost. When we began to improvise with the other actors, and after a couple of switches, I ended up talking to Chekhov's Treplev from The Seagull. We had a lot to share about the older men in our lives. After all, my Uncle Claudius had killed my father, the King, and was sleeping with



4.15 Private Moment for the Character Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.



4.16 Private Moment for the Character Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

my mother. My beloved Ophelia was lost to me through betrayal and madness. Treplev was similarly tortured by the older and accomplished Trigorin, whose successful career was a constant humiliation to Treplev. But worse, Trigorin was also sleeping with Treplev's mother and then later with his beloved Nina. We quickly connected: Misery loves company. Parting was actually hard when we were told to switch partners. My Hamlet and his Treplev were galvanized by the Improvisation.

Actor comment 3

I found a spark of revelation after using a Private Moment for the Character of Tamora in Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus. Contrary to the sex, power, and manipulative magnetism that Tamora embodies, she's nonetheless a prisoner in her own skin. My task was to create a moment in her life when all of her bearings were nothing more than the scraps of torrid memories she carried with her as a widowed, captured slave to Andronicus. By confining Tamora into the space of a cattle wagon, I was able to pick at the barren, four-walled prison surrounding me while creating a makeshift doll. The moment served as a rude awakening for Tamora as I carefully mulled over my life's events up to the present moment, while still

managing to make amends to my own private demons. I hadn't expected a surge of rapturous torment to come over me as it did, and I also didn't expect to weep with such confounded confusion over all my previous life's circumstances. My mind began to chatter, as it re-lived the history of Tamora's moments of detectable failures. I can remember coming out of the moment, feeling rattled, restless, and completely overcome with the circumstances I'd given her. The moment had its lasting effects, and carried its way into the monologue with such ease and fortitude. I had found her voice and, in that process my own as well.

Painting/Sculpture/Photograph Exercise

About the exercise

Continuous learning and self-evaluation is a core part of Method training. In this exercise, you embark on a shared sensory experience, merging yourself with the character by exploring the imagined given circumstances depicted in a work of art, which you select because it may bring you closer to understanding your character's world. The Painting Exercise is an improvisation or *étude* for you to both explore the imaginary painting through the five senses, as well as a means to inspire a role.

The goal is to fully transform yourself into a chosen character to intensify your belief in the reality you wish to create, having the thoughts and sensations of the character in a logical sequence. Perfecting this exercise intensifies your powers of observation as you create a character's soul and complex world outside of the play. You invent the character's inner life within the work of art.

Initially you choose any art that moves you deeply. After having a familiarity with the exercise, you choose works of art that inspire feelings and emotions suiting the physical and emotional qualities for a specific role or scene. If, for example, you're working on John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, you can absorb the sense of a migrant worker's deep hopelessness by viewing the heartrending photographs of Dorothea Lange at labor camps during the Great Depression, or study Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* to help evoke a wild terror, or Pierre Auguste Renoir's *Bal du moulin de la Gallette* to evoke a sense of lighthearted exuberance. However, the choice of period or



4.17/4.18 Painting/Sculpture/Photograph Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.



4.19/4.20 Painting/Sculpture/Photograph Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

style of the artwork does not have to be direct or literal. For example, you could possibly use a Jackson Pollock abstract expressionist painting for Hamlet's mental state of intensity, tension, hastiness, and contradictions.

You'll be investigating the life and times of the character by searching for similar qualities, themes, tempos, and atmospheres within these paintings. It's interesting to decide what the character may have been doing within the scene in the painting, as well as what may be experienced afterward. You're part sleuth, part student of humanity, finding stories to make sense of and animate your character's lives.

The Painting Exercise requires that you gain an increased cultural and sensory immersion into the art world, which is essential for you to be a relevant, compelling, and dynamic artist. Kim Stanley described



4.21/4.22 Painting/Sculpture/Photograph Exercise, Accademia Zero Nove, Milan, IT.



4.23/4.24 Painting/Sculpture/Photograph Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

how she used the Painting Exercise in Lillian Ross's book *The Player, a Profile of an Art* (Simon and Schuster, 1962). Kim remarks that in the role of Lea in Anita Loos's play *Cheri*, she went to the Phillips Gallery in Washington, D.C., and studied Renoir's painting *Boating*. She said she got actual feelings about the times and the women, which she used in the part. Particularly when you are doing a part that is not of your immediate background, looking at prints of women's clothing, for example, can give a sense of the constriction of apparel and stiffness of posture.

Directors determine the style for the production in regard to staging, costume, set, lighting, music. By using the Painting Exercise for inspiration, they can add dimension to their vision and unlock undiscovered sides of themselves to manifest in their work. Bringing the artwork to life enlivens your mind, adding textures to your characters. Entering the world of the Painting is like being in a time machine, transporting yourself to an imaginary place.

Exercise steps

- On your first try at the exercise, choose a Painting, Sculpture, or Photograph without any particular role in mind. Prepare by going to the museum to study a work of art of any genre or era. Choose one to which your intuition or instinct draws you and awakens an emotion or speaks to you on a visceral level. Choose one character in the artwork to become. Study the form of the painting in great detail, observing what your character would see, smell, hear, touch, and taste, employing the same slow, concrete investigation you're learning in each of the exercises. Memorize every detail and take notes. Viewing and studying the original in the museum and observing it more than once is optimum.
- You can also use online art applications or digital images from museum libraries. Zoom in on people, objects, colors, nature, textures, and painting techniques, many of which might inspire you and contribute to a more complete sensory experience of the place and the event.
- Choosing a sculpture or nonrepresentational work of art can be more challenging than a painting, since the setting and story will have to be imagined to a greater degree. Sculptures can be personifications of anguish or emotionalism, such as Greek sculpture



4.25/4.26 Painting/Sculpture/Photograph Exercise, Accademia Zero Nove, Milan, IT.



4.27/4.28 Painting/Sculpture/Photograph Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.



4.29/4.30 Painting/Sculpture/Photograph Exercise, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

or the idealized neoclassical expressions of youth and beauty, or even more modern works such as Giacometti, where elongated contortions and twists are subjected to your interpreted reactions. Occasionally, I'll have you work on a personal photograph with one or more people in it which can include you to actively re-create a place or an event from your own life.

- To clearly demonstrate the idea of the exercise, I've included an image of a classic Renaissance painting chosen because of the many sensory realities depicted in it. Also included is a list of examples of what can be experienced sensorially in the Painting. The image is of Pieter Brueghel the Elder's 1559 painting *The Netherlandish Proverbs* (also called *The Dutch* or *Flemish Proverbs*), which is overflowing with people and life from an era outside of our own contemporary experience. The *Proverbs* is at The

Gemaeldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, DE, formerly known as the Old Masters Museum.

- Closely study the painting. The examples below give you an initial idea of the vast number of descriptive choices that are possible. Always be inventive, curious, and questioning in your thinking.
- As you read through the sense-by-sense examples of observations, get ideas of how to approach the exercise. While you're reading the examples, try to have a digital image that can be zoomed in and scanned over.

What is seen: People, lovers in the attic, workers, praying, torturers, butchers, laborers, sea monsters, clothing, plants and animals, vistas, buildings, tools, vehicles, human activity and behavior, weather, water, food, the sea, season, machinery, fire, sky, dirt, and so on.

What might be smelled: Smoke, food, blossoms, other people, waste, dirt, the sea, animals, and so on.

What might be heard: Conversations, different animals, wind, waves, carts, screams, hammering, fire, whispering, arguing, wagon wheels, wind, paddling, lamenting, trees rustling, wings flapping, praying, buzzing bugs, panting, and so on.

What might be touched and felt: People, plants, animals, buildings, fabrics, tools, heat, wind, air, cold, oiliness, flesh, fire, leather, water, stone, pain, and so on.

What might be tasted: Food, bitterness, dust, drink, cigarettes, smoke, dirt, communion wafers, blood, sweat, water, and so on.

Look at the work of art and observe all the characters' activities. Ask yourself questions about the man tied to the stake and the woman carrying hot charcoal near him. Was he tortured? What for? Or the man in the blue cape, Take woman in the red dress, the men fishing, rowing, or walking on water. Who are they? A demon, Jesus, or a petitioner?

Take your time, in a relaxed yet active manner, while sensorially discovering the life and times depicted. Slowing down is crucial so that you're not rushing and doing a broad brush imitation or a miming of activities. You will be shocked by how much more is achieved by working slowly and through each sense separately.



The Netherlandish Proverbs, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1569, Berlin, DE, Gemaeldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, DE. Jörg P. Anders, Photographer. Courtesy Art Resources, Inc., New York.



- You have prepared by having selected and studied the artwork, chosen the character to become, and thought about what that life might be like.
- Begin the exercise alone in your own private space and don't disturb anyone else. The first half hour is devoted to making a sensory exploration of the setting by actively moving around in the place and creating all the objects. Bring in a few props and a simple costume that doesn't have to be exactly as in the Painting. Work at home the same way.
- Every character you portray mustn't only know who they are, but where they are. The place must be created. Use the first person, for example, by saying "I'm touching the cold stone wall," or "I'm smelling the fragrant roses and feeling the sharp thorns," or "I'm hearing the grinding motor and street sounds." Make the effort to pick up and touch imaginary objects, exploring their texture, weight, colors, sounds, and tastes. What season is it and what is the weather like? How do you, as the character, get up and move? What is your compartment, size, your posture? What daily activities would you be doing? Ask how you're groomed, including your make-up and jewelry. What's the expression on your face, your attitude? Clothing can be especially evocative and can give your character a sense of style. How are the garments constructed? Are they stiff, colorful, tattered, worn from age and repeated use? The kind of fabric may be an expression of the life and social position of the subject. Everything counts and adds life to the character.
- Explore the possibilities of what might not be depicted, not only before or after the artwork, but also behind doors and buildings or under water. If subjects are naked, where and why did they undress?
- If you've chosen a portrait of a single person to work with that doesn't have a setting or background, be precise in what the environment might look and smell like, and place yourself there. If it helps you to begin by striking your character's pose, do so. Build on the character's physical aspects. Don't spend the whole time in one position, as if you're an artist's model, or the work becomes static and too mental. The pose is a touchstone to which you can return throughout the exercise, but then riff on it, like a jazz improvisation.
- I've added a second part to the exercise, using the process of improvisation to force a connection between actors to enhance their experiences and initiate action. After working alone at first, the teacher

then directs you to begin the Improvisations – as your character – by visiting another actor for about five to ten minutes. You confide in each other, talking about your respective lives, needs, joys, troubles, flaws, and secrets. Connecting can be verbal or nonverbal. As you move from person to person, introduce yourself, describe your place vividly, and say what's on your mind, and listen intently to your partner. Ask questions about their reality and respond to them. As you switch partners and articulate your ideas about who you are, where you are, and why you're there, make the descriptions sensory-specific.

- Having the actors improvising and communicating with each other was not part of Strasberg's original exercise. What's very powerful and productive in having you visit the other actors is you will continue to learn more and more about your character as you interact with others. Fresh ideas come to light as a result. Wild juxtapositions and interactions occur such as a Picasso-esque woman dealing with a medieval church official, or a Degas ballet dancer with a Van Gogh potato-harvesting laborer, or a business magnate chatting with Titian's Mary Magdalen or a Frida Kahlo discussing things with Vermeer's Girl with the Pearl Earring. Lively improvisations with bold contrasts result.
- When observing two actors interacting well, I may suggest adding a few lines from a monologue or a scene, primarily for the actors to maintain the rhythm and sensations within the context of the line.



4.31 Painting Exercise Improvisation, TELL to JOY Theater, Copenhagen, DK.

- Hearing about the other actors' respective paintings, as well as repeating the description of your own, creates a unique perspective. You reveal yourself by articulating and codifying your own personal sensory and emotional reality. Adapting to each other and listening carefully to what's being said while retaining your own identity develops commitment and will. There's a transformation that organically occurs with revelations and impulses arising from each interaction. Contrasting values come face to face. These discoveries are invaluable in clarifying and embellishing your character's narrative. Each of the re-tellings creates a richer personal history.
- Eventually, you return to your original spot and resume being alone for about another half hour, contemplating all of the new insights that can help you move forward with your characterization. You're now fully engaged and ready to add monologues or lines from a scene. You speak the words clearly, confidently, with a resonant tone and proper stage energy. Don't whisper the words. The voice is a deep personal reflection of who you are and gives the lines a force of meaning. The saying of the words is dictated by the place, the situation, and behavior.
- Evaluate how the interactions transformed your experience. Were you touched by people? Think about which characters you connected with and why. Who annoyed you, who loved you, and vice versa? Did your experiences deepen or evolve in your mind by the improvising, or was it distracting? Did you capture the spirit and identify the needs of the character?

After the exercise, I offer critiques and you make comments about your experience. Be conscious of which particular senses or objects resulted in your having strong sensations and feelings. Notable responses and impulses should be recorded in your Journal. In the future, Paintings, Photographs, or Sculptures can be chosen that you instinctually and passionately feel represent the values that are truthful for every part you play. After perfecting the exercise, it can be used to quickly evoke the desired frame of mind.

Invariably, there are more *Actor Comments* about the Painting Exercise than any of the other exercises. I believe this is due to the fact that the exercise calls for actors to be open to a new process of discovery in deepening the search for the character, as well as using other arts to serve as inspiration.

Actor comment 1

I was in costume for Isabella in The Trickster of Seville (El Burlador de Sevilla). One of my fellow actors mentioned that I looked like one of 'Las Meninas' in the painting by Diego Velazquez. The pose, the dress, even the countenance of what I recalled in the painting immediately fitted the image that I wanted for the character. The long, wide skirt was the one article that drove me to the painting, and was to be the signature of my character. I created Isabella using Las Meninas. I imagined her wide, full skirt, first motionless, standing still, and then slowly moving and twirling.

Actor comment 2

The result of the Painting Exercise was so powerful and unexpected. I discovered layers of my character that never even dawned on me before. During the Improvisation, meeting the other characters from different eras and cultures, with different rituals and morals, changed how I conducted myself. Each encounter contributed to my belief in who my character was and why I was there. Going into other people's paintings, explaining and sharing our lives, hopes, and troubles defined my own life for me. I cared for the poor and hoped they would be OK when I left them. I was Mary Magdalene, and when I spoke to one of the men in Manet's seductive painting "Le



4.32 Painting Exercise Improvisation, Accademia Zero Nove, Milan, IT.

Déjeuner sur L'herbe” there was an understanding reached despite the obvious differences. I behaved like my character in the painting, not how I would’ve behaved. It gave me a logic and inspired a specific kind of struggle within me. It seemed so easy to concentrate, and I felt totally immersed in the exercise.

Actor comment 3

In the Painting Exercise, I felt so energized and inspired by improvising with the other actors. It forced me to really listen and not just think about the next thing I was going to say. I realized how much I normally anticipate everything. All the different people with their own lives, worries, careers, behaviors, tragedies, and from different times in history and cultures was a lot to process. I had to answer their questions, and what came up was so unanticipated that I surprised myself. The character I was doing was the God of the Underworld, and at the end of the



4.33 Painting Exercise Improvisation, Accademia Zero Nove, Milan, IT.

exercise, when we went back to being alone, I realized that the other characters taught me about living. That was a revelation.

Actor comment 4

I found the Painting Exercise very exhilarating as it brought the scene to life and opened a world of circumstances and

behavior. I picked a biblical painting – “Hagar in the Desert” by Marc Chagall. I began with my senses in creating the place, including objects, smells, and sounds to accentuate the mourning of my dead child. The black scarf I was wearing felt itchy and hot in the blazing sun. Sand got stuck on my hands and in my eyes and the air was so dry I could hardly swallow. I wanted water, and the surrounding plants and rocks left little protection, and the empty desert stimulated a sense of loneliness and desperation. I was immersed in the reality of my dying child’s weight in my arms. It became more vivid as I heard the other actors tell about their paintings. I started with specific details, like how the hot dust felt under my feet and in my throat, the smell of the smoke, and the dry and bleak outdoor atmosphere. The sound and the feeling of the stick being dragged on the ground to trace a sacred circle, imparted to me by the sword to fend off any danger helped me believe I was a strong woman. Improvising with the others gave me new ideas and empathies for their troubles, strength for my own struggles, and a complete disappearance of self-consciousness. I think the Painting Exercise is a unique way to explore a character, especially in the re-telling of the story and seeing yourself in light of improvising with the other actors.

Actor comment 5

I chose “Nighthawks” by Edward Hopper. The painting includes three middle-aged people sitting at a bar in a diner at night in 1940s New York City. Two of the people at the bar look to be a couple. The other man has his back turned away from the viewer, is alone, and there’s no indication of what this man might have been thinking about. With the complete freedom to choose and create that life, I decided to become the man sitting alone at the bar.

Because the period of this piece was the 1940s, I used my deceased grandfather, who knew more about World War II than anyone from his generation, as a substitution for the man alone at the bar. I decided to start with the idea that the man was drinking because he was upset his son was drafted to fight in the War. The personalization from my own experiences with my grandfather made this very real. Emotions started rising up. It became even more intense when I added a television set

to the bar and I put a NY Yankees baseball game on, which reminded me of my own childhood watching baseball games with my grandpa. The character with his back to the viewer was a blank slate from whom I could have invented any story. The Painting Exercise was incredibly vital for my training as an actor.

Actor comment 6

I chose a young man who's waiting to be hanged, but I made the choice that he was innocent. As we improvised and entered each other's paintings, I tried to empathize and listen to the other actors as I explained who I was, what era I was from, my living conditions, and what my life and troubles were that led to my being hanged. My explanations changed somehow or became embellished with each re-telling of my story. I could feel the inner life of my character grow extemporaneously. I saw why the other characters were scared of me, and also what made them believe I was innocent. Possibilities for how I behaved developed for me, scarier, more innocent, and also wronged. Then at the end, being alone again, everything was transformed. My commitment and concentration was better than it had ever been before.



4.34 Painting Exercise improvisation, Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute, New York.

Actor comment 7

The Painting Exercise was eye-opening for me because I'm not a very serious museum or painting lover. I realized that "seeing" isn't the sense I most rely on to observe the world. Also, while I can improvise things OK alone, sharing and improvising with other actors is more difficult for me. In the exercise it was like a sense parade, observing everything, feeling the drama and world of the painting. The real improvisation came with the other actors as their own characters. We shared our histories and lives and I felt great pathos for each of them. When we went back to being alone again, I was invigorated with new ideas and dimensions for my character. When you told us to switch . . . it was poetic and sad to leave whoever I was with. My only regret was not being open enough with the other actors.

Examples of the many available archives, museum online catalogues, and websites where works of art can be viewed for free are provided below. I urge you as often as possible to view the original works of art.

<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/>

<http://www.wga.hu/> (Web Gallery of Art)

https://images.nga.gov/en/page/show_home_page.html/ (National Gallery of Art)

<http://www.metmuseum.org/> (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

<http://www.moma.org/> (Museum of Modern Art)

<http://www.icp.org/> (International Center of Photography)

<http://www.louvre.fr/en/moteur-de-recherche-oeuvres/> (musée du Louvre)

<https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/> (Hermitage Museum)

<http://whitney.org/> (Whitney Museum of Art)

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx/ (British Museum)

Animal Exercise and Guide**About the exercise**

The Animal Exercise can be extraordinarily helpful for you to physicalize challenging roles, especially when the character's bearing is unlike your own. If you're cast because you're similar to the character,

you don't need to add the detailed physicality. However, I suggest you try this exercise for every role, even if there isn't a need for a physical adjustment. You search for the animal's psychology or personality that's in sync with your character's persona. This requires that you re-create the animal's mechanics and copy its behavior to inform your movements and sensibilities. You can also include insects, reptiles, or birds. The intermingling of human and animal qualities creates a distinctive impression and can provide physical logic for inhabiting a role.

Animals are deeply ingrained in our everyday lives and are associated with different energy levels, rhythms, personalities, emotional states, myths, and symbols. They can be perceived by humans as being threatening, friendly, submissive, powerful, mysterious, sneaky, and so on. An enlightening connection between human characteristics and animal qualities is demonstrated by the early English hunting tradition of giving creative names to assembled groups of animals. Referred to as terms of venery, they have survived and remain in use to this day. These names include a gaggle of geese, a pride of lions, a murder of crows, or a skulk of foxes, and each embody their own inferences of a human quality associated with the animal. Authors frequently include animal qualities in the descriptions of their characters.



4.35 Animal Exercise, Accademia Zero Nove, Milan, IT.

In class and in lectures, Strasberg emphasized that using the Animal Exercise helps the actor think, speak, move, and feel more naturally with one's own human content. When working on a specific role, you choose and isolate the animal's main characteristics or its behavior that lend themselves to or are emblematic of your character's nature. Ask yourself which animal would best capture the personality and fit the spine or need of your character. Although we always warn against imitation in the vocabulary and practice of The Method Exercises, with this exercise we do imitate the animal's movements, mechanics, habits, and behaviors.

In Strasberg's classes, the more advanced students did the Animal Exercise for several months to get a good grasp of it. Occasionally, there could be a special need for it earlier. If you were overly emotional in class, Strasberg might take you out of the normal sense-memory sequence to do an Animal Exercise, which would focus your full attention on the animal and stop your overly emotional distractions.

In my classes, when first learning the exercise, it's preferable for you to stay on the ground as the animal for several sessions before you stand or take on a human form. The sequence of time spent on various aspects of the exercise can be shortened, depending on class schedule and availability. In any case, it is advised that you do more work on the Animal Exercise at home and with different animals.



4.36 Animal Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

As directors form their vision for their productions and interpret the script, it can be very enlightening and helpful for them to envision certain characters as the animals they most closely align with in behavior and physical qualities. Whether actors are Method-trained or not, the director can ask them what Animal best characterizes the role or suggest one to give them insight into the part.

By having the skill to invent the character's behavior, you can utilize the exercise to maintain an inner life as the animal and bring logic and truthfulness to your portrayal. During a performance, as your character's behavior transitions within a scene or between scenes, the chosen animal habits you retain for your character add consistency and can introduce physical and emotional adjustments in unique variations.

Exercise steps

- The first time you do the exercise, choose an animal that fascinates you or piques your curiosity. You should go to the zoo several times and observe the animal as closely as safety allows. In addition to live observation, watch the many digital images of animals available on the Internet. However, live observation is always best. You can also use your own pet.
- Study the behavior of the animal closely and observe its physical mechanics. How does it move, lay down, get up, stretch, or groom itself? Does it walk, jump, peck, smell the ground, swim, fly, skip?
- How does the animal turn its head and neck? What are its attitudes, facial expressions, and where is its center of gravity? How does your chosen animal relate to the other creatures? Does the animal lurk, hover, stalk, scratch, threaten, attack, retreat, or cower? Is the animal sexual or protective? How does the animal smell and sniff everything, including the other animals?
- Imitate the sounds your animal makes: scratching, pawing, roaring, purring, whimpering, screeching, hooting, mooing, snorting, chirping, growling, cooing, or yawning. Does the animal slither on the ground, hop, spring, stalk, crawl, roll around in the dirt, or scratch itself on a fence post or tree trunk? What position does the animal sleep in?
- How does the animal eat its food? By chewing on it or ripping and tearing it apart? Does it hunt by looking and hearing, or does it peck, root in the ground with its snout, attack or toy with its prey?



4.37 Animal Exercise, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

- Does it lap up water with its tongue, suck it in, or slurp and splash about? How does it move its tail or paws? Be observant of every precious detail.
- You begin the exercise standing up for a minute or two, even if your animal doesn't. Externally, you imitate the animal's movements, which are meticulously created from your memory, using each of your limbs, extremities, facial muscles, head, mouth, nose, eyes, ears, neck, torso, and shoulders. After a few minutes of getting the animal energy going, get down on all fours, even if that wouldn't be logical. It's preferable to work on mats and to wear knee pads to allow for freer movements.
- Move each part of your body as your chosen animal might move the corresponding parts of its body. For example, hands and feet as paws or hooves, arms as legs or wings, fingers and toes as claws or nails, as well as using your head, eyes, ears, nose, jaw, and tongue as the animal would. It's important to observe the difference between how the animal moves and how you as a human being move by consciously comparing and contrasting them.
- Sniff as the animal does. Focus on the eyes and how your animal sees others and its environment. Does your animal glare, stare,

blink, or turn its head? Do its eyes dart back and forth or up and down? Do the head and the eyes move at the same time?

- You think with the animal's logic and you don't rush. Move carefully, engage the senses, and most importantly, be aware of not hurting yourself as you move your muscles in ways you're not accustomed to.
- In class you improvise and interact with the other actors after spending time alone. The teacher will tell you when to move around the room remaining on all fours as the animal, slithering, crawling, hopping, darting, or scampering. Does your animal act threateningly and then run away or stand its ground? Is the animal curious, affectionate, fearful, hungry, playful, or even grooming other animals? You try to respond the way the animal would, using the animal's sounds and movements.
- While there should be measured physical interactions, be careful not to hurt each other. The teacher may request that no hands be used if the exercise becomes aggressive or too physical.
- After being on all fours, the next phase of the exercise is for you to stand the animal up again, but still not as a human being. Even if the actual animal you're working on doesn't physically stand up in its own natural behavior, take a few minutes to figure out how it might stand up, while keeping its qualities and attitudes.



4.38 Animal Exercise, TELL to JOY Theater, Copenhagen, DK.

- Remain more like the animal than a human being, and be aware of what prominent attributes you want to retain for a desired character trait. Eventually, you transition to being more human and make specific choices to incorporate into your characterization.
- When the exercise is going well, and you feel fully connected to the animal, add a monologue and evaluate if the words come out in a way that's grounded in the rhythm and attitude developed by the exercise.

I have devised the following Guide, which lists a selection of animals and the personality or emotional characteristics and behaviors commonly associated with each of them. The listed animal behaviors are examples and only a starting point to an unlimited number of variations available for the actor to draw upon in creating a character.

Actor comment 1

I find it helpful to read between the lines of what my character claims to be and what she really is before assimilating the animal into her nature. My character, Carol Cutrere in Tennessee Williams' Orpheus Descending, is sexually forceful and wanting life's quests to begin. I pegged her as a dreamer, a societal outcast and exhibitionist alienated from her family, lonely and forgotten. I felt that an introverted fiercely independent and solitary lone wolf would embody her inner workings. To understand Carol's physicality, I broke down the wolf's main physical movements – the ones that would underscore her personality. My mind was fixated on feeling the fur on my limbs and wanting to growl which I retained and was perfect for an emotion to flow through. It was then that I suddenly felt Carol's repressed pain. I slowly stood the animal up as a human being. The process was grueling, and it took some time to get it right. Some animalistic traits can be lost when you stand on two limbs. The standing-up became transitional, and I sauntered around with a husky demeanor, growling my way through past and present troubles. During scene work I was able to assimilate the wolf's traits into a more fully realized Carol – fiercely and defiantly brave in her struggle.

Table 4.2 Animal Exercise Guide

ANIMAL EXERCISE GUIDE	
Animal	Animal Personality Characteristics
Alligator/ Crocodile	Snapping/Attacking Laying in wait Writhing Slithering
Ant	Strong/Creepy/Annoying Industrious Social
Bear	Powerful Lumbering Protective Ferocious
	Authoritative Curious Intelligent Familial
	Playful (cubs) Growling
Beaver	Industrious Earnest Busy Social
Bee	Busy Buzzing Workers Pollinators Annoying
Bull	Macho Powerful Raging Stud
Butterfly	Fluttery Fragile Light Joyous
Chimpanzee	Self-aware Empathetic Playful Energetic Mischievous
Cow	Maternal Mooring Stoic Curious
Coyote	Sneaky Wary/Howling Intrusive Untrustworthy
Deer/Doe	Staring Fragile Quiet Graceful
Dogs (different breeds) have different qualities)	Faithful Obedient Naughty Cheerful Prideful
	Optimistic Barking Licking Personable Loyal
Duck	Waddling Quacking Gliding Dunking
Eagle	Regal Princely Predatory
	Swooping Killing Perching

Elephant	Powerful		Loyal		Matriarchal
	Nurturing		Social		Great memories
Ferret/Weasel	Solitary		Observant		Vocal
Flamingo	Elegant plumage		Proud		Graceful
Fox	Predatory	Wily			Solitary
	Sly	Elegant			Quick
Goat	Grumpy/Old/Bleating		Eating, munching		Social, curious, gentle, independent
Giraffe	Tall		Loping		Social
Goose	Uninhibited, silly		Honking		Gagging
	Quirky		Prone to biting		Hissing
Gorilla	Personable		Emotional		Territorial
	Quadrupedal (walks on all fours)		Chest thumping/domineering		Nit picking
Horse	Free-spirited	Whinnying		Clever	Graceful
House Cat	Curious	Predatory		Preening	Hissing
	Purring	Playful		Scratching	Stretching
Hyena	Shameless	Scavenging		Outcast	Survivor
Jaguar/Panther	Fast	Sensual	Hunting	Pouncing	Acrobatic
Kangaroo	Marsupial	Hoppers		Social	Fast
Koala Bear	Sedentary	Dumb		Cute	Sleepy
	Familial	Roaring	Hunters		Nuzzling
Mouse	Paranoid	Nibbling	Mischievous		Scurrying
					Tidy

Table 4.2 (Continued)

Ostrich	Flightless	Fast	Large-eyed	Observant	Long-necked
Owl	Wise		Observant	Hooting	Staring
Ox	Big and ungainly		Strong	Dumb	Slow
Peacock	Beautiful		Ostentatious	Extravagant	Plumage
Penguin	Waddlers		Colonies	Sliders	Divers
Pig	Squealing		Wallowing	Snorting	Aggressive
Rabbit	Gentle		Nibbling		Affectionate
	Fertile		Intelligent		Social
Rat	Scurrying		Informant	Intelligent	Social
	Biting		Scavenging	Sniffing	Nibbling
Rhinoceros	Cantankerous		Big and fast	Aggressive	Wallowing
	Solitary		Territorial	Pre-historic	Armored
Sheep	Gentle		Sincere	Bah-ing	Familial
Sloth	Slow		Sedentary	Solitary	Upside down
Snake	Slithering			Sneaky	Untrustworthy
Squirrel	Erratic		Scurrying	Nibbling	Climbing
Turkey	Strutting		Plump	Fanning	Flocking
Walrus	Toothy			Immobile/ponderous	Excellent hearing
	Territorial			Noisy	Acute sense of smell
Wolf	Howling		Threatening	Predatory	Amiable
	Independent		Waiting	Prowling	Lonely

Actor comment 2

After doing the Animal Exercise for the first time, I realized that I live mostly in my head, using words and thoughts to express myself and relate to the rest of the world. I'm largely unaware of my own physicality, except sometimes when I gain weight or get sick. I didn't really have any idea about my own body language. I chose a lion, and I was blown away by how instinctively I was able to move, what I smelled, the care I used in grooming myself with my paw, how clearly I heard what was going on nearby, and how the other animals reacted to me. It never dawned on me before that this way of working could inspire me to physically and emotionally connect to a character. I felt totally transformed and unselfconscious during the exercise.

Actor comment 3

I laughed as the Animal and had the energy and playfulness of it. I was unembarrassed by feelings of love and rage, and I had a great sense of smell, which some of the other actors in the class didn't like. The animal's feelings, senses, and physical behaviors were different than my own, but in the exercise, they felt like they were mine. Funny things happened, such as a smaller animal acting tougher, like a big shot. I started provoking other animals and running away. The Animal Exercise gave me courage to do things and be slightly mischievous. Then the transition back to humanness was like a maturing. My sight became sharper, and I felt composed and also more open to be devilish again.

Actor comment 4

I spent a great deal of time observing and studying a specific goat at the Queens petting zoo. I watched it interact, how it ate, how it walked, how it bent its knees and lowered itself to the ground to lie down. Then in class I tried to get the movements of the goat, which was physically demanding work. I found in my own body the way my goat walked, held itself, moved its mouth, its weight, the roughness of its hair, and the sounds it made. I focused my attention on certain details, and suddenly a human character started to form. My goat became this bleating, angry mommy's boy, nerdy in gait and megalomaniacal in

outlook. I was not quite sure how that happened, other than I just followed the exercise instructions.

Actor comment 5

I did an Orangutan and after a while I felt like I was able to do super human things. With ease, I could jump over things and climb up to places. I remember sitting as the animal and viewing the world around as a jungle gym. I was young and my body could do anything. But the result of it for me was carefully examining the mechanics of the animal and then employing it. When I was a kid I could mimic anyone, and doing the animal was a completely consuming experience for me. Years later, I was in a boatyard and my sailboat was up on dry dock, set high in its crib. I had to get in the boat and there were no ladders around. I took a minute to go back into the animal, see things the way he did and to the astonishment of those around made a swift relaxed step up and in a single move pulled myself up and in the boat. It was one of the strangest events I've ever done with witnesses. It was the animal that got me up there.

Music Exercise and Guide

About the exercise

Music punctuates the seminal moments in our lives, binds people together, and touches us so deeply that we may feel physically and spiritually moved. Music can create euphoric behaviors and catapult you back to places in time. Throughout your career, music can be used to evoke powerful memories, atmosphere, moods, impulses, and responses that will inspire you into action and assist with changes as the plot unfolds. The Music Exercise provides you with an external source of inspiration. Just your selection of the pieces of Music to work with is a broadening experience that will add depth to your characterizations. Studying and listening to all types of music trains you to experience the connection between musical styles that can symbolize the tone and rhythm of a character or play.

The selection of music to practice with can be reflective of your own life, as you choose a song associated with heartbreak or loss, great joy, a traumatic world event, a national anthem, or a theme song. All

theater artists experimenting with the Music Exercise will stimulate creative ideas to consider what can be most evocative of the values being sought and how audiences might react.

Lee Strasberg discussed the role of music in theater and film to establish mood and time period. He emphasized that, for the director, an inventive use of music can establish values, tempo, mark the passage of time, or be used as an off-stage effect to help achieve a vision for the production. In Nikolai Gorchakov's *The Vakhtangov School of Stage Art* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, USSR, undated), Yevgeny Vakhtangov directs his students to write about all the paintings they've studied, what they've read, what they've learned about the old and modern theater, and to devote two or three hours a day to listening to good music. "More than listening," he said, "you absorb it, inhale it, and let it cleanse your thoughts in preparation for the next sensory experience, whether for acting or living."

The connective power of music can function as an actual character or recurring motif that symbolizes the way the world of the production is portrayed. The playwright may include the type of music desired in the stage directions, or the director, with the input of a musical director, may select the music to highlight transitions that feed the drama.

Exercise steps

- To prepare for the exercise, you first practice at home by sitting in a chair with your eyes closed, listening to two different pieces of music for about fifteen or twenty minutes each of any style, genre, or time period initially that stirs your imagination and then which you select for specific parts. After each musical selection, listen to it again, but only in your imagination, for the same amount of time. Note any responses.
- In class, you practice by listening to the first imaginary piece of music, sitting in the chair, eyes closed silently for fifteen or twenty minutes or until the teacher says you should stop. Be aware of any feelings or sensations. Are you weeping, nostalgic, exuberant, bored, giddy, toe tapping, or head bobbing? Do any memories come to mind? Are you transported to another place or time with people that you've not thought about in ages?

- If you have a strong emotional response, add a monologue and let the words be affected by what you're experiencing, paying no attention to the conventional meaning of the memorized line. If you're laughing, speak the lines through the laughter, but you must enunciate clearly and be understood at the same time. Check that your face and body are relaxed.
- When you're finished with the first piece of music, return to Relaxation for a few minutes and switch to the other musical selection. Work with the second one in the exact same way, adding the monologue if it becomes emotional. Upon completion evaluate your experience.
- As you become more adept, you can complicate the exercise by going back and forth between the two pieces of music to see how the monologue changes in tone and meaning. You can eventually get up with your eyes open and move around the room while still hearing the music, saying the lines and adding daily activities. Keep track of what music gave you the strongest responses.

A trap or pitfall for an actor before any audition, rehearsal, performance, or on set is for you to be too social and distracted by other actors, crew, or activities that aren't connected to your work. You can use imaginary music or real music with headphones to stay relaxed and concentrated. Music can assist you during performance, in between scenes, and during transitions as a tool to maintain atmosphere, continuity, and your character's state of mind.

I have provided a Guide containing all types of musical styles, including the commonly ascribed moods, atmospheres, or reactions people associate with that music. Physical and emotional reactions to the music may include fear, love, panic, gaiety, shivers, warmth, depression, or aggression.

Table 4.3 Music Exercise Guide

MUSIC GUIDE®						
Music Genres		Moods				
<i>Rock</i>						
Acid	Sharp/hard	Strung out	Psychedelic		Spasmodic	
Disco	Dance fever		Laser lights		Bell bottoms	
Doo-Wop	1950s cool	Tough guys		Hot rod cars	Fast girls	
Hip-Hop/Rap	Cool/rapid fire	Rhythmic beat		Rhyming burst lyrics	Stylized and suggestive hand and body moves	
Metal	Hard	Driving		Edgy	Heavy	
Oldies	Nostalgic	Lovesick		Dancing	Carefree	
Psychedelic	Flashy/hard/cold/strobe-lit	Druggie-ish		Long hair	Piercing	
Punk	Neo-destructive	Leather		Spiked hair	Jarring	
Rave	Youthful	Ecstatic dancing		Electronic	Club-ish	
Rock 'n' Roll	Freedom	Revolution		Back beat	Electric	
Surfing	Hot-rod cars	Bikinis		Beach party	Ocean and sun tan oil	
Techno	Synth-pop/Trance-like	Digital		Synthesized	Robotic	

Table 4.3 (Continued)

Avant Garde	Atonal	Jerky/formless	Elemental	Challenging
Big Band	Smooth/upbeat	Synchronized	Swinging	Conventional
Blues	Spiritual	Steamy/Believing	Rhythmic/Working	Soulful
Christmas	Nostalgic	Cheery	Sentimental	
Church/Religious/Gospel	Holy/hymnal/liturgical	Prayerful/Redemptive	Mysterious	Uplifting
		Rote/Repetitive	Ethnic	Wild/Uplifting
Classical	Elegant	Formal	Structured/Powerful	Staid/Ecstatic
Country/Hillbilly	Poignant and sad	Thigh-slapping	High-stepping	Corny
Drumming	Ancient traditions	Heavy beats	Staccato and rhythmic	Gentle and soft
Folk	Nostalgic	Political	Humanistic	Sensuous
Jazz	Improvisational	Jamming	Cool and hip	
Ragtime/Dixieland/Swing	Rhythmic	Beer hall/Piano Bar	Dancing	
Lullaby	Sleepy	Light	Innocent	Dreamy
Opera	Grand/dramatic	Booming	Sentimental	
Pagan	Dark	Mysterious	Evil	Ritualistic
Square Dance	Country	Wholesome	Swing your partner	
Waltz	Grand/Elegant	Sedate	Formal	Syncopated
<i>World/Cultural</i>				

Afro	Rhythmic	Ancient	Primal
Bossa Nova	Tropical smooth	Sensual	Romantic
Cajun/Zydeco	Dancing	Southern – Creole	Energetic
Gypsy	Cool/fast/swirling	Atonal/disjointed	Mysterious
Irish Traditional	Reels	Exuberant	Boisterous
Polka	Energetic	Folksy	Innocent
Reggae	Up-tempo	Rhythmic and driving	Revolution-ary
	Easy	Spiritual	Druggie-ish
			Repetitive

Actor comment 1

I've always been a musically tuned-in person and the Music Exercise worked like an Emotional Memory switch for me. It was so startling that a heart-thumping event that I hadn't thought much about could suddenly come to mind solely through the Music Exercise. I remembered it like it was yesterday. Almost instantly, I was back in that drab, poorly lit place, crowded and noisy, with its throbbing rhythms, where I experienced a great and wonderful joy, and how it then transformed into an opposite experience because of something else that happened there. Now I can experience both of those emotions through listening to the same piece of imaginary music.

Actor comment 2

I couldn't imagine or hear the music during the exercise or feel any actual physical sensations or emotions from listening to it. My mind was wandering, and I felt frustrated, so I stopped and went back to Relaxation, then continued to try again. I realized how oblivious I am about what I hear and what I don't hear. But I persisted with my song and an actual place from my life came to mind. The music really hit me hard. I was so moved and had a very strong reaction, so I added the monologue. It was by leaps and bounds the best and truest that monologue ever came out. The exercise opened my eyes to working with music and the other senses so intimately.

Actor comment 3

For me music is like a magic potion. If I'm stuck, getting in my head, or freaking out, all I have to do is play the song in my head that connects me to the character, and it brings me right to the place I need to be. I did a lot of work on Sonya in the important final scene of Uncle Vanya. There's a lot going on for her, and in rehearsals I used an Emotional Memory, a Place, an animated Personal Object and different Substitutions. All of this created the layers needed for Sonya in the final moments of the play. But every night the only thing I took into the wings with me was what I called Sonya's song, which popped right into my head, seemingly out of nowhere, the first time we rehearsed the scene. I hadn't heard the song since childhood, and I was pretty surprised that it came to my mind. Every night

before coming back on stage, for the very last scene, I would listen to this song in my head, and it kept me in the moment, concentrating, present, and prepared. For me, the song is like everything we have worked on tied up in a neat little parcel to take with me in my costume's pocket to call upon in times of need.

Practical Use of the Work

Chapter 5

Throughout the *Handbook* I have commented on how a particular aspect of the work or sensitivity can be applied to the rehearsal process, auditioning, or performing. The following discussion isn't intended to be a full how-to description of those activities. Instead, it's a compilation of examples and insights that connect the exercises and give suggestions or guidance on their potential uses at rehearsals, auditions, and while performing.

REHEARSAL PROCESS

During the Rehearsal Process, the cast members become a company, joining together into an alive and functioning unit sharing a creative purpose. The director has already put in a great deal of effort by forming the vision for the script, selecting the cast, scheduling rehearsals, and preparing for them. It's productive for the director to give you the opportunity to contribute your own ideas in order to involve you in defining the character. This process can be advanced by sharing the research done on the play and its biographical, historical, and cultural context. You, on the other hand, must adapt to how the director works, and together you forge ahead in the discovery process.

Rehearsal procedures are structured and scheduled to fit the medium, the type of production, and location, all of which varies between the commercial and noncommercial theater, musicals, TV, and film. Rehearsal time is a luxury, and there isn't usually much of it, unless you have a director with sufficient clout. There are full read-throughs of the script by the entire cast, which can be logistically difficult and expensive. For certain projects you may have zero rehearsal time. Actors who are able to should get together independently, outside of cast rehearsals, to work on their parts. Serious, committed work must be done on your own.

In his Director's Unit, Strasberg detailed an intense rehearsal process patterned after the work of Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, and Meyerhold leading up to the opening. These rehearsal stages listed below are not cast in stone, but have a sequential logic, allowing for the characters and the play to develop. The stages of rehearsal in this sequence are:

- Actors' first reading(s) by themselves.
- Table reading with the entire cast.
- Rehearsing and Blocking (planned movements).
- Scene rehearsals and improvisations as needed.
- Run-throughs.

- Dress Rehearsals.
- Out-of-town openings (like a dress rehearsal or run-through with an audience).
- Opening night.
- Ongoing adjustments.

The first reading should be mainly an exploration without the pressure to perform. Punctuation marks and stage directions for emotions should be crossed out of the script, as was done in The Group Theater rehearsals, so as not to imitate or feign a fake emotion. You should say the lines without inflections or overacting. With classic works, which are frequently performed and well known, the problem of avoiding imitation of the cliché is challenging. The classics also bear the weight of what's collectively known about previous famous performances and their expected pre-programmed pauses, starts, highs, lows, and beloved speeches may cause you to imitate or to be controlled by something other than your emotions.

At a first reading or cold reading, speak from the heart, slowly, simply, directly, and don't think at all about how the words will be said. Strasberg stressed to his students that there should be "no acting" during the first reading. The first reading isn't meant to be a performance with actors emoting changes in tone, intensity, or tempo. How



5.1 Rehearsal of *The Seagull* on the porch of Chekhov's Melikhovo home where he wrote the play, Chekhov International Theater School, Melikhovo, RU.

can the subtleties of voice and delivery be known when you don't yet have the feel of the whole play? At this stage, you don't predetermine when to be louder, slower, angry, aggressive, or submissive. The rhythm of the action is a result of the drama and subtext developing organically.

As you read the play, get ideas and imagine what everyday activities are implied or would seem logical, such as cooking, shaving/make-up, getting dressed, working, cleaning, walking, even if they aren't included in the script. Think about entrances and exits. Is the character coming onstage from the freezing outdoors or escaping some serious off-stage trouble? Does a parallel reality from your own life or an event to substitute come to mind? Note sensory details from the text about characters and settings in your Journal or the margins of the script.

When you get together with your scene partner after having read the entire play on your own, you both sit opposite each other, relaxed and in control, then look down at the script and memorize a line or two, then look up and say the lines to each other without emphasizing any specific words or making points. The lines contain the story and physical actions, but the meaning of the lines emerges from your own feelings and sensations as they develop. Eventually, you get up with your scripts in hand to discover where to move on stage organically. The blocking is a technical element, where behaviors and movements are planned, set, and notated by the actor and director. This process demands time and patience.

Establishing where to move on stage and marking entrances and exits must further the narrative and be justified. Subsequently, whenever you rehearse with a partner on your own without a director, you should have an explicit goal in mind and use improvisation in order to explore an aspect of the character, the theme, a relationship, or pivotal moment in the play. For example, if you're playing a very tense character, doing a slow neck rotation would be a logical behavior to choose and would give the impression of tension. The neck rotation then becomes a chosen mannerism, a gesture, to express the character's tension and relieve your own.

Depending on time constraints, the actors memorize the lines and incorporate the needs and motivations of the characters into their portrayals. Some actors like to memorize the lines at the very beginning of learning a part to get it out of the way. Strasberg told us to wait

until we became more knowledgeable about our characters. Relaxation should always be practiced at home before rehearsals, as well as during rehearsals, on breaks, and between scenes.

Actor comment

I find it very helpful when my scene partner or director is familiar with The Method. Relaxation is key, so I relax at home before the rehearsal. I also rehearse alone, outside the fixed rehearsal time, in order to prepare my own Substitutions or Overalls that I feel are necessary for the scene and character. When I'm in the rehearsal room with my scene partner and the director, I've done all my own prep work and I'm ready to connect and listen. I love using improvisations in the early stages of rehearsal where my scene partner, director, and I can discover the crux of the scene together. When working with people who are not familiar with The Method, I'm not necessarily open with my process. I like to keep secrets and keep the magic in my work. This way I surprise my scene partner and director in ways they didn't expect, instead of laying everything out in the open. I want to give life to my part but there's no good in rehearsing something to death. I've found if I prepare, trust myself, and listen to my scene partner, the moments where everything falls into place happen more often than not.

AUDITIONS

When running an audition, Strasberg told us he spoke to the individual actors specifically in an attempt to elicit reactions and behavior that might shed light on their capabilities. He asked probing and conversational questions such as “What frightens you?”, “What do you hate?”, and “What foods do you like?” These types of questions and their respective responses give the casting director or director a sense of the type of human being you are, along with gauging your ability to supply the emotional, physical, and dramatic values required for the part. You must be engaging in the pressurized circumstance of an audition and bring an element of surprise and spontaneity to set yourself apart.

It's natural to be nervous, with a pounding heart, before an audition. This is where Relaxation can be used to excellent effect, and should always be done beforehand as part of your preparation. The energy

going into being nervous can be redirected creatively to better ensure that you stay concentrated and poised. Auditions can take many forms – a general meeting, performing a monologue, or being taped for a specific part. Approach each situation as an opportunity to use your talent and practice your craft.

To see if you're flexible, a casting director or director might ask you to perform the part in three distinctly different ways, placing the responsibility for finding the behaviors with your own creativity. With no time to prepare for each of the three versions, a technique that can allow you to emotionally and physically change your disposition or frame of mind instantly and believably would be invaluable. If you're confronted with that type of an instruction, knowledge of the exercises is your pot of gold. You can use three different Substitutions with Places, Overalls, Needs, or an Animal Exercise to create instant variations of character values and behaviors which you will be able to truthfully shift into.

To strengthen your auditioning skills, train yourself like a resilient athlete. You must treat your body like a temple and work on yourself physically and spiritually to keep up with the demands of auditioning and performing. Good physical and emotional health improves concentration, memory, willpower, and durability. Preparing for an audition involves arming yourself with information by researching whatever material is given to you and having a clear sense of the subtext and given circumstances. Very often you'll be given little information, or only just segments of the script, known as the "sides." If you get the "sides" beforehand, develop your character's needs and use the Character Guide. Ask how the character is like or not like you, what style of speech is needed, what Substitutions and other exercises you will use to evoke values for your character. Find the three most important moments in the scene to heighten the event and emphasize them. What was your character doing and feeling just before entering the scene? Choosing the exercises to use demands the sharpest instincts and intuitions to evaluate and surmise what the director is after.

Prior to your audition, don't chat with the other actors while waiting to be seen, and keep to yourself, breathe easily, and stay relaxed. When entering the room for the audition, be yourself, be confident, and exude professionalism. Casting directors and directors want to see your personality and may want your opinion and ideas about the part, so be prepared with intelligent answers. Know the material

inside and out, have it totally memorized and pronounce every word correctly. Speak with conviction and don't mumble. Show grace under pressure. During your audition, if the directors or producers are in the room, don't act toward or look at them directly. Casting directors have their preferences on whether you look at them or not during an audition. Most would rather you not address the monologues or scenes toward them. If you're talking to another character in the scene address the lines to the camera person or reader. When alluding to an additional figure, don't put them far off, use the other side of the camera, for example, as a point of concentration. Don't look down the entire time. Nothing is down there. Bring your gaze up to eye level or else you can't be seen.

The director looks for your inner possibilities during an audition in an attempt to get a feel for your range and flexibility. Actors use the exercises to prepare for the audition to best show how well they can fit or adapt to the director's vision of the character and be able to deliver transitions smoothly and believably.

Actor comment 1

When I receive the "sides" for an audition, the first thing I do before I read it is Relaxation. It centers me and allows me to take in the available information without distractions. I research everything I can about the script. I try and figure out my relationships with any secondary characters using a Substitution as my weapon. I get very nervous before auditions, so I keep the breathing and Relaxation going when I leave my house. I memorize the lines perfectly so that I have one less thing to worry about. I find that, almost always, I've been chosen to read for a role because I'm close to the character in nature. For most auditions, I don't have to use an intense preparation to get to the character because I can simply use myself. I rarely do an emotional memory or any type of overall unless it's a very specific type of scene. Substitution is consistently reliable for me because often I'll be auditioning with a reader who isn't an actor. This can be really frustrating. I'm not getting anything back from the other person and giving so much of myself. However, with the use of Substitution, I can play off of the person easily because I've practiced it so many times before and know its value.

Actor comment 2

An actor comes to an audition with bold and specific choices, but auditions are often unpredictable, and in the room I must be prepared to alter, change, and re-direct any choices. For example, I once auditioned for a character who was sitting on a couch hearing critical news about his mother's health. After performing the scene, the director asked to hear the same speech but, this time, he told me that my character was at the peak of a nervous breakdown and no longer just sitting on a couch but also folding laundry and organizing the room. I tried an emotional memory, and it worked like a charm. It can be jarring to make changes to a performance on command, but that's precisely what is required of an actor.

PERFORMANCE

Your preparation for a role should become a matter of daily practice leading up to performance. Relaxation should be practiced before you arrive at the theater or set. Prior to each performance, review the exercises that you've consciously chosen and worked on. Make sure everything you planned is clear in your mind and ready to be revealed at your command and continue Relaxation.

In performance, concentration and relaxation combine to give you a firm footing in each present moment. You use exercises to maintain concentration and focus when off-stage or between scenes preparing for your next entrance.

Losing your concentration in class while doing an exercise, scene, or monologue will happen, and you must learn from this as described throughout the *Handbook*. In an audition or in performance, more is at stake. Lapses in concentration will happen less and less often as you progress. What will grow is your poise, technique and ability to gracefully handle the unexpected.

Aside from forgetting lines, potential disasters await the distracted actor. Your preparation for adapting to those moments is part of your craft learned through the exercise work for developing concentration and creativity. Distractions or breaks in the flow of the play that aren't the actor's fault include other actors missing their cues or problems with the set, such as a door, or drawer being stuck, or a prop that goes missing. Other distractions may come from a loud noise outside of the theater or backstage. Perhaps the most startling distractions

come from the audience itself in the form of cellphones ringing, candy wrappers crinkling, or coughing.

In certain plays the audience is purposely and actively engaged, and there is an implicit invitation for impromptu audience participation, and this has to be invisibly and spontaneously woven into the flow as the work proceeds. An actor who looks directly at audience members is more likely to have an audience member react or say something.

In a play where the cast members came off-stage and into the audience, as told by Strasberg in class, a well-known theater person was in an aisle seat and happened to be close friends with the actor coming into the audience. As that actor walked by, the friend mischievously said “hello,” badly throwing the actor off of their stride, revealing that the actor did not know how to regain control over the role.

For all these distractions, your most important goal is to not come out of character or be visibly shocked. Act how the character would act. If it's a loud noise or other distraction, it's not believable to completely ignore it, and you must be creative about acknowledging the distraction with a look, shrug of the shoulders, or improvised word, all while staying in character and continuing on. The actor can be flustered by the unexpected. Being cool and nimble with the distraction and smoothly continuing with the play is essential and is an art unto itself. The exercises are the lifelines to reel yourself back into the moment when the distraction occurs.

Actor comment

Doing Relaxation and the exercises I've worked on in preparation for the performance has proven to be a reliable way of getting into the character's inner life and the moment before my first line is said. For each rehearsal I worked on at least three specific sensory exercises with substitutions to allow the exploration to unfold. For instance, the scene between the brothers in O'Neil's Long Day's Journey into Night required a strong sensation of a respiratory sickness like tuberculosis. Using that illness as my Overall heightened my awareness of the coughing, fatigue and congestion which flavored my speech and physical behavior.



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Developing the Actor's Presence

Chapter 6

The Evolution Exercise and the Song and Dance Exercise develop your stage presence, increase your physical and emotional self-awareness, and strengthen your concentration to handle the many pressures of performing.

The Evolution Exercise, which I also call “Dance the Song of Your Life,” requires you to make up interpretive dance movements to an inspiring piece of classical music at every stage of your life. Becoming more physically expressive contributes to a positive overall sense of yourself and empowers you as a person and artist.

The two part Song and Dance, was initially developed and taught by Strasberg as a diagnostic tool to deal with singers and dancers who were overly tied to their strong habits. The results were startling, and he began teaching the exercise to all of his students. The exercise helps uncover habits and tests your ability to break them, and it can also teach you to focus on more than one thing at a time while following your own commands.

EXERCISE DESCRIPTIONS

Evolution Exercise (“Dance the Song of Your Life”)

About the exercise

The Evolution Exercise can increase your vitality and energy levels by requiring you to invent spontaneous movements to express feelings and emotions. The reason why I also call this exercise “Dance the Song of Your Life” is that you’re being subjected to the power of memory to re-capture your feeling at every age from the vantage point of who you are now. You can also work on characters in the same way, imagining the trajectory of their lives. This imagination exercise takes at least an hour. The preparation is to have begun your training by learning Sense Memory in order to expand your sensory life and experiences.

The exercise can be just as emotional when observing it as doing it, because you can see hidden qualities and sensitivities about a person. You can see who is locked up and where they hold their tension. It’s interesting to watch the struggles people have transitioning from one stage of life to another. If you get a chance to observe this exercise, you can test your own empathy and observe who touched you and why.

Each segment of your life will either precede your current age (for which you imagine and recollect back), be your current age, or be in the future – when you’re older and for which you must imagine forward. Be aware of what you’re experiencing physically and



6.1 Evolution Exercise (“Dance the Song of Your Life”), Accademia Zero Nove, Milan, IT.

emotionally during each stage. You can interact silently with the other actors if the impulse arises, but no talking, humming, grunting, or singing is permitted except during the first stages where infant sounds are permitted.

For this exercise you make up a set of expressive movements to the orchestral version of Bizet’s *Carmen*. Any piece of dramatic music of your choosing can be used. Each segment of music will correspond to a phase or age period of your life. You’re the choreographer of the dance. Make gestures using your arms and legs and get the whole body involved. Bend your knees, move your hips, and make contact with parts of the body that may be difficult for you to activate. Don’t worry about what you look like. You don’t have to be a good dancer. Let the music move you. There’s no aesthetic to be concerned with.

- Begin by lying down comfortably on a mat or on the ground with your eyes closed.
- The teacher (or you at home) will start and stop the music for each age or phase of your life, however long that piece of music lasts, which is usually a few minutes.
- In class, while resting between segments, the teacher can read the description of each phase before playing the next piece of music to remind you how to proceed.



6.2 Evolution Exercise ("Dance the Song of Your Life"), Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU. Photo by Vasily Shevchenko.

- If you become static and don't involve your whole body, which often happens, I remind you to make it a dance and get out of your head.

The stages of life include:

Inside your mother's womb – You're safe and secure, floating, stretching, and moving. You may hear muted sounds and sense variations in light. All your needs are taken care of, or maybe there was stress. Explore those feelings, be aware of them, and move around in the fetal position. Try and remember what it felt like to be in your mother's womb and use the music to move and guide you.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Being born, Infant/Baby – This can be a wondrous process of movement and discovery. There can be struggle and effort. Make noises, wail, laugh, or cry. You may feel the colder air as you are born, or the sense of being cleaned or swaddled. Are you bewildered? How do your arms and legs move? When do your eyes open and how? You will hear many sounds for the first time and see bright lights. Try to remember what it felt like to be a newborn baby and move to the music with those feelings. Make it a dance and respond with the whole body.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Toddler (Ages 1–3) – You're crawling, nursing, eating with your hands, gurgling, smiling, loving, crying, trying to walk and falling, speaking gibberish, talking. Also acknowledge the stressful aspects of life, such as boundaries being learned and needs that aren't met or other discomforts. Use the senses to explore this time of your life and dance those feelings.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Your earliest school years (Ages 4–6) – Here you're in pre-school or kindergarten. Both at school and at home, you learn to play, you're inquisitive, interact, laugh, run, paint, make music, listen to stories, learn to read, be without your parents, have lunch and snacks, make friends or feel left out, have tantrums, watch TV. Think about how you felt as a child of that age. Were you scared, carefree, or angry? Try to recall what it was like back then and move to the music, making up a dance to those feelings.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Elementary school (Ages 6–10) – Big changes take place at this age. Were you terrified on the first day of school or were you excited? Were you shy and inhibited or outgoing and inquisitive, wild or possibly the troublemaker? Did you make friends easily or were you a loner? See the school itself, the teachers, and the other kids. Have the feeling of being there and use the senses and your whole body to reveal those feelings in any way they come out. The movements are expressed organically and originate from your own impulses.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Middle school (Ages 10–14) – This is usually a tumultuous time as your hormones begin to rage. You are trying to fit in at school, with all the anxiety that produces. Try to remember how you felt. Were you painfully shy, outgoing, aggressive, a bully, prudish, scared, clumsy, arrogant, popular, average, or athletic? How did your parents relate to you and were there conflicts and pressures or engaging adolescent activities? Let the music inspire you and find the movement inside yourself that best expresses what you felt at that time of your life. Be sure to make it a dance, not a mental image.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

High school years (Ages 14–18) – You can pick a particular year to make it more specific. Were you extroverted or introverted? Think about

friends, school, crushes, worries, rebelliousness, sports, work, physical vanity, disappointments, parental conflicts, wanting to be independent, all of which are part of the process of growing up. Did you fall in love? What were your future educational considerations? Dance your remembered feelings from those formative years.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Late teens–early twenties – The possibilities of your life are opening up – or they are not – and you're deciding what to do with your future. High school is over, and decisions must be made. How do you deal with college, friends, love, and sexual relationships, religion, aging parents, dying grandparents, hobbies, careers, living in new places on your own, money worries, health, as well as all the frustrations and heartbreaks that are part of normal life?

When the music stops, lay down, relax, and breathe.

Mid-twenties and thirties – If you haven't reached this age yet, try and envision it, and dance to the music, expressing how you intend your life to be then. In this age segment, you're considering career, family, health, financial concerns, success, and dissatisfactions. Did you meet the love of your life? Try to envision that person. If you want children, create them, see them, and touch them. Are you acknowledged in your chosen career? Perhaps you received an award. See that happen in your mind's eye. It takes place in your imagination, so anything is possible. Use the feelings to inspire your movements to the music.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Forties and fifties – You're contemplating middle age and the joys, pleasures, and conflicts associated with that in your mind. Professional developments, religion and spirituality, triumphs and failure, love life, children and their successes and struggles, extended families, homes, vacations, recreation, physical condition, passions. Have you made it to Broadway or Hollywood? Let the responses wash over you as you move and make up a dance to the music.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Sixties and seventies – How do you envision your life to be at this age? Your children are grown up. There may be grandchildren or no children at all, so investigate the feelings associated with that. Your dreams may or may not have come true. You may be planning

for or dreading retirement. Are you healthy or ill? Maybe friends begin to die more often. It's all under your control, and this is part of the beauty of the exercise. Let yourself have any feelings that transpire and express them through the dance movements.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Old age (Eighties, nineties, and beyond) – Make up a dance of what your life has come to, how you want to be in your old age, your health and outlook. What new discoveries and wisdom have you gained? Dance the aches and pains, loves, joys, friends of all ages, alive and dead. Have you continued to work? Are you held in high regard in your field? Are you able, spry, and proud? Do you feel well-loved? Are you joyful, grumpy, or alone? Are you prepared for whatever occurs next? Let those feelings come to the surface through the dance.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Your own death – What do you want that to be like? In your sleep? With loved ones at your side, saying good-bye to everyone? Telling jokes and kidding right to the end? Mystical or religious? On stage? Try not to dwell on your fears of it, if possible. Create a dance for this 'undiscovered country' using your own unique feelings of what you envision: peacefulness, a sense of fulfillment, beautiful timelessness, or terrifying hell?

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

Life after death – Do you have a conception of life after death, or do you think it's all nothingness? Make up a dance of nothingness, if that is how you feel. Is it a religious or cosmic experience? Let the music direct you in the dance. Is there even consciousness? Can you see light, colors, or hear sounds? Is it beautiful or fearful? Will you see everyone you ever knew? You can imagine people whom you loved that died. Fill yourself up with the feelings and make up a dance to the music.

When the music stops, lay down, rest, relax, and breathe.

- Remain lying down and quiet after the exercise and take some time to digest the experience.
- Think about which ages were more powerfully evocative for you. Did you experience new interpretations of your past? Were you surprised by buried memories or feelings?

- Did you dance more freely than you thought you would? Did you feel inhibited or self-conscious at certain ages?
- Remember what ages or movements triggered certain sensations, events, places, people, or emotional memories. The results from this and the other exercises is what Strasberg told his actors was called the “raw material” for your work.

After resting for a few minutes, I have the actors slowly get up and, without speaking, gather in a circle. I play a great piece of contemporary dance music that everyone knows and loves, and then one person at a time goes into the center and dances alone as everyone in the circle celebrates them and their life for a few minutes. That actor then chooses the next person to dance in the center, until everyone has been celebrated. The experience is indescribably exhilarating.

It takes more effort to do the exercise alone, but it's well worth it. In class you have the expertise of the teacher and inspiration from the shared experience of being with the other actors, and this encourages everyone to rise to the moment.

As the teacher I'm always amazed at how moving and powerful it is to watch actors allow themselves to become more vulnerable. It's of particular interest to watch those who tend not to be physical in their acting and are restrained in their behavior awaken to impulses in themselves that take them to the next level. Their movements and gestures are fuller and more expressive than in their lives.

The exercise can be done at any time during the training. I teach the Evolution Exercise at the end of a weeklong Master Class, where the actors have begun to comprehend what working through the senses entails as a means of molding themselves into committed artists. When you share an emotional experience in class, it promotes a sense of camaraderie among the group, which helps to facilitate a common artistic goal.

Actor comment 1

Moving abstractly without forethought and dancing as myself at each stage of my life from birth to after death to the music was a major shock to my system. I'm not big into dancing, and I never experienced anything so full of feeling before. I moved with surprising freedom and experienced conflicting emotions in my responses to the music that corresponded to each age. I felt so inspired, and knowing all the actors were experiencing



6.3 Evolution Exercise (“Dance the Song of Your Life”), Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU. Photo by Vasily Shevchenko.

the same thing made it even more intimate. I had an epiphany when I realized how every character I work on in the future can be put through a whole lifespan in my imagination. A huge stream of faith has entered my heart about how I can approach a character by becoming more physically, emotionally, and spiritually connected to them and myself.

Actor comment 2

The exercise felt like a roller-coaster ride. Moving my body in sync with my feelings to the music through each period of my life was surreal, and like nothing I'd ever experienced before, especially dancing to classical music as a teenager. I was very inhibited back then, and it was liberating to move spontaneously. I felt nauseous during the teenage years, and the dying part was emotional but not fearful because of being able to say good-bye to people. By the end, I felt liberated without judgments and it made me look forward to the rest of my life.

Actor comment 3

The rhythm of the music distracted me from the content at the beginning. I don't feel like I'm a good dancer, so it was challenging. Then I realized it was not about the dance, but

more about feelings, and I was able to let go more than usual. The middle and end were most powerful. Being born was hard to imagine, my youth was so full of ups and downs, and in the future I have more of an idea of who I might want to be.

Song and Dance Exercise

About the exercise

Lee Strasberg told us that he designed the Song and Dance Exercise especially for singers and dancers as a way of identifying and breaking their strongly ingrained habits and patterns, many of which were formed in their voices and movements as a result of repetitive drilling and practice. An aesthetic emerges from that behavior which becomes habitual and limits range and creativity and can lead to being type-cast. Strasberg began teaching the exercise to all of his students. Song and Dance gives us a way to recognize and unlock habits for a fuller expressiveness, and practicing it improves the ability to follow your own commands.

Just becoming more aware of a habit is a change agent. Strasberg preached that when habits are controlling you, they produce forms of expression that are conventional and clichéd. He believed in the absolute necessity of breaking your own physical, mental, and verbal habits that inhibit your truthful responses and color your actions and behavior. It can be difficult for you to recognize your own mannerisms and habits. The teacher is there to point them out. They may be verbal habits, breathing patterns, facial or body tics. The challenge is to remember all the different commands demanded by the exercise and implement them at the same time, which addresses the ability to concentrate at will, break your habits, and take control.

You perform the two parts of the exercise alone, in front of the class, and guided by the teacher. Every actor will do the same exercise, and the other actors in class act as the audience, and this presence is essential and basically mimics conditions experienced when acting for the public. You will obviously not have this same sense of pressure when working at home.

Part 1 – Song

Exercise steps

- Pick a simple song like “Happy Birthday,” or a nursery rhyme, and one that’s indelibly imprinted in your brain and that you know by heart.

- Stand alone on stage in front of the whole class with your eyes open and your feet hip distance apart. Don't move from the neck down. Shoulders are relaxed, face is unfurled, and you breathe easily with your hands at your sides. Make sure your fingers aren't in a clenched fist. Stretch them out and relax them if they feel tense.
- Look at the people in the room and let them affect you. Don't look away from them or look down. Strasberg told us that when you look down, you bury yourself, but if you look up, it's as if you're searching and begging for divine assistance.
- You must acknowledge how you feel both physically and emotionally in that moment, as this cultivates an awareness of yourself. You have to be aware of this and silently articulate it. Strasberg told us that you can't say you don't know how you feel. You must evaluate your state of mind as you do during Relaxation. Impulses will arise that you must deal with.
- Do you want to run and hide, or laugh or cry hysterically? Do you feel exhilarated up there? Are you hyperventilating and feeling faint? If you want to cry or laugh or whatever comes up at the moment, don't stifle it. Try to relax and breathe slowly.
- Be aware if you're moving unconsciously, such as swaying or rubbing your fingers together.
- When you're ready or when the teacher asks you to begin, sing one syllable at a time of the simple song for three or four seconds for each syllable while maintaining eye contact with someone in the audience.
- Using a strong, committed, resonate voice, begin to do the song maintaining the melody, "HAAAAP . . . PEEEEE . . . BIRTHH . . ." Be loud and give each syllable an equal amount of emphasis and control the length of time taking at least one full breath in between each syllable.
- The most common mistake is not taking a few breaths in between the syllables. You use the breath to ensure that your sound is powerful. Be focused and don't rush. Don't let the sound get stuck in your throat or be weak in tone at the end of a syllable. Keep the power throughout.
- The song can't be expressed in a monotone with no changes in pitch, which is a difficult thing to include and remember.

- Look at different people during the exercise. Continue for each subsequent syllable in the song. It can take a few minutes to get through the whole song. The audience is often very active with laughing and other responses. When you finish the song, take a few moments and get ready for the second part of the exercise.

Part 2 – Dance

Exercise steps

- Begin making one spontaneous and repetitive dance-type movement. Don't worry about how the movement looks, just keep repeating it. Hopping, jumping, and dance or work-out moves can be used. Get a solid rhythm going and maintain it.
- When the movement is established, use the same song, but add a short burst of sharp staccato syllables from the song "HAP! . . . PEE! . . . BIRTHH!" The syllables are in the same order as in the song, but the timing is random for breaking up the words. There's no melody required. Again, the voice must be strong, resonant, and committed. The syllables can be linked together, but grouped arbitrarily with words chopped up. Make the repetitive movement and sound at the same time, but remember that they don't have to be in sync with each other.
- Keep going until the teacher asks you to switch to another repetitive dance movement, and then you continue with the short, staccato, broken-up words. The teacher points out any problems with expression or concentration.

When you are onstage you must remember all the physical and emotional elements of the part, in addition to memorizing the lines. The Song and Dance Exercise will help you carry out these numerous tasks. The concentration is divided and compartmentalized. It's common to lose your focus and resort to imitating what you've done before. Unbroken and dominant habits will sneak themselves into your work too easily. Song and Dance also strengthens your resolve and concentration by subjecting you to the public pressure of an audience.

Actor comment 1

During the Song and Dance, when I stood alone on stage in front of everybody, my heart was beating as if it would explode. I began to sweat before I even started the exercise. I had no character to hide behind. It was just me up there, feeling very vulnerable. I remember breathing so deeply, practically

hyperventilating, and I felt extremely embarrassed looking at people's faces. My fingers were tingling. I blushed. I felt slightly dizzy. I tried to concentrate on the simple one-syllable sounds of the song. I couldn't keep the tune or break the habit of the word patterns. When I started the dance part, I couldn't even remember the words to "Happy Birthday." I was laughing and crying. It felt surreal. I realized how disconnected I am from my body, and that I couldn't do any of the things I told myself to do because I was so tense and affected by the pressure of the audience. I couldn't control my thoughts and actions.

Actor comment 2

Song and Dance helped me to understand more about myself. It taught me how to handle doing more than one task at a time, such as must be done in a scene like having to remember the lines, the blocking, and the action all at once. It was hard for me to establish how I felt emotionally at the start of the exercise, because I put on a smiling face to the world and don't really show my true feelings. Letting my own truthful impulses come out felt terrifying and, at the same time, extremely gratifying. I became acutely aware of my physical mannerisms and realized how they get in my way. Afterwards, I felt energized yet calm.



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Directing and Teaching

Chapter 7

Throughout the *Handbook* I've pointed out where the work of directors and teachers directly interconnect with learning and using The Method Exercises. There's a similarity in the roles of director and teacher: both are trying to improve the actors' ability to deliver exactly and reliably what the part calls for.

It is of significant value for the actor to understand as much as possible about directing and teaching. Actors are their own directors during training and through their whole careers when they're rehearsing with their scene partners or on their own. Actors are their own teachers as they choose exercises and evaluate their work. In addition, many actors have expanded their careers to include teaching and directing.

DIRECTING AND THE METHOD

Lee Strasberg's work, as it evolved from the ideas and philosophies of Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold and others was put into practice front and center on the active New York City stage with the iconic productions of The Group Theater (1931–1940). The Group Theater worked and experimented with the Stanislavski system, using its tremendous vitality and dynamism to great acclaim, and they left an indelible mark on the American theater. The plays mounted by The Group Theater mirrored the social and political upheaval of the 1930s from a progressive, political perspective. They broke theatrical ground and introduced new playwrights, actors, and directors educating and inspiring audiences by changing and influencing people's hearts and minds. The Group Theater production of *Men in White* (1933) written by Sidney Kingsley and directed by Lee Strasberg won a Pulitzer Prize.

Lee Strasberg directed or co-directed over twenty plays, always honing his skills as a master teacher and director. He experienced success and failure, and he staged productions in different styles and genres, copying and building on the work of directors who influenced him, but also adding his own stamp and originality. Strasberg told us that he learned more from his failures, and he spoke of how important it is to rectify your mistakes or you'll have a faulty technique.

After The Group Theater disbanded, Strasberg furthered the connection between The Method and directing with his founding of the Director's Unit at the Actors Studio in New York City in 1960. Strasberg systemized and formalized how The Method Exercises could contribute to the directing process. He instituted and taught a Director's Unit at the Lee Strasberg Theater and Film Institute in New York and Los Angeles until his death in 1982, and this work continues to be taught at the Institute.



7.1 The Group Theater, 1936. Courtesy Photofest. Shown back row, from left: Art Smith, Walter Fried, Sanford Meisner, Ruth Nelson, Lee J. Cobb, Lief Erickson, Roman Bohner, Morris Carnovsky, Lee Strasberg, Kermit Bloomgarden; middle row: Luther Adler, Phoebe Brand, Eleanor Lynn, Harold Clurman, Frances Farmer, Robert Lewis, Elia Kazan; seated in front: Irwin Shaw.



7.2 Lee Strasberg (seated in front in center aisle) and second to his right is James Dean at the Actors Studio, 1955, New York. Dennis Stock Photographer. Courtesy of Magnum Photos.

The creating of a system for directors to apply The Method was groundbreaking in America. There have been books about directing by accomplished directors addressing their own technique and what they did or didn't do in any of their productions. Much of the material may be excellent and inspirational, or it may demonstrate creative decisions. However, it doesn't constitute a technique for directing. Knowing the highlights of what someone else did doesn't provide a repeatable procedure or process to follow for those who want to learn the craft. Lee Strasberg's teachings demonstrate how The Method can interface with each director's own artistry and styles.

The Lee Strasberg Notes contains a chapter on "Directing and The Method," which presents the edited transcripts of Lee Strasberg discussing specific directors and how their work reflected Method sensibilities. That material is highly insightful. Strasberg in his Director's Unit would urge directors to equip themselves by learning and practicing The Method Exercises. Strasberg added that history shows that the best directors often come from an acting background.

A driving sense of purpose is essential for high achievement as an artist. This can be gained through learning and practicing the exercises, which will shape your personal aesthetic and ingenuity. You present a broader, more sophisticated view of the world, which feeds your directing choices and your soul. The exercises propel you into thought and action, not just static images or visualizations in the mind.

Directors need to see all their efforts coalesce to reveal the event clearly and dramatically. Our training helps the director unearth the character's psychology to discover what types of behavior would be suitable in keeping with the intent of the playwright.

Strasberg told us that it's essential for the director to know every conceivable aspect of the production by undertaking meticulous research regarding the story, its themes, historical context, place, style, and the psychology of every character. It must be crystal clear to the director what the author is trying to say to the world with his work. Knowledge of The Method Exercises enables the director to increase their powers of observation by experiencing the place and sensory atmosphere of each scene. The director chooses what they believe will contribute to the heightening of emotions consistent with the given circumstances, character spines, logic, era, and milieu of the production. Utilizing the exercises can make an emotional and physical connection and intensify the drama.

Not every actor or audience member has the same intellectual capacity to grasp meanings and metaphors, and it's the director's job to know clearly what those meanings are and communicate them to each actor. What will always be needed by the director is an eternal spring of creative discoveries, intuitions, and ideas that can contribute power to the production.

A director should have knowledge of all styles of theater. Directing in different genres and invoking a wide range of stories with various rhythms and tones strengthens your flexibility. Your vision and cultural statement must incorporate the varying styles of staging, language, imagination, and behaviors, whether the theatrical style is Naturalism, Classical, Expressionism, Realism, Epic, Absurdism, Modernism, Postmodernism, or Theater of Cruelty. You want to be able to go from one to the other in the same way you may go from comedic to tragic.

The Method works equally well for any style of theater. Sometimes it's wrongly assumed that because The Method is humanistic in its approach it's most associated with Naturalism or Realism.

The exercises that functioned well will become part of your repertoire to inspire a specific quality or reality in any style of theater. Strasberg would ask us to go further than ordinary reality, emphasizing that the stage isn't life, it's bigger than life, meaning that the acting cannot be casual or natural but should be theatrical. We need a heightened reality on the stage to connect emotionally with the audience. The energy and emotions can be intensified by the sensory work that makes for a more expressive instrument and creates a compelling reality.

By becoming more responsive and sensorially aware, the director is better able to digest the given circumstances, surmise subtext and beats where dramatic shifts in energy, pacing, or tempo occur, and use it to move the story along.

The various Guides provided here will aid the director in exploring character personalities and behaviors, as well as set design and musical choices. The director is the primary force of the production, and should provide literary, cultural, and artistic insights to the actors, illuminating the written material. Directors can actually fill out the Character Guide for each character and use any information available from the script, the playwright's notes, and stage directions. That information will give you a clear and accurate sense of the characters in light of the author's given circumstances.

Strasberg told his Directors Unit that the set is not a mere background for the eye, but the foundation upon which the play is launched, and it can make or break a production. The Painting, Private Moment for the Character, and Place Exercises can provide ideas for envisioning characters and where the action will take place in terms of each specific sensory detail – place and decor, inside/outside views, weather, lighting, sounds, and music. A work of art can be used for inspiration in establishing the atmosphere, historic and cultural contexts, set, lighting, and costume design. Selecting an artwork to use in the Painting Exercise will give you ideas to determine how the staging and blocking of the actors will occur. Your idea of the set must embody and support your vision for the play.

Strasberg taught us that the master painters offer the director infinite opportunities to use lighting creatively. Observing the work of Goya, Rembrandt, and Giotto teach us lighting techniques and effect. The Impressionists were great innovators in using the senses to convey atmosphere and emotions. For example, in their work, lighting is integrated with the emotional and physical reality of each moment, enhancing the drama, facilitating changes in time, and defining spaces on stage and off. Learning how light illuminates your production is aided by paintings, studying sculptures, tapestries, ceramics, and photographs from different cultures and periods in history.

The Music Exercise can help create the atmosphere or mood and set the tone and psychological intensity for the production. It can be used to emphasize action, intimacy, the passage of time, the season, herald and foreshadow events, or be used to repeat a theme or as background. Music adds meaning and is deeply ingrained in our lives – emotionally, spiritually, and physically. We compose and play music, dance, listen, sing, pray, and react to it in innumerable ways.

For directors, whether their cast is Method-trained or not, the Relaxation or other exercises help the actors enter into the creative mood. The exercises provide a concrete way for the director to explore and solve problems when they arise.

Through precise and detailed exploration of each sense, the director can communicate with the actors to mold individual performances and scenes into a cohesive, moving production. For example, by practicing a Place Exercise, the director can create the style, look, and feel of things through each sense and help actors respond to it. The

Substitution Exercise can help identify character personalities and their psychology, emotions, and behavior.

The Emotional Memory Exercise, in the director's hands, can provide a powerful jolt of recognition and inspiration for actors rehearsing their parts. The director should be knowledgeable about this exercise and how it works to get actors to go deeper emotionally, if needed. An Emotional Memory can help you form the context for your interpretation of the script.

The Animal Exercise can transform a character's personality and help define how they interact with others. The exercise will awaken the senses to the deep connections and associations humans have with animals. Reference can be made to *The Animal Exercise Guide* in Chapter Four for ideas to develop the character's physicality, non-verbal expression of emotion, or vocal qualities. For example, in Tennessee Williams's *Cat on Hot Tin Roof*, the author's note for Big Mama describes her as huffing and puffing like an old "bulldog," short, stout, and somewhat breathless most of the time and Maggie is cat-like. In Chekhov's *The Bear*, Smirnov in his verbal jousting with Popova describes women, in their souls, as "crocodiles" or perhaps "reptiles," and in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom is an "ass."

The Need Exercise can be invaluable for the director to see how the actors interact with each other. Actors open up to physical and emotional possibilities for their characters' motivations, behaviors, and transitions. The exercise establishes the characters' needs within the subtext of the story, and these become building blocks for directors.

Harold Clurman, in his book *On Acting*, recounts a classic story that highlights the idea of the importance of vision for a production. The situation described is in the seventeenth-century salon of playwright Jean Racine, who is described as being in an elated frame of mind. Racine is asked by a guest why he is so elated, and Racine responds, with classic French aristocratic wit, that he is elated because he's just finished his newest play. In the midst of courtly approbation, Racine adds that all he now has to do is write the dialogue.

Insights and a practical grasp of spines reveal human archetypes – be they villain, mother, hero, scapegoat, fool, or magician available to the director for character development. Distilling a character can be imagined and created by deciding on a concise spine for each character and the entire production.

Clurman was masterly in capturing the essence of any production by finding the spine. The wording and images reflect Clurman's Method approach, and they have an artful brevity, beauty, and poignancy. Clurman describes each of the character's inner needs in his notes. His one-line characterizations use psychology and poetic imagery to create the character's spine. Finding and defining the inner content of the story is the director's work. The staging of the production flows from this process.

Depending upon each individual's ability or openness to working with The Method, knowing the exercises is a pathway to communicate clearly to motivate actors and help them overcome obstacles. Directors must be sensitive and give great care to the way they talk to actors, unlike the director who says "go and relax," without suggesting how to help the actor do it. If the director tells an actor to act angry, this is a limiting direction, as it relies on only one emotional note. If the actor knows in advance that the director wants anger, it will likely stifle the actor and move him toward a mechanical, phony expression of anger. The clichés of anger, such as yelling, banging a table, punching the wall, or glaring glances, can be even worse, because using the cliché sets up a style of acting that can permeate the whole production and spawn disinterest and distrust from the audience.

Directors can get good results by asking actors to try using their own lives and experiences to create the desired value. Strasberg advised that directors must get the actors to become alive on the stage and not just make believe or fake things, but to think and to really feel. You can't teach an actor the exercises while in production, but you can light a fire in their imaginations by asking them guiding questions to activate the senses and emotions.

There may be a time when the director might ask the actor, "Imagine if your long-lost lover who broke your heart was standing in front of you right now?" or "Describe how you feel toward the person who gave you your greatest success?" The question is geared to evoking the actual sensations you're seeking, which is the point of The Method Exercises. Even if the actors don't know The Method way of working, exercises can be suggested that might improve their performances.

It is wise for directors to encourage actors to share their insights as they search for the truth and meaning of the play. The director should provide a safe environment in which actors feel they can experiment.

Shared knowledge of the exercises in the *Handbook* creates a common ground, and the likely result is a more productive exchange of ideas, in which solutions to problems can be discovered. It's up to the director to recognize when an actor can contribute certain values to the play, and the director might suggest adjustments that will help his actors nurture those values. It's the unexpected that makes a performance great and the director must allow for the contributions of the actors.

When the director encounters an actor's mannerism or habits taking over, and the actor is doing things completely unconsciously, the director should intervene and be vigilant in addressing that problem. For example, when actors are oblivious of looking down or crossing their arms, jiggling their fingers, touching their hair, swaying, sighing, pacing, or any other habitual behavior, it falls on the director to address it. The director explains why the actor must be free of habits that can interfere with the expression of the needs and spine of the character. Since the habit, by definition, is unconscious, it works directly against the goals of The Method, which promotes consciously chosen behavior that fits the role. Why should the character be limited by the actor's own habits?

When the actor's arms are crossed, unconsciously, it may be a problem if they're locked in that fixed position most of the time. Impulses may be thwarted. The hands and arms are expressive tools for an actor, and if they're always crossed and static, they're not available for other activities. Even when the arm-crossing is a specific choice for the character, if it's done too often, the meaning of the gesture is lost. To me, the actor crossing his arms is silently conveying aloofness, arrogance, being closed off, showing an inaccessibility – saying, by deed, stay away. In life we do cross our arms now and then – it's a comfortable position, and it may also be communicating something standoffish. It's fine to do onstage occasionally, unless it becomes a mannerism or an indication of clichéd behavior repeated unconsciously.

One of the problems with habits for film or television actors is the degree of magnification. While swaying back and forth or standing with arms crossed may be visible on stage, certain, smaller habitual behaviors such as facial expressions or tics may not be. However, on screen, in close-up shots, more is revealed, and the elimination of these habits should be dealt with, not only for how it might look or might distract an audience, but also for how it can thwart an actor's natural expressiveness.

When actors are first made aware of a habit, they usually resist accepting the fact that they actually even have it. Eventually, they're made to realize it, but it often takes the other actors to confirm, that, yes, they are always doing it. Invariably, they're shocked, and, later, astonished at the freeing effect that arises when the habit is broken. A sense of accomplishment and confidence is earned by getting one's habits under control. The longer you've had the habit, the longer it will take to eliminate it. Commenting on actors' habits is not a personal criticism, but help for them to grow as artists.

By applying the exercises, the director can form a rich tapestry of images and ideas to inspire themselves, the actors, and the entire production.

Director comment

Directing can't be a pasteurized process, in which all actors receive the same command. What works perfectly fine for one actor might be less effective for another. Throughout rehearsals I perceive the sensibilities each actor possesses, and I start personalizing the approach to each, using my knowledge of the Sense and Emotional Memory work. It's like back in class, where each actor is at different stages of learning the Method. One actor will be working on an Overall, while someone else will be working on a Smell or a Song. As director, my goal is to reach a certain level of emotion in each scene, and to get the full potential out of each actor. It isn't about starting or winning a battle with them or imposing a system like The Method or trying to stop an actor wanting to follow his or her own ideas. If an actor has their own process to create what the scene needs, wonderful. I do my best not to interfere.

On the other hand, if the actor doesn't give me what I need for the scene, I have them try an exercise, such as an Improvisation or a Need, until we're both satisfied with the result. When the actors are trained in The Method, we have a common vocabulary that can be very helpful and time-saving. Some actors might tend to search for problems where there are none and feel like they're not working properly if they're not sweating to achieve a strong final result. I have them do Relaxation and then another exercise to try and achieve what I'm after.

TEACHING THE METHOD

In my teaching, I tell actors what Lee Strasberg continually told his students, which is that they can't stop working on themselves. If you stop working you will regress. Actors must keep tuned, active, consistently honing their craft to rise to a level of excellence and grow as artists. Strasberg's greatest gift and pleasure was as a teacher, nurturing the actor's talent, which he felt was his great responsibility and that we actors must take responsibility for our own talent. He shared his philosophies about art and the creative process with many thousands of actors, directors, and authors, both professional and amateur.

Strasberg rarely missed an opportunity in class to wax poetic, providing fascinating background on theater history and world theatrical figures. I urge my students to become voracious in their pursuit of experience and knowledge of the arts, literature, and especially biography, theater history, and good theater criticism. Their reading should be broad and purposeful. For example, they read not just *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but everything Tennessee Williams wrote. Great novels should be read, where rich dialogue feeds the character's narrative, themes, spines, and transitions by the likes of Tolstoy, Proust, Bronte, Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and all great modern writers.

Teachers must emphasize the need for their students to immerse themselves in all styles of theater and film genres from the world stage and cinema. One starting point is to advise them to watch all Academy Award, Emmy's, Golden Globe, Independent Spirit, Cannes, Sundance and other winners and nominees. Violent movies, where car chases, robotic killers, and gratuitous violence are the principal elements, and there's no intelligent character development or storyline, should be avoided. I have compiled and shared with my students reading lists and suggested plays and films that can facilitate a provocative acting discussion. Art museums should be visited regularly, and contemporary and classical music should be used to enhance an artistic life and broaden tastes. Immersion in the arts is the ultimate adventure residing in a conscious journey during which the actor cultivates the superior parts of their nature, while enriching their spiritual and intellectual life. Students should be keeping track in their Journals of everything they're experiencing sensorially – in life, in class, and in their scene work.

The best way to become a Method Teacher is to take Method Acting classes yourself. You learn the work by practicing the exercises daily and developing discipline, consistency, and commitment, just as your future students must. Becoming more aware of and developing your own sensory life will make what you're teaching clearer and more relatable to your students. Listening to teacher commentary and critiques, and observing how they work with their actors, is also instructive. The *Handbook* is a tool for learning and applying the work, but the exercises discussed within it must be practiced under the guidance of a teacher. It's impossible to learn how to act from a book alone. My purpose isn't to offer a textbook on how to teach acting or how to direct films or plays, but rather to present how The Method Exercises can inform elements of the artistic process and provide sensibilities and insights that can be of use to actors, directors, teachers, and writers.

The *Handbook* does provide detailed instructions, descriptions, and Method Exercise Guides that teachers can use in their own classes or coaching situations. It's also illuminating to observe actors practicing the exercises. By watching carefully, you learn how each student relates to the world sensorially, as well as their level of relaxation, concentration, and capacity for feelings. You observe their strengths and weaknesses and make suggestions or adjustments for variations in exercises to help them move forward.

At the end of an exercise, the teacher leads a conversation that helps the actors to evaluate what worked for them and what they were going for. The actors describe what they experienced emotionally and physically, but they never share personal details, including who said or did what and when. Strasberg told us he didn't want to frustrate actors by having them repeat the exercises over and over if nothing was transpiring. You can tell the actor to return to an exercise at a later time when the senses are more developed.

Giving critiques is an integral part of the relationship between teacher and actor. Engaging with the actors after their scenes and sensory work gives them an opportunity to deal with constructive criticism, good or bad. It's up to the teacher in the class to estimate how to get the best out of an actor. It may be necessary to tread lightly with certain actors and be more emphatic with others. Each person deals with criticism differently, and the teacher should be sensitive to an actor's style. It's incumbent upon the teacher to unlock an actor's

potential, while at the same time to not impose your will by telling them every single thing to do in the scene.

When rehearsing scenes outside of class, tell your students not to direct each other or tell each other what to do. They must learn to think for themselves and develop foresight in seeking different possibilities for creating a reality. Each person handles criticism differently. You'll hear actors apologize when you critique them, but remind them that it isn't a question of doing something wrong, merely a means of figuring out what can be done to solve a problem. It's better for actors to defend their choices rather than to apologize for them, even if it's wrong. They should stick to their guns and ideas about the character. The adjustments you give them should be incorporated into their future work. I keep notes to track an actor's progress to make sure this gets done. Both in my class and in the *Handbook*, I try not to overtheorize, but I do try and clear up any misconceptions or misunderstandings in terms of semantics and The Method.

As the years pass, fewer teachers of The Method have had the first-hand experience of studying with Lee Strasberg or with those who have studied with him. Strasberg was passionate about the importance of Relaxation and the significant role it plays in harnessing the creative process. I urge all teachers to emphasize this supremely important exercise, which prepares actors so well for auditions, readings, and performances. In my class, when an actor is blocked, locked, static, or distracted, I direct them to return to Relaxation and to consciously get hold of the situation. The Relaxation Exercise can positively affect all areas of an actor's life and should be discussed, demonstrated, and practiced in every Method Class so there's no confusion about how or when to do it.

You remind the actors to make sounds and movements when mental tension arises and have them stop, and go back to Relaxation for a few minutes, reconnect, and continue the exercise. What may be most immediately clear is how Relaxation sets the tone and prepares the actor for the serious and disciplined exercise and scene work to come. The teacher should allow sufficient time before checking each person's Relaxation – making corrections, suggestions, and forging a supportive working relationship where trust develops and problems are solved.

It's essential for teachers to diagnose the actor's unconscious behavior and habits. In Chapter One on Relaxation, I expanded on the

idea of habits and how debilitating their impact on creativity can be. Since the habit, by definition, is unconscious and a result of tension, it works directly against the goals of The Method, which is to be able take on the character's habits as part of their behavior, while eliminating your own personal habits. Teachers and directors are on the front line of correcting the self-limiting effect of unconscious habits that can be deadly for an acting career. When you observe an actor doing things unconsciously you must diagnose it and point it out. If an actor cannot say lines without constantly using or waving their hands, I insist that they keep their hands absolutely still at their sides or behind their back. When the habit is eliminated, something will change in the actor's gestures and expressiveness. New opportunities for impulses and behaviors open up, unblocked by the self-defeating habit. Not being able to speak above a whisper has to be a changeable habit. Other actor problems may require attention, of which the teacher should be conscious, especially work with the voice, which is crucial and in many cases requires specialized training and attention in areas of vocal expression, diction, and enunciation.

Actors are taught to understand that allowing adequate time for training plays an important role in developing concentration. Method Acting isn't for the faint of heart, and it's one of the most challenging professions with no shortcuts to success. Grit, resilience, and endurance are vital to handle the ups and downs or the applause and criticisms. At the heart of it is the actor's talent and belief in the role of the artist to transcend adversity by developing mastery of the craft. Over the course of a class, the actor's work naturally has evolved at its own speed. Patience is key, knowing that actors develop at different times, and one never knows if and when talent will reveal itself. I sometimes have a private conversation with an actor about where they are in their work and suggest exercises to help them to go further and deeper. The dialogue is part of a working relationship and creates a shared purpose.

There can be a dilemma for a teacher about working with people who have different degrees of talent. As a Method Teacher, you explore with everyone their areas of weakness. For some students you work with a focus on the senses in trying to discover a pathway for them to become more expressive. However, if there isn't any appreciable breakthrough after a significant amount of time, and if an actor hasn't learned anything through the self-evaluation process, they may begin

to figure out there's a problem by the response or lack of it. But I've been pleasantly surprised by an actor's leap in skill level and comprehension after a passionate application of the exercises.

A pitfall to be avoided is labeling an actor as, for example, a "young Brando" or the "new Meryl." This isn't constructive and can end up hurting the actor by the comparison. It's good to know the "type" and what they may be cast as, but that's different. The idea of any such label will enter the actor's mind and potentially limit their ongoing exploration and experimentation with their natural abilities. Critical reviews can comment on the similarity between an actor and an earlier star, but this introduces a meaningless standard and will not help the actor give a better performance. There can be positive ways to make comparisons to famous actors that aren't as limiting. For example, make a comparison to an actor's boldness or inventiveness.

Actors must be taught and encouraged to think imaginatively, differently, with foresight and a childlike wonderment, remaining unceasingly curious and with a whimsical yet serious nature. Actors should understand that failure is temporary and, unfortunately, inevitable. It prepares you for the more humbling aspects of the profession which must be viewed as an opportunity for growth. In the face of adversity teach the actors to pause, gather themselves, breathe, get their footing, and persevere. Most important, teach your actors that the only failure is in being regretful that no effort was made.

MASTER CLASS MATERIAL

My intention for my Master Classes is to give as many people as possible – including those who don't have the luxury of being in a Method Acting training program – a firsthand exposure to Lee Strasberg's work in a concentrated format. I must reiterate here that attending a Master Class, just like the *Handbook* itself, is a guide to introducing The Method work, and that acting can't be learned from a book alone or a single Master Class. To fully learn and use The Method, a teacher and regular training is required.

Master Classes are intensives of varying length that give students and observers a rigorous and thorough immersion into The Method Exercises. They are designed to contain varying numbers of actors, depending on their scheduled length or venue. A Master Class may include a showcase presentation as part of the agenda in keeping with the goals of the sponsoring institution. A seven-day/eight-hour-per-day

class should not have more than twenty-five participants to allow for sufficient individual attention while a seminar, lecture, and demonstration can still be beneficial to considerably larger groups. You must take space into consideration, since you do not want actors stretching out and touching each other. A small gym could have forty to fifty chairs, for example. In this format there is limited personal attention; however, giving the actors a taste of how to work with The Method can be of great benefit and enlighten the participants to the basic ideas.

Whether I am teaching a weekly class for twelve weeks at the Strasberg Institute, a seven-day Master Class, or a one-day seminar or lecture, the same basic ideas of The Method Exercises are presented to the participants, although to different levels of detail and practice. I try and cover as much of the Sensory Exercises and Character work, scenes, and monologues as time allows by devoting an equal amount of time to each while providing some context for the work in terms of theater history and the role of the other arts.

Strasberg and Stanislavski concluded that the problems of the actor derive not from the words of the play, but from the actor's own issues, tensions, and habits, all of which prevent pure and truthful expressiveness. Therefore, in a Master Class, I address this and insist on the discipline and practice of Relaxation to eliminate mental and physical tensions and mannerisms. The Relaxation Exercise is practiced at the beginning of each day of the Master Class for about a half hour to forty minutes, which is a new experience for the actors and can reveal a great deal to me and them about their concentration and will.

The actors begin to distinguish between mental and physical tension and must ask themselves how they feel when they begin the exercise. I ask them to pick a number from one to ten, with ten being best and one being worst, to gauge or characterize their overall state of mind at that very moment. Beginning the process of self-evaluation that is needed while working with The Method, the actors ask themselves if, for example, they feel angry, nervous, joyful, or depressed. They learn how their feelings of stress and tension are dealt with by movement and sound.

Even if the actors have never done so before, they now get the idea of how restorative Relaxation can be and the importance of evaluating your own state of mind. The actors can then take corrective measures in the struggle to free themselves of unconscious physical and emotional tension that can prevent them from obeying their own

commands. As they achieve a degree of relaxation, the body becomes more expressive and better equipped to handle the demands of performing. Actors must cultivate an awareness of their own bodies and minds to expand themselves emotionally and physically in order to be able to play different characters and not be typecast.

Prior to the start of the Master Class, the participants are provided with a syllabus or a written outline of what is expected of them, and this may include assigned monologues or scenes. They make choices for the Painting and Animal Exercises and I also ask them to bring in a favorite object, such as a scarf or a hat, to use during the class.

The first half of each day of the Master Class is just like my regular classes – rigorous, hard work, starting with Relaxation and then continuing with selected Sense Memory Exercises. The beginning exercises nurture a basic understanding of The Method’s sensory approach and develop discipline and a strong foundation for future work.

The Master Class participants follow the sequence of exercises adhered to in my regular classes, beginning with activities that are done daily: The Breakfast Drink comes first, followed by Mirror/Make-Up/Shaving; Sharp Taste; Sharp Smell; Three (3) Pieces of Material; Taking off and Putting on Underclothes, Shoes, and Socks; Sunshine; Sharp Pain; and then four or five Overall Sensations and weather conditions (Shower, Bath, Sauna, Strong Wind, etc.), and Personal Object, Place, and Private Moment Exercises. It takes an enormous amount of dedicated time to do all of the exercises properly. After they’re completed we complicate and combine them to test and train the will of the actors to focus simultaneously on multiple behaviors and sensations.

We move on to Character work and apply the exercises to form the more emotionally charged moments using Emotional Memories, Needs, Music, Painting or Sculpture, Animal, Place and Private Moment for the Character. The sequence may be changed depending on the individual needs of the actors. Various additional exercises, such as Song and Dance, Substitutions, and the Evolution Exercise are also demonstrated and practiced. At the end of each exercise, the actors convey their experience to me and the class, making notes afterward in their Journals regarding those senses, objects, and experiences that could be useful in future work.

After a break the second part of each class day is devoted to the actors as they work on their characters, scenes, and monologues,

which are critiqued by me. Sometimes I work with the actors by stopping the scene and asking them to improvise or have them make another adjustment. When the monologue or scene is over, the actor is asked to describe how he or she arrived at the characterization and which exercises were used and why.

Homework assignments are given to prepare for the next day's exercises before the end of every class. The preparations are the same as described in the *Handbook's* exercise descriptions for what actors should do when first learning each exercise at home. They involve the same detailed sensory exploration for each exercise using a real object or while performing an actual daily task at home. For example, doing the Breakfast Drink with your actual morning cup of coffee or glass of juice, doing the Sharp Taste with an actual lemon, or the Make-Up or Shaving Exercise while actually applying make-up or shaving for real. Other homework may involve selecting and observing an animal or painting to work with. The actors may also select props to bring for the next day's improvisations.

Nearing the end of the Master Class, I take time to have the students perform the Evolution Exercise discussed in Chapter Six in which the actors act out each stage of their lives to music which is a highlight of the Master Class. This exercise, which I have also referred to as the "Dance the Song of Your Life," brings together music, movement, and memories to forge a strong emotional connection to yourself and the other actors.

It is my hope that Master Class participants will want to continue their training with a Method teacher by taking regular classes, if available to them. Often the actors at the end of a Master Class are inspired by what they have learned and have developed a working relationship with the other actors. Forming an ongoing group that continues to work together practicing the exercises and encouraging each other to grow is ideal.

MASTER CLASS PUBLIC PERFORMANCE/SHOWCASE

A Showcase presentation of Master Class exercises, scenes or monologues to a private audience may be included at the end of the session to give the actors an opportunity to show their work. Depending on the time and skill level of the actors, it can be a portion of a play as a work in progress or a demonstration of particular exercises like Relaxation or Emotional Memory that they've worked on in class.



7.3 Master Class Public Showcase, Decameron Art Studio, Moscow, RU.

The intent of the Showcase is to educate the public on how The Method can be applied. As the audience enters and settles in, the actors are already seated in their chairs on stage or in the performance space far enough apart and doing the Relaxation Exercise to prepare.

While the actors are doing Relaxation, I talk to the audience about what the actors are doing and how the Relaxation Exercise was devised to be the foundation for the actor's pre-performance preparation to eliminate tension in much the same manner as is the preparation for class, auditions, rehearsals, and every performance.

While the actors continue relaxing, I discuss what they will be doing with their monologues or the work-in-progress performance. I give a brief talk about The Method and its history to present a context for the work. Strasberg always said that without Stanislavski there would be no Lee Strasberg, and he dedicated his entire life to expanding and improving on his work.

I introduce and discuss the idea and use of Emotional Memory as defined by Stanislavski and elaborated on by Strasberg, which articulates the use of memory and the senses to re-create a powerful once-in-a-lifetime event. Normally, Emotional Memory is practiced later in the actor's work, after they have developed their concentration and sensory skills. I observe the actors for the first few days of the Master Class and select someone who has a good grasp of the sensory work and seems well-grounded to demonstrate the exercise under my



7.4 Danish National Film School Master Class Presentation, TELL to JOY Theater, Copenhagen, DK. Photo by Tanya Kalinina.

supervision. A full description of the Emotional Memory Exercise is included in Chapter Three of the *Handbook*.

I describe to the audience the different Method Exercises the actors are preparing as they switch to their work on the character by using Painting, Animal, or Place Exercises. The audience watches as the actors transform themselves. What is demonstrated is how the Master Class has taught them to utilize their five senses to stimulate their imaginative powers. The actors have learned to relax and concentrate at will, to connect and improvise with other actors, to increase their knowledge of the other arts, and to discover what exercises worked well and can be re-used at will.

I discuss how directors can also benefit by using The Method Exercises for interpreting scripts, identifying themes, and for directing actors. I relate how teachers can also learn how to communicate better with actors and strengthen their own sensory skills by learning The Method Exercises themselves so they can explain them to others, sharpening teacher criticism in the process.

From actor comments, it's clear that the Intensive Master Class provides a solid learning experience.

Master class actor comments

- *If using a time machine is possible, my experience during the Intensive proves it can happen. I revisited experiences from*

my life by using the senses as a way to inhale a character. I'm now equipped with a viable technique, whereas before I had been floundering. I had never studied The Method before, but I had heard some superficial and mean-spirited talk that The Method is "only about crying." I suppose it's possible that some of those critics might be uncomfortable with deeply felt emotions on stage, or maybe really within themselves. How can good acting not be emotional? The Method work covered in the class taught me to create truthful emotions when I needed them, and to let go of them if required, all under my own control. I'm amazed at what I experienced and the confidence I gained.

- *When I was working on something imaginary, I tried hearing it and didn't get a strong reaction, so I switched my focus onto what I was touching, and to my amazement, I got sensations. I just never thought of looking at everything so closely and through each particular sense. I was so involved with what I was doing that I barely heard the other actors doing their exercises. I couldn't believe how concentrated I felt.*
- *I've had a few directors who, if I mention The Method, seemed very negative about it. I guess what you don't know or understand can seem threatening, so people attack. Now I just do Relaxation or an exercise and my best work.*
- *During some of the exercises I felt like crying and laughing at the same time. I felt joyful at unexpected moments, the opposite of what I thought I'd feel. Memories and ideas kept coming up to the surface as I concentrated more on my senses than on the memorized lines. How enlightening to see life differently and experiment with new behaviors.*
- *I had a sense of dread that was so real which came when I used my room on my Aunt and Uncle's farm for the Place Exercise. The quiet and dryness of everything and rich odors of the farm and the stars so bright above and then I heard the sound of the boots coming across the wood porch and the screen door slamming as my Father came to take me home. Having that moment come back so sharply was startling.*

- *The idea of the effort being more important than the result really appeals to me. The pressure to perform was gone.*
- *I realized how easy it would be to do Relaxation or Sunshine Exercise before an audition, even while you're just waiting. No one needs to know you're practicing an exercise.*
- *It felt great being 'home' again in my Childhood Place. The objects I focused on and explored, what I smelled, heard, and what made me laugh and cry were very real, but surprisingly and positively different from what I remembered. Different people kept popping up too. I just stayed working on the sensory reality of the place and the people ended up just seeming to pass through my world.*
- *I got nervous, confused, and jittery during an emotional exercise, so I added sunshine, and that calmed me down instantly and enabled me to stay in control and add the monologue. I found the combination of exercises very good for my work on Hamlet. I picked places and objects well-suited for the scene.*
- *During the Painting Exercise, I was a poet in a room with a flow of other people to meet and talk with. I felt the sensations of a droning wind that kept bringing me back to my Place. Some characters were scared, some threatened me, and other people put me in a state of shock. Among the characters I met, there was a woman in despair and she told me of her desire to die. Her reactions to me were surprising. Getting back to being alone again was such a relief.*
- *Meeting everyone else in the Painting Exercise highlighted how my character was so eccentric. I explained myself to them. I felt restricted and restrained, but contact with them showed me a side of my character I hadn't thought of.*
- *The Personal Object wasn't so strong emotionally but I stayed with it even though nothing was happening and that took a lot of energy. I got bored, but I kept going and, finally, something began to happen. I realized that I rush, and that stops me from experiencing the moment.*
- *For the Animal Exercise, I chose a praying mantis, which is very unlike me physically and in temperament, so that was revealing. I became the character with a few of the Mantis*

qualities. It changed everything. I made up the body and its various parts. It was physically demanding and a real revelation.

- *I was a deer in the Animal Exercise and that was scary, because the other animals were threatening. It was hard to maintain an “emotion-less-ness” while exploring the Animal mechanics. I was watching and experiencing the world differently. It was a fascinating experience.*

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