

Stanislavsky's Creative State on the Stage

A spiritual approach to the 'system' through practice as research

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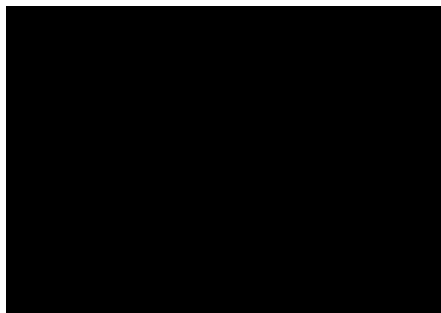
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Declaration of Authorship:

I Gabriela Curpan, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed



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Contents

STANISLAVSKY'S CREATIVE STATE ON THE STAGE	1
CONTENTS.....	3
ABSTRACT.....	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
INTRODUCTION	8
PART ONE: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS	28
CHAPTER 1.....	29
1.1 METHODOLOGY.....	31
1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	35
1.3 ORTHODOX ROOTS.....	47
1.4 ORIENTAL INFLUENCES.....	51
CHAPTER 2.....	59
2.1 THE 'SYSTEM' FROM HUMANISM AND SPIRITUALITY TO RELIGION.....	60
2.2 THE CONCEPTS OF THE 'SOUL', 'SELF', 'HEART', 'CREATIVE 'I'	65
2.3 MORALITY VERSUS ETHICS	76
2.4 THE IDEA OF 'NATURE'	79
2.5 INCARNATION VERSUS EMBODIMENT	84
CHAPTER 3.....	87
3.1 THE SUPERCONSCIOUS.....	89
3.2 THE SUPERCONSCIOUS CREATIVE STATE AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT.....	94
3.3 THE ART OF EXPERIENCING AND THE CREATIVE STATE	99
3.4 THE DIVIDED CONSCIOUSNESS.....	105
PART TWO: PRACTICAL EXPLORATIONS.....	111
CHAPTER 4.....	112
4.1 THE FIRST LEVEL OF WORK: CREATING THE ATMOSPHERE	118

4.2	THE SECOND LEVEL: MEDITATION—AN UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE OF BREATH	122
4.3	THE THIRD LEVEL: TESTING THE ELEMENTS	134
CHAPTER 5.....		137
5.1	CONCENTRATION, ATTENTION, AND WILL.....	139
5.2	TESTING THE CONCENTRATION, ATTENTION AND WILL OF THE ACTORS	144
5.3	PRANIC COMMUNICATION—ENERGY RAYS OR PRANA.....	153
5.4	PRACTICING COMMUNICATION	158
CHAPTER 6.....		164
6.1	‘I AM’ - FROM CONCENTRATING TO BEING	166
6.2	PRACTISING THE ‘I AM’.....	173
6.3	ACTION IN MEDITATION AND MEDITATION IN ACTION	184
6.4	TESTING THE SPIRITUAL ACTION.....	190
CHAPTER 7.....		197
7.1	THE METHOD OF ACTIVE ANALYSIS	197
7.2	INTRODUCING THE TEXT	205
7.3	PRACTISING ACTIVE ANALYSIS.....	206
7.4	THE ÉTUDE OF THE SCENE BEFORE THE SCENE	210
7.5	EXPERIENCING THE CREATIVE STATE IN REHEARSALS.....	211
7.6	THE PERFORMANCE: ARTISTIC AND TECHNICAL CHALLENGES.....	215
7.7	THE LAST ELEMENT OF THE ‘SYSTEM’—THE SUPERTASK.....	221
7.8	BRINGING THE SUPERTASK TO LIGHT	225
CONCLUSION		228
	THE ORTHODOX INFLUENCE.....	228
	CHALLENGES AND DEFINITIONS	230
	THE CREATIVE STATE—OUTCOMES: IMPACT AND EVIDENCE	233
	SOLUTIONS FOR BETTER OUTCOMES	236
	SOLUTIONS FOR FUTURE LEARNING AND THE NECESSARY MINDSET.....	237
	<i>Table1: From Self-Discovery to Becoming the Character</i>	<i>238</i>

FINAL REMARKS	240
APPENDIX	242
<i>Table 2: Content and Time Frames of the Video Evidence</i>	242
BIBLIOGRAPHY	244

Abstract

This practice as research aims to rediscover and test a spiritual way of preparing the actor towards experiencing that ineffable artistic creativity defined by Konstantin Stanislavsky as the creative state, or as experiencing “the living human spirit, the life of the human soul” on the stage (2010: xxiv). Filtered through the lens of his unaddressed Christian Orthodox background, as well as his yogic or Hindu interest, the practical work allocated for this thesis was conducted during nearly five years of weekly sessions, and followed the odyssey of the artist, from being oneself towards becoming the character. The practice was structured in three major horizontal stages and was developed on another three vertical, interconnected levels. By using various meditation techniques, as an underlying principle of breath, and by observing a certain spiritual way of behaving, the practice began with the creation and constant maintenance of a virtually sacralised atmosphere. Later on, during training, when rehearsing, or while performing, the work evolved into testing all the elements of the ‘system’, with a particular focus given to seven of them that might hold both technical and spiritual values or usability. The procedures through which these elements can be addressed in practice were translated into acting exercises and études designed to elucidate such Stanislavskian principles as ‘morality’, ‘nature’, ‘experiencing’, ‘incarnation’, or the ‘superconscious’. The methodologies used had the purpose of teaching the actor how to give herself the chance of experiencing the creative state, with no guarantees offered—for, truth be told, no one has the power of controlling the hypothetical soul of the artist with its ineffable inner mysterious sources of inspiration or with its subtler higher ways of creativity.

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Moreover, I find myself incredibly lucky and thankful for working alongside such amazing actresses as Aphrodite Evangelatou, Maria Alexe, Ella Kova, and Claire Kirk, as well as such gifted filmmakers as Ricky Thompson and Emma Nan Hu. I am immensely grateful for their trust, hard work, and their total commitment during this long journey. For years, all these wonderful people came back, every week, no matter what. They were there with me all the way until the end, with no pecuniary gain whatsoever but, on the contrary, having made many various personal sacrifices.

I am also grateful to the space coordinator, Jennifer Payne, for her support and constant effort to give us, as much as was possible, the chance of rehearsing and performing on the stage, in the always busy and constantly booked George Wood Theatre. I find myself in great debt to Vivian Ten Have, for volunteering to help us with the lights and sound, as well as for a good job done during performances.

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Introduction

Sections of this thesis were published in 'The Influence of Christian Orthodox Thought on Stanislavski's Theatrical Legacy', *Stanislavski Studies*, Taylor & Francis (August 2019). The thesis strives to reflect upon practical explorations of relevant theoretical findings relating to possible artistic ways of preparation towards experiencing the creative state on the stage, as envisioned by Konstantin Stanislavsky. This state represents the very goal of the 'system', reachable "when an actor is completely taken over by the play" and when, "independent of his will, he lives the role without noticing *how* he is feeling" or without "thinking about *what* he is doing". As a result, "everything comes out spontaneously, subconsciously" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 17).

For the purposes of understanding and testing such possible ways, a deeper analysis of the more tangible and comprehensible realist aspects of Stanislavsky's 'system' is essential to illuminate how, in order to be ready for this creative state, the actor might need much more than just a basic development of physical and mental skills. Although crucial in terms of progressing their technique, such skills might not be all it takes for experiencing more profound stages of artistic creativity.

As Maria Shevtsova argues, in Stanislavsky's vision, "the task of training the actor is to develop" that inner spirit of "the human being who is the actor so that acting transcends play-acting and show". Undoubtedly, "the more the actor grows spiritually, the greater the resources of the actor become". Furthermore, "once a feel of this transcendence enters the actor's play, it surpasses banal technique to coalesce with the invisible dimension that powers human life". Clearly, "the preparation of actors was fundamental to Stanislavsky" (Shevtsova, 2014: 336).

However, as Shevtsova further explains, "such preparation was not so much about technical training, which Stanislavsky equated with dressage, as about the actor's thoughtful, conscious and probing 'work on himself'". It might be no coincidence that he

established “the titles of his volumes on the subject of developing the actor”, suggesting “that training in the sense of ‘dressage’, or, indeed, in the sense of ‘tools’, was far from his central aim”. It was more about “the awakening and sustainability of capacities – some of which, nevertheless, were a matter of rudimentary technique” (Ibid, 2014: 334-5). Moreover, according to Stanislavsky, the ‘system’ was not designed only for a realist style, as labelled after the great success of The Moscow Art Theatre with “the *historico-realistic* line” (2008a: 184). As he further asserts:

We were discussed in the press and in high society. We were labelled once and for all a realistic theatre, naturalist, of authentic precision and detail in our productions. This misunderstanding took root, is still alive to this day, although for the following quarter of a century we passed artistically through the most varied and divergent phases and lived through a whole series of reforms. [...] I was born and lived for the highest purposes of art. The *historico-realistic* line was only one, initial transient phase in our development [...]. (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 184-5)

In the 1920s, as Sharon Marie Carnicke argues, “the System itself—based upon the premise that there is an indissoluble link between mind and body, spirit and flesh”, started to violate “the required materialistic philosophy”. If “body and flesh were acceptable”, mind, as in the unconscious could only remain questionable, while ‘spiritual’, ‘soul’, and ‘spirit’ became totally unacceptable (Carnicke, 2009: 102).

Andrew White argues that “Stanislavsky distinguishes body from soul” by “suggesting that actors become ‘incorporeal’” (White, 2006: 75), and he seems to appreciate “the important holistic bond between body and spirit”. Yet, as White further notes, “through the lens of Soviet ideology”, Stanislavsky looks to be “inaccurately portrayed as favouring the scientific over the spiritual” (Ibid, 2006: 81).

Furthermore, as Jean Benedetti points out, “starting with 1938, as part of Stalin’s policy of centralized control”, the Moscow Art Theatre was forced to become “the model for all Soviet theatres, while Stanislavsky’s image and life-work were “included in a Stalinist pantheon” (Benedetti, 1991: xiii). This association could only

cause a distorted vision and comprehension of his personal beliefs and ideals. Jerzy Grotowski, as cited by Jennifer Kumiega, for example, considers this distortion to be “Stanislavsky’s assassination after his death” (Kumiega, 1987: 110).

All these might have led to a widespread acknowledgement of the realistic approach to the detriment of a possible spiritual one. According to Shevtsova, certain “instrumentalist appropriations of Stanislavsky today [...] tend to use them exclusively for psychological realism”. However, considering that Stanislavsky’s “aesthetics as both an actor and a director revolved around the psycho-emotional and psychophysical aspects of human behaviour” (Shevtsova, 2014: 335), the psychological realism might not represent the unique way in which the ‘system’ can be explored and taught.

“Like many great artists, Stanislavsky” constantly “navigates between these eternal poles, profane and sacred, rough and holy, earth and clouds, showbiz and sacrament” (Donnellan in Stanislavsky, 2010: xi). Although the practitioner may “feel more comfortable” for a while if she/he “ignores one pole”, as Declan Donnellan worries, this might lead ultimately “to artistic suicide” (Ibid, 2010: xi).

As it appears, Stanislavsky includes both the artist’s and the character’s souls in the creative processes. As such, his way of training, that might be intended not only for the artistic maturation of the actor but also for their spiritual development, cannot abide by the rules of the modern Cartesian dichotomy. While eliminating the idea of the soul, such rules tend to draw a clear distinction between body and mind, assigning “the immaterial contents” of the latter “to an immaterial mental subject” (Foster, 1991: ix).

As a short parenthesis, in Gordon Baker’s thought, Cartesian dualism evolved from the philosophy of Rene Descartes, and “is commonly used to set the agenda of philosophy of mind” (Baker and Morris, 1996: 2). Interesting to note, however, is that, although “drawing on the dualistic philosophy that had been so important to many earlier Platonist thinkers on the mind-brain relationship” (Clarke, 2013: 109), Descartes

does not negate the existence of the soul, nor does he eliminate the notion of 'divinity' that seems to disappear from the later Cartesian theories.

He acknowledges the divine, explaining that there "is a perfection in God" which cannot be understood because he is "immutable in himself" (Descartes in Des Chene, 2005: 4). As a way of touching upon the spiritual aspects of a human being, Descartes "proposed that man was a soul in a machine" and argued in favour of a clear "body-soul interaction", a conception "strongly critiqued from the very start" (Clarke, 2013: 109).

To continue, as opposed to a Cartesian type of thinking, for Stanislavsky, there are three human aspects to be considered - body, mind, soul - and to him, these appear to be equally real, working together in a perfect symbiosis. In Stanislavsky's thought, "the bond between the body and the soul is indivisible. The life of the one engenders the life of the other, either way around" (2008b: 228), whilst all the aspects of the mind: conscious, unconscious, and superconscious (Chapter 3) provide the link between the physical being and the spiritual one. He urges his students to ask themselves: "Can the first [physical being] exist without the second [spiritual being] or the second without the first?" (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 207). The only possible answer in his mind is that all these aspects of a human being "cannot be alien to one another"; on the contrary, "their kinship and congruence are mandatory" (Ibid, 2008b: 207).

As David Magarshack informs, Stanislavsky was born and raised in the Christian Orthodox Faith (Magarshack 1986: 3). He probably was an active practitioner for more than half of his life, at least until the 1917 Russian Revolution (Chapter 1). Therefore, both as an Orthodox and an artist, he can only reject the Cartesian dichotomy noted above. In fact, transcending this split might be the first step towards the premises that can enable the actor better to prepare for experiencing the creative state on the stage.

Phillip Zarrilli, who might not be interested at all in a spiritual approach to acting, also finds that a "Western dualistic thinking creates problems for the actor" and these

are sometimes insurmountable, for, “acting is either too easily over-intellectualised or becomes overly subjective” (Zarrilli, 2009: 55). To avoid this, a comprehension of an initial necessary body-mind-spirit harmony might become essential.

By using the Stanislavskian body-mind-soul continuum as a point of reference, the present practice as research embarks on a transformational journey of becoming. While on this path, the entity of the human being-student who, like Kostya when playing Iago or like Marya while running down “the stairs with the desperate cry, ‘save me!’” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 16), might stumble upon the creative state, should slowly transform into the entity of the human being-actor. Yet, based on my personal training and acting experience, I can argue that, although more skilled than the student, the emergent actor is not necessarily ready to reach the creative state often.

Similar to the Orthodox believer—endlessly climbing a symbolic ladder towards theosis (Chapter 2)—the Stanislavskian actor might be far from completing her journey. In that respect, an actor’s work is never finished, for she constantly should strive towards embodying the ideal trinity of the human being-actor-artist, for whom experiencing the creative state is as natural as breathing.

But how can such process, designed to help the student-actor along this journey of ‘becoming’ an actor-artist, be delineated? Where does it start, and what are the possible paths to be followed? To answer these questions, cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches are called for in order to understand and, consequently, to follow an appropriate and clear direction. Thus, this research considers all the possible and probable avenues of influence for Stanislavsky’s legacy.

It begins with his almost forgotten Orthodox roots, moves towards his well-known and largely observed interest in the yogic and Hindu practices (with an emphasis on meditation), to conclude in the analysis of some intriguing similarities between many of Stanislavsky’s concepts and Zen Buddhist ones. Considering the complete lack of

written evidence that might prove his eventual knowledge or intended use of Buddhism as a source for some of the principles observed by the 'system', it would be impossible to tell if Stanislavsky was ever interested in or had any knowledge whatsoever of Zen. It was only because certain Zen Buddhist practices (meditation and the *kin-hin*) were used during this practical exploration of the actor's work (Chapter 4) that these similarities had to be acknowledged and thoroughly analysed. Any argument intended to prove such a Buddhist-Stanislavskian connection falls outside of this research.

It is crucial to note that, in terms of practice, the Orthodox avenue noted above was not explored in its pure original form nor used with either a religious or a dogmatic purpose in mind. On top of that, because this thesis employs both terms - 'spiritual' and 'religious' – sometimes interchangeably, it is important to explain the reason behind this. Although often “expressed through art, poetry and myth”, 'spirituality' also belongs to “religious practice” (Dein and all, 2010: 63). Even though spiritual people are not necessarily religious, due to the nature of their believe system, being a religious person may automatically imply being spiritual. In Simon Dein's thought:

Both religion and spirituality typically emphasise the depth of meaning and purpose in life. One does not, of course, have to be religious for life to be deeply meaningful, as atheists will avow. Yet, although some atheists might not consider themselves spiritual, many do. Spirituality is thus a more inclusive concept than religion. (Ibid, 2010: 63)

While trying to mirror Stanislavsky's possible spiritual ways, this research adapted certain practices and ideas (such as meditation, a conscious sacralisation of the space, the silence of the heart and mind, pursuing higher ideals, morality, or the notions of 'love', 'beauty', and 'truth'), to the practical work of the actor, both on her 'self' and on her role. All these were embedded in usable patterns of artistic beliefs and behaviour, while their ultimate purpose was never intended to exceed artistic spheres.

As another parenthesis, it is important to remember that such notions as 'practice as research' or 'practice-based research' are both used to stand for endeavours very

similar to the present project. Christopher Bannerman draws a clear distinction between these two terms. On the one hand, “practice-based research implies [...] that the research may be based in practice, but that there are [...] other modes used to further the work”. On the other hand, “practice as research [...] implies that practice, in and of itself can be considered research” (Bannerman, 2003: 65).

In Robin Nelson’s thinking, “a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry” and results in a practical form such as a theatre performance, can be “submitted as substantial evidence of a research inquest” (2013: 8). Barbara Bolt talks about a “double articulation between theory and practice” in so far as the “theory emerges from a reflexive practice” while, simultaneously, the “practice is informed by theory” (Bolt in Nelson, 2013: 10). Although reluctant to engage in what he calls “the historical binary between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’”, Nelson appears to agree with Bolt.

Finding “PaR [...] ineluctably centred in practice”, Nelson also considers “reading, as in any research programme”, to be just “another mode in a multi-modal research enquiry” (Ibid, 2013: 29). Similarly, Bolt argues in favour of “theory imbricated within practice” (2008: 37). She talks about two distinctive ways of knowing - that is to say, “Know-how and Know-what”. The first one represents the “Embodied knowledge” as in “Experiential, haptic knowing – Performative knowing – Tacit knowledge”, whilst the second remains a “distant knowledge” that needs to be “made explicit through critical reflection: – Know what ‘works’ – Know what methods – Know what principles of composition [...] – Conceptual frameworks”, and so on and so forth (Bolt, 2008: 37).

Focusing “on the ‘uniqueness’ of PAR’s production of knowledge”, Angela Piccini argues that it might run “counter to the wider critical engagement with ‘knowledge making’ in the arts and humanities” (Piccini and Kershaw, 2003: 120). According to Piccini, by calling into question crucial notions of ‘objectivity’ and ‘originality’, “PAR may

significantly contribute alternatives to current ‘ways of knowing’”, also raising “critical issues regarding the ability to generalize such knowledge” (Ibid, 2003: 120).

Citing Gunther Kress, Heli Aaltonen considers this “production of knowledge in performance practice [...] different from ordinary arts practice” to the degree that it can be both epistemological and ontological (Aaltonen and Bruun, 2014: 54). As she explains, performative research “often requires methods that are applied in vocational training”, and these can make “the embodied knowledge explicit through the analysis of practices, multimodal discourses and contextual social settings” (Ibid, 2014: 54).

In terms of theory versus practice as generator of knowledge, as opposed to Nelson and Bolt, who are in search of defining better ways of congruence, Helen Bendon finds this distinction unhelpful in expounding her practice. Quoting David Durling, who refers to “some forms of practice as ‘personal Journeys’” (2002: 81), Bendon simply chooses to name what she does as “the work” (2005: 157).

According to Durling, there should be a clear distinction between practice and research. In his view, “research has goals quite different to those of practice” to the extent that it “asks questions, selects appropriate methods, tests the questions, analyses the results, and disseminates the conclusions unambiguously” (Durling, 2002: 81). However, in my vision, based on the practical work explored on the stage, these research goals do not seem to differ from those of the practice, as Durling argues.

Both during training and while rehearsing the actor finds herself in a constant need to ask questions, to select the methods appropriate in order to test these questions and, finally, to analyse the results. There is also a lack of ambiguity in disseminating the conclusions drawn. Being embodied in her own artistic creativity, the stage-floor experience of the actor becomes very clear to her, while the results are visible to the naked eye of the spectator. It might be that due to their ineffability, some of these personal results are not always easily explained and need a more profound and

ongoing reflection. Nevertheless, as Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton argue, “the heart of the reflective process is the space it provides to bring into existence a personal relationship with the material” (2009: 203). Further:

Reflection allows time to consider the moral attitudes, principles, and beliefs that lie beneath actions and to see these in relation to the views, actions and feelings of others. Reflection lets us see how ideas are mediated and how thought is changed when it becomes concretized through action. (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009: 203)

In terms of research methods, Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson strive to bring forward ideas of reconceptualization that can highly benefit studies of theatre and performance. In order to “resist unhelpful dichotomies and fixed binaries, which separate embodiment and intuition from intellectual practices, emotional experiences and ways of knowing”, they both support a methodology of “thinking philosophically, procedurally, and practically, about working processes” (Kershaw and Nicholson 2011: 2).

As Kershaw explains, because “PaR is pursued through time-space events, its transmission—the means by which any knowledge/understanding/insight it produces are communicated—is always multi-modal”. Additionally, it “has the qualities of a moveable feast: always already the ‘same’ project but forever differently displayed through diverse channels”. Therefore, it ends up by disrupting the “powerful parade of binary formulations: theory/practice [...], ontology/epistemology, artist/academic [...], multiple formats/singular outcomes, and so on” (Ibid, 2011: 66-7).

On the same note, without denying the importance of any of the views noted above, because the artistic creation leading to experiencing the creative state can be a very personal accomplishment, by relating to my own former training and acting experience, while using in places a strong personal voice, and by often bringing on indirect evidence, I have moved away from the normal academic ways of research, to look upon the findings and problems that are formulated and analysed in each chapter.

These findings followed the structure in which the practice was organised and also considered the constant feedback coming from the actors.

It is crucial to explain that, although, this thesis is separated into two distinctive sections—a theoretical and a practical one—from the point of view of the work done, a binary formulation is clearly neither intended nor acceptable. Firstly, a theoretical reminder of Stanislavsky's almost ignored Orthodox upbringing was crucial for elucidating how his practice might have been influenced by it. Secondly, due to the constant usage of Oriental ideas and various meditational procedures during my work with the actors, the yogic and Hindu sources could not be left aside. And thirdly, the significance of many principles that might be considered spiritual, present throughout most of Stanislavsky's works, had to be brought under scrutiny.

Terms such as 'spirituality', the 'soul', 'self', 'creative I', 'morality', 'nature', 'incarnation', the 'superconscious', or 'experiencing', appeared in grave need of a thorough analysis, both from a spiritual (sometimes religious) perspective and an artistic one. Nonetheless, this theoretical analysis was first and foremost crucial for the actors involved in this project insomuch as it fully informed their own practical quest. Moreover, although, in places, the present thesis tends to highlight many religious ideas, this is done only to draw attention to their possible connections with the Orthodox Faith as a major presence in Stanislavsky's life and not at all as an expression of my personal dogmatic ideology. It might be worth explaining that, even though I was also born and raised as an Orthodox, I do not consider myself to be a religious person.

All the actors fully concurred that these religious concepts, terms, and ideas had to be analysed, understood, and agreed upon, not at all from a dogmatic perspective but rather from a humanistic, philosophical one, and could never replace or deny, in any way, the necessary more tangible, technical, and concrete aspects of the stage. Therefore, there is no intentional binary in this research, neither in terms of religion

versus science, nor as theory versus the practice. It was only for the purposes of clarity that the thesis was structured into the two distinctive sections.

The first one, 'Theoretical Reflections', contains the initial three chapters, with a breakdown of each of the principles observed, structured in the order of their immediate practical importance. The second section, 'Practical Explorations', comprises the remaining four chapters, and follows the stages of the practice, named partially using Stanislavsky's own formulas: 1. 'An Actor's Work on Her Self'; 2. 'An Actor's Work on Her Role'; 3. 'Performing as a State of Being'. This second section also strives to describe how the elements of the 'system' (firstly analysed theoretically) were further tested in practice, and in what ways the work done related to the principles observed.

This may appear fragmented, but there was no fragmentation in the practice in so far as these stages were highly interconnected and were only used as milestones along the journey of the actor rather than as three separate approaches. Being absolutely necessary for clarity in understanding what to do and why, as well as for the organisation of the practice, the breakdown contained in the first section of the thesis follows the order in which all the theoretical findings were presented and explained to the actors. In addition, the way in which the chapters are structured is clearly intended to reflect this holistic aspect of the practical work done.

Striving to encapsulate all the spiritual ideas observed, and to analyse their practical use as discovered on the stage-floor, this thesis contains seven chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. To bring forward evidence of the work done and to support the theoretical findings, three video clips are also attached to the thesis. The first one covers the actor's work on the self; the second focuses on the character approach; and the third features the resulting performance. The total length of the videos amounts to around three hours and twenty-five minutes. This might be considered too long; yet, keeping in mind that the practice was conducted over nearly

five years of weekly sessions, in order to show the process, and the progression of the work as a whole, further shortening of the footage proved to be impossible.

The opening chapter starts by introducing the main current information and opinions regarding Stanislavsky's spiritual background alongside the theoretical and methodological contributions of this practice as research to the subject of the creative state in connection to the 'system'. Chapter 1 continues with a reminder of Stanislavsky's religious upbringing and concludes by addressing the yogic and Hindu connections. Chapter 2 attempts to expound on the crucial notion of 'spirituality' in relation to its former meaning in the nineteenth century Russia.

By trying to elucidate certain unaddressed Orthodox principles, present in all of Stanislavsky's writings, this chapter continues with a brief analysis of a possible religious or spiritual meaning of such notions as the 'soul', 'spirit', 'self', or the 'creative 'I'', in relation to the ego (filtered through Orthodox thought, yoga, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as well as through a psychological lens). It also analyses the idea of 'nature' with its potentially religious undertone, and the concepts of 'incarnation' and 'morality', connected with Stanislavsky's often expressed need for spiritual growth.

Chapter 3 opens by endeavouring to elucidate the idea of 'experiencing' (one of the key Stanislavskian terms) in relation to the creative state. The third chapter continues by analysing the notion of a 'double consciousness' experienced during this creative state and which might be induced by a correct use of the 'I am' element. Finally, this chapter observes the yogic idea of a 'superconscious' and concludes by looking upon the creative state in comparison with the Zen Buddhist states of *zanmai* and enlightenment that, curiously, seem to echo perceptions very similar in their description to the ones experienced on the stage.

As part of the second section of the thesis, showing the first steps of the actors—from theoretical findings towards their practical application—Chapter 4 starts with a brief

introduction of the work done, and continues by presenting the three vertical levels of practice that proved to be crucial for the processes leading to experiencing the creative state. These are as follows: 1. Creating the proper atmosphere; 2. Meditation as an underlying principle of breath; and 3. Testing the elements of the 'system'.

For Stanislavsky, this atmosphere is extremely important, being associated with "a liturgical mood backstage" (2010: 572). Therefore, during the entire practice, a similar atmosphere was subtly induced and encouraged through the observance of a certain type of behaviour, very similar to a religious one. Yet, it is highly important to note that, in fact, the constant practice of several ways of meditation (seated meditation, meditation in walking, and meditation in action) was what enhanced and maintained the required mood. Moreover, both the first and second levels ceaselessly made use of all the elements, such as concentration, attention, will, action, imagination, 'I am', the magic 'if', given circumstances, emotional memory, or the supertask.

By focusing on the first three—concentration, attention, and will—working as trinity, as well as on 'communication' by means of 'prana' (both in theory and in the ways in which they were tested), Chapter 5 introduces the first stage of the work. Chapter 6 continues the exploration of the elements in focus. It starts with the 'I am', as related to the actor's self, and moves on towards using this element in order to depart from working on herself while attempting to become someone else. In other words, the actor learns how to use personal experiences and feelings to start creating the new imaginary life of a given character. Thus, the practical exploration of the 'I am' element marks the introduction of the second stage of the work. In addition, Chapter 6 focuses on action, both from a physical and a spiritual perspective.

Striving to illuminate how Stanislavsky's Active Analysis can function within a spiritual framework, Chapter 7 begins by looking at it, mainly from Maria Knebel's perspective. This chapter also talks about the text used - *Three Sisters and a Sister-in-*

Law - a new and original adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. It is important to explain that the text was created specifically for this practice as research, in my own authorship, with a significant contribution of all the actors involved in this project.

Chapter 7 continues by touching upon the initial relation actor-character, while observing a possible gradual process through which the actor's creative 'I' (soul) might merge with the newly created soul of the given role by means of the 'I am' element, improvisation, and meditational techniques. In addition, introducing the last stage of the practice, this chapter focuses on challenges and successful outcomes, as well as on the testing ground of the performance. Finally, it analyses the 'supertask', while striving to identify whether or not this crucial element emerged during the work.

After summing up the experience of the whole practice as research, the Conclusion addresses the expected results compared with the actual ones, how and why these happened, and what else could have been done differently. Moreover, the Conclusion comments upon the successfully demonstrated ability of the actors to cope with the technical aspects necessary for any performance, while maintaining higher meditational awareness of what they were doing during the last stage of the work.

The video clips attached were edited and structured to follow the three stages of the practice. Accordingly, Video Clip 1 (*An Actor's Work on Her Self*) concentrates on the ways of preparing both the physical and spiritual apparatus by means of meditation and breath, self-observance, or imagined projections of energy (prana), all being explored through various acting exercises. Intended to develop a spiritual type of awareness in the consciousness of the actor, the work featured in this video directly relates to their personal development (spiritual and artistic growth), while transitioning from silence and stillness to improvised speech and movement.

Covering the second stage, Video Clip 2 (*An Actor's Work on her Role*) starts by introducing the first steps of the actor from being herself towards becoming someone

else, via the ‘magic if’. It shows ways of imagining personal reactions to situations in which a character is described to be. The clip also features the creation of the role through a progressive process of transformation, merging, and becoming, by means of improvisation on études - Active Analysis. Focusing on the third stage of practice, the last video clip (*Performing as a State of Being*) contains footage from all three showings of the performance (*Three Sisters and a Sister-in-law*), edited in a single file.

It is also important to note that even though the actors were constantly encouraged to express opinions and feelings regarding all the aspects of this research, in front of the camera through individual interviews, much of the resulting footage was not comprised in the three videos featuring the work done. To prevent making these video clips unacceptably long, the choice of using only the interviews directly connected to the exercises and études presented was necessary.

From a spiritual perspective, during the second and third stages, the process of becoming noted above, can unravel subtly and continuously, until the fine line between the soul (creative ‘I’) of the actor and the created character is no longer apparent. At this point, by experiencing the creative state (reaching superconscious levels of creativity), the artist cannot tell where she stops or where her character begins because she becomes aware of both at the same time, in a double consciousness of herself in the role and of the role in herself. Such awareness, echoing the mystical Buddhist ‘enlightenment’ noted above, can transform the whole performance into a complex act of artistic meditation and contemplation on the stage, and this might provide the actor with the optimum conditions for experiencing the creative state.

As Anatoly Smeliansky suggests, Stanislavsky “deified the theatre, reinterpreting the major tenets of religion in terms of living a life in art” (Smeliansky in White, 2014: 99). All his letters are abundant with ideas “corresponding to such religious concepts as ‘vows’, ‘humility’, ‘obedience’ or ‘sacrifice’—ideas essential for unlocking ‘the mystery of

Stanislavsky” (Ibid, 2014: 100). With an artistic outcome in mind, all these religious conceptualizations were also infused into the three levels of this practice as research.

As to the use of Stanislavsky’s books, the thesis refers to both Jean Benedetti and Elizabeth Hapgood’s translations, and this might create confusion. It is crucial to explain that, due to the translators’ significant contradictions regarding their choice of spiritually connected words, the use of both versions was needed. While excising other important original spiritual terms, Benedetti completely replaces ‘soul’ with ‘mind’ (Chapter 1). In opposition, although heavily edited to accommodate the American reader, and separated in two different books (*An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*) instead of a single one, as Stanislavsky intended, Hapgood’s version preserves the term ‘soul’ and adopts a more spiritually orientated tone. Out of the necessity of bringing forward evidence of the importance of these notions, I decided to use only *Creating a Role* that was published after Stanislavsky’s death, and which does not concentrate on the ‘system’, but on his latest rehearsing technique.

To elucidate the concepts of a ‘higher self’, ‘soul’, and ‘ego’, viewed through both spiritual and psychological lenses, alongside writings on the Orthodox Faith as, for example, John Meyendorff, Anthony Coniaris and Nicolai Berdyaev’s books, this thesis refers to Carl Gustav Jung and Edward Edinger’s works on the archetypal self (Chapter 2). Also, to illuminate a psychological angle of Stanislavsky’s ideas, this study further draws on Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Daniel Goleman’s notion of ‘flow’.

To support the argument of a possible Orthodox origination of many Stanislavskian concepts, the ancient *Philokalia*, and St John Climacus’s *The Ladder of Divine Assent*, two of the most significant books on Orthodox thought, were also used. In addition, to address the similarities noted above, the research looks upon the Zen Buddhist concepts of ‘mindfulness’ and ‘enlightenment’ as presented by James Austin,

a neuroscientist and Zen practitioner, as well as by Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, a Jesuit priest who strived to teach how Buddhist and Christian practices can be compatible.

There are two more aspects to be clarified: the first one involves Stanislavsky's notion of 'emotional memory'; the second regards the impact that Theodule-Armand Ribot's behaviourist psychology had on Stanislavsky's early concepts of 'emotional' and 'sense memory'. Due to the limited space of the thesis, often I had to decide what needs to be left aside. Although heavily analysed in the literature, because 'emotional memory' is not one of the elements in focus, its theoretical in-depth observance was not needed. Similarly, further enquiries on Ribot's influence, already thoroughly analysed by Rose Whyman, were found unessential and thus no longer pursued.

Finally, it is pivotal to stress that it is not in the intention of the present practice as research to claim that the spiritual paths explored are the only ones possible or that the creative state is something unreachable in any other way. Due to my previous artistic experience, I can vouch that, no matter how ineffable, almost indescribable, and utterly uncontrollable it might be, at the same time, this creative state is very much possible. It is recognisable by both actors and the audience, and it can also be highly transformative. However, the creative state can be an intimate, personal experience, as well, while the ways towards it are numerous and various.

With reference to practice, this study is based on the work conducted with a group of four professional actors: Maria, Aphrodite, Claire, Ella, who were selected after auditioning, and who accepted to participate alongside me. However, it is important to note that the first year of practice was conducted with a slightly different group. To be more precise, after several months of theoretical research, in January 2013, with the help of six professional actors, a practical exploration of the first stage was initiated. Unfortunately, in less than one year the work with this group ended when four of the

actors decided to leave. Only two actresses, Maria and Aphrodite, were left to continue the work alongside me. Consequently, it became necessary to rethink the entire project.

Soon after this split, however, two new actresses, Ella and Claire, joined, and the second group noted above was formed. Even though the entire practice had to be reconsidered, and the work had to start all over again, the early development involving the initial group cannot and should not be completely ignored. This is so because some of the discoveries made during this time proved to be crucial for the later progress of the practice. In addition, the two remaining actresses clearly benefitted from it. Although the video evidence attached to this thesis retains some of the footage featuring this early work, it is crucial to explain that such images are solely intended to show the progress of the two remaining actresses and not the initial group.

Notwithstanding that, in the beginning, I had no intention of engaging in this research as an actor, due to the reduced number of people from the second group, I often found myself forced to partake. First of all, in order to be properly explored, many of the exercises used involved more than four actors. Secondly, the adaptation of the play retained some of the minor characters from the original text, such as Anfisa, and this required the presence of a fifth actor in the project.

Finding another professional willing to commit to such long-term unpaid work, proved to be impossible. As such, I had no choice but to step in and complete the cast. Nevertheless, this unplanned decision of becoming involved in the present project both as a director-teacher and as an actor-student was not in conflict with Stanislavsky's path. On the contrary, he advises those interested in teaching his 'system' to

Always bear in mind that you can never give something you have not yourself, nor teach anyone something you have not mastered yourself. You must yourself go through the whole course of studio or theatrical work and you must yourself know everything that is taught in the studio, for only then will you be able to be the principal or a teacher of it. (Stanislavsky, 1967: 144)

As a professionally trained and experienced actress, I was previously able to go through many of the exercises and études used during this research. In my youth, I studied Stanislavsky in the drama school. However, the version taught at the time followed the Soviet approach to the letter, being fully centered on Realism. During training, I was blessed to learn from one of the best Romanian teachers, Professor Olga Tudorache. A renowned actress and a highly gifted mentor, Tudorache had a vision of Stanislavsky's legacy filtered through her artistic background and covert personal religious feelings.

The daughter of an Orthodox priest, with strong religious ties, she was able subtly to infuse the official method with love for beauty, truth, passion, and a sense of sacredness and sacrifice. She also made use of yogic principles in her teachings. Although, Tudorache tried to add these spiritual ideas to the 'system', she could not do so openly, but had to follow the official approach. Moreover, her spiritual methods were never explained to us and, only years later, when looking at the 'system' from this perspective, I was able to grasp what she was trying to do.

This desire of exploring ways towards the creative mood was also born out of my own personal experience. I was only ten years old when I first stumbled upon it, by accident. At the time, I had no idea about what acting involves. Yet, the state experienced was so strong that it changed my life. Interesting to note is that, before engaging in my artistic education, I was lucky to reach the creative state quite often. Nonetheless, this was no longer the case during and after completing the training.

As it appears, instead of helping, the acting classes teaching a 'system' devoid of any spiritual thought, and conducted only from a realist-psychological perspective, started to impede my natural access to creativity. At the time, afraid of losing my abilities, I was struggling to understand why this happened, while trying to find possible solutions to my predicament. Somehow, twenty years prior this research, I knew intuitively that a more spiritually orientated path might provide some viable clues.

After graduation, I was invited to join the artistic team of the Bulandra Theatre in Bucharest, Romania. For nine years there, I was lucky to work with brilliant artistic directors such as Alexandru Darie, the former President of L'Union des Théâtres de l'Europe (et de la Méditerranée), and Andrei Serban, who is known world-wide for both his theatre and opera productions. In Paris, in the 1970s, he worked as Peter Brook's assistant at the International Centre for Theatre Research. In the United States, Britain, and France, Serban has collaborated with Plácido Domingo, Roberto Alagna, and Dame Gwyneth Jones, amongst many other famous names.

I cannot but be grateful for the unique opportunity of working with and learning from such models, all of them being internationally accomplished artists, inclined towards a more spiritual approach to the artistic act. It is from this background that the idea of exploring a spiritual path of the Stanislavskian actor stemmed. Later on, when teaching my own students, I made use of most of these exercises. Nonetheless, they were never previously tested in the ways adopted during this practice as research.

Part One: Theoretical Reflections

Chapter 1

The Creative State: From the Orthodox Faith to Oriental Thought

Concerned with his own struggles as an emerging actor, and profoundly unhappy with the nineteenth-century Russian general style of an actor's education, mainly teaching pupils "to read and act according to a demonstration", and thus giving them no other choice but simply to "copy their teachers" (Stanislavsky, 2008: 61), Stanislavsky embarked upon what was to become the main goal of his life.

That was to elucidate and conquer the ineffable moment of almost magical transformation that actors of genius, such as Mikhail Shchepkin and Glikeria Fedotova, about whom he so fondly writes in *My Life in Art* (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 57), appeared to master so naturally in performance. Stanislavsky was mesmerised by "certain qualities" all the great actors he admired seemed to share: "there was a kind of aura around them on the stage" (Gordon, 1988: 28). According to Mel Gordon:

Audiences sensed something different about these performers. They were relaxed yet filled with a concentrated energy. They were completely involved in the theatrical moment, possessing an ease and liveliness that gave each of their roles a special charge. The performances of these actors reminded Stanislavsky of the absolute absorption and rapture children feel when building sandcastles [...]. Time and place transform themselves. (1988: 28)

It seems that Stanislavsky refers to "this inspired artistic condition" as "the Creative State of Mind". Similar to "love, this state appeared to be instinctive yet, remained a passion beyond the boundaries of any mental control" (Gordon, 1988: 29). In the case of most of the actors, such passion "could not be summoned at a moment's notice" in so far as "it vanished as unexpectedly as it came". Only actors of great genius look as though they "'intuitively' know how to 'create' it on the stage" (Ibid, 1988: 29).

For Stanislavsky, this transformational moment of artistic creativity is equated with the actor "getting into paradise", when he can "capture the very heart of a role" to "*become* the character" (2008a: 121). As he clearly states, the very purpose of the

whole 'system' "must serve as a threshold into the creative state, and one must learn to open, not close the door" (Stanislavsky in Carnicke, 2009: 169).

Sharon Marie Carnicke compares this creative mood with the awareness "of a yogi who has reached a higher state of consciousness" (2009: 130). Michael Chekhov describes it as a "happy moment", in which the actor reaches a particular inner freedom, whilst he—the 'creator'—simultaneously becomes the 'observer' of his own creation (1991: 155). In Peter Brook's account it is an artistic "act of possession" (1990: 123). Jerzy Grotowski considers the creative state to be the illusive moment in which "the actors are penetrated [...] by themselves" (Grotowski in Brook, 1990: 123).

Demidov draws an analogy between this state and the experience of driving "an automobile that's reached its greatest possible speed". As for the driver, who cannot think of something else but: "I hope I don't crash into anything or break my neck!", the "actor who's at the highest stage of his creative potential" cannot suddenly stop to analyse the experience (Demidov, 2016: 639). He can only live it, with the hope of "blazing past everything in one piece and not crashing into anything" (Ibid, 2016: 639).

The artistic creation becomes an entity in its own. As such, its manipulation and conscious control seem no longer to be within the actor's power. According to Demidov, a phenomenon of 'doubling' happens. The actor's "'integral identity' is doubled by the 'character-identity', while both are 'tempered with unity'" (2016: 639). Furthermore, as expressed by Giuliano Campo:

The creative way is individual, it is a way that puts the actor in contact with his/her own self, where life in art must be pursued with a pure heart, seeking for one's own creative seed, getting rid of selfishness, pride and envy. [...] Anticipating Grotowski, Stanislavski explains the need to unblock the individual energies in order to establish a spiritual contact between actors and spectators, that achieve a unity in beauty, something that is common to all human beings. (2017: 184-5)

1.1 Methodology

As part of a practice as research submission, this thesis endeavours to find answers to several central questions: Is the creative state, as envisioned by Stanislavsky, reachable merely by acquiring skills developed only through a realist-psychological technique that do not accounts for his earlier spiritual ideas? Or, on the contrary, does this creative state also necessitate a spiritually orientated type of work? Moreover, by following a spiritual path that connects body and mind to touch upon what a believer would consider to be the soul, can the actor reach deeper and subtler awareness? And if so, can this awareness be transformative to the extent of touching upon that moment when “the actor merges with his part” (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 226)?

Yet, how such a spiritual awareness can go hand in hand with the necessary technical aspects of the actor’s work? Are the two divergent approaches so incompatible that they could not be brought together? To answer these questions, the present research explores whether or not a point of congruence is possible and strives to show ways in which this can be done. Considering Stanislavsky’s expressed certainty that the two “natures of a part, the physical and the spiritual, merge in each other” (2008b: 150), this bringing together might not at all be an impossible task.

To start with, the research draws on Anatoly Smeliansky, Nikolai Demidov and Maria Shevtsova as primary sources concerning Stanislavsky’s concept of ‘the creative state’, as well as the Orthodox influence. To support the argument of a spiritual way of working with the ‘system’, this study also turns to Rose Whyman, Mel Gordon, Sharon Marie Carnicke, Jean Benedetti, David Magarshack, Bella Merlin and Christine Edwards, while making much use of the letters, translated by Laurence Senelick. With the purpose of elucidating the yogic and Hindu inspired ideas, this research refers to Yogi Ramacharaka and Ernest Wood as primary sources of inspiration for Stanislavsky, and it also makes use of the works of Sergei Tcherkasski and Andrew White.

From the perspective of the work done, the main focus was on rediscovering and testing possible ways in which these forgotten spiritual principles might support the practice, and on how such ideas can be used by the actors involved in this project. In order to equip them with all that might be needed for experiencing the creative state, the theoretical aspects served to teach them how to strive towards the ideal of an artist, and to guide the actors on this endless artistic odyssey of becoming and of being.

For this purpose, the research follows the structure delineated by Stanislavsky throughout his books. It starts with the work of the actor on themselves - training - and continues with their work on the text and the role - rehearsing. The practical exploration culminates in the creation of the life (soul) of the character in front of an audience - performing. In addition, the research considers John Gillett's envisioned structure of the 'system' which also strives to follow Stanislavsky's.

All the spiritual and sometimes religious, aspects analysed throughout this thesis were necessary to establish the framework; to look at his work from a different perspective. Whether spiritual or not, as Stanislavsky asserts, the 'system' is "a guide" (2010: 612). The actor should "open it and read" it as "a reference book", and not at all as "a philosophy", because in practice "the 'system' ends when philosophy begins". He strongly advises the actor to work on it "at home", and when on the stage to "put it on the side", for clearly, she/he "cannot act the 'system'" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 612).

Yet, this does not mean that the spirituality of Stanislavsky's legacy should also be left 'on the side', as some practitioners might think to be more appropriate. As Shevtsova informs the reader, on the one hand, "the instrumentalist idea of Stanislavsky's teachings has been above all exploited in the pragmatic Anglo-American cultures". This idea tends constantly to emphasise the "know-how together with the applicability of techniques", assuming that these "techniques are 'tools' with which the actor can master craft" (2014: 335).

On the other hand, as Shevtsova further argues:

Non-instrumentalist or what might be called organic appropriations, for their part, also generally tend to work within these parameters. They have, on the whole, come out of theatres in Russia, where the direct, oral transmission from Stanislavsky's pupils to their pupils, and their pupils, has perpetuated the aesthetics of psychological realism. (2014: 335)

There is no doubt that the realist-psychological aspects are highly important for the actor. Nonetheless, reaching the creative state also requires "uninterrupted creative work" that becomes "the actor's sense of living" and "the meaning of her life" (Campo, 2017: 186-7). To achieve this, "she must develop goodwill towards humanity, showing the beauty that resides in herself", both in a humanistic and a spiritual sense for, "the greater and purer feelings and goodwill towards the other human beings an actor has, the greater qualities will discern in her neighbour" (Ibid, 2017: 186-7).

Moreover, this creative dimension transcends consciousness, and needs to be made "second nature" by means of self-conditioning through "daily exercise" (Benedetti, 1989: 37). According to Stanislavsky, "one of the most important fundamentals in our school of acting" is "*to introduce an actor's creative powers through a conscious psychotechnique*" (2010: 329). But the practitioner should not be limited only to an inspiration springing forth from the conscious mind for, "there is a great deal of subconscious in this process [...] and where you have the subconscious [and the superconscious] you have the inspiration" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 327).

To address such critical issues, firstly we have to consider Stanislavsky's constant tendency to talk about the soul, sometimes described as the spirit or as "the creative 'I'" of the artist (1967: 111). The definition of the word 'spirit' (*dukh*) in his lifetime, as asserted by Whyman, did not necessarily have religious connotations. Nevertheless, as she further explains, Stanislavsky's way of talking about acting clearly connects the stage with his religious upbringing (Whyman, 2008: 76). Secondly, we should consider his need to reach beyond both the conscious and the unconscious

while searching for a deeper level of the mind - “the superconscious” – which is a “secret source of inspiration” that, according to Stanislavsky, can be accessed and controlled only by “the sacrosanct ‘I’ of the actor, the artist-human” (1981: 13).

More crucial questions may arise at this point: How can a practitioner bring into the creative processes such ineffable, untouchable, and indefinable concepts as ‘soul’ and ‘superconscious’? What would be the starting point to create from the depths of the inner ‘I’ or, in other words, what might be the path towards experiencing a creative “sense of self” (*samočuvstvie*) ‘that combines two conscious perspectives: being on the stage and being within the role’” (Musilová, 2018: 81)?

By posing these questions, the thesis also challenges the instrumentalist approach noted above, while striving to explore a spiritual dimension that, at least in practice, seems mostly ignored, in spite of its possible critical importance for the processes of experiencing the creative mood. Clearly, to find some viable answers, we should try and rediscover what Stanislavsky did. This requires an initial comprehension of his personal beliefs and ideals that probably have influenced his entire theatrical work. As Carnicke warns, “readers who take Stanislavsky at his word without seeking his deeper subtext can easily mistake his texts as singularly interested in Psychological Realism” (Carnicke, 2009: 106). She asserts that, “like subtext in a play, the richness of Stanislavsky’s ideas can be found only reading between the lines, an accommodation made necessary by the culture of Soviet censorship” (Ibid, 2009: 94).

Expressed through many spiritual concepts (some of which, possibly originating from the Orthodox thought) scattered throughout all his writings, Stanislavsky’s upbringing and his personal feelings seemed constantly to have shaped his life-long sense of artistic spirituality. In the end, these humanistic and spiritual feelings could only become inseparable from his ‘system’. In spite of this constant presence, however, the possible religious connections are not yet properly analysed, explained, or debated. On

the contrary, as subsequently argued, most of the time, they seem to be intentionally ignored. After decades of translating, transmitting, and reinterpreting Stanislavsky's legacy, somehow so much of his practical work still remains a mystery. With the probable exception of the Russians, the rest of the practitioners are limited to understanding and consequently using only the tangible layers of this legacy, devoid of its spiritual perspective that might be crucial for experiencing the creative state.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

During an interview featured in *Stanislavsky and the Russian Theatre* (a documentary directed by Michael Craig in 2011), Smeliansky gives an account of a subtle presence of religious thought in the 'system' translated into acting ideas. According to Smeliansky, "Stanislavsky's understanding of the theatre is how to combine his deepest religious feelings with theatre. That is the conversion" (Smeliansky in Craig, 2011).

He cautions the theatre practitioner that, without a prior comprehension of this religious conversion, it is impossible to grasp what Stanislavsky "did and his understanding of acting [...], of the relationship between the actors and the audience, his understanding of serving the society" (Ibid, 2011). Yet, Smeliansky does not seem to explain further what he means by this 'conversion'. Could he refer to a possible transformation of Orthodox religious ideas into theatrical principles, usable when creating on the stage? Clearly, "Smeliansky invites us to discuss 'the deeply religious roots beneath Stanislavski's understanding of acting'" (Campo, 2017: 177). These roots are grounded in the Orthodox Faith with which he grew up and matured.

Although not clearly expressed in Stanislavsky's writings, "everything that related to his art practice was surrounded by an aura of the sacred", including "his constant fidgeting" (Gordon, 1988: 20) which, according to Gordon, "had a thoughtful and inner religious component" (1988: 20). Whyman also points out "the religious tone" in

Stanislavsky's use of words, "in which art is the god and actors the priests" (Whyman, 2008: 78). In addition, whenever reading Stanislavsky's works, more examples of such conversion may be found in his constant advice for the actor to observe a correct moral behaviour while creating and maintaining the liturgical atmosphere on the stage (Stanislavsky, 2010: 572). As well, it might be reflected by his relentless encouragements towards love for art or passion for beauty and truth in order to be able to incarnate the soul of the character, alongside the utter need for spiritual growth, envisioned as climbing a symbolic ladder towards perfection (Ibid, 1967: 93).

All these concepts ('morality', 'love', 'beauty', 'truth', 'soul', 'incarnation', 'ladder', 'sacrifice'), present in the Orthodox Faith, appear to be also used as artistic instruments—for, as Whyman further argues, undoubtedly "there are religious or spiritual connotations to the way Stanislavsky talks about acting" (Whyman, 2008: 77). For example, the actor has to "sacrifice himself, to relate to the universal idea [...] of the general life in nature" (Benedetti, 2008: 16). Furthermore, the liturgical mood noted above, directly links with Stanislavsky's idea that the stage and the theatre should become "sacred altars on which" the actor "should lay his offerings" (1967: 15).

He advises the actors to sacralise their work by investing the space and all the objects contained in it with a nearly ritualistic importance. In Stanislavsky's vision, including the costumes and the props are to be handled and used as if they are sacred. He asserts that "a costume or a prop [...] for a character cease to be mere objects and become holy relics" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 575). The simple gesture of putting on a costume should mean much "more than just an actor dressing". For the Stanislavskian artist, this moment should be as meaningful as the ritual of a higher priest who prepares towards performing a holy ceremony. The mundane dressing up becomes no less than a ritual in itself, through which the actor "puts on his robes" (Ibid, 2010: 575).

Yet, in Benedetti's translation, *An Actor's Work*, with the exception of the clearly conveyed goal of the 'system' to support "the creation of the life of the human spirit in a role" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 19), there is no evidence of a religious or spiritual presence. Throughout the entire book, crucial terms such as 'spiritual' or 'soul' seem to disappear completely. The only time when the word 'soul' can be found is when reading the extracts from the 'Original Draft Preface', in which Stanislavsky appears to acknowledge the soul and its fundamental significance for the art of the theatre (2010: xxiv).

Whilst constantly and relentlessly repeated throughout the entire book, as in a mantra, the expression "the life of the human spirit" becomes, in this preface, "the life of the human soul", which cannot be created or known through the brain, but "through feelings" (Stanislavsky, 2010: xxiv). This slightly different formulation that includes the religious idea of the soul in the creative processes, and which might be crucial for understanding how the 'system' works towards experiencing the creative state on the stage appears nowhere else in *An Actor's Work*, and thus can be easily overlooked.

As noted in the Introduction, in opposition to Benedetti's version that replaces 'soul' with 'mind', and which eliminates the word 'spiritual' completely, Elizabeth Hapgood's *Creating a Role* includes such crucial spiritually connected terms. Furthermore, using Stanislavsky's words, ideas, and his advice for the actor, other books also contain clearer references to the spiritual nature of theatre as art. For example, let us consider *On the Art of the Stage* that is based on a collection of lectures or discourses given by Stanislavsky between 1918 and 1922 at the Opera Studio, as translated and edited by Magarshack. In this book, the word 'spiritual' is very much present, whilst 'soul', although not disappearing completely, tends to be replaced with 'heart', as in "the living treasures—the hearts of men" (Stanislavsky, 1967: 97).

In contrast with Benedetti's choice to use 'mind' instead of 'soul', Magarshack's option does not seem to eliminate a spiritual dimension, for when referring to the heart,

surely Stanislavsky cannot be alluding to the literal human organ but to what it symbolises. For example, the Russian '*dusha*' translates as both 'soul' and 'heart' (Shevtsova, 2010: 173). This might be so because, in Orthodox thought, the word 'heart' depicts both the biological organ and the spiritual one - the soul - containing the divine essence - love and the Christ – and this gives it a clear spiritual meaning.

Faced with such opposing choices of translating his words, one cannot but wonder why there is such a huge difference between various writings, all of them attributed to Stanislavsky. Why do some of these books seem constantly to emphasize such critical terms as 'soul' and 'spiritual', while others appear completely to disregard them? Unfortunately, as a consequence of the replacement or excisions of all religiously or spiritually-originated words from Benedetti's translations, what remains visible appears to be connected only with the technical aspects of an actor's work and with the more realistic layers of the 'system', involving the physical action of the body or the behaviourist psychology of the mind. Unless possessing knowledge of Orthodox theology (or other religious and spiritual practices), as well as being familiar with ways of looking for a more profound meaning hidden behind Stanislavsky's words, it becomes almost impossible for the reader even to be made aware of a spiritual perspective that includes the religious conversion highlighted by Smeliansky.

While finding "Benedetti's translation very readable", Shevtsova points out that, unfortunately, "it does not quite fully convey the emotional principle embedded in Stanislavsky's research" in so far as, "too frequently, he uses 'mind' for Stanislavsky's '*dusha*' that, in Russian, refers to both 'heart' and 'soul'" (Shevtsova, 2010: 173). As she further argues, due to this replacement, 'mental' covers also "the adjectives *dushevnoye* and *dukhovnoye* from the corresponding two nouns". Therefore, Shevtsova warns against the suggestion "that Stanislavsky envisaged the actor as more rationally driven

and in-the-head in his/her practice than is implied by his continual emphasis on the actor as a constantly developing emotional and spiritual being” (Shevtsova, 2010: 173).

From her conversation with the Russian actress Katya Kamotskaya (who advised Benedetti during compiling his translations), Merlin reached the conclusion that Benedetti’s decision to eliminate the word ‘soul’ was born out of a desire “to avoid allusions or ideology that, from an English-speaking perspective, might seem too religious” (Merlin, 2012: 13). Benjamin Lloyd challenges such an idea and feels compelled to question this urge of removing everything that is inexplicable, spiritual, or mysterious from the ways of acting and drama study. He cannot help but wonder: “Why has spirituality been excised from the transmission of Stanislavsky’s work, when so much else which came from him has shaped western actor training?” (Ibid, 2012: 15).

Supporting Lloyd’s statement, Merlin also disagrees with the idea that “an English-speaking readership” would “really find the notion of ‘spirit’ too religious” and she brings into argumentation the common practice of “yoga and meditation without necessarily seeing any religious connotation” (2012: 15-6). In Merlin’s opinion, “the fact that *dusha* and *dukh* can also be found under *um* in the Russian dictionary” does not “really justify the cultural hybridisation as well as the linguistic translation” (2012: 15-6).

Grasping the deep nuances of the replaced Russian terms, she declares:

I found myself perturbed by the substitution in *An Actor’s Work* of spiritual concepts for mental or psychological ones for two key reasons: (a) the ethos of Stanislavsky’s ‘system’ is, with equal emphasis, about the physical and the spiritual; therefore, to reduce the latter was to do a disservice to the fundamental underpinning; (b) Stanislavsky’s philosophies had already suffered under the knife of Soviet censorship, and I was uneasy at the thought that in twenty-first-century Britain, we might have added to the strata of censorship. (Merlin, 2012: 14)

Quoting Oliver Saylor (who witnessed many of the Moscow Art Theatre performances), Christine Edwards argues in favour of a constant Stanislavskian “spiritual emphasis on the psychological background of realistic interpretation”. Alongside the visible and

broadly accepted “superficially realistic” layer, a less evident but very powerful and highly “contagious alchemy of the spirit” was present. This alchemy inspired “an inner vision of plays and roles and a general method of spiritual” interpretation, more profound than the psychological one (Edwards, 1966: 221).

Two major strands seem to influence how Stanislavsky’s ideas are interpreted. On the one hand, “in the West, his System is still often mistaken for” Lee Strasberg’s Method “with its overemphasis on psychological Realism and therapeutic self-expression” (Carnicke, 2009: 207). In Russia, on the other hand, “Soviet Marxism limited Stanislavsky to the physical world, behaviourist psychology, and Socialist Realism” (Ibid, 2009: 207). As Carnicke asserts, “these two cultural veils” failed to acknowledge a spiritual presence for they “allowed features such as Realist styles and Western notions of ‘self’ to be seen, but hid other aspects drawn from [Leo] Tolstoy’s aesthetics”, symbolism, or yoga (Ibid, 2009: 207).

Although slightly contradicting Smeliansky’s argument, Whyman also connects Stanislavsky’s legacy with a spiritual presence. According to her, “following Tolstoy, Stanislavski believed that art is about communication between people and that what is communicated is of spiritual importance” (Whyman, 2013: 15). Whyman further explains that “this did not imply religious feeling” but followed the concept of ‘the art’ as a means of enabling “human beings to transcend everyday experience and to envision dimensions beyond it, of truth and beauty” (Whyman, 2013: 15).

In Tolstoy’s vision, the very value of any work of art is reflected in its power to infect those witnessing it, insofar as “art is that human activity which consists in one person’s consciously transmitting to others” her own feelings and experience, reflected in “certain external signs” (Emerson in Tussing, 2002: 238). Brought up in a noble family, “Count Leo Tolstoy was fated by his noble origins to a life separated from the vast majority of the people, the peasants among whom he lived” (Ibid, 1986: 16). Like

Stanislavsky, Tolstoy was educated in the Orthodox tradition. As he remembers, from his childhood he started “to read the New Testament” and was “touched most of all by that portion of the doctrine of Jesus which inculcates love, humility, self-denial, and the duty of returning good for evil” (Tolstoy, 2014: 2).

In his way of thinking, this is “the substance of Christianity” and the main reason why he “submitted to a religion professed by a multitude of toilers, who find in it the solution of life - the religion taught by the Orthodox Church” (2014: 2). Clearly, his issues were not with the faith itself but with the institution of the Church. In 1901, Tolstoy’s complicated relationship with it was brought to an abrupt end, when he was officially excommunicated (Nickell, 2010: 183). To use his own words:

[...] in making my submission to the Church, I soon saw that I should not find in its creed the confirmation of the essence of Christianity; what was to me essential seemed to be in the dogma of the Church merely an accessory. [...] The Church did not give me what I expected from her. I had passed from nihilism to the Church simply because I felt it to be impossible to live without religion, that is, without a knowledge of good and evil beyond the animal instinct. (Tolstoy, 2014: 2)

To return to Stanislavsky’s spirituality, as Bertolt Brecht puts it, with “a cool-headed appraisal” of his vocabulary, a “mystical and cultish character” of ideas can be “brought to light” (Brecht and Mueller, 1964: 156). Although his intent is to criticise this “cultish” tendency, nonetheless, at the same time, Brecht acknowledges that, for Stanislavsky, “the human soul appeared no different from what it is in a religion”, and that “there was a ‘priesthood’ of art, a ‘congregation’, a ‘captivated’ audience. ‘The word’ had something mystically absolute about it, and the actor was a ‘servant of art’” (Ibid, 1964: 156).

Indeed, Stanislavsky does not seem to shy away from using religious ideas in his research. Yet, it is necessary to remember that, even though the thought of staging mystery plays came to him after attending one in Paris, Stanislavsky's creative purpose was not at all religious. Recording the event, he notes in a letter written on 8 May 1897:

The play is called "Evangile en 3 parties". This kind of performance is organised for those who wish to pray and cleanse their souls. [...] I wept at all three acts and left the theatre completely refreshed. [...] 'Our Father', set to the wonderful verses of Rostand and uttered in a whisper by Sarah amid a sobbing audience, —this is artistic in the highest degree [and] it moves one to tears. My dream now is to stage this play...if only in a private home. Let those people who have lost their ability to pray in churches come to us and be inspired in the theatre. (Senelick, 2014: 76)

In the end, Stanislavsky "never set out to create liturgical or any other type of ritual compositions for religious purposes" (Shevtsova, 2012: 6). That is to say, he did not use the art of the stage with a religious outcome in mind. Quite the opposite, Stanislavsky seemed to have planted the seeds of religious thought into the artistic soil of the creative act. Moreover, it is well known that "the tradition of the Moscow Art Theatre has its roots in that of Shchepkin and Gogol", who "saw the theatre as an institution" that, like the church, was very much capable "of influencing the spiritual needs of [an] audience, of educating it toward a higher morality and ethics" (Gorchakov, 1973: 18).

By pointing out another of Stanislavsky's letters, addressed to his wife Mariya Lilina and written only "three days after he had set out his need for moral education in his diary", Benedetti notes his "view of the theatre and its function" (Benedetti, 1999: 37). In this letter, Stanislavsky establishes "the artist" as "a prophet who appears on earth to bear witness to purity and truth" and "who must become an ideal man" (Ibid, 1999: 37). Clearly, in his vision, there is a huge difference between a mere actor and an artist. To achieve artistic greatness, the actor needs to strive relentlessly towards becoming this artist, who (according to Stanislavsky) is a "superior being, with a quasi-religious responsibility in the expression of his art" (Benedetti, 2008: 16).

As opposed to Benedetti, Senelick simply preserves the spiritual or religious meaning of the original words when translating Stanislavsky's letters. Magarshack and Smeliansky argue more firmly the crucial importance of religious Orthodox beliefs for Stanislavsky as a private person, as well as a theatre practitioner. As noted above, one of the key sources, related to some important spiritual aspects of Stanislavsky's work, was Demidov's book. According to Andrei Malaev-Babel, Demidov made a major contribution to the development of the 'system'. In a document written in 1926, after Demidov resigned the newly formed Realistic Theatre (former Fourth Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre), and found "himself unemployed", Stanislavsky declared:

This is a man full of genuine love for the art, and a selfless enthusiast. From the time we met [in 1907] ... he continuously helped me to develop the rich and complex subject of the actor's creativity. At the moment, I think he is one of the few who knows the 'system' theoretically and practically. (Demidov, 2016: 1)

Following this separation, Demidov continued his own research and work. A few years later, however, "Stanislavsky engaged Demidov at his Opera Theatre as a director-teacher" and another period of close collaboration between the two began. During this time, as explained by Malaev-Babel, because Demidov also was helping Stanislavsky to edit the material for the publication of his book, they were working together tirelessly "at the theatre, in rehearsals, and at home" (Ibid, 2016: 9).

With some exceptions, it appears that there is a gap in the writings on Stanislavsky's legacy; most of the studies have focused only on his fascination with yogic thought, while the Orthodox Faith—with which he grew up, being thus an equally powerful presence for more than half of his life—is mostly ignored. For example, due to the Soviet influence, Sonia Moore, tends to negate any spiritual dimension of the 'system', stressing constantly the technical and realist aspects of the actor's work. And she does so by denying any possible religious or mystical origination of some of his core principles. In order to highlight the practicality of the 'system', Moore feels

compelled to argue repeatedly that “there is nothing mystical, there is no mysterious transformation in Stanislavsky’s ‘reincarnation’” (Moore, 1960: 60-1).

Kathryn Wylie-Marques as well appears to have a vision limited to a realist-psychological observance that does not acknowledge a hidden spirituality. Failing to notice his notion of ‘inner-spiritual action’, Wylie-Marques appreciates Stanislavsky’s “tasks” and “through line of action” as very much realist and concrete, therefore deeming them incompatible with any spiritual ideas (Wylie-Marques, 2003: 150). Thus, she opposes the mystical connotation of Zeami Motokiyo’s ‘seeds’ and ‘flowering’ (terms used in Noh drama) to Stanislavsky’s concept of ‘physical action’.

Yet, the ‘tasks’ and ‘through line of action’ should not be observed only from a physical perspective. On the contrary, to Stanislavsky’s mind, action is “not something external, but rather something internal, nonphysical, a spiritual activity” (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 50), whilst the score of actions “for the physical life of a role is only the beginning” of an actor’s work. Its “most important part” consists in “the deepening of this life until it reaches the very depths where the spiritual life of a role begins” (Ibid, 2010: 154) or, in other words, until it reaches its soul.

Without negating a scientific approach but, on the contrary, acknowledging and sometimes exploring such possible ways, the present practice as research also does not seem to find much common ground with Jonathan Pitches, who appears to be aware only of the realist dimension of the Stanislavskian legacy. Neither specifically denying nor supporting a spiritual presence, Pitches looks upon Stanislavsky’s work through the lens of scientific thought. He highlights two distinctive paths—a “Material Newtonian” one and a “Romantic path—associated [...] with Goethean science” (Pitches, 2006: 4). Nonetheless, he does not seem to link Stanislavsky with the latter.

For Pitches, only Michael Chekhov and Anatoli Vassiliev look to fit into this second category. He opposes their spiritual views to Stanislavsky’s presumed realism.

Firstly, Pitches points out Michael Chekhov's connections with the occult - the influence of Anthroposophy through "Rudolf Steiner's teachings (from *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment*, specifically)" (Ibid, 2007: 35). However, this does not mean that Stanislavsky was completely unaware of Michael Chekhov's mystical quest. As White argues, whilst "the spiritual strands in Chekhov's ideas, his use of Yoga and his devotion to Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science of anthroposophy are well known", because Stanislavsky "is not generally seen as a spiritual thinker", his "shared interest in the spiritual side of acting" with Chekhov (White, 2009: 25) appears to be forgotten.

Secondly, although noting Vassiliev's background as a former scientist and a "trained chemist", Pitches comments upon his distancing from scientific thought, hence from Stanislavsky's realist legacy, in the pursuit of "a spiritual reformulation" of the 'system' (Pitches: 2006: 4). Be that as it may, this spiritual pursuit looks to have been stronger than his scientific interest and background for it led Vassiliev towards meeting Grotowski. Moreover, the opposition noted above, as highlighted by Pitches, appears to be contradicted by Vassiliev, who declares that he was drawn towards Grotowski's theatrical work only after he began to understand Stanislavsky's spiritual ways:

It was only at the end of this road that I started to notice and observe the same things as Grotowski [...]. And it was at this point in my life that I suddenly found myself at the crossroads where we could really meet each other. And that meeting became possible thanks to Stanislavsky. (Vassiliev, 2014:1)

In spite of this spiritual presence, because for decades, Stanislavsky's "ideas have been viewed through pervasive veils of assumptions" (Carnicke, 2009: 207), his legacy tends to suffer from a perpetuation of a "myth presented as a conventional wisdom that the approach of Stanislavsky and his successors *only* applies to 'Naturalism'" (Gillett, 2007: 12). Additionally, according to Benedetti, "Stanislavski's mature activity can only be understood if it is seen as rooted in the conviction that" the purpose of theatre "is to civilise, to increase sensitivity, to heighten perception" and "the best method of achieving this end was adherence to the principles of Realism" (Benedetti, 2004: 16).

Due to the 'myths', 'assumptions', and 'conventional wisdom' noted above, Stanislavsky's legacy might be viewed in opposition to such artistic paths as Grotowski's. Nevertheless, if a hidden spirituality is considered, this apparent opposition tends to fade away. "Grotowski's debt to Stanislavsky is strongly evident in the 'holy' variant of his rejection of realistic representation, and he acknowledges Stanislavsky's great influence" (Shevtsova, 2014: 336). As Whyman argues, "for both Stanislavsky and Grotowski, theatre had a quasi-religious significance" (Whyman, 2008: 161).

In Stanislavsky's vision, very much similar to Grotowski's, the art of the theatre "had transcendental power in its communication with an audience". Furthermore, while "Grotowski developed the notion of 'holy theatre'" (Ibid, 2008: 161), Stanislavsky dreamt of creating "some kind of a spiritual order of actors" (Tcherkasski, 2012: 2). For both practitioners, "dedication and spiritual qualities were to be demanded of its practitioners and a spiritual awareness would be awakened in its audience" (Whyman, 2008: 161).

To conclude, Stanislavsky seemed to have planted the seeds of religious thought in the artistic soil of the creative act. Smeliansky's argument concerning a conversion of religious feelings appears to be endorsed by Stanislavsky's constant use of such notions as the "heart" (1967: 224), "love" (Stanislavsky, 1967: 116), and "beauty" (Ibid, 1967: 139), or such as climbing a spiritual "ladder" (Ibid, 1967: 93). Although found in many other schools of thought, these notions are also central to the Orthodox Faith. Therefore, in order to grasp this conversion and to find out more about his personal feelings, it seemed only logical to start by looking into Stanislavsky's Orthodox upbringing and early "strict religious education" (Magarshack, 1986: 3) as a possible source of inspiration for the use of many potentially spiritually connected terms.

1.3 Orthodox Roots

To highlight the strong ties with Orthodox thought and traditions, it is imperative to remember that, as a younger member of the old merchant Muscovite society, Stanislavsky's family followed the Orthodox tradition. During the formative years, he was surrounded by a spiritual way of thinking, as well as by his father's credo that a good Christian has to dedicate his existence and work to the benefit of others. Born Alekseev, one of the wealthiest merchant families in pre-communist Russia, Stanislavsky's personal letters abound in references to God as part of his daily language, such as "thank God" (Senelick, 2014: 23); "My God" (Ibid, 2014: 49); "if God takes away" or "gifts God has given me" (Ibid, 2014: 53).

As explained by Magarshack, Stanislavsky was raised and educated in a patriarchal environment, in which "certain patriarchal customs were still observed: all church holidays and fasts were strictly kept" and "the whole family went to church regularly" (Magarshack, 1986: 3). Later in life, when married and with children, he continued to go to church. In a letter addressed to his wife, written on 3rd May 1896, Stanislavsky gives an account of his day: "since yesterday was a public holiday, I got up about 12. The house was empty. Where should I go? I thought and thought, went to mass, attended prayers at the Three Joys" (Senelick, 2014: 67).

He also appears intent to continue this tradition with his own children, as proved by a Will written on 17 April 1893, in which he asserts that, in the event of his death, it is his utmost desire that his daughter Kira be religiously educated. "Bend every effort", he writes, "to make her religious, since only in that manner can one preserve the poetry in life and a sense of higher things". He urges the beneficiary of this Will to teach Kira "that the goal of life lies not in hedonism, wealth and pleasures, but in serious work and the beauty that elevates the soul" (Senelick, 2014: 59-60). Although this section might

indicate Stanislavsky's religious feelings, at the same time, it defines clearly their philosophical and poetical aspects, as opposed to a dogmatic one.

Brought up in Moscow, in a strong Orthodox moral environment, Stanislavsky chose his own path and boldly reinvented himself. As a way of hiding his theatrical activities from his father, to whom the thought "that his son harboured ambitions to become a professional actor" was purely "unthinkable" (Benedetti, 1999: 21), Konstantin Alekseev took the stage name Stanislavsky. His passion for the theatre, as a "temple of art" (1967: 95) was his constant beacon, and everything he learned or experienced in his life's quest was given to the stage and represented his personal highest offerings for the benefit of humankind. All his theatrical research had one single purpose, and that was to guide the actor towards becoming an ideal artist, as much as it was humanly possible. According to Stanislavsky, "this ideal human being" can only devote "himself to one single great goal in his life", that is "to make plain the hidden spiritual beauties which a masterly work of art contains" (2010: 314).

This Stanislavskian way of thinking appears to be in line with the Orthodox hesychastic advice to lead a spiritual life (outside the church) in the context of a personal calling. Hesychasm, known as "the method of interior or spiritual prayer" (Lossky V, 1973: 209), constitutes a major part of the ancient ascetic heritage of the Orthodox Faith. Whereas much older, the wisdom of the hesychastic way was written on paper in a treatise attributed to Saint Symeon the New Theologian, dating from the early eleventh century, and which compiles all the knowledge "transmitted from master to disciple by word of mouth, by example, and by spiritual direction" (Ibid, 1973: 209).

Considering the Orthodox upbringing and his family's traditional way of life, it can be assumed that Stanislavsky was also a believer in the necessary development of the human being, both from a humanistic perspective and a spiritual one. After 1917, however, under the new communist regime, religious and many other spiritual beliefs or

practices became less and less acceptable. According to Whyman, it is very hard to tell if Stanislavsky “maintained Russian Orthodox faith throughout his life, secretly, as many Russians did after the revolution” (Whyman, 2008: 78). Yet, bearing in mind his own sense of spirituality, developed during around forty years of life, and the influence of Leo Tolstoy’s genius, undyingly admired by Stanislavsky (2008: 122), it seems highly unlikely that an over-night change in politics and ideology could have completely erased all traces of spiritual thought from Stanislavsky’s consciousness.

Tolstoy’s religious influence, and the Oriental one, alongside the years spent as an active Orthodox (before the revolution), tended to be conveniently forgotten under the new proletarian order. Moreover, not only that almost all the spiritual ideas were eliminated by censorship, but his modified “work was used to support Stalinism and socialist realism” (Whyman, 2008: xiii). Many of his words were manipulated “to create the illusion” (White, 2006: 81) that due to an avowal of his sudden and exclusive fascination for science, any former spiritual interest was, in the end, rejected.

It is extremely important to remember that Stanislavsky lived his formative years both personally and artistically, outside communism, during such times when the Russians’ daily life was grounded in various spiritual and religious customs. For example, when baptized, a child would have been given a saint’s name, and the importance of that saint’s yearly celebration day (known as the name day) had a higher significance than the actual birthday. The meaning of the holy baptism for the Orthodox people is not connected solely to the entrance of the newly born child into the Holy Church. More significant is the fact that it marks the possibility to access the inner grace of God, and thus, to begin a personal journey towards theosis, central to Orthodox theology. The very goal of Orthodox spirituality “is the attainment of union with God and consequently theosis or deification” (Coniaris, 1998: 132), pursuable only with the help of God’s grace that becomes accessible through baptismal ritual.

Stanislavsky could not have been a stranger to all these Orthodox norms of life, for he simply lived them all in his youth. Religious thought, the Orthodox Church, religious celebrations and daily prayers were constantly present in his personal and professional life. Before the Revolution, all the major events in the Russian people's lives, such as buying a property, joining the army, or starting school, used to be blessed by a priest. Stanislavsky was no exception. As Benedetti points out, including when the Moscow Art Theatre had its first rehearsal day in Pushkino, a small village situated near Moscow, "a short religious opening ceremony" took place (1999: 67).

In a letter written by Vsevolod Meyerhold on 17 June 1898, he proudly names the venue in Pushkino "our temple of Melpomene" and informs that, upon their arrival, "everything was ready for the ceremony". Later on, he continues to explain that "there was a table in the auditorium covered with a white cloth on which" were "icons, water, and everything needed for [the] ceremony" (Meyerhold in Benedetti, 1991: 21). Although not clearly specified in the letter, this ceremony could only be religious.

All the items described appear to be objects used to build an improvised altar; the white cloth signifying the purity of the place, the water being the holy water from the church, and the icons, representing holy objects, intended to bring the sacredness of the church into the space of rehearsals. The icon is a symbol that connects the worshiper to God as Holy Trinity, thus becoming a focal point and a link between the worshiper's spiritual emotions and the Holy Spirit. As Orlando Figes asserts, the Orthodox Faith considers the icon to be "a gateway to the holy sphere" (2002: 299).

Furthermore, considering that the birth of a new theatre was a major event in the life of Moscow, its legitimacy had to be acknowledged by the church. According to Whyman, the Metropolitan blessed the official opening of the Moscow Art Theatre, and Stanislavsky himself led the actors in prayers (Whyman, 2008: 76). Although being the norm in those days, could this grand opening religious ceremony in Moscow (or the

simple blessing in Pushkino) also have had a similar significance with that of a baptism, through which the new theatre would have been blessed with grace?

For the purposes of clarity, it is crucial to note that, far from being an atheist, Stanislavsky felt quite distant “from Soviet values” (Carnicke, 2009: 96) and held no interest in any politics at all. As stated by Senelick, Stanislavsky “was not political”. In fact, “until the Revolution, he was a loyal subject of the Tsar and his interest in affairs of state mattered only insofar as they affected his factory, his theatre and the lives of his nearest and dearest”. As for “his liberal views”, clearly, they “never exceeded those characteristic of his class” (Senelick, 2014: 8).

Smeliansky argues that, during the years of terror, while “condemned to a kind of house arrest” Stanislavsky “took no part in Soviet life, did not sign any group letters supporting the murder and torture of dissidents, did not stage propaganda plays”. As far as was possible, “he preserved his autonomy” (Smeliansky in Stanislavsky, 2010: 686) and his high moral standards. According to Benedetti, he also made many efforts “to ensure that the members of the company had food and shelter”. Yet, “he did nothing in his own behalf, neither reacting nor protesting” when he was faced with an “eviction order”. Privately, however, Stanislavsky “apparently broke down and wept that after four years of apprehension and doubt, his worst fears were realized” (Benedetti, 1999: 257).

1.4 Oriental Influences

While trying to elucidate the yogic influences, Sergei Tcherkasski comments on the “evidence about Stanislavsky’s early interest in yoga” as being fragmentary and “partly a guess”. Instead, he clearly points out the year 1911, when Stanislavsky “got acquainted with Ramacharaka’s *Hatha* Yoga” as “beyond doubt” (Tcherkasski, 2012: 5). According to Elena Polyakova, yoga was part of the actor’s curriculum in the First

Studio, where “improvisations were alternated with readings from *Hatha Yoga*” (Polyakova in Tcherkasski, 2012: 5). Moreover, as Tcherkasski informs:

A [...] letter by EB Vakhtangov has been preserved in which, in May 1915, he was asking the students: “There is one more request. Take 1 ruble from the box office. Take it under my name. Buy Ramacharaka's *Hatha Yoga*. And give it to Ekzemplarskaya on my behalf [Vera Ekzemplarskaya was the student of the First Studio—S.T.] She should read the book attentively and it is necessary that in the summer she does all the exercises from the part on breathing and on ‘prana.’” (2012: 5)

According to White, “a collection of books on Hindu philosophy [...] attributed to one ‘Yogi Ramacharaka’ were instrumental in shaping Stanislavsky’s understanding of yoga and, ultimately, the system itself” (2006: 74). By stating that “In Stanislavsky’s private library and archive two of his books are kept: *Hatha Yoga-Yogic Philosophy of the Physical Well-Being of a Man* and *Raja Yoga-the Teaching of Yogis about the Mental World of a Man*”, Tcherkasski seems to endorse White’s account (Tcherkasski, 2012: 12). As asserted by both authors, not only were Ramacharaka’s books part of Stanislavsky’s private library, but they also contain extensive handwritten notes.

It is of great importance to remember, however, that Ramacharaka was not at all an Indian sage but the pen name of William Walker Atkinson, an American “lawyer-turned-metaphysician”, who was “a prolific writer” (White, 2006: 82) and who, between 1903 and 1907, published a collection of twelve books on yoga and Hinduism, many of them being translated into Russian shortly after their publication. As White explains:

Atkinson’s Ramacharaka series covers a wide range of topics including life after death, clairvoyance, psychic healing, Christian mysticism, general introductions to Yogic philosophy, plus translations of and commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. (2006: 82)

In her letters, Helena Roerich, as cited by White, observes that by presenting a mostly diluted version of yoga, aimed at a more “curious but largely uninformed readership”, Ramacharaka’s books offer no more than a simplified “second-hand information” (White, 2006: 83). According to Roerich, writers on yogic philosophy and practices such

as Ramacharaka, “while giving not a bad exposition of some systems of Indian Yoga, at the same time speak with the light-mindedness of a dilettante about the ease of mastery of the highest achievements of the Raja Yogis” (Ibid, 2006: 83).

Considering that, in Europe and The United States, most knowledge of the Oriental religious practices was highly diluted, had various interpretations and was used to create new occult movements such as Theosophy, Hermeticism, or Anthroposophy (Rosenthal, 1997) to name only a few, one has to ask how much yoga, Hinduism, and Buddhism, both as philosophies and practices, were available and understood in Russia at the time. Nonetheless, bearing in mind that Stanislavsky never exhibited an interest to follow a new religion or the occult, and that his interest was directed towards finding new sources of inspiration for the ‘system’, it might be safe to presume that this very dilution gave him access to a more generalised analysis of yogic principles.

In order to be transformed and used for artistic purposes, a direct study of them based on the original Hindu texts might have proved highly complicated, while its principles would have been way harder to be comprehended in depth, if not impossible. According to Tcherkasski, Demidov who, at the time, was the tutor of Stanislavsky’s son, introduced him to these simplified teachings of yoga.

Tcherkasski explains that, before completely dedicating his life to the art of the theatre, Demidov, who “studied Tibetan medicine at Saint Petersburg Russian-Buryat school of Piotr Badmaiev, doctor to the Tsar’s family”, was also a medical student at the Moscow University (Tcherkasski, 2016: 27). In her memoirs (quoted by Tcherkasski), the Russian actress Nadezhda Smirnova, describes the wonderful experience she had during the summer of 1911 with Stanislavsky’s family in Saint-Lunaire, where they were engaged in long conversations regarding a possible system of acting reflected in various psychophysical exercises and designed to sustain a functional acting technique.

As Smirnova remembers, fascinated by some similarities between the Hindu philosophies and Stanislavsky's ideas for acting, Demidov enquired: "Why should you yourself invent exercises and search for the names of things that have been named long, long ago"? And he offered to give Stanislavsky Ramacharaka's books. "That will interest you, because many of your thoughts coincide with the things written there" (Smirnova in Tcherkasski, 2016: 27). Shortly afterwards, in 1912, spurred on by the resistance of the established Moscow Art Theatre's actors to work in the new yogic-inspired fashion, Stanislavsky looked for a solution in founding "the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre [...] as a laboratory in which to develop the system by conducting practical experiments in the context of rehearsal" (White, 2006: 78).

Vera Soloviova, a former member of the First Studio, recalls that no matter how busy Stanislavsky was with the rehearsals at the Moscow Art Theatre, he "came after the performance and stayed" at the Studio "until two o'clock in the morning" (Soloviova in Gray, 1964: 137). According to Soloviova, "the First Studio" was the place where Stanislavsky "made all his experiments and evolved what later became known as his System" (Ibid, 1964: 137). He appointed one of Tolstoy's followers, Leopold Antonovich Sulerzhitsky, "as the artistic and administrative director" (Tcherkasski, 2012: 5).

The two friends and collaborators seemed to understand, support, and complete each other. It appears that Sulerzhitsky's notes—made over a period of two years spent on his journey to Canada with the Doukhobors, a Russian religious sect forced into exile by the Tsarist government (Davenport and Bennett, 2016: 506)—strongly impressed Stanislavsky. The meditative practices of the Doukhobors were based on daily morning meditation. While assuming a relaxed position, they used to sit down and meditate on the day ahead and its planned activities, imagining and visualizing better ways in which to fulfil all the tasks of the day, step by step (Tcherkasski, 2016: 31) — a process later

used by Stanislavsky in his acting exercises, mainly the ones designed to train the imagination. In *An Actor's Work*, Tortsov tells his students:

[...] all you have to do is set a theme for you and you begin to see pictures with what we call your mind's eye. In our actors' jargon we call these *mental images*, *the inner eye*. Judging from personal experience, to imagine, fantasize means above all to see the things one is thinking about with the mind's eye. (Stanislavsky, 2010: 73)

The Doukhobor's practice of meditation and lifestyle appear not so different from the ones experienced either in a *sesshin* (a Zen religious retreat) or in a hesychastic Orthodox monastery. As James Austin explains, a *sesshin* is mostly sheltered by a temple or a secluded holy place where, for a particular period of time, the aspirant follows a strict program of meditation, either sitting, walking, or through physical work, while sharing her/his experience with the small community (1999: 138).

On land acquired by Stanislavsky near Evpatoria, on the shores of the Black Sea, a similar "communal summer retreat" was created for the actors of the First Studio by Sulerzhitsky (White, 2006: 79). As White argues, using the experience gained during his travels with the Doukhobors, Sulerzhitsky established "a quite strict regimen" in which, alongside acting exercises inspired by yoga, as well as the Doukhobors' way of meditating, the students shared a different "communal responsibility". While in the retreat they had chores to do: "one was a cook, another [a] coachman, a third a housekeeper, a fourth a boatman" (Ibid, 2006:79), and so on.

In a similar manner, to reach 'mindfulness' (*sati*), "both as a function or quality of mind, [...] often described as something to be practiced or cultivated" (Kuan, 2008: 1), and as a way of constant focusing of the mind on every job at hand, while being present in the moment, a Zen Buddhist practitioner would combine seated and walking meditation with day-to-day activities and with hard work. However, the same combination also used to be employed in Orthodox monasteries.

The famous monastery of Optina Pustyn, for example, was a place often visited by “all the greatest writers of the nineteenth century—Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy among them” (Figes, 2002: 292). According to Meyendorff, “the phenomenon of the Optina *Startzy*” represented a rebirth, “in the midst of the nineteenth century”, of “the ancient hesychastic prophetic character” (1974: 160), and “a return to the hesychastic path of Russia’s most revered medieval monks” (Figes, 2002: 292). Everyone was welcomed to the monastery for, as Meyendorff further explains:

The senator, the poor peasant, the student, in the eyes of the elder, all seemed equally suffering and in need of spiritual medicine. [...] No problem that was significant in the life of a human being was indifferent to the *starets*. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky describes the setting and atmosphere of Optina in detail; something of the character of Zosima reappears in the famous *Starets* Ambrose, who from 1873 to 1891 succeeded Father Leonidas and Father Macarius, the founders of the institution of the *startzy* at Optina. (1974: 160)

So far, there is no written evidence to attest if Stanislavsky ever visited Optina Pustyn. Nevertheless, considering the fame of this Russian holy place, he could not have been completely unaware of its Orthodox hesychastic practices. Shevtsova envisions Stanislavsky’s legacy as resulting from an intertwining of ideas generated by his Orthodox upbringing and those stemming from his later interest in Oriental ideas. “There is the interlacing of Orthodoxy and a component of Hinduism together with the secular preoccupations of making theatre” (Shevtsova, 2014: 337).

Astonishingly, two apparently opposed spiritual practices, as in the Orthodox Faith and yoga, seem to go well hand in hand, for, as Shevtsova further asserts, “Stanislavsky’s adoption of the idea of prana for relaxation and breathing exercises” was not in conflict with, or contradicted in any way by “his ingrained Orthodoxy”, which “was at the heart of his concern with the ‘life of the human spirit’” (Ibid, 2014: 337).

While it can be argued that, because of major differences in terms of origination, dogma, belief systems, and practices, Christian thought has no common ground with

either the yogic or the Hindu philosophy and, as such, they appear to be often at odds, Stanislavsky might not have had difficulties in finding them compatible. In fact, as explained by Walter Evans-Wentz, all these religious paths are much more connected than generally assumed. To support this statement, Evans-Wentz brings into the discussion the entire monastic history, both in the West and the East, and he considers it to be almost indissoluble from the history of yoga:

When the early Christians, both Gnostic and non-Gnostic, dwelt in the desert and mountain solitudes of Egypt and the Near East as solitary hermits or in communities, [and] vowed to the three vows, of poverty, chastity, and obedience, they grafted into the tree of the Christian Faith a form of *yoga* which appears to have had sources both in the monasticism of the ancient Egyptian priests and in that of the early Zoroastrians and Hindus. (1965: 35-6)

Furthermore, “Eastern meditation influenced Christian mysticism through the gateways of Alexandria and Neoplatonism and the influence was retained and handed down through the ages” (Dumoulin, 1974: 62-3). As John Meyendorff argues, “the monks of the Christian East learned to use Neoplatonic language” in their treatises on Orthodox spirituality (1974: 17). Although this Neoplatonic language belonged to a contemporary philosophy, “hardly compatible with Christianity itself”, nonetheless, it served to combine the idea of ‘nous’ - “the natural divinity of the human mind” - with the goal of the “monastic asceticism” to witness the “presence of the Kingdom of God” within the body, by means of “a disembodiment of the mind in prayer” (Meyendorff, 1974: 17).

There are also many connections between the Buddhist (including Zen) thought, yoga, Hinduism and Christianity, especially in their mystical forms. According to Heinrich Dumoulin, “the entire way of higher meditation in Christianity and Zen Buddhism glows with the fervour of mysticism” (1974: 19). Further:

Stillness and meditation, oneness of spirit and body, intuitive awareness of the truth touching the mastery of reality—all these lie deeply within man, at the very root of his existence. They are by no means the exclusive possession of Far Eastern spirituality but are embedded (if forgotten) in Western tradition. We here touch common ground. (Dumoulin, 1974: 19)

As noted in the introduction, interesting similarities between some of Stanislavsky's ideas and Buddhist principles can be spotted throughout his works. These might be completely accidental, or they might be related to similar yogic and Hindu notions. On the one hand, "all the schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism" from which Zen evolved, are based on a group of some of the oldest sutras from the Hindu texts known as *Upanishads* (Dumoulin, 2005: 34). On the other hand, all forms of yoga are also based on the knowledge found in the *Upanishads*, including Raja yoga, known to have been extensively used by Stanislavsky. "In the first Studio of 1912, he and Leopold Sulerzhitski, its leader, regularly used Hatha yoga and Raja yoga" (Gillett, 2007: 35).

As Linda Brown Holt informs, Zen is grounded in Raja yoga in so far as its central principles: "*dharana*, keeping the mind focused on a thought or object; *dhyana*, meditation; and *samadhi*, superconscious experience" are also key components of Buddha's 'Eightfold Path' on which Zen is based (1995: 1). In the light of this, it is only logical to conclude that, although indirectly, some of Stanislavsky's yogic inspired ideas might share a common significance with the Zen Buddhist ones.

Chapter 2

Spiritual Principles

After the brief reminder of Stanislavsky's Orthodox upbringing and the presence of yogic thought in the 'system', another crucial question arises: How can the actors involved in this practice as research relate to a possible quasi-Orthodox interpretation of his work when, in Britain, the Orthodox Faith is not a largely practiced, well known, or clearly understood denomination? According to Mircea Eliade, it is not an easy matter to grasp either a religious or a "cultural phenomenon" that "is alien to one's own ideological pattern" (1978: 11). As Eliade further explains, "there is, indeed only one way" to make sense of such a phenomenon, and that is "to place oneself at its very centre and from there to track down all the values that radiate from it" (1978: 11).

In the light of Eliade's thought, to get an inkling of what the Stanislavskian phenomenon represents, it was crucial for the actors to start by rediscovering and understanding the spiritual patterns of life during the times in which he grew up and matured, by the beginning of the twentieth century. Such an understanding was a prerequisite in order to grasp a possible more profound meaning of Stanislavsky's legacy. For this to happen, it was important to draw a bridge between the actors' own present values and the ones that he treasured and relentlessly pursued in his life.

Although he "was writing in Soviet Russia at a time when anything esoteric was heavily suppressed" (Merlin, 2007: 46-7), spirituality appears to be in a very close partnership with inspiration, for "it crops up in Stanislavsky's work with astonishing regularity". Important spiritual values were inherent, "cultivated by the atmosphere in [the] theatre and the years of training" (Ibid, 2003: 35). Moreover, Stanislavsky makes use of the word 'spiritual' over and over again in many of his letters and writings, in such expressions as: "the spiritual needs of a superior intelligence" (Senelick, 2014: 331),

“spiritual resources” (Stanislavsky, 1967: 100), “spiritual powers” (Ibid, 1967: 102), “spiritual nature” (Senelick, 2014: 447), “spiritual treasures” (Stanislavsky, 1967: 110), or “spiritual education” (Ibid, 1967: 114). In spite of this constant use, however, he does not seem to give a clear explanation of the term itself.

As opposed to religion that mostly “refers to socially based beliefs and traditions, often associated with ritual and ceremony”, and which are established and guided by holy writings (The Bible, The Coran, The Torah), the idea of spirituality is more associated with “a deep-seated individual sense of connection through which each person’s life is experienced as contributing to a valued and greater ‘whole’, together with a sense of belonging and acceptance” (Dein and all, 2010: 63).

From an Orthodox point of view, as the Russian philosopher Georgy Petrovich Fedotov asserts, in its broadest sense, the term ‘spirituality’ expounds the moral and intellectual qualities of people in their relation to themselves, to others, to nature and ultimately, to God (1981: 1). It can be concluded that ‘spirituality’ does not necessarily imply a religious path, following a specific dogma, but recognises the presence of a higher power that bears many names - God, Allah, Yahweh, Ishvara, Brahman or The Void. With this in mind, we should try and understand Stanislavsky’s own use of the word as a Russian artist, a spiritual thinker and, possibly an Orthodox believer.

2.1 The ‘system’ from Humanism and Spirituality to Religion

It is imperative to remember that, because written evidence which may explain his use of ideas found in the Orthodox Faith (and their possible intended meaning) appear to be missing, there is no way to prove that, with the exception of his early religious upbringing and education, Stanislavsky had and used in-depth knowledge of Orthodox thought. However, his employment of such clear religious principles as the ‘soul’, ‘incarnation’, ‘morality’, or ‘sacrifice’, seems too important to be taken as a simple

coincidence and thus completely disregarded. Alongside the religious ideas noted above, there are broader spiritual and humanistic aspects to Stanislavsky's legacy.

All these three different areas may find common ground through their values. In terms of the human evolution, multiple kinds of humanism developed through ages. "There is, of course, the original Renaissance or literary humanism, and the classical humanism of Greece and Rome that the *umanisti* emulated" (Modras, 2004: xiv). There is also "Enlightenment or secular humanism", often referred to as either "scientific, rational, atheistic, agnostic, or ethical humanism". Moreover, although ambiguous, there is a "*religious humanism*", especially a Christian one that "stands alongside Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Islamic, and Jewish humanism" (Ibid, 2004: xiv).

Additionally, let us not forget the "spiritual humanism" that looks at "the spiritual as a dimension of our humanity" and an attribute to "the artist, or anyone able to be drawn into something *for its own sake* rather than for some practical purpose for or used by us" (Carini, 2000: 10-1). This implies developing a consciousness "that includes values apart from the [smaller] self, a gauge of what matters beyond *self*-satisfaction or *self*-aggrandizement" to cultivate "true feelings of value". And it is precisely this "feeling of value which can be embodied in a spiritual humanism" (Ibid, 2000: 107).

Probably Michael Chekhov best expressed such timeless connections of human values. When referring to the ancient yogis, who's principles and practices were used in the First Studio, he states: "They were seeing the same thing as us" (Whyman, 2009: 81). It might be that, for Stanislavsky, such values, either spiritual or not, were first and foremost human. Yet, their constant, relentless, and careful use might have been also intended for higher spiritual purposes. It is, however, important to point out that, due to the lack of direct evidence to explain the exact meaning of such human values, as well as a possible significance for the use of the term 'spiritual' in Stanislavsky's writings, a

detailed analysis, in relation to the 'system', can only be pursued through the lens of other spiritual works, including some religious Orthodox writings.

Anthony Coniaris, for example, asserts that, for Orthodox people, the religious sense of the word 'spirituality' is to be filled with "God's grace", the "Holy Spirit", granted to all through baptism (1998: 27). As a way to evolve, a believer can be transformed in body, mind, and soul, by means of grace and personal effort. Although, religiously speaking, "spirituality implies growth toward maturity in Christ", it also means "to keep growing in love and understanding" of other people (Macarius in Coniaris, 1998: 27).

Interesting to remember is that the Orthodox idea of leading a spiritual life does not necessarily imply becoming a priest or joining a monastery. As noted in the previous chapter, in the advice of the hesychasts, such life can also be led in the context of a personal calling that might have nothing to do with the religious one, but which follows similar rules. Moreover, a spiritual life can be as practical and as concrete as possible, and it is mostly reflected through the good deeds (actions) of the believer.

This Orthodox spiritual practicality could explain Stanislavsky's ease in finding practical ways towards an eventual 'spiritual' type of artistic creation for the art of the stage, by bringing together the physical actions of the body with the spiritual actions of both the mind and the soul. He uses the Orthodox idea of climbing a spiritual ladder towards deification, translated into a continuous effort that the actor should employ to reach "that point of perfection in the creative art of the stage" (Stanislavsky, 1967: 93).

The notion of ascension on a heavenly ladder was introduced in Orthodox thought sometime between the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century by Saint John Scholasticus, a famous abbot of the Mount Sinai Monastery, known as Climacus after writing the *Klimax (The Ladder)*, one of the most significant Orthodox works on the journey towards theosis. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* is a guide

containing various spiritual exercises/advice that, to the mind of its author, if properly followed, can enable the believer to reach higher and higher towards perfection.

In Stanislavsky's account, all the "steps of the ladder leading from a very ordinary and simple movement across the room to the highest efforts of self-sacrifice" need to be learned, understood, and transmuted "into living images" that are reflected "in truthful and correct physical action" (1967: 93). He clearly mirrors here the Orthodox concept of 'spirituality', which "is not mere perfectionism ('I have arrived! I have made it!')". On the contrary, it can only be "a never-ending process of climbing and growth leading to new levels of God and holiness" (Coniaris, 1998: 189-90).

Furthermore, in Stanislavsky's opinion, not only does the actor climb a symbolic ladder for, indirectly, by witnessing the artistic creation, so too does the spectator. The artist, as the creator of "the life of a human soul", cannot and "must not imitate" the "spectator". The artist "must lead him up the rungs of a great ladder" while helping to "open his eyes to ideals" (Gorchakov, 1973: 2). As Shevtsova points out: "The more the human being grows spiritually, the more he/she evolves along what Grotowski called 'verticality', that is, along the ascending ladder (to use a Biblical image) that leads to the divine—call it a vision of perfection, or transcendence, or God" (2014: 336).

To emphasise the number of years Jesus Christ lived until his Baptism, the Orthodox ladder contains thirty steps. It is reminiscent of Jacob's dream of a ladder, extending from earth to heaven, but, as Coniaris argues, it is also the symbol of Christ, as in "the mystic ladder", the gift of God, revealing the ways towards spiritual transcendence and theosis or deification (1998: 190).

For both Stanislavsky's art and the Orthodox Faith, spirituality appears to be anchored in 'love' and 'beauty', two major concepts that, from a religious perspective, mirror the love and beauty of God. In Orthodox thought, "God is love; but He is also the source of all that is truly beautiful. Beauty is the outer expression of God's resplendent

Glory” (Coniaris, 1998: 11). The real purpose of life is understood as a continuous journey (theosis) of creation seeking a spiritual transformation through love and “the attainment of the grace of the Holy Spirit” (Berdyayev in Lossky N, 1952: 1), while beauty is the measure of this transformation.

The spiritual meaning of these two concepts of ‘love’ and ‘beauty’, central to the Orthodox Faith, might be shared by Stanislavsky, who envisions them as crucial theatrical means for the necessary “spiritual education” in the theatre (1967: 114). In his lectures to Opera Studio, Stanislavsky appears to stress a “passion for beauty” that is crucial in establishing the correct “atmosphere of the studio” during training (Stanislavsky, 1967: 139). A teacher of acting, in Stanislavsky’s account, should be “a flame of unquenchable love... Love is sacred just because its fire is never quenched, however large the number of hearts it kindles” (1967: 116).

From the point of view of the actor, this love and passion for art can generate a feeling of joy and serenity that boosts the spirit, and which can be the measure of the creative state. In Orthodox terms, such feeling is recognized as ‘*umilenie*’. As argued by Nicholas Arseniev, “*umilenie*” is a very difficult word to translate and it could be rendered as “the anguished search for purity and spiritual peace, and the admiration of purity and peace”. Most of all it is “the thrill of love and forgiveness, the tears of repentance and joy, and the gift of self, offered in joy” (Arseniev, 1975: 37).

This state appears to manifest as “a feeling of inexplicable tenderness which seizes the hardest of hearts” (1975: 76) and needs to be associated with a “spiritual sobriety” that, in the words of Hesychius of Jerusalem, as cited by Arseniev, “is the pathway of all virtues and of divine command”, also known as the “silence of the heart” (1975: 37). ‘*Umilenie*’ can be enabled by a continuous taming of all egotistic desires towards the free expression of the soul, in a humble attitude, embracing life in all its aspects. It mirrors Christ’s humility, as a spiritual doctrine opposing the proud attitude

that causes the human being to be “deaf and blind to the world; he does not see the world, but only himself, reflected in all things” (Yelchaninov, 1950: 423).

As expressed by both Arseniev and Climacus, the key that opens a door to the “heavenly kingdom” is none other than humility (Arseniev, 1975: 37). As opposed to pride, “a holy team are love and humility; the one exalts, and the other, supporting the exalted one, never allows it to fall” (Climacus, 1959: 169). Through ‘*umilenie*’, reflecting love and humility, one can be blessed with self-knowledge (the knowledge of the soul) as part of the whole (God), which is the true measure of a person’s spiritual development. Stanislavsky’s constant reminder for the actor of the correct attitude, feelings and behaviour in relation to the art of the theatre and acting, such as “to make sacrifices” in order “to serve art” and not “exploit it” (2010: 35) while pursuing the creative state, appear not so different from all of the above noted spiritual advise.

According to Campo, by describing “his ideal theatre as ‘simpler, lighter, higher and more joyful’”, Stanislavsky shows the quintessence of his life in art - “his own years of work in search of new forms, where ‘earth’ (simpler and lighter) can easily merge with the ‘heavens’ (higher and more joyful)” (Campo, 2017: 177). One could argue that these qualities have nothing to do with either spirituality or religion. Yet, by sharing important human values, they might unite the theatrical profane with the sacred dimension of art.

2.2 The Concepts of the ‘Soul’, ‘Self’, ‘Heart’, ‘Creative ‘I’

Demidov metaphorically compares the soul of a human being with multiple types of rivers: “everybody has a different soul depth, width, and capacity”. Some manifest it in “tiny, little streams”, while others, in “rivers like Volga, the Amazon, the Ob, the Mississippi” (2016: 70-1). As Demidov further explains, “everybody has depth of soul; but for some, the gates leading to it are closed, stuffed, walled up, and have a pile of trash on top of them”. For this reason, “it’s not so easy to measure the depth of any of

our souls". Yet, as he argues, "if you try to get through to these forbidden doors and open them, it turns out that not all of us are such poor beggars" (Demidov, 2016: 70-1). As noted in the Introduction, according to Stanislavsky's way of thinking, the soul of the actor, infusing life into the soul of the character, is of utter importance for the concept of theatre as art. On 31 December 1929, to the Moscow Art Theatre, he remarks:

The time will come, and very soon, when a great play, a work of genius, will be written. It will be, of course, revolutionary. [...] But this will not be a revolutionary play in the sense that one will parade around with red flags. The revolution will come from something inside. We shall see on the stage the metamorphosis of the soul of the world, the inner struggle with a worn-out past, with a new, not yet understood or realized present. (Stanislavsky, 1981: 201)

In a Stalinist era, Stanislavsky seems to dream of a different revolution. A revolution of the spirit (soul) that prevails over the 'red flags' of a totalitarian propaganda. According to Whyman, under Stalin, "there was a rejection of the idea of universal or transcendent truths and anything that sounded mystical" (2008: 33). The word 'soul' was one of the most problematic to be used. Carnicke asserts that, in 1931, Stanislavsky's friend and editor Lyubov Gurevich warns him "that terms like 'the life of the human spirit', 'the soul' and 'magic if' [...] invite 'Marxist scissors' because they invoke nonmaterial ideas". Gurevich appears to caution Stanislavsky constantly "of the 'dangers' in his work which 'frighten her'" (Carnicke, 2009: 101-2).

Vladimir Dybovskii, as cited by Carnicke, informs that, "in 1936, Stanislavsky received a letter from The Central Committee of the Communist Party criticizing terms such as [...] the life of the human spirit', 'the soul', 'intuition' and 'subconscious' considering them 'hazy' and inappropriate" (Ibid, 2009, 102). Smeliansky also explains that "a special committee was set up to verify Stanislavsky's writings from the point of view of the latest scientific advances" and the existing "correspondence with a party official, Aleksei Angarov, reveals the direction in which they tried to steer Stanislavsky in this matter, [...] to unmask 'his mystical terminology'" (Smeliansky in Stanislavsky,

2010: 689). This is confirmed by Tcherkasski who asserts that the committee was in charge of removing “from the manuscript everything that did not meet the demands of materialistic philosophy, i.e. dialectical materialism. They forced Stanislavsky into self-censorship” (Tcherkasski, 2016: 17)

Clearly, such self-censorship, aimed to eliminate any sensitive words or ideas that could have led to imprisonment or even execution, became more than necessary, especially during the years of terror. Sheila Fitzpatrick defines “terror” as an “extra-legal state violence against groups and randomly chosen citizens”. According to her, apart from targeting mostly “kulaks”, “priests”, “private businessmen”, and later on “communist elite”, the ways in which victims were chosen had a frightening “random element” in so far as “anybody could be exposed as an ‘enemy of the people’” (Fitzpatrick, 2000: 7). Moreover, not only the victims were suffering the consequences in so far as the whole family “usually shared in their stigmatization” (Ibid, 2000: 190). Alexander Solzhenitsyn remembers that the simple “arrest of a family member changed everything overnight”, endangering the rest of the family, regardless of how devoted to the communist cause they were (Solzhenitsyn in Fitzpatrick, 2000: 212).

During the terror, the entire population was under a constant state of governmental “surveillance”; everyone was “watched” and thus “subject on an unpredictable but large-scale bases to arrest, execution, and other forms of state violence” (Fitzpatrick, 2000: 190). No one was sheltered from the terror, not even the communist elite. As argued by David Brandenberger: “Unmasked as enemies of the people between 1936 and 1938, many of the members of the new Soviet Olympus fell into disgrace or disappeared” completely, “taking with them an entire generation of bestsellers, textbooks, and popular drama for the stage and silver screen” (2011: 4).

Benedetti looks to disagree with the idea that Stanislavsky was ever in any real danger, both under the Bolsheviks and during the Stalinist years of terror. He finds that

an eventual prosecution of “a man whose artistic ideas were being pressed into the service as a cornerstone of the state’s official policy” was, if not impossible, very difficult to pursue (Benedetti, 1999: 372). In opposition, Tcherkasski states that:

Stanislavsky had reason to be afraid. In the late 1920s there began a forcible transformation of the Moscow Art Theatre into a model theatre, an element of the official picture of prosperity. Stalin’s ideologues were creating ‘a tower of socialist realism’ out of the Art Theatre. (2016: 17)

Smeliansky as well considers the thought that “Stanislavsky was in any way sheltered from the terror in his home as on a kind of island retreat” (Smeliansky in Stanislavsky 2010: 686) best to be reconsidered. He urges the reader to remember that

As early as June 1930 one of his favourite nephews had been arrested. Neither his [Stanislavsky’s] status as a “sacred cow” nor his pleas to the head of the secret police Heinrich Yagoda were of any help. Mikhaïl Alekseev died in jail. The only gesture of kindness that was made by the authorities was to hand his dead body over to his relatives. Other close relatives were arrested and K.S. took charge of their children. The word “concentration camp” appears for the first time in his letters to mean imminent death. (Ibid, 2010: 686)

Moreover, censorship also seemed to extend to the spoken word. Therefore, terms such as ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ were better avoided, even in private. Yet, Stanislavsky continued to use them in his letters and personal conversations. The Russian director Boris Zon remembers that, during “an automobile drive through Moscow, for pleasure”, he witnessed such a dialogue between Stanislavsky and one of his last assistants, Mikhail Kedrov: “The main task of the Soviet writer”, Stanislavsky explained, “is to show the soul of the new people”. When Kedrov strenuously objected that “the soul is a figure of speech”, Stanislavsky “pushed back” by daring him to “think up an equivalent word” which he promised to use happily (Zon in Carnicke, 2009: 101).

Although Stanislavsky constantly struggled to defend his choice of words “by arguing that no other language will do” (Ibid, 2009: 101), an “equivalent word” for ‘soul’ was actually already in use (‘heart’) for, as noted in the previous chapter, the Russian word “*dusha*” conveys “both ‘heart’ and ‘soul’” (Shevtsova, 2010: 173). Regardless of

how concrete and non-mystical the word 'heart' might sound (as opposed to a more elusive 'soul'), in fact the term itself, for Christianity in general, and particularly for the Russian Orthodox Hesychasm, has a clear spiritual meaning.

According to the Bishop Kallistos Ware of Diokleia, the heart is "both the centre of the human being and the point of meeting between the human being and God". Moreover, the heart can be regarded as "both the place of self-knowledge, where we see ourselves as we truly are, and the place of self-transcendence, where we understand our nature as a temple of the Holy Trinity", and "where the image comes face to face with the Archetype" (Ware of Diokleia, 1986: 11).

As Meyendorff argues, in Orthodox thought the name Jesus Christ, as in "the Name of the Incarnate Word, is bound up in the essential functions of being: it is present in the 'heart', it is linked to the breath" (1974: 38). For this reason, the Hesychasts were using a psychophysical prayer based on relaxation and breathing, known as 'the prayer of the heart'. Through a constant concentration of the mind on the words of this prayer, "the monk is called to become conscious of the actual presence of Jesus in the interior of his own being", into his very own heart (Meyendorff, 1974: 38).

As Eliade informs:

The practice itself is designed to awaken and develop strength of attention and concentration, and [...] the essential conditions enumerated for success are "genuine humility, sincerity, endurance, purity." Hesychius of Jerusalem, a fifth-century teacher of the use of the Jesus Prayer [...] describes it as a spiritual art that releases one completely from passionate thoughts, words, and evil deeds [...]; its essence is purity of heart, which is the "same as guarding the mind, kept perfectly free of all fantasies" and all thoughts. (1982: 162)

Strangely enough, this Orthodox Hesychastic method appears to echo Stanislavsky's own use of meditation and psychophysical training, insofar as the actor is also called to delve into "his spiritual 'I', that is to say in the work of his heart" (Stanislavsky, 1967: 224). By means of renunciation, by silencing the mind and heart, as well as by a

conscious and ceaseless surrender of the ego to God, the monk gains access to his inner divine nature through the prayer of the heart.

In his research on Eastern Orthodox private devotion, Father Sergei Sveshnikov argues that achieving “the prayer of heart” necessitates following “a path of stillness of thought and silence of mind” (2007: 1). Once this silence is achieved, in a similar manner to a mantra, the words “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Rossi, 2010: 1) are silently repeated during the Hesychastic meditative prayer.

According to Saint Macarius of Egypt, as cited by Meyendorff, any negative passions and the dissipation of the mind can only agitate and trouble the soul, hence “the mind cannot achieve recollection of the Lord Jesus [...] But when the soul frees itself from passions, then it possesses the very grace that meditates with it” (Meyendorff, 1974: 31-2), and thus takes control and allows the entire human being, in its body, mind, and soul to grow and transcend spiritually.

In a similar manner, Stanislavsky warns the actor that, if troubled by uncertainty, lack of faith in his creation, or “if he is going to be greedy for the applause of his admirers, his stature will be lessened”, and he cannot experience the creative state, which should be “the super-objective of” his life in art (1968: 37-8). Like the words of the prayer, this super-objective (supertask) should be the main object of concentration for the actor. As opposed to Stanislavsky, who does not use the example of the Orthodox prayer of the heart, Demidov refers to it as a method of meditational breathing.

He envisions this religious meditation as “a prayer with the mind in the heart” during which “the in-breath” covers the words “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God...” and “the out-breath: ‘have mercy on me’”. He further explains that, “taking in God’s name and then breathing it out, you don’t quite exhale all the way out—part of it stays in you and is *digested*” (Demidov, 2016: 707). As subsequently argued in this chapter, the idea of working “with the mind in the heart” (echoing the practice of the Hesychastic prayer)

was also often used by Stanislavsky as a method of communication on the stage. In his account, “only when we listen to the melody of the living heart can we fully appreciate the worth and beauty of the text and what it contains” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 403). Stanislavsky asserts that, through the feelings of their characters, the actors “would be aware of the energy inside them, stemming from their secret depths, from their heart of hearts” (Ibid, 2010: 403)—that is to say, from the seat of their soul.

Although the existence of both God and the soul remains a highly debatable and non-provable hypothesis, it is important to remember that such notions are central to most religious, spiritual, and even philosophical ways. In the end, for a believer, the soul is a matter of faith. In one way or another, all the major philosophies and religious practices appear to acknowledge its existence and they appreciate it as originating from a superior divine power. In fact, even physicists such as Professor Hans-Peter Dürr or neuroscientists such as Dr Christian Hellweg are convinced that, at a quantum level, the religious idea of a soul is very much possible.

According to Dürr, as cited by Rolf Froböse, “a universal quantum code exists that applies for all living and dead matter”. Although “the body dies”, this “spiritual quantum field continues” (Froböse, 2012: 90). Hellweg believes in the reality of a “quantum state” of the spirit. He asserts that, “our thoughts, our will, our consciousness and our feelings show properties that could be referred to as spiritual properties” (Ibid, 2012: 90). Furthermore, as argued by David Bohm (one of the pioneers in the field of the quantum physics, known also as Albert Einstein’s student and friend), “the results of modern natural sciences only make sense if we assume an inner, uniform, transcendent reality that is based on all external data and facts. The very depth of human consciousness is one of them” (Ibid, 2012: 91).

As Sir Roger Penrose explains, “matter itself is nebulous and transient; and it is not at all unreasonable to suppose that, from a quantum perspective, the persistence of

'self' might have more to do with the preservation of patterns than the actual material particles" (1994: 14). While questioning the existence of a soul, which might survive death, the nuclear physicist Amit Goswami argues that if "quantum ideas are included in our model of consciousness in the context of idealist science" then it appears that "a soul-like entity" becomes available. He calls this entity "the quantum monad" (2001: xi).

To resume, alongside the concept of the 'soul' (crucial for the artist), also the Orthodox religious idea of the human being created in the image and likeness of God might be a key ingredient for the more profound comprehension of Stanislavsky's 'system'. As expressed by the Orthodox doctrine, to be created in God's image and likeness means "to retain Godlike unity" (Coniaris, 1998: 20). As such, the Eastern Church does not appear to distinguish between the flesh and the spirit, as the Catholic and other Western denominations do (Rosenthal, 1997: 85).

According to Saint Paul, by being "filled with [God's] grace" undoubtedly, "the matter or the body, [...] becomes a temple, a church" (Coniaris, 1998: 20). Moreover, this notion of 'likeness' is also directly connected to the Orthodox concept of 'the Holy Trinity' that stems its formulation from "Neoplatonic philosophy, with its metaphysics of substance and its doctrine of hypostasis" (Benz, 1963: 55).

The Orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity states that God, in his essence (the Godhead) can only be inaccessible and unknowable to created nature. However, because the Godhead reveals himself through the three Persons, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he communicates and pours himself into his creation only in the form of his energy or grace (Lossky V, 1973: 76). In order for such an incomprehensible concept to be grasped, the doctrine itself was formulated as an antinomy. As Ernst Benz explains:

The paradoxical combination of unity and trinity was summed up in the formula: 'Three Hypostases in One Being'. The Neoplatonic concept of '*hypostasis*' was later clarified and replaced by '*person*', a word taken over from the language of Roman law because it seemed a better term for the particularity and individuality of the three divine aspects. (1963: 55)

Vladimir Lossky informs that, “the energies express by their procession an ineffable distinction—they are not God in His essence—and yet, at the same time, being inseparable from His essence, they bear witness to the unity and the simplicity of the being of God” (1973: 76). Similarly, the human beings, created in God’s image, manifest through their own trinity as body-mind-spirit, while witnessing the inherent unity. Stanislavsky might have seen this as the body-mind-soul trinity of the human being-artist, aiming to metamorphose into a similar trinity of the human being-character, while witnessing the unity and the simplicity of the artistic act (1967: 118).

Apart from the ‘creative I’, ‘spirit’, ‘soul’, and ‘heart’, both Stanislavsky and Demidov also make use of the word ‘self’, in the sense of either a smaller one, which the actor has to let go of, or a higher one that enables the artistic creation (Stanislavsky, 1967: 115). According to Ernest Wood (whose work was one of the sources of inspiration for Stanislavsky), this higher self is “the artist”, whilst the smaller self is nothing more than “the picture” the artist is drawing (Wood, 1963: 5).

Michael Chekhov also distinguishes the ego from the self. However, probably as inspired by Anthroposophy, he seems to use the term ‘higher Ego’ instead of ‘self’. According to Chekhov, any “gifted person” is constantly submitted to an internal struggle between her “higher and lower Egos” (2005: 146). The mind or “lower Ego”, which is usually “complete with its ambition, passions and egotistical agitation, is the victor in everyday life”. For an artist, however, the higher Ego should be “the victor in the creative processes”. Yet, whilst attributing all the “powers, capabilities and qualities *to itself*”, because “the lower Ego is inclined to deny the existence of the higher Ego completely”, the latter tends not to be the victor (Ibid, 2005: 146).

By means of meditation, the higher self becomes self-aware and “learns not to confuse” itself “with the picture, the lower self, on which it is his business now to work” (Wood, 1963: 5). And this is achievable only by silencing the canvas of the ego that

leads to a clear and silent conscious mind. If the ego (smaller self) keeps arguing, fearing, or questioning everything, the artist (higher self) will never be able to create a profound and exquisite work of art. In the light of Wood's spiritual meaning of the 'self', Stanislavsky's understanding and use of this term, sometimes referred to as "the creative 'I'" (1967: 111) or as "the sacrosanct 'I'" (Stanislavsky, 1989: 13), cannot be completely reduced to its basic psychological dimension. In the field of psychology, 'self' is a term coined by Carl Gustav Jung, to highlight a new concept related to the unconscious, as opposed to the 'ego' that pertains to the conscious mind. In his words:

We understand the ego as the complex factor to which all conscious contents are related. It forms, as it were, the centre of the field of consciousness; and insofar as this comprises the empirical personality, the ego is the subject of all personal acts of consciousness. [...] Theoretically, no limits can be set to the field of consciousness, since it is capable of indefinite extension. Empirically, however, it always finds its limit when it comes up against the 'unknown.' This consists of everything we do not know, which therefore, is not related to the ego as the centre of the field of consciousness. (Jung, 1978: 3)

Although he uses 'self' mostly with clear psychological connotations, Jung equally illuminates its spiritual meaning. To this end, he feels compelled to cite *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, according to which: "He who dwells in all beings, whom no beings know, whose body is all beings, who controls all beings from within, he is your Self, the inner controller, the immortal" (Jung, 1978: 223). Furthermore, Jung defines the self as an archetype or, more precisely, as *the* archetype of all the rest of existing archetypes—that is to say, the inherent God-image, the microcosm as a symbol of the soul.

Not so different from Stanislavsky's notion, this symbol appears to be used also by Hindus, yogis, and Buddhists alike. Therefore, it is imperative to stress that his concept of 'self' may retain both a Jungian and Oriental significance. Following in Jung's steps, the American psychiatrist Eduard Edinger also acknowledges the self as "the central archetype, the archetype of wholeness", that is the "ordering and unifying centre of the total psyche (conscious and unconscious)" (1992: 3).

In Edinger's vision, "the Self is [...] the supreme psychic authority and subordinates the ego to it" (1992: 3). He seems fully to agree with Jung's idea of an archetypal psyche (in the sense of a collective unconscious) that asserts "the individual psyche" as being much more than "just a product of personal experience". On the contrary, it has a "transpersonal dimension" that is "manifested in universal patterns [...] found in all the world's religions and mythologies" (Edinger, 1992: 3).

In Jungian terms, the process of silencing the ego, while consciously acknowledging the supreme existence of the self can be translated into the form of 'individuation'. Edinger uses this term to depict a conscious process by which the ego is neither unconsciously identified with the self (inflated) nor entirely separated from it (alienated). During the process of individuation, a person experiences the "awareness of the reality of the ego-Self axis" (Edinger, 1992: 103).

In other words, the ego "becomes aware, experientially, of a transpersonal centre (Self)" to which it is subordinated. In the eventuality that the person "is able to work consciously and responsibly with the activation of the unconscious, they may discover the lost value, the god-image, within the psyche" (Edinger, 1992: 68). This is precisely what Stanislavsky's 'system' stands for: a constant conscious stimulation of the unconscious towards the unfolding of an elevated process of superconscious creativity, enabled by the inner mysterious creative 'I' (soul) of the artist.

There is no doubt in Stanislavsky's mind that in the theatre there is no room for an inflated ego. "Leave your ego at the stage door as you come in", he urges the artist (Benedetti, 1999: 149). If the actor is ever to grow artistically and spiritually, inevitably, first and foremost, she has to learn how to let go of her own egotistical desires and to cultivate precious spiritual values. Sadly, as assessed by Benjamin Spock, such values appear to be less and less important in this twenty-first century.

When asked about his own sense of spirituality, Spock highlights the following:

Spirituality, unfortunately, is not a stylish word. It's not a word that gets used. [...] 'What is that?' people say. Spirituality, to me, means the nonmaterial things [...] like love, and helpfulness and tolerance, and enjoyment of the arts or even creativity of the arts. It takes a high degree and a high type of spirituality to want to express things in terms of literature or poetry, plays, [...] creating beauty any way. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997: 229-30)

Not necessarily religious in their essence, nonetheless, the nonmaterial things that are recognised by Spock as inseparable from his personal spiritual view, and which are very similar with Stanislavsky's own highly cherished nonmaterial things, can also be traced back to the values embedded in all the major humanistic, spiritual, or religious paths. The pursuit of such universal values leads to maturity and spiritual development, which are equally critical for a strong personality. It may be that, for this reason, the journey of a Stanislavskian actor cannot and should not be orientated only towards developing her technique or craft for, whilst the training period aims for the acquisition of this technique, it also provides the initial support for self-scrutiny and self-acceptance. As such, training can open up a door towards initiating spiritual development.

2.3 Morality versus Ethics

All the values discussed so far (that, if constantly considered and relentlessly pursued, might lead to experiencing the creative state on the stage) can be expressed and enhanced through a higher sense of morality. As advised by Stanislavsky, this morality should be guarded at all times. Unfortunately, in the theatre, morality might be viewed mostly in its extrinsic form, as a simple and necessary way to secure a healthy, safe, and productive working environment. Yet, the moral or ethical behaviour that Stanislavsky called for and observed his entire life is too often stressed to have only an organizational importance, and it may be the starting point from which the actor can begin to understand the 'system' in a spiritual manner.

Demidov also considers the “morality of an artist’s emotional and volitive make-up” (2016: 75) to be utterly important, and thus to be made an integral part of the actor’s curriculum. As noted by Malaev-Babel, Demidov used to teach “moral education for athletes” (2016: 16). Before collaborating with Stanislavsky, “in parallel with his theatre work, the young Demidov was seriously involved in athletics” at the “St Petersburg Athletic Society”. There, “he developed and taught his own system of training” that included morality as an instrument of education (Demidov, 2016: 16).

To return to Stanislavsky’s roots, it is important to note that his father, Sergei Vladimirovich Alekseev, a loving and generous man with religious and high moral principles, was a constant example, and “may be regarded”, according to Benedetti, “as the major moral and ethical influence” in Stanislavsky’s life (Benedetti, 1999: 24). If his family’s lifestyle and his religious feelings are to be taken into consideration, then this idea of moral behaviour in the theatre might hold a much more profound meaning.

Doubtless, good moral behaviour is not only praised, but also practically demanded in all forms of spiritual thought, be it religious, mystical, or the occult. For example, in Judaism and Christianity, as well as Islam, morality is connected to repentance and redemption, crucial to the saving of the soul. Yet, for the Orthodox Faith in general, and particularly for the Russian one, morality is not necessarily associated with the saving of the soul, but is linked to a process of cleaning, healing, and improving human nature. As Benz asserts, “the consciousness that man was imprinted with the image of God from the day of creation” was so dominant, that the initial “idea of original sin never could become established within the Orthodox Church in its blunt Western form”. For the Orthodox Faith, “sin manifests itself as a distortion, a damaging, infecting and tainting of the image of God; but it cannot rob man of its original nobility. This is always his because he remains the image of God” (Benz, 1963: 18-9).

As noted in the previous chapter, under the influence of the Soviet perspective, totally opposing a spiritual view, Moore argues against any mystical presence in Stanislavsky's work. In her thought, the actor should be able to control everything: "all his actions" and his entire stage existence (Moore, 1960: 61). She refers here to a type of restraint that does not surpass the body, the physical action, the given circumstances, or the lines of the character. It might be indeed about control; however, such restraint is related to the ego or, to use Stanislavsky's own term, "the egotistic 'I'", completely opposing the "creative 'I'" (soul) of the artist (1967: 111). It is a self-mastery learned through years of spiritual training and by ways of maintaining a yogic or Hindu type of correct moral behaviour, as well as a possible Orthodox one.

In Hinduism and yoga, morality is associated with eliminating obstacles, non-attachment, and self-mastery. Moreover, the control of the mind, as stated by the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali, leads to the control of knowledge, and this control is achieved only through relentless practice. One needs to make the effort of building a "spiritual life" which "begins with control", whilst control comes through practice (Organ, 1980: 311).

Furthermore, morality is a way of eliminating progressively what the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali call obstacles. There are nine such known obstacles: "(1) disease of body and/or mind, (2) inertia, (3) doubt and indecision, (4) frivolity, (5) laziness, (6) intemperance, (7) erroneous knowledge". Any of these seven barriers can lead to the "(8) inability to attain a state of concentrated contemplation", as well as to the "(9) unsteadiness of the mind in the state of contemplation" (Ibid, 1980: 311). Nonetheless, with training, purification through moral behaviour, right knowledge, and faith, these obstacles can be overcome while the mind gains in steadiness and clarity.

But how can this yogic and Hindu idea of obstacles relate to the work of the actor or to her own sense of morality? Considering that Stanislavsky advises the artist over and over again, in most of his works, always to fight against a range of challenges such

as the lack of proper knowledge and a focused attention, doubt in one's inner creative powers, laziness in relentlessly working with oneself, the frivolity of pursuing fame, success, or material gain (2010: 35), then it can be argued that all of the above are also obstacles that the actor has to overcome in order to reach artistic greatness. Stanislavsky wisely advises the actor: "think more about other people and less about yourselves. Be concerned for everybody else's mood, everybody else's work and less for your own, then things will go right. [...] Stop indulging in self-pity" (2010: 558)

In a similar manner to that of the yogi and the Orthodox Hesychastic monk, by means of constant training, effort, humility, a higher sense of morality, proper knowledge, and faith in one's creativity, the actor can grow spiritually and artistically. Therefore, she can gradually overcome all the blockages that might encumber the natural unfolding of the creative state. Morality appears to be also linked to the awakening of the spirit, found also in most of the mystical and occult practices, or as inner purification, which is crucial to the vertical advance on the ladder towards spiritual growth. For the Orthodox Faith in general, and particularly for the Russian one, the notion of 'morality' is not necessarily connected with the saving of the soul but it is rather viewed as a means to follow a process of cleaning and healing human nature.

2.4 The Idea of 'Nature'

In addition to the necessary observance of correct moral behaviour, Stanislavsky also relentlessly calls attention to the importance of working within the laws of nature, that is to say, the immutable laws of creativity, acknowledged to be an integral part of the basic natural laws that govern the world/universe. He asserts that there is no better, more ingenious or subtler artist than nature itself. According to Stanislavsky, "not even the most refined technique can be compared to her. She holds the key! This attitude, this relationship to nature absolutely typifies the art of experiencing" (2010: 17).

However, regarding Stanislavsky's constant references to nature, it is crucial to note that, in a similar manner to 'morality', they should not be understood only from a physical point of view, simply because Stanislavsky meaning of 'nature' might also have, higher spiritual connotations, similar with the ones found major religions or spiritual practices. For example, Ramacharaka's books consistently emphasise the importance of nature to yoga in general, and particularly to Hatha Yoga.

According to Ramacharaka, "Hatha Yoga is first, nature; second, nature; and last, NATURE" (Emphasis in the original, 2008: 2). Its practitioners should always choose the path that "seems to conform the nearest to nature". They should always "apply the nature test to all theories" because only "nature knows what it is about" (Ramacharaka, 2008: 5). In a similar manner, Stanislavsky estimates this importance of nature as crucial for the art of the stage. As argued by Whyman, he "believed that art does not represent or imitate nature: art should be nature. It should be life, or natural truth, and the purpose of theatre is the creation of life on stage" (Whyman, 2013: 15).

Demidov also acknowledges its importance: "Nature has everything. [...] It has everything, you just have to know how to look" (2016: 49). It might be said that this Stanislavskian concept of 'nature' echoes the ancient Aristotelian one that establishes the relation between nature and art. In his *Physics*, as cited by William Newman, Aristotle describes the functionality of art as a dichotomy. On the one hand, there is the art that functions "on the basis of Nature" or, more precisely, an art that can "carry things further (*epitelei*) than Nature can" with the intention of perfecting it. On the other hand, however, there is the art that only seeks to "imitate (*mimetai*) Nature" without attempting to alter it in any way (Newman, 2005: 17).

In the light of Aristotle's thought, it can be argued that a similar dichotomy applies to the art of the theatre; whilst ancient drama aimed to improve the nature of the human being by means of spiritual dedication, with some exceptions, the secular theatre risks

to remain only an imitation of nature. As Eliade points out, “the ‘origin’ of the drama [...] has been traced back to certain seasonal rituals” that caused a transcendental dimension to it, inherited by the secular theatre through its “sacred origins” (1978: 10). Nevertheless, this is well hidden, for as Eliade further explains, there is a tremendous “qualitative difference” between the ancient drama and the secular theatre (1978: 10). While “the ritual spectacle belonged to the sphere of holy things; it unleashed religious experiences; it involved the ‘salvation’ of the entire community”, the secular one seemed to inspire only “aesthetic emotions” while pursuing “an ideal of formal perfection quite alien to the values of religious experience” (Eliade, 1978: 10).

According to Brook, with the exception of “certain Oriental theatres”, in spite of having “in its origins rituals”, the modern drama might lose its spiritual dimension for, over the centuries, “these rituals have been either lost or remain in a seedy decay” (1990: 54). Because the holiness of the act of artistic creation (central to Stanislavsky’s art of experiencing) is in danger of being forgotten and lost, there is indeed a desperate need, “today as at all times” to “stage true rituals” (Brook, 1990: 54).

In Stanislavsky’s terms, such a “qualitative difference” between the ancient drama and the secular theatre might become visible through the type of acting employed and could be translated into the “dividing line between real art and stock-in-trade” (2010: 28). He considers the work of “the stock-in-trade actor”, using “mimicry, voice and movement” or, in other words, using “external clichés” and “tricks” with “no actual feeling in them”, to be a mere “imitation, a resemblance to its supposed outer results” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 28). There is no room for imitation in the art of experiencing, because “there is no genuine art where there is no experiencing” (Ibid, 2010: 28). Although initially the Stanislavskian actor seems intent to imitate nature, by understanding and making use of the immutable laws of creativity, she, in fact, pursues a final spiritual goal which is to experience within the depths of her soul the newly born

life of the character, and thus to perfect her own inner nature. In one of his letters, Stanislavsky insists that

Creativity is what creates the life of a human soul. Is it possible to imitate another's soul? No. One can imitate only the externals. It is possible to imitate the manner, the behaviour, [and] the outer appearance of a character. However, outward imitation cannot provide feeling itself. Gogol said: 'Anyone can *ape* a character, only a genuine talent can *become* the character'. (Senelick, 2014: 494)

Stanislavsky refers to the ancient theatre both to highlight the eternal in art and in relation to artistic creativity. As opposed to "the fashionable" which "passes by, leaving but little trace", the eternal in art "never dies" (Senelick, 2014: 460). This eternal can be accessed when the artist begins to understand the "immutable laws of creativity, common to all humanity". Such laws "have been studied" again and again, "from ancient times", "with relation to acting technique" (Stanislavsky, 2014: 460).

By addressing the inner harmony that can be found beyond the actor's smaller self (ego) while maintaining a silent and attentive mind, by changing their set of values, and by demanding a near religious behaviour during training, rehearsing, or when performing, Stanislavsky creates the premises for a spiritual, almost holy, type of artistic creativity. And this can be accomplished when understanding and using the immutable laws of nature. As Demidov argues, "nature is complex, nearly beyond" any "painter's power", for example. According to him, a true artist "will sense something in it that is, at the moment, vibrating in tune with his own soul". Therefore, "he'll try to convey this 'language of nature' with the help of sketches", or with "spots of colour". These seem to be "better, of course, than making a 'mould' or a 'mask'" that are mere copies, being "far from the heights of the art of painting" (Demidov, 2016: 48).

Demidov also feels compelled to caution his readers that, under any circumstances, "the truth of life" which fuels nature should ever be confused with 'mundaneness'. The "everyday existence" is not "the domain of art!" (2016: 47-8)

Bringing forward another example of a person caught up in the process of admiring the artistic image of a “magically painted pine”, Demidov appreciates that

[...] he'll see wondrous life in it, the beauty ... he'll feel the breath of nature, the harmony, the power ... Mundane concerns will leave him, and, possibly for the first time in his life, having gotten away from his everyday worries, he'll ponder the continuity of life ... the inviolable laws of eternity; his heart will shudder, and—in response to the millions of voices of nature—a new, hitherto untouched string will vibrate in his soul. (2016: 47- 8)

The idea of following natural laws as a means to unlock the mystery of art, central for the Russian artist, could also have had philosophical origins. As noted by Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, sometime at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russia became acquainted with German Romanticism, through Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling's philosophy (Kornblatt in Rosenthal, 1977: 77).

Schelling, who was the founder of a “school of romantic philosophy called Nature Philosophy”, and whose works seem to be inspired by yogic and Hindu thought, clearly shares a similar vision regarding the importance of nature. According to Schelling, “Nature is visible Spirit” while “Spirit is invisible Nature” (Whyman, 2008: 3). Moreover, German Romanticism constituted one of the primary sources for the Russian “conception of the role of the artist in society” (Ibid, 2008: 15).

It might be that Stanislavsky indeed had a more profound meaning in mind when referring to nature and its laws. Through the actor's connection to her inner nature and spirit, the artistic creation may transcend show, playacting, or a sense of performing. Moreover, by means of experiencing, the act of artistic creation might reach a quasi-mystical form of expression. Considering that, with the opening of the First Studio, Stanislavski was musing “to create a ‘spiritual order of artists’” meant to pursue “a ‘creative condition’, to be sustained as a second nature (Campo: 2017: 176), such an idea might not be too far from the truth. Living the soul of the character on the stage

could be perceived in ways very similar with “mystical ecstasies” that, from a religious perspective, are “interpreted as union with God” (Lossky N, 1952: 167).

The mystic philosopher Ivan Ivanovich Lapshin, with whose writings and ideology Stanislavsky was familiar (Whyman, 2008: 52-61), connects such personal mystical ecstasies with Nature and God. In his article ‘On Mystical Knowledge and Cosmic Feeling’, Lapshin draws a parallel between these “mystical ecstasies” and personal “experiences in which the subject is conscious of himself as being merged with nature and the world as a whole” (Lapshin in Lossky N, 1952: 167).

Such personal feelings of being in harmony with nature and its laws might prove to be crucial ingredients for triggering the creative state for, as Stanislavsky clearly states, “the creative process of living and experiencing a part is an organic one, founded on the physical and spiritual laws governing the nature of” a human being, “on the truthfulness of his emotions, and on natural beauty” (1989: 45).

2.5 Incarnation versus Embodiment

In Orthodox thought, through the inner presence of the incarnated Word - Christ, the human soul is an integral part of the divine essence of God. This Orthodox concept of ‘incarnation’ could illuminate a more profound understanding of the term, as envisioned by Stanislavsky; an understanding that also might go beyond the boundaries of a more physical or realist meaning. Although choosing to use “the more secular embodiment” for the Russian “*voploshchenie*”, at the same time Senelick undoubtedly recognises its clear “devotional” nuance (Senelick, 2014: xiv).

Taking a step further, Ned Manderino asserts a much more spiritually orientated sense of the concept of ‘incarnation’ that, otherwise, appears to be generally limited to its rather down-to-earth significance as a physical embodiment of the role that fails to include the idea of the soul incarnated. According to Manderino, if solely connected to

the actor's physical apparatus, in terms of movement and gestures, speech and the use of voice, as well as the use of facial expressions, the references concerning the concept of 'incarnation' can only lead to its narrow interpretation, thus failing to cover the complete concept of 'incarnation' (Ibid, 1989: 19). Manderino might have here a very good point. However, whilst arguing in favour of a deeper spiritual connotation of 'incarnation', he does not explain further his vision.

Clearly, on the one hand, 'incarnation' can be deemed more down-to-earth. However, on the other hand, the term equally might echo the Orthodox idea of the human soul as an innate presence of the Incarnated Word - Christ. In order for the spirit of the role to be manifest, indeed it requires the actor's physical apparatus. In that respect, there is no doubt in Stanislavsky's mind that the body has to be continuously tuned, trained, and drilled so it can perform to the highest standards of artistic creativity.

Yet, at the same time, the actor also needs to use it as a vessel through which to incarnate not just the thoughts and feelings of the character, but the life force, the very living spirit that is borne out of the soul of the actor. As noted above, in light of the Orthodox concept of 'incarnation', the human soul is a manifestation of the inner divine nature; it is the living image of the Incarnated Word. In the Orthodox Faith, the act of becoming conscious of this inner divine presence is made possible through what is known as a process of descending "with the mind into the heart" (Coniaris, 1998: 252).

Both Stanislavsky and Demidov observed a similar process in relation to the actor's work. While seeking a viable solution to the "solitary communication" on the stage, through Tortsov's speech, Stanislavsky highlights two critical centres: "the centre of the nervous system in the brain", as well as another "one located near the heart—the solar plexus" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 233-4). As Tortsov explains to his students:

I tried to get these two centres talking to each other. I took the centre in my head to represent consciousness and the solar plexus to represent emotion. So, my impression was that my head was in communication with my heart. "Well then", I said to myself, "let them talk". My subject and object have been

found. From that moment on my mood when relating to myself onstage felt secure, not only in silent pauses, but also when speaking out loud. (Stanislavsky, 2010: 233-4)

It looks as though this simple way enabled Tortsov to attain a harmonious balance between his thoughts and his emotions. This descending, or communication allowed him, as an actor and creator of his character, to believe in the lines he had to deliver, or, in other words, he found his own personal faith in his artistic creation, a faith very much similar with what St Paul depicts as a “head-in-the-heart faith” (Coniaris, 1998: 250).

According to Saint Paul, as cited by Coniaris, “the head seeks God, but it is the heart who finds Him”. By descending with the mind into the heart, the faith ceases to be just an intellectual one; it becomes a felt faith or, more precisely, “not just a head faith, or just a heart faith”, but, as noted above, a “head-in-the-heart” one, in which the heart represents the “inner man”, the “Godlike spirit that was breathed into the first” human, “and it remains with us continuously” (Ibid, 1998: 252).

In a similar manner, Demidov distinguishes between these two types of faith. According to him, “It’s possible to tune yourself so that everything will only reach your head, but it’s also possible to do it in such a way that everything will reach your emotions, your soul, and, possibly the Spirit” (Demidov, 2016: 706). Later on, Demidov calls this way of thinking with the heart the artist’s “special mind” (2016: 75).

Citing a letter received from Pavel Stepanovich Mochalov, one of Russia’s greatest tragedians, Demidov remarks that “the smart actor is the one who ‘deeply perceives all the moments of his situation with his soul’ and not with his intellect” (Demidov, 2016: 75). According to Demidov, “no matter how complex intellectual understanding may seem” in fact, it can only be “primitive”. Moreover, for the artist, regardless “how deep it may seem”, this way of knowing can only be “shallow; no matter how emotional it might seem, it’s soulless” (Ibid, 2016: 75).

Chapter 3

From Spiritual Principles to Artistic and Creative Ones

To those who might reject a spiritual vision of art, Demidov accentuates the importance of believing in something that transcends the physical sphere:

You don't have to believe in the Holy Spirit; armed with science, you can explain the influence of prayer however you like: as self-hypnosis, as an exercise in creative passivity, as a concentration of all psychological forces into one single power, and so on. One thing is undeniable and unavoidable. The actor's stage and the books, paintings, and sculptures invisibly radiate either intelligence or stupidity, greatness or baseness, spiritual richness or an artist's poverty. (Demidov, 2016: 436)

Similarly, for Stanislavsky the creative state cannot be divorced from a spiritual type of thought, for he warns the actor over and over again against "self-conceit and vulgarity", against being proud and thinking "I am an actor"—that is, "I am an important person" (1967: 97). On the contrary, in Stanislavsky's account, an artist has to strive towards a "liberation of his creative 'I' from the clutches of his egotistic 'I'" defined by "passionate, petty and spiteful impulses, vanity" and small cravings for fame and material gain (1967: 111). The creative 'I' can only be liberated by "the achievement of a state of complete self-control", by the "awakening in himself" of "a taste for life in the quest of the beautiful", and by "an inner experience of all contemporary life as the expression of the highest example of beauty" (Stanislavsky, 1967: 111).

'Love', 'beauty', and 'truth' are the three pillars on which Stanislavsky based his entire legacy. In his thinking, only "truth and love" can introduce an actor "into the rhythm of art's whole life" (1967: 116). Although 'truth' is the less abstract concept of these three, it might be also one of the most misunderstood. Echoing Tolstoy, for both Stanislavsky and Demidov, "truth is art": it is "the way of the art of experiencing" (Demidov, 2016: 44). Demidov asserts that "there are so many arguments and misinterpretations around this word: *truth*" (Ibid, 2016: 44).

According to Stanislavsky, as explained by Demidov, the truth of the artist has nothing to do with the mundane existence of the actor on the stage. Quite the opposite, like Tolstoy's understanding of it, such truth might be connected with her inner divine nature and thus it becomes an archetype. Tolstoy believed that "the work of art flows from the state of the artist's soul". In his thought, "the truth in art" is more than the "truth of what it is" in so far as it reflects the "truth of the Kingdom of God, which is close at hand but not yet here" (Tolstoy in Gustafson, 1986: 22). Being connected with a higher power and purpose, this artistic truth may become universal. In order to highlight this universality, Tcherkasski, quotes Stanislavsky's words expressed after his encounter with the American director Edward Gordon and the famous dancer, Isadora Duncan:

I understood that in different parts of the world, on account of conditions unknown to us, different people, in different fields, coming from different directions, are searching in art for the same recurrent, naturally born creative principles. When they meet, they are struck by the community and kinship of their ideas. (Stanislavsky in Tcherkasski, 2016: 113)

As Demidov argues, Stanislavsky "always wanted to see only one thing onstage—genuine sincerity and boundless truth, i.e. *life* onstage or, to put it another way, *process*, not *results*" (2016: 140). Yet, as Demidov further muses, "it's so strange" that "because this achievement is considered to be easy, simple, and self-evident" the process itself appears to be "what is almost always missed" (2016: 140). In Demidov's assessment, many actors seem to think: "Of course, authenticity! Of course, sincerity! What else can it be? I always strive for this!" (2016: 141). However, as he points out, such actors cannot be further away from understanding Stanislavsky's truth:

I'll say the following, leaning on the bitter experience of a teacher and a director: whoever says this and thinks that to himself, typically has no idea, can't even imagine, what 'truth' Stanislavsky is talking about. It isn't 'self-evident' at all, you have to search for it, search some more, and keep on searching! (Demidov, 2016: 140-1)

Such truth can only be unleashed if, by means of experiencing, the actor learns how to allow her inner nature (soul) to take over. Moreover, "a perfect work" of art "happens

only when a master artist imbues it with his soul” and thus “he melds with it” (Ibid, 2016: 44). This melding of the soul of the artist with the soul of the creation itself can transform the created object or—in the case of the actor, the created character—into a natural and truthful living art. Trying to describe the miraculous feeling of experiencing the creative state on the stage, Stanislavsky asserts that when “working on the part of Stockmann” from Henrik Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*, it was the character’s “love and his craving for truth” that the actor Stanislavsky was in search of (1967: 118).

Although he reveals that Ibsen’s character was intuitively born in his own body, he also acknowledges that the love, beauty and truth that “grew naturally out of the inner man” enabled “Stockmann’s and Stanislavsky’s body and soul” to fuse “organically with one another” (Stanislavsky, 1967: 118), which might have opened up access not only to an unconscious type of creativity, but also to a superconscious one.

3.1 The Superconscious

For the purposes of clarity, we must analyse the meanings of such terms as ‘subconscious’ and ‘unconscious’ that Stanislavsky seems to use often in his writings. In Benedetti’s translation, ‘unconscious’ is often replaced by ‘subconscious’, whilst Hapgood’s texts continue to use the first one. It is important to note that Stanislavsky refers mainly to the ‘unconscious’ as defined by pre-Freudian theories. They allude to the existence of specific “forms of latent mental activity” pertaining to “a single substrate or realm associated with ‘the unconscious’”, as opposed to the later interpretations of the subconscious defining certain “automatic or latent forms of cognition” (Nichols and Liebscher, 2010: 21) such as bodily functions or instincts.

In addition to its Pre-Freudian sense, Stanislavsky makes use of the yogic interpretation of the unconscious mind, as depicted by Ramacharaka in *Raja Yoga* (1972: 223-46). However, as Whyman further argues, Ramacharaka “also appears to

draw on pre-Freudian ideas of the” unconscious through “conscious, preparatory methods, from the bodily to the spiritual, the unreal from the real, from naturalism to the abstract” (Whyman, 2008: 85). Moreover, alongside these terms, Stanislavsky introduces the actor to the yogic concept of a ‘superconscious’.

Carnicke, as cited by Whyman, suggests that he “saw the ‘un’” from the unconscious, “divided into ‘super’ and ‘sub’ after yoga” (Ibid, 2008: 88). Tcherkasski argues that Stanislavsky acknowledged an utter “connection between the creative state and unconsciousness, borrowing the notion of superconsciousness, as the source of inspiration, creative intuition, and transcendental knowledge” straight from Raja Yoga (Tcherkasski, 2012: 18). Somewhere else, Tcherkasski explains that “Yoga helped to formulate the core concept of the System about the unconscious and its division into the subconscious and the superconscious” (2016: 112).

Yet, this ‘division’ is also similar to that of the German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann. According to Whyman, pre-Freudian knowledge was introduced in Russia mostly through the influence of his works and those of William James. In 1869, Von Hartmann published *Philosophy of the Unconscious* that “was enormously influential in Russia over the next decades” (Whyman, 2008: 88). While exploring philosophical ideas filtered through moral and social values, “James was in search of a practical meaning” for religious, spiritual, or metaphysical ideas and beliefs (Ibid, 2008: 4).

Citing Henri Ellenberger, Whyman points out that Von Hartmann established three distinctive layers of the unconscious: the “absolute unconscious”, the “physiological unconscious”, and the “relative or psychological unconscious”. Echoing the yogic ‘superconscious’, the first layer constitutes the very “substance of the universe” (Whyman, 2008: 88-9), being also the source for the other two that only relate to the body and the mind.

Metaphorically speaking, Stanislavsky compares the actor's creative mind, as well as the play, with the "levels and strata of the earth". On the surface, as he explains, "sand, clay, rocks, and so forth, which go to form the earth's crust" can be found. This crust is comparable with the superficial layer of the consciousness. Behind all these strata, "deeper down in the very depths, in the core of the earth where you find molten lava and fire, invisible human instincts and passions are raging" (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 12).

Furthermore, beyond these primordial passions and instincts, at the very centre of a human being, Stanislavsky places "the realm of the superconscious", which is the domain of the soul. According to him, "that is the life-giving centre; that is the sacrosanct 'I' of the actor, the artist-human; that is the secret source of inspiration". The actor is not at all "conscious of these things", yet he can feel them with his "whole being" (Ibid, 2008b: 12). As a way to reinforce his argument later on, using similar words, Stanislavsky reminds his readers that

[...] there, in the centre of our spiritual being, in the realm of our inaccessible superconsciousness, our mysterious 'I' has its being, and inspiration itself. That is the storehouse of our most important spiritual material. It is intangible and not subject to our consciousness; it cannot be defined in words, seen, heard, known through any senses. (2008b: 81)

In a slightly different manner, the physician and playwright David Feldshuh envisions the mind as a "tunnel through which creative impulses flow or a screen upon which these impulses play" (1976: 83). The conscious level of the mind is crucial only because it is a limiting factor in the creative processes. Given the condition in which the "conscious mind is filled, this tunnel becomes blocked and the screen becomes cloudy" (Feldshuh, 1976: 83). The artist needs to maintain a consciousness that "is emptied of distracting thought" to become "permeable to the flow of creative impulse". Feldshuh envisions such a clear and silent consciousness as "the optimum mental condition for creative functioning", philosophically connecting it with the "Zen mind" (1976: 83).

While citing Langdon Wainer, Feldshuh points out that “the source of creative action is called the ‘Zen Unconscious’”, as in an unconscious that “is not a limited, personal sphere, but has universal dimension”. Whenever “the artist quiets his mind and succeeds in turning ‘himself into a puppet at the hands of the Unconscious’, creativity becomes” not only possible but, most likely, inevitable (Wainer in Feldshuh, 1976: 83).

Moreover, according to Martin Heidegger, the artist learns to “attune himself to that which wants to reveal itself” and thus to “permit the process to happen through him”. As Heidegger further explains, in all probability, “when creative action does occur it is not because the artist has achieved something new. Rather, he has learned to tap a universal and natural creative force” (Heidegger in Feldshuh, 1976: 83).

It is this philosophical idea of a natural and superior creative force that can be associated with Stanislavsky’s concept of the ‘superconscious’ and, as noted in Chapter 2, the only way to tap into such force is “with the aid of nature” or, more precisely, with the aid of its divine aspect—God/Nature—as in “the only creator in the world that has the capacity to bring forth life” (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 82).

After the actor becomes acquainted with all the conscious content of the play (by means of the given circumstances) or, as Stanislavsky puts it, after the actor “has exhausted all avenues and methods of creativeness”, she “reaches a limit beyond which human consciousness cannot extend” (2008b: 81). In other words, the actor reaches a moment when she has to let go; she has to stop rationalizing and, by means of silencing her ego (to clear the conscious mind), she gives up any tendency of questioning or controlling the artistic creation and allows the creation of her own soul to surface. As Stanislavsky asserts, “the essence of art and the main source of creativeness are hidden deep in man’s soul” (2008b: 81). Therefore, it may be inferred that only the actor’s soul is able to access superconsciousness.

According to Stanislavsky, “the superconscious begins where reality, or rather, the ultra-natural, ends, where nature becomes exempt from the tutelage of the mind” (2008b: 82). In order to highlight “the yogic idea of creative repose” (also attributed to a superconscious type of artistic creativity), Whyman refers to the notes made by Konkordiya Antarova during Stanislavsky’s lectures at the Opera Studio from 1918 to 1922. While in this creative repose, the actor can experience an utterly concentrated state of mind with “all the personal perceptions of the passing moment” almost gone and in which “life—the whole life—is concentrated, clearly, forcefully, and definitely [...] only on the given piece of the scene” (Whyman, 2008: 85).

According to Carnicke, Stanislavsky envisions the concept of the ‘creative state’ as operating “on a continuum of mind, body, and spirit” which should equally tap “the conscious, subconscious, and superconscious layers of mind” (Carnicke, 2009: 180). For this continuum to function harmoniously, the actor needs to become aware of it and simply allow it to unveil. She also needs to make a conscious choice in silencing the ego that, otherwise, will bring into the creative work too much unnecessary noise, and be the main source for the usual blockages.

To transcend her artistic limitations, the actor might need to aim towards higher ideals while adopting a higher sense of morality for, in Stanislavsky’s vision, “the Superconscious” represents “a transcendent force” that, above all, “elevates a person’s soul” (Carnicke, 2009: 180). Moreover, the superconscious level of the mind enables a type of communication that goes beyond any physical action or verbal manifestation, through the eyes of the actor as “the mirror of the soul”, through “his gaze, his glance” which “reflect the size, the depth of his creative mind” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 231).

3.2 The Superconscious Creative State and the Enlightenment

Demidov seems to equate highly inspired moments of artistic creativity on the stage with what he calls “flashes of enlightenment” (2016: 29). He feels compelled to interrogate his students: “haven’t you ever seen these flashes of enlightenment, when all of a sudden, you got this inkling – that’s ‘IT’ ... this is ‘IT!’ ... Of course, you have! It’s for these moments that you threw yourself into theatre in the first place” (Demidov, 2016: 29). According to Demidov, “these seconds, these fleeting moments [...] are completely real”. While acknowledging the impossibility of controlling their emergence and progression, he urges the actor to “observe them, to think about” these precious moments “and then contrive a way to catch the elusive firebird” (Ibid, 2016: 29).

When looking at how the creative state might feel like, as described by actors, an interesting association can be made. It would appear that incredibly similar words are used by Zen Buddhists to depict short personal experiences of enlightenment. Both actors and Zen practitioners seem to acknowledge like states of mind, feelings, and perceptions. Could this mean that, by reaching the creative state, the actor may experience something as strong and transformational as the Buddhist ‘enlightenment’?

In Shunryu Suzuki’s thought, the enlightenment is a state of mind reachable “beyond rationality”, with a rush of “intuitive insight” in which the person gains “not only universal knowledge but clarifies issues of personal existence” (1970: 27). This is followed by a happy “feeling of exaltation”, utterly ineffable, in which one finds it difficult to describe the experience. It also comes with “changes in the boundaries of time and space”, insofar as the normal perception of time disappears, being replaced by “a sense of ‘eternity’ and ‘infinity’, while ‘the old mental boundaries drop out’ and the physical space is perceived as limitless” (Suzuki, 1970: 27).

The event is accompanied by a “persisting positive change in attitude and behaviour” (Austin, 1999: 543). The person and her ways of seeing herself or the world

are improved, and this immediately triggers transformed behaviour. Moreover, the experience is perceived as “realer than real” and, in this new reality, “the true nature of things is seen into, things as they really are” (Ibid, 1999: 543). For example, James Austin recalls experiencing such a state, known as ‘kensho’ or ‘satori’. In his own account, while “waiting at leisure for the next train to Victoria Station”, Austin remembers looking around at “the dingy interior of the station, some grimy buildings in the middle of the ground, and a bit of open sky above and beyond” (1999: 537).

He was observing the scenery with no particular thoughts in mind, when all of a sudden, a consciousness of “Absolute Reality”, “Intrinsic Reality”, and “Ultimate Perfection” struck (Austin, 1999: 537). The experience was not limited to this awareness, but continued in waves, with a distorted perception of time and space. The second wave brought about a feeling of “total understanding at depths far beyond simple knowledge”, followed by the realisation that “no words exist to describe the depths and the qualities” of the gained insights (Ibid, 1999: 537).

Lastly, Austin began to observe himself as in the physical person—James—“feeling totally released mentally” as well as “feeling especially good inside”, entirely “revived and enormously grateful” (Austin, 1999: 537). There was also an inner “Wow!” present, “a big, silent exclamation mark”, while the “expansion of capacities remained internalized” without proceeding into an “overtly exultant behaviour”. Austin describes his feelings as “being awed, deepened, and calmed within a profound on-going intellectual illumination” (1999: 537-9).

This sensation of a simultaneous consciousness of himself (the person changed by the experience) and himself (the observer) echoes the split in consciousness experienced by the actor during the creative state, subsequently detailed in this chapter. Moreover, as shown later on in the second part of this thesis (describing the practical work done), all these perceptions of time and space, as well as the split in

consciousness common to enlightenment, were experienced during certain acting exercises and études more than once by the actors involved in this practice.

The key to enlightenment, according to Suzuki, resides in paying constant attention to one's "physical body" (1970: 27). If the body slumps, the mind will automatically wander about, losing the self. If a person's mind wanders about, she will not be present in her own body; thus, she cannot be present in the moment and, as Suzuki asserts, "this is not the way. WE MUST EXIST RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW! This is the key point" (Emphasis in the original, Suzuki, 1970: 27). In a similar manner, the Stanislavskian actor starts by using "individual monitors for the automatic release of tension" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 127). That is to say, she starts by controlling the body, in a constant self-observation that brings her into the present moment.

Reaching enlightenment is the ultimate goal of Zen Buddhism, and it is considered to be the highest experience available to humankind. It can be depicted as the achievement of a consciousness of one's true nature. However, as Hugo Enomyia-Lassalle points out, once attained, enlightenment does not imply a completion in practice. On the contrary, it needs to be experienced "again and again, until an ethical perfection has also been attained" (1995: 80). This mirrors both the Orthodox pursuit of theosis and Stanislavsky's idea of a never-ending preparation of the actor towards spiritual and artistic growth, envisioned as climbing the endless symbolic ladder.

Another state of mind, attainable without practicing Zen meditation, but which is recognized and highly esteemed by Zen Buddhists, is known as *zanmai*. As Enomyia-Lassalle asserts, this particular state is a "sign of approaching enlightenment", and it can be reached during any activity in which a person endeavours to become "completely absorbed and concentrated". After failing over and over through *zazen* (meditation), many Zen practitioners achieved enlightenment by experiencing *zanmai* when simply involved in their daily activities (Enomyia-Lassalle 1995: 40).

While trying to depict this unique state of mind, Enomyia-Lassalle explains the difference between how consciousness works in ordinary life, as opposed to the conscious mind while experiencing *zanmai*. Most of the time, the will, the reason, and the memory seem to work separately. With the exception of “impulsive decisions”, usually one tends to make a conscious choice only after she/he “is reminded of something” and can reflect upon it. In deep concentration, however, “when consciousness is joined” with the will, the reason, and the memory, “the depths of the soul are touched, and acts are not fixed, but born” (Enomiya-Lassalle, 1995: 40).

In addition, during *zanmai*, the consciousness is altered while “the inner person withdraws further and further from the outside world”. Yet, this withdrawal does not alter the senses. On the contrary, “the person can see, hear and feel as usual”. Even though her/his senses are sharper and clearer than ever, she/he is no longer “distracted by these sense perceptions” (Ibid, 1995: 40). Also, a complete relaxation occurs.

Nonetheless, being in fact combined with a highly attentive readiness, this relaxation has nothing in common with the kind achieved just before sleeping. Another important feature of *zanmai* is characterized by an alteration in the perception of time that can even extend to the feeling of no time. In Enomiya-Lassalle’s opinion, “if [...] we are able to remain constantly in a state of *zanmai*, then it is possible to attain enlightenment at any time, even when we least expect it” (1995: 40-2).

In the light of these statements, it can be easily deduced that both the Zen Buddhist states are also available to the actor. Moreover, the actor who, according to Stanislavsky, must concentrate not only onstage but in life” in order to “notice and register everything that goes on around” (2010: 113), may equally reach similar heights with the Zen practitioner, who can experience both *zanmai* and enlightenment by concentrating on every single job at hand in her day-to-day activities while practicing ‘mindfulness’ or ‘no mind’ (the seventh step of Buddha’s eightfold path). To the Zen

Buddhist, the notion of 'no mind' does not equate a "complete mental blankness, as though one were asleep". On the contrary, it implies a very sharp mind, which is free of the "incessant chatter" of polluting thoughts (Austin, 1999: 21).

When this "incessant chatter drops out" the mind stays clear and ready to access only "those few mental processes essential to the present moment" (Ibid, 1999: 21). Moreover, in Austin's account, as both Zen practitioner and neuroscientist, "Zen meditation is a relaxed, attentive state" or more precisely, "a passive activity" (1999: 21). He further explains that, in order to understand the Zen concept of 'no mind', both activeness and passiveness, as fundamental aspects, have to be taken into account. Stanislavsky's idea of experiencing the life and soul of the character as "I, here, today" (1989: 76), by means of the "I am" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 70), appears to bear uncanny similarities with this practice of mindfulness, leading to *zanmai* and enlightenment.

Enomiya-Lassalle speaks about a "meditative doing", as being "concentrated in the doing of every activity" (1995: 42), no matter how simple and normal that particular activity might seem. As he explains, the secret resides in being present "in every situation" and in giving oneself "wholeheartedly to the matter at hand; not just physically, but with full mental alertness as well" (Enomiya-Lassalle, 1995: 42).

On the same note, the Stanislavskian actor should exist at the centre of her created world, while allowing things to happen naturally, of their own accord. Instead of consciously re-enacting a previous mechanically established construct, the actor needs to learn how to give herself permission simply to react to these happenings. Although related to the created life of the performance, as opposed to normal daily life, Stanislavsky envisions this artistic existence as a sequential, uninterrupted, and logical line of actions or "throughaction" (2010: 306) that needs to be grasped wholeheartedly, at all times when on the stage, in its inner and outer manifestations, while continuously living that life in body, mind, and spirit. Whilst the practitioner of Zen contemplates the

unity of life in the everyday activity, the actor exists at the very centre of the created world of the performance and silently contemplates upon the unfolding of the life of her character. It can be concluded that any eventual differences mostly reside in the worlds to which Zen practices and the art of the theatre relate.

3.3 The Art of Experiencing and the Creative State

One of the Stanislavskian key terms is 'experiencing'. As argued by Gillett, "the core, the bedrock, the alpha and the omega, the absolute essential element of Stanislavsky's approach" is "the belief in experiencing" (2012: 1). As Gillett further explains:

[...] the crucial thing for experiencing is creating the inner impulse which brings the action to solve the problem, and it is these impulses strung together which drive us on through the action of the play like fuel explosions in an engine. This analogy of Stanislavsky's is especially good because it indicates how objectives need to be embodied, physically experienced and affect the feelings and the will. (2012: 8)

Tcherkasski highlights "the art of experiencing" as the process towards reaching the "creative state" that has three main elements: "a) freedom of the body (muscles), b) concentration", and "c) effectiveness" (2012: 7). Although viewed as a process that allows the actor to access a highly concentrated creative awareness, as argued by Merlin, it equally "involves honed skills, the starting point for which is muscular release". In this respect, "Stanislavsky is adamant that without freedom of the body, 'experiencing' cannot be ... well, experienced" (Merlin, 2012: 8).

Merlin attributes this notion to the clear influences of "Tolstoy's own spiritual approach to art and life". Like Tolstoy, Stanislavsky is said to have described the act of "experiencing the role" as "the artistic arousal of [...] spiritual and bodily sensations" and which, "with the help of repetition" can be brought to a natural unfolding (Ibid, 2012: 8). Next to experiencing, Whyman adds other terms inspired by Tolstoy, such as "*infections*" and "*transmission*" as well as a specific "*sense of measure*" and

“*communion*”. In her account, “Stanislavsky’s [...] teleology” is expressed as the utter “spiritual purpose” of art to enable “*communion* between people” (Whyman, 2008: 15).

There are three conditions to experiencing: first of all, it “is artistic”, meaning that it demands more “than just being yourself on stage”; secondly, “it involves body and spirit”; and thirdly, “it requires repetition” (Merlin, 2012: 8). While investigating a possible meaning of the term, Carnicke endeavours to provide us with an answer as well.

According to her, “Stanislavsky describes” experiencing “as a state of mind ‘happy’, but ‘rare’, when the actor is ‘seized’ by the role” and during which the artist reaches “an all-perceptive sharpening of the senses, an intense awareness, an oceanic joy, and bliss” (Carnicke, 2009: 130). In Merlin’s opinion, “all too often a mystery hovers around ‘becoming the role’ or experiencing a part”. Citing his words, taken from Whyman (2008: 58), Merlin argues that

Stanislavsky himself rebelled against the way in which ‘experiencing’ was being interpreted [...]: ‘In Khaliutina’s school at Mchedlov’s the students experience for the sake of experiencing. They bathe in experiencing—there are pauses for two minutes, and then a quietly and indistinctly thrown-out muffled pause. This is terrible. Consequently—from this year on—1912—I shall not teach experiencing, but action that is, fulfilling a task.’ (Merlin, 2012: 50)

Through Tortsov’s words, Stanislavsky explains that “experiencing helps the actor to fulfil his basic goal, which is *the creation of the life of the human spirit in a role and the communication of that life onstage in an artistic form*” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 19). It is crystal clear that, in Stanislavsky’s account, ‘experiencing’ helps the actor. In other words, as noted by Demidov, it is a process and not a resulting mental state, as described by Carnicke. During this process, not only that the actor becomes aware of everything that happens around, but also, she tends to form opinions and to entertain inner monologues regarding every discovery made. Both as a human being and an actor, she can experience everything, every action, thought, or feeling.

However, there is another element in play, crucial to a superconscious type of artistic creativity and that is the character that the actor works with. As long as the actor is 'doing' this character, in the sense that she continues to perceive herself as different from her creation, and tries to control the process, the actor still can experience everything, but she is not yet her character. That is to say, the natural merging of the two still separated entities—actor and character—is not yet fulfilled. Only when the actor (creator) ceases to 'do' her character and, by sacrificing her own person, allows herself to 'become' the creation, all the separate entities at work are made one, in a trinity of the human being-actor-character that might mirror the Orthodox idea of God as a Trinity (Father-Son-Holy Spirit) in one ultimate creator.

Along the journey of an actor, there is first the trinity of the body-mind-spirit of the human being that, with years of training and self-improvement, becomes the trinity of the body-mind-spirit of the artist. During the artistic creation, this might take the form of a third trinity, as in the body-mind-spirit of the character. Whenever experiencing the superconscious creative state, all these exist at once. On the one hand, the actor gains access to a multitude of different aspects of herself in one single creation, which is, in essence, the expression of the soul. On the other hand, however, the unique soul of the merged human being-actor-character might touch upon all these different aspects, without causing the actor to lose her personal sense of self or her identity.

In other words, while developing consciousness of herself, as in the person of the character, the creator also remains conscious of her own personality, both as a human being and an actor. Yet, because the creator uses herself in order to create something new, if she continues to entertain inner comments regarding any of these aspects, she automatically limits her conscious mind to either one or the other. Thus, instead of living the life of this character, she only generates more opinions about it.

By doing so, the actor only experiences herself as a potential creator, without ever becoming the creation itself. With no creation, there is no creator and vice-versa. The creative state might not even be possible. To change this outcome, the actor needs to bring her mind to a state of silence and stillness, where there is only ongoing contemplation of the artistic act, devoid of any inner comments or opinions.

Only in this silence the artist can gain access to a more powerful and unique perspective that allows the observance of a double existence as both creator and creation, at the same time. Although non-religiously orientated, because it might mirror the double existence of the world (microcosm) within the One (macrocosm), and of the One (the ultimate creator - God) within the world (the creation), such insight can bring about an artistically-mystical type of experiencing, very similar with Lapshin's notion of "mystical ecstasies" (in Lossky N, 1952: 167) noted in Chapter 2.

To conclude, indeed an actor, through this process, is highly likely to reach the creative state of mind. However, this does not mean that, by means of experiencing, the actor definitely will reach it. First of all, the creation of the soul is not controllable in any way. The more the actor tries to control it, the further removed and unreachable this superconscious artistic creation seems to become. Therefore, she needs to learn how to let go of control, while sacrificing all her personal desires of success. Secondly, this process of experiencing also comes in different degrees of intensity. The deeper the concentration, the stronger this experiencing becomes; the stronger the experiencing, the closer the actor is to the superconscious realm of the creative state.

Carnicke also argues that 'experiencing' is Stanislavsky's ultimate goal - a state of mind reachable on the stage, very similar with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' (Carnicke, 2009: 130). In the field of psychology, 'flow' is recognized as a state of deep concentration in which the psychic disorder of the mind or psychic entropy simply

disappears, while the mind is focused on the information coming into consciousness and is directed solely towards the goal to be reached (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008: 39).

According to Csikszentmihalyi, when in flow, the psychic entropy of the mind represented by negative thoughts and involving a sense in which the smaller self (ego) informs an overwhelming feeling of isolation tends to be replaced by a soothing feeling of communion with the environment or the world. This feeling comes with a state of happiness and bliss, in which the normal perception of time disappears and the one experiencing the flow discovers, afterwards, that she is somehow a better person, improved either physically or psychologically, or even both (Ibid, 2008: 39).

Undoubtedly, there are clear similarities between the creative state and flow. However, there are also major differences that cannot be ignored. Whilst Stanislavsky associates the creative state with the superconscious, thus surpassing all the lower levels of the mind, Csikszentmihalyi limits the notion of 'flow' to the unconscious, without exploring any other possible higher mental level. Moreover, flow can also come with major differences of degrees in intensity, from the most insignificant to the highest ones, and which Carnicke does not seem to consider when arguing that experiencing equals the creative state, as well as flow.

For example, Csikszentmihalyi matches a worker's experience of flow, while doing an utterly boring job, with the flow experienced by a mountain climber who risks her life while conquering a seemingly unreachable peak, or with that of an Olympian who is breaking a world record. Yet, the tremendous differences between the lengths of time necessary to acquire the skills mandatory for completing these tasks, the amounts of effort involved, the energy consumption, and the results achieved, are undeniable.

As far as the Stanislavskian actor is concerned, she might not risk her life in the processes of creating on the stage, and she might not break any records. Nevertheless, in order to hone the crucial skills for a superconscious artistic creation, years and years

of training and self-improvement are required. Moreover, the artist is far removed from enjoying an easy, boring, and undemanding experience insofar as she goes through almost uncontrollable and paralysing anxiety caused by public exposure and fear of judgement, states of mind constantly emanating from her smaller self or ego.

In the end, through a spiritual type of training that allows her own soul to live the life of the character, the actor channels this overwhelming emotionally charged energy for the purposes of transmuting it into a creative, higher-vibrational one. It is probably this type of transmutation which is the one that enables the spiritual and artistic growth of the actor. Additionally, according to Csikszentmihalyi, when in flow, one experiences a “loss of self-consciousness” (2008: 62).

More precisely, by concentrating only on the job at hand, the person’s mind can reach clarity and balance while overcoming any worries, self-pity, anxiety, or self-judgement. Clearly, if left uncontrolled, a constant self-pitying, self-indulgence, or self-denigration can develop into energy-consuming emotional and psychological imbalance. This can only block the natural growth and well-being of a person. In Csikszentmihalyi’s opinion, experiencing flow states as often as possible can prevent such imbalance simply because

[...] in flow there is no room for self-scrutiny; [...] There is one very important and at first apparently paradoxical relationship between losing the sense of self in a flow experience, and having it emerge stronger afterward. It almost seems that occasionally giving up self-consciousness is necessary for building a strong self-concept. (2008: 64-5)

Although this clearly applies to the actor, at the same time, it is limited to a psychological perspective that does not consider any possible spiritual implications. Therefore, from a Stanislavskian point of view, such loss of self-consciousness should not be understood in relation to the soul in so far as it might pertain to the egotistic ‘I’ (ego) and not at all to the creative ‘I’ (soul) (Stanislavsky, 1967: 111). More precisely, it might be a loss of the ego-consciousness towards gaining inner higher self-awareness.

As noted above, alongside these major differences between ‘experiencing’ and ‘flow’ there are also significant similarities. For example, both during ‘experiencing’ a role and in a flow-like state, the activity in which the mind is utterly absorbed is done without a conscious expectation of any material gain or other future benefits. On the contrary, the action becomes an “autotelic experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008: 67) during which, by simply being involved in the activity, the person is already rewarded.

This autotelic aspect eliminates any worries for future material or social losses, worries that can distract the mind while disrupting the concentration needed for the flow experience. In a similar manner, Stanislavsky’s advice for the actor to stop thinking of personal gain and success is rooted in his own understanding of the creative mind—in order to unfold in the processes of experiencing, the creative mind should be concentrated solely upon the actions that take place within the world of the stage.

The artist’s real gain comes through the enlightened experience of becoming her own creation, while sharing it with the audience. As long as she is in search of praise or fame, the actor’s egocentric creation can only remain insignificant and superficial, while the success is neither real, durable nor profound. Ironically, as a natural response to the manifestation of the creative ‘I’ (self) of the actor, and not at all to an inflated egotistic ‘I’ (ego), the real fame and success are inevitably achieved mostly when not pursued.

3.4 The Divided Consciousness

While in the creative mood, because the artistic creation unravels in the present moment, here and now (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 76), a distortion of how the actor normally perceives time takes place. On the one hand, seconds appear to expand significantly while, on the other hand, the reverse happens insofar as everything seems to be over in a blink of an eye. It could be said that the actor experiences a paradox, not only timewise, but also in terms of personality. As noted above, similar paradoxes are

experienced by Zen Buddhists when in *zanmai* or just before approaching enlightenment. Such similarities might show possible connections between creativity and higher spiritual mindsets.

From an artistic point of view, Michael Chekhov calls this moment “the fourth level of the creative process”, during which “the actor acquires a Divided Consciousness” (1991: 155). In Stanislavsky’s thought, this “concept of dual consciousness” takes the form of “a separate creative consciousness, an artistic monitor” that exists alongside the character’s mental make-up, and which silently observes the unfolding of the artistic creation, without any “sense of judgement present” (Gillett, 2012: 10). The “theatrical reality” that “is created by the actor experiencing the circumstances and events of the play as if they are real” (Ibid, 2012: 10), becomes the actor’s private performance. In other words, from inside out, the actor is transformed into a spectator of her own creation. Such performance is possible, according to Michael Chekhov, only if the actor “has found a way to free his higher Ego (self) and to experience the Divided Consciousness” (1991: 157).

This clearly echoes Stanislavsky’s idea of freeing the actor’s creative ‘I’ (higher self) to gain access to an initial unconscious level, followed by a superconscious spontaneous creation (1967: 111). All the moral and ritualistic behaviour, the meditation, the ‘I am’, the processes of experiencing, “all the Elements which produce the creative state in the human being/actor” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 296) are designed for this unique goal. Following this path, the actor learns how to let go of her egotistic ‘I’ (ego) to gain access to higher levels of creativity. In order for the “higher Ego” (self) to be free, “the lower Ego” needs to recede (Ibid, 2005: 146). In Michael Chekhov’s words:

A kind of division of consciousness occurs, with the higher Ego acting as the *source of inspiration* and the lower Ego as the bearer, the agent. Interestingly, the higher Ego also becomes a bearer at such times. It is not closed off egotistically into itself; it is ready to acknowledge that the true source of creative ideas lies in even higher spheres. It observes and directs the lower Ego from

outside, guiding it and *empathizing with* the imagined sufferings and joys of the character. (2005: 147)

Stanislavsky, as cited by Merlin, acknowledges and refers to this type of double consciousness as a “split focus between self and transformed being”. After working on an *étude*, in which he was playing the character of the Critic, Stanislavsky remembered that he “divided” himself, “as it were, into two personalities. One continued as an actor, the other was an observer” (Stanislavsky in Merlin, 2006: 252). He also asserts that while involved in the *étude*, “strangely enough, this duality not only did not impede” his artistic creation in any way but, on the contrary, “it actually promoted” his own creativity while encouraging it. Moreover, it seemed that it was precisely this dual perception that “lent impetus to” his own creative endeavour (Ibid, 2006: 252).

Based on his own experience, Phillip Zarrilli defines this double consciousness as the sixth element “common to a psychophysical type of acting training” (2009: 83). In his account, whenever the actor reaches a “fully embodied primary focus and awareness” during the process of “attending to a specific task/action” this element becomes manifest as a feeling of “inhabiting dual (multiple consciousness)” (Zarrilli, 2009: 83). Psychologically speaking, this idea of a split in the conscious mind of the actor does not resemble in any way the so known ‘pathological splitting’:

This affliction paints a picture for us of how a person can be himself and also not himself. But the difference between this state and that of an actor is enormous. During pathological splitting, a person’s sense of self becomes so inhabited that his identity seemingly disappears altogether. In the meantime, another identity rises up in its place—the one created by his imagination. An actor’s identity (his own sense of self), however, doesn’t go anywhere—it’s with him at all times, and it is constantly living, observing, and directing the life of the ‘other ‘I’— the assumed new guise—the ‘character’. (Demidov, 2016: 621)

Stanislavsky associates the actor’s divided awareness with a superconscious type of creativity that can neither be forced nor controlled. He explains that “only when an actor’s behaviour, both mental and physical, onstage is spontaneous, normal according to the laws of nature, can the superconscious emerge from its secret places”. It takes

but “the slightest compulsion” in order to withdraw “into the depths of the psyche, to save itself from crude muscular anarchy” (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 191).

To express it in a different manner, as long as the ego tries to control the experience by questioning, forcing, or guiding the creator (the soul), the unconscious creation is blocked by consciousness, and Stanislavsky’s superconscious creation or Michael Chekhov’s fourth level, are utterly unreachable. As Rosemary Gordon asserts, only the capability of suspending “ego functions and controls” by risking not to know while allowing oneself to become “available to possession” can make the experiencing of a “sacred awe” possible (2000: 134). As explained in Chapter 2, this ability of suspending ego functions, with their controlling tendency, may be strongly related to a matured and developed individuated ego-personality.

On the one hand, if the ego is inflated, it cannot accept the higher value of the self, as it considers itself to be the supreme value, in which case a surrender of control is not even possible. On the other hand, as alienated, the ego perceives itself in such a complete unworthiness and so incapable of any accomplishments that the only surrender is directed towards fear and not at all acceptance. The individuated ego-personality alone is capable of acknowledging the limitations of the ego and can exhibit the will to surrender to the higher guidance of the self (Edinger, 1992: 103).

As shown by the Raja Yoga, the human mind, the ego, and the body are mere tools for the manifestation of the real ‘I’ or the higher self. The mind is subdivided in three “Mental Principles”. At the lowest level, there is the “Instinctive Mind” (Ramacharaka, 1972: 30-1), responsible for the survival of the species. This mind controls the regular functioning, repairing, and renewal of the body, all the basic animal instincts, and the lower or negative emotions such as fear, jealousy, and the desire for revenge, envy, lust, pride, hatred, or physical love.

The next level, above the “Instinctive Mind” is the “Intellect” (Ibid, 1972: 32), responsible for the analytical processes, reasoning, or thinking. Above the “Intellect” is the “Spiritual Mind”, which is the source of all the higher and noble emotions such as selflessness, mercy, forgiveness, kindness, love for others and for God (or any other higher power), the source of all the inspiration and spiritual thought, or the genius creativity (Ramacharaka, 1972: 33). The spiritual growth is based on the unfolding of this region of the mind into the conscious field.

In light of this theory, it can be assumed that, by consciously choosing to think and behave in an altruistic manner, the doors to more profound levels of creativity, as well as to an enlightened state of awareness, begin to open. As long as the consciousness is centred on the instinctive mind, governing the lower thoughts and feelings, the chances of reaching a higher state of awareness are close to zero. Hence, the constant need for the artist to observe a correct moral behaviour in order to evolve.

However, this is not to say that, to grow artistically, the actor has to create only positive characters that do not have negative feelings and, as such, do not touch upon the lower regions noted above. On the contrary, because the artist-creator is the one transformed by the creative state (and not the character), she can and should deal with negative emotions as often as necessary. By experiencing the lower feelings of her role, while placing herself on a higher consciousness, the actor has the unique opportunity to transcend her own personal lower feelings and thus to become aware of her intrinsic make-up and greatness as a higher ‘I’ (self).

To conclude, speaking from personal experience, and considering how other performers (including the ones participating in this project) tend to identify moments of enhanced artistic creativity, this awareness of the actor’s self, doubled by the one of the character, as described by both Stanislavsky and Michael Chekhov, may be taken as a clear sign of experiencing the creative state. Alongside the distortion in the perception

of both time and space, this double awareness is crucial for understanding how artistic creativity works, and for becoming aware of this creative state in order to be able to recognize it properly whenever it might be reached during the practice.

Part Two: Practical Explorations

Chapter 4

From Theory to Practice: Levels of Work

As noted in the Introduction, the initial work on the first stage of the practice ('An Actor's Work on Her Self'— Video Clip 1) started in January 2013, and was interrupted after eight months, when more than half of the actors were no longer able to continue the project. This stage was resumed in January 2014 with the present group of four professional actresses. Two years later, in February 2016, the second stage ('An Actor's Work on Her Role'— Video Clip 2) was initiated and it lasted over a year, concluding at the beginning of April 2017. However, the first stage of training continued in parallel with the second stage, during the entire year of weekly rehearsals.

The third stage ('Performing as a State of Being'— Video Clip 3) started a few weeks prior to the evening of 15 April 2017, the opening night of the performance. Although much shorter than the other two, this last stage was done at a faster pace and with daily rehearsals, as opposed to the previous weekly sessions. With the main purpose of observing how the actors were able to make the transition from improvisation to the fixed constructs of the performance, this stage was much more intense. Because the rehearsals involved Stanislavsky's 'Active Analysis' (that, as subsequently analysed in Chapter 7, uses improvisation on both the text and the line of actions), during the unfolding of the life of their characters, the actors had to find their own ways of maintaining the meditational mind-frame while balancing it with the inevitable technical aspects.

For the sake of clarity, it is crucial to explain that, because this is a practice as research project, and not a research by performance one, it is completely irrelevant whether or not the final production itself (as a stand-alone event) was well directed, successful, or well received. On the contrary, its purpose was an experiential one, for it gave the actors a real opportunity to apply (in front of an audience) all that they learned

during training and while rehearsing. Therefore, in order to provide ways of holding on to that highly concentrated awareness while learning to cope with the fixed cues for the light and sound, to change costumes, or to deal with unexpected accidents, the final performance was intended only as a testing ground for the actor.

To meet the minimum requirements for the newly adapted text, the cast was comprised by five actresses. While bringing together most of the scenes from the original play (*Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov) that feature female characters, *Three Sisters and a Sister-in-Law* is centred on the relation between the sisters, Natasha, and Anfisa (the old nanny). In order to test the idea that, although Stanislavsky used “realism, almost bordering on naturalism” to “enter into the superconscious” (2008: 152), his ‘system’ was not designed to create only a realist type of performance (Stanislavsky, 2008: 184-5), the final production intentionally moved away from a realistic style. The set was formed of four chairs that became either a sofa in a living room, or a bench in the garden. In addition, many times imaginary objects or rooms were used alongside the real ones. There were certain scenes involving male characters, played by the same actresses. Nonetheless, these scenes were constructed in a symbolic manner, based only on movement and action.

The performance began and ended with a quasi-Orthodox ritual that used masks. Yet, it is important to stress that, from a directorial perspective, the presence of the mask was connected only with the idea of an ancient ritual, and it had nothing to do with Jacques Lecoq’s notion of the ‘neutral mask’. From the point of view of the researcher, this presence also symbolised the absence of the character. In other words, the act of taking off the mask was designed as a symbolic gesture through which the character is revealed. Thus, the unmasking took the meaning of a metaphorical initiation rite of the artist, intended to trigger the transformational processes of becoming this newly born entity of the human being-artist-character.

As subsequently analysed in Chapter 7, the final production also used meditation and acting exercises, intentionally imbedded in the scenes as explored during training. Additionally, certain études, developed in rehearsals with Active Analysis, became part of the show. Such études explored either a ritualistic construct, a stylised symbolic vision of a dream, nightmare, memory, or a scene that does not exist in the text (as in an event that takes place before or after the actual written scene).

Even though most of the exercises used during this practice as research (as subsequently explained throughout the following chapters) are known to be created by Stanislavsky, their actual testing was original in the sense that they were adapted, developed, and expanded during practice to accommodate and often elucidate spiritual ideas and principles such as the ones analysed in the first part of this thesis. For example, as featured in Video Clip 1 (00.26.59), initially, 'the Mirror' exercise was tested in its primary version, attributed to Stanislavsky, with two actors consecutively mirroring each other (Benedetti, 2008: 33). The exercise was further developed by means of testing Michael Chekhov's version that introduces a third actor (Zinder, 2009: 106). Finally, by including all the actors working as one, in meditation, this exercise took a surprisingly original form that can be described as an 'ensemble Mirror'.

During the early stages of the work, this exercise was explored as a way of learning concentration of attention in movement. Nevertheless, as argued in Chapter 5, later on, 'the Mirror' became critical for enabling inner communication between actors as well as for understanding how the meditational processes can be extended from stillness to motion. Moreover, this acting exercise continued to be used and constantly developed during all three stages of the practice, including the performance.

Another exercise that departed from its original version to find a unique development, specific for this practice as research, was 'the Tree' (Video Clip 2). Stanislavsky neither created this particular exercise in the three stages explored during

this practice (as subsequently analysed in Chapter 6), nor did he specifically require the use of either a real or an imaginary tree as a subject of reference.

With the purpose of clarification, it is important to note that this practice uses both acting exercises and études. However, the notion of 'acting exercise' is more connected with the training period whilst the 'étude' is present mostly during rehearsals, being used as "a synonym for Active Analysis" (Jackson, 2017: 172). According to David Jackson, "there are many types of étude", such as either "an off-text improvisation" or "a stand-alone acting exercise" that "can be performed solo, in pairs, or in the ensemble". These are done either silently or "with the minimum of dialogue" while using "the actor's own words" (Ibid, 2017: 172). Jackson appears to talk here about études, and acting exercises used during training. Yet, for rehearsals, the "method proposed by Stanislavsky—the so-called Method of Active Analysis" (Knebel in Thomas, 2016: 87), defines the idea of 'étude' in a slightly different manner.

In Knebel's view, Active Analysis explores the play "in terms of action through études using improvised text", directly on the stage-floor, rather than "at the table". The études developed in this manner, serve "as stepping-stones", designed to lead actors towards a "creative assimilation of the author's text" (Ibid, 2016: 87). It can be concluded that for both Stanislavsky and Knebel, the notion of 'étude' may be more connected with the approach of a character (rehearsing processes) whilst the idea of 'exercise' appears to address mainly the work on the self for enhancing personal skills (training period). As shown in *An Actor's Work*, Tortsov develops many études used only for training purposes, such as 'burning money' (2010: 87-8) or 'the madman' (Stanislavsky, 2010: 49), totally independent of a pre-scripted text or play.

However, these études still follow an improvised story that does not exist in the make-up of other Stanislavskian exercises as the ones testing relaxation, muscle release, concentration, rhythm, or communication, for example. Because they continue

to explore the self of the actor by means of the 'magic if' (as in what the actor does if...), the études noted above can be taken as a lynchpin between working on self and characterisation. While the initial acting exercises develop certain skills by exploring the self directly, these études appear to use improvisation on various stories that connect the actor with possible given circumstances and various imagined situations.

To resume, after several months in which Stanislavsky's main writings in English, as well as other books and articles related to the 'system', were thoroughly read and analysed, it became progressively clear that, in spite of the significant range of publications on the subject, not many of them were touching upon the religious connections. Therefore, a further research into the existing Orthodox literature proved to be critical. For the purposes of facilitating understanding of the proper conditions for a spiritual type of work, one of the main procedures adopted during practice was based on theoretical lectures depicting the findings presented in the first part of this thesis.

While working with the initial group, I delivered these lectures in a conventional manner, by presenting and discussing the ideas and principles analysed. Later on, however, during the work with the present group of actors, a decision to experiment with the ways of delivering the information was made. This time, the theoretical aspects of the spiritual ideas to be explored in practice, were introduced in a totally unconventional way, while the actors were sitting down in Hatha yogic way of meditation subsequently described in this chapter. Sharing the theory during the sessions of seated meditation was intended to stimulate the subconscious of the actors, as well as to create faster absorption of information through a relaxed but simultaneously highly attentive mind.

This was done in light of Stanislavsky's idea of gathering and making use of knowledge as inspired by yogic ideas. With the goal of increasing artistic creativity, and as a way of understanding how to work consciously towards relentlessly stimulating the unconscious mind, he uses the advice of the yogi masters:

Take a handful of thoughts, they suggest, and through them into your subconscious sack, saying: I have no time to bother with them so you (my subconscious) attend to them. Then go to sleep. When you wake up, you ask: Is it ready? The answer is: Not yet. Take another handful of thoughts and again throw it into the sack and go for a walk. When you return, ask: Is it ready? The answer is still: No! And so on. But in the end your unconscious will say: it is ready. And then it will return to you what you gave it to do. (Stanislavsky, 1989: 82)

Although, due to its subtle effects, it might be impossible to prove that this unconventional method can be successful, based on my own observations of the how the actors responded to it, not at all negligible is the fact that, in a rather short period of time, all of them—including Maria (who declared herself to be an atheist right from the beginning)—seemed to open up their minds towards the subject taught, without any later need for debating the spiritual and religious notions presented. On the contrary, the actors appeared to accept the information as possible or hypothetical.

Highly important to note is the fact that the theoretical research was never left aside in order to concentrate only on the practice. Alongside providing evidence for a spiritual approach of the 'system', these theoretical findings proved to be so crucial for both the actor and the whole practice, that they became an integral aspect of the entire project and cannot be considered separately. In the end, the theory illuminated why and how the constant pursuit of a correct moral behaviour, the higher ideals, and the quasi-ritualistic atmosphere during practice, can influence the artistic growth and the skills of the actor, her mental make-up, the sharpening of her perceptions, as well as the constant elevation of her emotional intelligence.

4.1 The First Level of Work: Creating the Atmosphere

At all times when in the theatre, either during training, rehearsing, or before and during the performance, the actor needs to embrace a special atmosphere that, as noted in the Introduction, Stanislavsky calls “a liturgical mood backstage”. According to him, it is absolutely vital for such an atmosphere to be created and maintained everywhere, including in the auditorium (Stanislavsky, 2010: 572). Moreover, in terms of his artistic philosophy, as Stanislavsky reminds his readers, the stage and the theatre should become “sacred altars” on which the artist can lay her/his creations (“offerings”) (Stanislavsky 1967: 151). Clearly, this ‘mood’ appears to be subtler than it is recognised by most practitioners in so far as it might operate on a higher spiritual plane.

With this in mind, the actors involved in the present project needed to adopt a higher moral attitude and a quasi-ritualistic behaviour that incorporated all the religious and spiritual values analysed in the first section of this thesis. Starting with the creation of a proper “atmosphere of the studio” during training or while rehearsing, by means of a continual “spiritual education” of the actor (Stanislavsky, 1967: 114), the entire practical work strived to include these ways of theatrical sacralisation, translated into certain norms of behaviour that embraced commitment, accountability, trust, care for the space and objects, love and respect for each other or readiness to help.

Such a behaviour was gradually induced and constantly encouraged. During each session, the space, the props, and the actor’s outfit or costumes were slowly and persistently invested with a higher meaning. For example, from simply being a workspace, the room became a treasured place of silence and stillness for, as Stanislavsky puts it, “the studio is, as it were, the portals of the temple of art” (1967: 102) in which the actors gradually can relax and enter the deep concentration required, while leaving behind all their personal problems. According to Stanislavsky:

A studio is the place where a man should learn to observe his own character and his inner power; it is a place where he must cultivate the habit of looking on

himself not as a man who just allows the current of life to sweep him along with it, but as one who loves art and who wants by his creative work, through and out of himself, to fill every man's day with the joy and happiness of his art. [...] Here there should be inscribed for each of us in fiery letters the notice, "Learn to overcome all obstacles by loving art and rejoicing in it". (1967: 102)

To start with, the actors were constantly advised to arrive on time and, instead of falling into the usual small talk that mostly happens while waiting to begin, immediately to change their clothes in silence and to concentrate on the necessary preparation. The very first steps, when training for a more spiritually orientated type of acting, should be directed towards following the Delphic advice 'know thyself'—that is to say, become self-aware. This self-awareness can bring about understanding and acceptance that should enable the spiritual and artistic growth of the student-actor.

However, for this constant self-awareness and improvement to become possible, the actor needs to feel safe. As such, a special atmosphere is required; an atmosphere of peace, calm, and relaxation in which all worries and fears of being imperfect, all egotistical desires of becoming famous and of being an important actor, or any type of disruptive judgemental attitude can be tamed by means of genuine acceptance, and can be replaced with a true desire for self-mastery and with love and passion for art.

By becoming self-aware, and by silently accepting the discoveries made, both the students/actors and the teacher/director are enabled to strive constantly towards self-improvement and towards adopting higher ideals personally as well as professionally. Yet, such a spiritual type of behaviour cannot be enforced nor demanded. The only way for it to work is to be inspired and nourished over time. On top of that, the actors also have to make a conscious choice to acknowledge the possible existence of a soul, higher self, or creative 'I', beyond the body or the mind.

Nevertheless, this acknowledgement does not necessarily involve a personal belief in God or in the soul; it requires only a humble and open mind which can accept that, in the end, anything may be possible. In order to encourage such an open mind-

frame, from the first day onwards, the actors were directed gradually to develop a free individual pattern that helped them to shake off whatever state of mind was brought into the rehearsal space, either by concentrating on a personal circle of attention that could enable them to reach what Stanislavsky calls “*public solitude*” (2010: 99), or by simply performing various individual warm-up and relaxation exercises or meditation.

In addition to this individual preparation for initiating each session, and as a way to create the basis for constant observance of correct moral behaviour during work (which, as argued in Chapter 2, had a higher spiritual meaning in Stanislavsky’s mind), the actors were guided towards building strong relationships within the group. As noted above, such relationships were based on mutual respect, trust, and a selfless attitude, care for each other and desire to help; real appreciation of the work being done, and a healthy sense of criticism. They were thus enabled to follow Stanislavsky’s advice, always to leave their ego behind, outside the studio (Benedetti, 1988: 149), while developing a spiritual type of behaviour that includes an altruistic frame of mind and a perpetual readiness to share ideas or to respect and help each other.

Although this specific spiritual behaviour during work does not seem to be made part of the ‘system’, at the same time, as previously explained, it appears to be very important for Stanislavsky. Yet, once more, there is no clear explanation why such a conduct might be crucial. With the gradual development of this practice, however, it became clearer that a spiritual perspective and motivation, as well as observing a correct moral behaviour in the studio, while cultivating values, are critical for creating an atmosphere that nurtures the artistic development of the actor.

By first creating the proper atmosphere during work, in which the actor might be enabled to reach what can be described as spiritual awareness, this study strived to induce and subtly encourage such ways of conduct, in order to test them, while observing their outcomes. Thus, all the acting sessions were designed and carefully

planned to stir and increase the actors' interest and passion for self-improvement and creative work as much as possible. Moreover, every acting exercise or *étude* used during this research was selected and developed not only to reflect Stanislavsky's spiritual vision, but also in response to how well the actors received it. Consequently, progressively during most of the sessions, the actors started to experience a sense of ease and flow-like states, while the normal passage of time simply vanished, with no need to take coffee or toilet breaks (evidence in the video clips).

There were, of course, days in which, for one reason or another, this atmosphere did not come naturally, and the actors seemed to struggle with their concentration. Each time this happened the actors were guided towards remembering the meditational state, either by performing different types of meditation, or by revisiting those acting exercises previously developed in connection to meditation, such as Michael Chekov's 'Staccato-Legato' (Video Clip 1: 00.20.43) or Stanislavsky's 'Mirror' (Ibid: 00.28.10).

In the end the actors' gradual artistic improvement, their commitment and usual lack of interest in having breaks during sessions, their happiness and joy, as well as their tendency to laugh easily when recognizing either failures or accomplishments, can be taken as signs of spiritual and artistic growth. As Stanislavsky asserts, the studio in which the student prepares herself towards reaching the creative state "is no place for anyone who does not know how to laugh, who is always grumbling, who is always depressed, who easily takes offence and is, generally, a wet blanket" (1967: 102).

Due its subtle manifestation, the spiritual and artistic development of the actor might not be quantifiable, yet it can be documented. It slowly becomes noticeable in the ease with which the actors start to perform certain tasks; in their willingness to try again what in the past seemed to be impossible; or in the ways in which they end up working together while communicating with each other, beyond words and physical gestures. Most of all, however, this growth is highly visible in the artistic intelligence gained.

4.2 The Second Level: Meditation—An Underlying Principle of Breath

Without any particular explanations, the only direct advice that Stanislavsky seems to offer on how an artistic creation, stemming from the superconscious levels of the mind, might be reached, is to look at the ways of “the Yogis of India, who can work miracles in the realm of the subconscious and the superconscious” and who “have much practical advice to offer” (2008b: 83). Considering this suggestion, it is imperative to note that the path of the yogis, Buddhists, or that of the Orthodox monks, is a path of meditation and contemplation of the inner divine nature present in the higher self (soul).

For all these practitioners, the way of gaining a feeling of this divine nature, and a tiny glimpse into its realms, seems to be common—they all learn self-control in body and mind towards a relaxed but utterly concentrated attention that brings about a silence of the mind and heart. Only when the conscious mind, as an instrument of the ego or, in other words, as the instrument of the “egotistic ‘I’” (Stanislavsky, 1967: 111) is brought under control and acknowledges the self (creative ‘I’) as part of the divine (thus concurring with its supremacy), can the gates of a superconscious creation begin to open up, whilst the soul of the actor embraces the potential soul of the character.

As Stanislavsky asserts, through “renunciation of the personal ‘I’”, that is to say, by completely renouncing her ego, the actor can create in her “mental make-up... a state of complete harmony” (1967: 182), not so different from the Russian *umilenie* analysed in Chapter 2. One of the spiritual procedures—teaching the ways of silencing the mind—that will reflect on both the body and the actor’s attitude towards it, is the practice of meditation to enhance concentration and attention by means of exercising the will, while working with the mind, as well as the body.

When applied to acting-training, meditation teaches how these unique human instruments can respond to a relaxed concentrated attention, and how the actor

develops a certain sharpening of her senses, which enables communion and communication beyond words. Therefore, during this practice as research, at least three major ways of meditating were employed throughout all the years of practice.

As noted in the Introduction, these are: seated meditation, meditation in walking, and meditation in action. The exploration of the last two ways of meditating (as subsequently explained) was decided to be utterly necessary in order to eliminate the gap between meditation and action, discovered in the early stages of the research. The choice to begin the training with seated meditation was inspired by Stanislavsky's own warnings to his students-actors:

Till you realise that the whole basis of your life – respiration – is not only the basis of your physical existence, but that respiration plus rhythm forms the foundation of all your creative work, your work on rhythm and breathing will never be carried out in full consciousness [...], as it should be carried out, in a state of such complete concentration as to turn your creative work into inspiration. For, unless you do this, you will never become good actors. (1967: 168)

While finding its origin in Stanislavsky, this way of exploring the work of an actor in its entirety, by means of meditation, can equally be viewed as original, insofar as it emerged as a direct result of the discoveries made on the stage-floor. In order to cover all the three stages of an actor's work during the whole of this practice as research, meditation had to be expanded and adapted to various acting exercises or etudes. Thus, the meditational processes became an underlying principle of breath, designed to connect each phase of the work with the next: firstly, from stillness to motion and physical action, secondly, from silence to basic sound, thirdly, from this basic sound to improvised speech and, finally, from improvisation, to the use of the given line.

In spite of the fact that there are clear references to concentration and attention in all Stanislavsky's books, as for example, "creative concentration and attention" (2010: 90) or such as the "sensory concentration", which is "particularly necessary and particularly valuable [...] when establishing the 'life of the human spirit in a role'"

(Stanislavsky, 2010: 111), the idea of meditation does not seem to be explained. Yet, as argued in Chapter 1, during the work at The First Studio, meditation was often employed for training purposes by Sulerzhitsky (Tcherkasski, 2016: 31).

Moreover, Stanislavsky used Wood's book on concentration, "very popular in the early part of the twentieth century", and which "provides exercises in giving one's whole to an object" in order to reach an "expansion of concentration" (Whyman, 2013: 27). Alongside these exercises, however, the book also contains an ample 'Supplement on Meditation' that thoroughly explains the meditational processes in relation to concentration and attention. Surely Stanislavsky, who "marked exercises in the book" and used such exercises "in the system" (Whyman, 2008: 85-6), could not have been completely unaware of its second part. In addition, as Gillett points out, Stanislavsky employed both Hatha and Raja yogic practices. Whilst "Hatha aims for calm and relaxation" by means of "physical postures and balance (asana) and breath control (pranayama)", most definitely "Raja focuses on mental control through concentration (dharana), visualization, observation and meditation" (Gillett, 2014: 10-11).

As a short parenthesis, it is important to explain that even though they are highly interconnected, concentration and meditation are not one and the same thing. Being concentrated on something specific does not necessarily mean being automatically in meditation. Moreover, whilst concentration can exist outside meditational purposes, at the same time, meditation cannot function without concentration.

From a psychological point of view, "concentration is an attentional process that involves the ability to focus on the task at hand while ignoring distractions" which, according to Cognitive research, "it is vital for success in any field of skilled performance" (Moran in Murphy, 2012: 117). By "mastering the inner art of concentration" one learns "to harness and direct the power of the mind". Although also

exploring this power, meditation implies an intention “to gain deep insight” (Levey and Levey, 2003: 4) and this might be more spiritually orientated rather than psychologically.

To resume, following in Stanislavsky’s footsteps, during the first few months of this project the actors were taught how to use the “complete breathing method”, as instructed by Ramacharaka in *Hatha Yoga* (2008: 92-4). Using this way of breathing, they learned concentration on the movement of the air through the body, without paying attention to the rush of thoughts flowing into the conscious mind. Because the very intention to eliminate thoughts by controlling them will automatically result in a sudden flood of other random thoughts, forcefully to silence the mind is almost impossible. The harder one struggles to clear the mind, the stronger the assault of these thoughts becomes. On the contrary, the mind needs to be tricked into silence.

Whenever the attention is guided towards something specific, such as the sensation of the air traveling through the body or the sound produced while inhaling and exhaling, the actor can become aware of a special silent space. This space of utter silence and stillness resides in between breaths, right at the end of the exhalation and the beginning of a new breathing cycle, being a natural space within which thoughts cannot exist. As featured in the first video clip (00.03.35), Maria’s discovery (without any specific guidance) was that, during this brief silent moment, one can feel the soothing beats of one’s own heart. Instead of letting her mind wonder from one thought to another, the actor learns to listen to this special silence (Video Clip 1: 00.04.24) that, with practice, can expand up to the point in which all thoughts are gone.

In light of this realisation, right from the beginning, the actors were introduced to the yogic way of breathing (Ramacharaka, 2008: 140). This consists of an intake through the nose, followed by apnea, and concludes with an exhalation through the mouth. As a way of establishing a correct pace of breathing, the actors were also asked to count silently to fifteen, while performing a full cycle (five counts for inhaling, five for

maintaining apnea, and five while exhaling) (Ibid: 00.01.08). Later on, in order to broaden the length of the breathing cycles, this counting was progressively increased.

It is important to note that, when seated meditation was first introduced in the training sessions, Maria found it difficult to deal with the counting, the imposed rhythmic breathing, as well as with the rush of thoughts passing through her mind. She explained that mostly she felt very uncomfortable with the imposed counting. As such, instead of relaxing, Maria only managed to tense her neck muscles, which resulted in an undesirable almost choking sensation. When advised to forget about the counting and to concentrate her attention on the sound of her breath, Maria relaxed and was finally able to clear her mind. As noted above, this mental silence enabled her to become aware of her own heartbeats and, by the power of her will, she learned how to focus on this silent and soothing space that enabled her to be also present in the moment.

Later on, it was further discovered that the yogic breathing was not only essential for gaining awareness of that inner space of utter stillness, but it was also crucial for understanding and recognising it as a very natural state that we tend to experience naturally whenever we make a wonderful discovery or every time we find ourselves in a state of awe at the sight of something unbelievably beautiful and inspiring such as a flower, a work of art, the smile of a baby, or the sight of a loved one.

On each of these occasions, we do not need to breathe, judge, comment, or think. It is an intense moment of contemplation during which the ego is rendered silent. Moreover, although such a state is accompanied by a sensation of readiness and complete absorption, it also comes with heightened senses, and a feeling of happiness. In addition, it happens with a brief simultaneous contraction and dilatation of time. As explained in Chapter 3, all these sensations are very much similar to how the Buddhist enlightenment, as well as the creative state on the stage, should feel like.

The easiest way to become aware of it, and to learn how this moment can be called upon, is by observing the space between the breathing cycles in comparison with the apnea. Whilst the holding of the breath is tensed, the space between breathing out and breathing in again is totally relaxed, natural, and effortless. Once the mind can recognize this difference, it might be possible to recall such a moment by recreating it through the breath. Due to its similarities with the creative state, by ways of breathing, the actor can trigger within herself that calm readiness that will allow her to let go of any fear or egotistic desires, and simply to exist in the act of creation in a natural manner.

After a while (when the yogic breathing reached a comfortable level), instead of continuing with the Hatha Yogic way of meditation (by means of concentrating on the breath), in order to introduce the actors to the idea of the inner higher self (soul), a more powerful type of meditating was adopted during practice. This more complex form uses the inner imagination of the practitioner, as well as mantras. These are short affirmations that the meditators have to repeat in their own minds, while concentrating on the words uttered, instead of the breath. In addition, the actors were encouraged to use projections of mental images, such as a sphere of light placed in the centre of the heart, or rays springing forth from the heart centre, the eyes, or the tips of the fingers.

The purpose of these images was to give the inner core a form and a place in the body or to give substance to elusive energy. Furthermore, the actors were guided to use the 'I am' affirmation instead of mantras, such as: 'I am a higher self, beyond my body or my mind'. By means of the 'I am' affirmation, the conscious mind (egotistic 'I') was enabled to learn about, and accept, the reality of the unperceivable creative 'I' (soul) with its subtle energies. As previously argued, according to Stanislavsky, a liberation of this creative 'I' becomes available within the "ever-expanding consciousness" of the actor (1967: 110).

When both ways of seated meditation seemed to be properly practiced, the actors were further guided towards transferring the concentrated attention learned while sitting down, completely still, to moments of motion, when simply walking on the stage (Video Clip 1: 00.05.05) and, later on, when engaged in actions (Ibid: 00.09.42). The second and third ways of meditating, as in the walking one and the meditation in action, were mostly observed during this research through 'A Mourning Ritual' (Ibid: 00.58.49).

This silent *étude*, based on movement and actions, was intended to draw a bridge between the practices of meditation during training and the actual creative processes employed while approaching a specific role. Envisioned as a symbolic ritual, this *étude* strived to use the seated, the walking, and the doing meditation in an artistic form. For example, the work on 'A Mourning Ritual' was initiated by learning meditation in walking that followed Stanislavsky's instructions on how to walk on the stage.

This appears to be very similar with the Zen Buddhist type of meditation known as the *kin-hin*. However, once again, I need to stress the fact that, by pointing out this similarity, I do not try to imply Stanislavsky's direct use of Zen Buddhist knowledge. The reason why I decided to look upon this particular practice was not because Stanislavsky employed it but rather as a way of exploring the principles used from both perspectives.

The *kin-hin* is a "walking exercise" that helps the practitioner to relax the overstressed limbs, without interrupting the inner concentration, and which is practised during the sessions of seated meditation (*zazen*) (Enomiya-Lassalle, 1995: 30). There are many types of walking in meditation, some differing in the rhythm and velocity of the pacing, and others combining the rhythm and speed of the steps with mental counting during inhaling and exhaling. According to Enomiya-Lassalle, the correct practice of the *kin-hin* should be observed as follows:

The gaze is directed towards the floor, about three metres ahead. [...] To start, the right foot moves half a step forward. On lowering the foot [...], it becomes almost anchored to the ground. [...] As the foot is put down, the leg straightens, and the weight is shifted onto it; [...] the chin is always pushed slightly in and

the shoulders hang naturally. It should feel as though one were pushing up through the ceiling with the top of the head. (1995: 30)

Another form of this type of exercise in meditation is presented by Wood in his *Zen Dictionary*. As he explains, “in some Zen monasteries” during the sessions of meditation, instead of simply walking, “at a signal from the director the monks rise after an hour’s meditation and run rapidly round the hall in a circle, following one another” (Wood, 1963: 85). While running, the monks make use of the same bodily postures and deep concentration as the ones reached by practicing the *kin-hin*. In order to explore different rhythms in movement, while maintaining a highly concentrated mind, both walking and running in meditation were constantly explored during this research.

Highly noticeable is the fact that, while analysing the flawless way in which the actor should walk on the stage, Stanislavsky dedicates seven pages from *An Actor’s Work*, ‘Year Two: Embodiment—Physical Education’ to a practice much similar to the *kin-hin*. With the clear purpose of raising awareness of the necessity to learn how to walk when exposed to public scrutiny, Stanislavsky observes the physical apparatus in movement. He concentrates on how to develop a flow-like type of walking enabled by an essential “flexibility of movement” that, with proper training, could become second nature (2010: 365). According to Stanislavsky’s thinking, the actors or the dancers that master it “don’t dance, don’t play, they are what they do”. Further, “if they were to pay genuine attention to the things they are feeling, they would be aware of the energy inside them, stemming from their secret depths, from their heart of hearts. It courses through the whole body” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 365).

As it appears, for Stanislavsky, “only that kind of movement is right for the artistic embodiment of the life of the human spirit of the role” (2010: 365). An actor should develop inner awareness of the interdependence between body and spirit while performing the simple action of walking, for “only through inner awareness of movement can we begin to understand and feel it” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 365). With the intention of

developing this awareness, Stanislavsky accentuates the importance of maintaining a straight body while slightly flexing the knees, in order to induce a slide-like motion that opposes the usual interrupted, jolted one. The correct use of every part of the leg, shoulders, and head, is further analysed in detail, perfectly mirroring the above-noted Zen Buddhist ways of the *kin-hin* practice.

To resume, after a long period during which the actors learned to feel comfortable with all these ways of meditating, a much-simplified version of the 'A Mourning Ritual' étude, was initiated. During this early version, the actors were advised to start by performing a sequence of simple tasks that strived to combine the three meditational ways noted above. Thus, the actors began with eyes closed, meditating while seated on chairs, in a circle, in the centre of the room. On a certain signal, they were guided to open their eyes, pause, slowly and simultaneously raise, pause again, and turn towards their left hand while maintaining coordinated breath.

By directing the vision on the centre of the upper back of the person in front (approximately where the heart is located), and by sending, through the eyes, imagined rays of energy towards this centre, the actors were able to establish subtle invisible connection. Concentrating only on this imaginary connection and without looking at their own feet, they were ready to start walking in a circle, as it is done in walking meditation, with the final purpose of achieving perfect coordination.

Later on, when these meditational tasks started to be executed in a natural manner, in order to introduce the actors to the idea of action in meditation (mindfulness), the étude was brought up to a more elaborate structure. Both real and imaginary objects were added. This time, the actors began by sitting on the floor, each facing a real chair with an imaginary candle placed upon it. After slowly and simultaneously elevating themselves to a standing position, motion during which they

had to recall the previously established inner connection, the actors were directed to pick up the imaginary candle, turn towards left, and start walking in meditation.

When a few rounds of coordinated walk around the chairs were completed, the new task was to place the imaginary candle on the floor and work instead with the real chair by either simply touching it, observing it in its smallest details, lifting and moving it in various directions, or by using it to perform a simple action (Video Clip 1: 00.10.04). This way of focusing the attention while working with a chair is listed by Benedetti as one of Stanislavsky's acting exercises used in his final lessons, during the summer of 1935 at the Opera-Dramatic Studio. As Benedetti asserts, the students of this studio were constantly encouraged "to feel the back of the chair" and to "tell the group what its shape is, if there is any carving or moulding" (2008: 34).

It is important to note that such a manner of concentrating on the slightest details of a specific exterior object is not at all employed in any form of yogic meditation that focuses the attention within, but it is undeniably similar to the Zen Buddhist way of concentrated meditation. In the same manner with the two types of the yogic meditation noted above, Zen Buddhism also teaches two ways of meditating.

The first one is conducted mostly in a seated position and consists of a sustained and uninterrupted attention "on a single item until one tends to become more or less absorbed in it" (Austin, 1999: 72). The term used by Austin to depict this way of meditating is "*Concentrative meditation*" (1999: 72), and it is also known in Zen as a contemplative way of concentration (Dumoulin, 2005: 16). Friedrich Heiler, as cited by Dumoulin, considers this concentrated meditation "a purely spiritual activity" whilst "the seated posture of the body is only of auxiliary significance" (Ibid, 2005: 16). In Stanislavsky's terms, this can be translated into the idea of "public solitude" (1967: 142) by means of "circles of attention" (Magarshack, 1961: 322).

The second form of Zen meditation is known as “*Receptive meditation*”—that is to say, an “unfocused” but highly sustained attention that “opens up to whatever experience is available, neither overreacting, nor interpreting it” (Austin, 1999: 72). This second type of Zen meditation can be associated with Stanislavsky’s creative state on the stage, which, as noted in the previous chapter, also might echo the concept of ‘mindfulness’ and the mystical experience of both *zanmai* and enlightenment.

In Stanislavsky’s account, alongside focusing all the five senses on certain real objects while observing their slightest details, the work with imaginary objects is also highly important. This type of work “focuses the actor’s concentration first on himself then on physical actions and obliges him to observe them” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 167). The actor needs to “break down large physical actions into consistent parts and study each of them separately”. Such attention tends not to be used when working with a real object simply because the action is done automatically, without any particular thought to the “conscious control over each, small, subsidiary action” (Ibid, 2010: 170). Yet, when working with an imaginary object, the actor becomes aware of each and every small action that form the entire sequence, while being totally absorbed in performing all these actions, each one at a time (Video Clip 1: 00.11.28).

To continue with the analysis of the practice, it is imperative to note that, apart from creating the proper atmosphere during my work with the actors, the constant repetition of all these meditational sessions equally had the purpose of entering and maintaining the relaxed awareness (previously explained), again and again. This repetition helped the actors increasingly to familiarise with such special awareness, up to the point at which it can become second nature.

By repeating gestures done in meditation—such as closing the eyes and taking a deep breath—the relaxed and concentrated state can be triggered at will. Both actions can be natural stimuli for instantly entering deep concentration. Later on, the actors no

longer needed to meditate before every rehearsal because their conscious minds remembered the feeling of being relaxed while highly concentrated, learned during meditation, and immediately responded to the stimuli employed.

Alongside enhancing concentration, the practice of seated meditation also provides a primary understanding of the concept of inner action, simply because the conscious mind is, in fact, concentrated on a physical action, as in breathing. However, in order to achieve a better grasp of the strong connections between meditation and action the actor should also be able consciously to use a similarly silent mind and a relaxed body while engaged in movement, or while performing different actions.

As briefly noted at the beginning of this chapter, during the initial stages of the practice, although all the actors responded well to the seated meditation, after each session was concluded, a problem seemed to arise repeatedly. More precisely, the moment they were standing up, ready to continue the work involving actions and the body, the actors appeared completely to forget about using what was gained during the meditational sessions. With the exception of when performing the Mirror exercise (subsequently analysed in Chapter 5), all the actors were exhibiting an unexplained inability of connecting the mental state reached in meditation with any physical action.

Consequently, a practical way of establishing the contiguity between meditation and action became utterly necessary. In fact, similar gaps as the one experienced from meditation to action tended to be repeated, in a pattern, every time a new phase of the work began, including when introducing improvised speech after silence, or when using the fixed given lines of the text, after enjoying the freedom of improvisation. Each of these gaps had to be eliminated and this was successfully achieved by means of returning constantly and relentlessly to sessions of meditation.

After the long period during which all these types of meditating were tested, with the purpose of enabling a body-mind-soul continuum awareness, by making use of the

breath as an underlying principle of the whole practice, it became obvious that meditation, in all its explored forms, can be a crucial and powerful instrument for achieving embodied perception and acceptance of a possible inner creative 'I' (soul).

Furthermore, through constant exercise, the initial controlled-breathing process becomes second nature, and the actor is brought to a point in which she again breathes freely. However, this time, her natural breath is accompanied by a strong awareness of both herself and her own creation. In other words, by simply breathing, the artist can feel a slight connection with her inner creative 'I' and, thus, she is enabled to accept the natural subordination of her mind and body to this creative 'I' or soul.

In addition, by becoming aware of the breath, the actor learns to master elements such as 'concentration' and 'attention' by means of exercising a free 'will'. She also begins to feel and control the inner flow of energy (prana) for, as subsequently argued in Chapter 5, they are all utterly connected to each other. Moreover, all these elements, pertaining to the processes of meditation, are also known to be key component elements of Stanislavsky's 'system'.

4.3 The Third Level: Testing the Elements

It is important to remember that, as noted in Chapter 1, the practical work allocated for this thesis strove to rediscover and follow the actor's possible transformative journey, viewed through the lens of Stanislavsky's legacy. As such, all the elements of the 'system' needed to be tested. Yet, considering that this research concentrates on a spiritual approach, focusing on seven of them proved to be critical. Without diminishing the importance of the rest of the elements, this thesis is centred mostly on concentration, attention, will, 'I am', communication, action, and the supertask.

These seven elements in particular, subsequently thoroughly analysed in the following chapters, may be recognised as 'spiritual' insofar as each one might have the

capacity to access the special innate awareness that Stanislavsky had in mind when referring to the actor's soul (creative 'I'). It is true that each of these elements can be addressed in a more concrete, realistic way, as related to the technical aspects of the 'system'. Yet, they can also be explored and understood in a more complex spiritual way, as concomitant to experiencing possible higher states of mind associated with an enlightened, superconscious, type of artistic creativity.

In spite of the fact that, for clarity's sake, they are analysed more or less separately throughout this thesis, it is crucial to remember that, in practice, all the elements of the 'system' are completely and utterly interdependent. It is also important to explain that, although heavily used in practice, because they are not necessarily spiritual in their essence, a number of other key Stanislavskian elements, such as, for example, the given circumstances (Stanislavsky, 2010: 59) or emotion memory (Ibid, 2010: 195), were not submitted to a separate detailed theoretical analysis.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that they were less important and of no use during this research. Quite the opposite, all the elements of the 'system' were present, throughout the entire work and at all times, in all of the exercises and etudes employed, as well as during rehearsals and while performing. Thus, they allowed constant observance from both from a spiritual and a functional perspective. The above noted statement should not be taken as a disclaimer but rather as a necessary explanation for the missing theoretical analysis of some well-known and highly important elements.

During practice it was discovered that the actor might not be able to reach the 'I am' state (subsequently analysed in Chapter 6), without firstly learning how to make use of a concentrated mind, through meditation. Moreover, concentration needs attention and will, which are also grasped by means of meditating. Attention, directed by the will and resulting in concentration, constitutes the basic soil that nourishes the imagination,

being essential for enabling communication that employs rays of energy or prana. All these elements are also crucial in fulfilling the task at hand (action).

It might be that a possible spiritual meaning of the seven elements in focus is not at all obvious when reading Stanislavsky's works. Yet, if the sacred attitude towards the art of the stage and the theatre, constantly highlighted by Stanislavsky, is reconsidered, a spiritual connotation might become available. The actor's creativity seems to be heightened by a behaviour comparable with the one adopted in a temple or a church. This includes changed values, an increased sense of morality, as well as an attitude that implies reverence whilst calling upon a virtual holiness of the space and the work.

Chapter 5

The First Stage of the Practice: ‘An Actor’s Work on Her Self’ (A Basic Understanding of the Elements)

Citing the Sutras, Vivian Worthington argues that, concentration in meditation, in a continuous process of “watching the random thought waves while practicing detachment [...], may bring the aspirant to the mystical experience of union with reality” (1982: 56). By the same token, while experiencing the creative state during which they end up watching their own ephemeral artistic creations, actors also may be brought to experiencing a quasi-mystical union with the whole.

It might be for this reason why, according to Stanislavsky, “the student-actor who has dedicated his life to art” has to develop “all his inner creative powers”, such as the will for a highly concentrated attention (1967: 142). In Stanislavsky’s own words: “the centre of man’s creative work is his attention. It is on that, therefore, that he must concentrate. It is his attention an actor must do his best to develop and control” (1967: 142). As shown previously, this can be learned by focusing attention on the breath simply because, “according to the inevitable physical law of nature”, attention is utterly connected to rhythm, while the rhythm is linked to the processes of “breathing”. Moreover, this “strictly rhythmical” way of breathing “renews all the creative functions of” the entire organism, including the heart and all the muscles (Stanislavsky, 1967: 142).

In Stanislavsky’s way of thinking, “indeed, the actor who has learned to control his attention and is able to focus it at will on certain groups of muscles, has also learned how to enter the circle of public solitude without any effort on his part” (1967: 142). For example, the first thing that any trainee in the art of acting has to learn, in Stanislavsky’s opinion, is how and why he or she is present on the stage, at any particular moment, without experiencing the dread of “the big black hole”—the auditorium (2010: 14).

By concentrating on helping a stagehand to collect some nails dropped while struggling to rehearse, the student Kostia realised that his awareness of the auditorium disappeared completely simply because his attention was concentrated on the physical action of picking up the nails. In Kostia's words: "suddenly, I felt fine, almost at home on the vast stage" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 11). It follows that, by making use of concentration, attention and will, the actor not only is able to control stage fright, but she also learns how to exist naturally in the artificial world of the performance.

In Moore's assessment, concentration is pivotal for Stanislavsky's work. According to her, "the more the actor exercises his concentration, the sooner it will become automatic". That is to say, with hard work, concentration can "finally [...] become second nature to him" (Moore, 1960: 31). Indeed, concentration appears to be of central importance for a Stanislavskian actor. However, this element does not stand alone, but can only work in combination with attention and will.

More so than the rest of the elements of the 'system', this trinity in particular should not be observed in an individual manner, simply because each of these three elements cannot function separately from the rest. As expressed by Ramacharaka, concentration is the result of a continuous "focusing of the mind" that necessitates "a focusing or bringing to a centre of the Will. The mind is concentrated because the Will is focused upon the object. The mind flows into the mould made by the Will" (1972: 84).

All Stanislavsky's writings refer to the importance of an actor's will as the main engine that powers the act of artistic creation. In *My Life in Art*, he asks: "Are there really no means of getting into paradise technically, not by chance, but through an act of will?" (2008a: 121). The instrument with which the actor creates is the imagination, as an aspect of both her unconscious and superconscious mind, while this imagination is guided and enhanced by the power of a strong will. In Stanislavsky's words, "an actor must have a strong power of will. The first duty of an actor is to learn to control his will".

Furthermore, in order for the artist to be able “to achieve true art”, she has to “possess the will and tenacity to do the work” (Stanislavsky, 1990: 45).

If the will of the actor is not consciously exercised, the artistic creation can be random, insignificant, and unreliable; it is usually related to fear or pride, hence, it is connected to the ego and not in the least to a creative ‘I’ (soul). As opposed to an artistic creation, emanating from the soul of the actor, and related to the unconscious/superconscious (while experiencing the creative state), the artistic endeavour controlled by the ego can only address the physical actions of the body and the superficial conscious layers of the mind.

Oddly enough, in Orthodox mystical thought, it is not this mind that is the root of the will, but the heart—insofar as the heart of the human being is “the point from which the whole of the spiritual life proceeds and upon which converges” (Lossky V, 1973: 200). As Vladimir Lossky asserts, and as noted in Chapter 2, in the ascetic tradition of the Eastern Church, “the heart is the centre of the human being” and the real “root of the ‘active’ faculties, of the intellect, and of the will” (1973: 201).

In a similar manner, in Hindu and yogic thought, it is the ‘I’ or the higher self that is behind “every mental effort” of a human being. It is the ‘I’ that “bid the Mind work” while the mind can only obey the will of the ‘I’ (Ramacharaka, 1972: 43). Furthermore, due to this intrinsic manifestation of the higher self (‘I’) in the form of her personal will, one is granted the power not only to control, but also to manipulate both the mental and the physical planes while imagining and creating a new reality.

5.1 Concentration, Attention, and Will

As Ramacharaka asserts, “concentration and Will-power are the means by which the Yogis obtain such wonderful results” (1972: 75). They master the ability properly to make use of their will by maintaining unyielding focus of attention, which “is the outward

evidence of the Will”, as in an act of reaching with the mind towards something, while directly concentrating or focusing upon it (Ramacharaka, 1972: 85-6).

From a psychological point of view, a similar triad is also acknowledged by Csikszentmihalyi as being critical for enabling flow (optimal experience). To use Csikszentmihalyi’s words: “the mark of a person who is in control of consciousness is the ability to focus attention at will, to be oblivious to distractions, to concentrate for as long as it takes to achieve a goal” (2008: 31). As opposed to a conscious mind, affected by information that distracts it or which is in direct conflict with the intentions to carry out a set task, the controlled consciousness is the basis for a flow state.

By consuming the energy necessary for the fulfilment of the task, and by distracting the mind from the job at hand, any random thoughts of being incapable or unworthy, as well as any expressed or unexpressed fears can only block the flow. Therefore, flow cannot occur without a focused and controlled consciousness. Clearly in Csikszentmihalyi’s view, flow does not necessarily involve a religious type of thought or a moral behaviour. However, he acknowledges an intimate connection between religion and flow. As Csikszentmihalyi further points out, “many of the optimal experiences of mankind have taken place in the context of religious rituals” and the arts (2008: 76).

A correspondence of a similar use of these elements, with which both the body and the mind are controlled by means of rhythmic breathing, can be found in the Buddhist way of meditation. Concentration, attention and will are embedded in the meditational processes involving the state of “conscious mindfulness” and which, in Dumoulin’s account, “is the heart of the religion of Buddha” (1974: 133). Meditation, as practiced in all forms of Buddhism, particularly in Zen, is mostly based on “exercises of concentration emphasizing attention of the mind or mindfulness” (Dumoulin, 1974: 133).

When reading *An Actor’s Work*, due to no explanation of how these elements can be explored more in depth, one can wrongly assume that Stanislavsky was interested in

using concentration, attention and will only as a means for the actor to escape the paralysing fear brought about by the auditorium. He indeed advises that, in order to “divert your attention from the auditorium you must become engrossed in what is happening onstage” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 90). However, Stanislavsky was also aware of the spiritual power these elements hold, as proved by his thorough study of Wood’s book on concentration and meditation, noted in Chapter 4.

As Whyman informs us, Wood was a well-known nineteenth century “English theosophist”, “Sanskrit scholar”, and yoga practitioner (Whyman, 2008: 85). Therefore, his analysis of concentration is conducted from a spiritual point of view. Moreover, speaking from her own experience in working with Stanislavsky, for example, Soloviova confirms that “the actors of the First Studio were experimenting directly with Yogic techniques” (White, 2006: 79-80), which are spiritual in their nature.

As Soloviova remembers, “we worked a great deal on concentration. It was called ‘to get into the circle’” (Soloviova in Gray, 1964: 137). From a yogic perspective, these techniques, involving circles of attention and prana, are mostly designed to free the consciousness of the practitioner from the illusory sense of being separated from the world and to help her learn nonattachment with the purpose of gaining awareness of the inner self. In a similar manner, by means of concentration and attention and by infusing life into the illusion of the artificial construct of the stage, Stanislavsky seeks to free the actor’s creative powers that are hidden deep in her very soul.

According to Magarshack, attention, inspired by the yogic “system of abstract meditation and mental concentration” was one of “the most important” element of his ‘system’ (1961: 322). As confirmed by Soloviova and Magarshack, in what Stanislavsky defines as “the circle of public solitude”, he seems to incorporate “a number of large and small ‘circles’ into which the actor has to withdraw in order to keep his attention concentrated on the stage and not on the audience” (Magarshack, 1961: 322). To use

Stanislavsky's own words, in order to highlight the importance of attention, the Moscow Art Theatre "has a favourite expression: 'the circle'"—as in an "imaginary circle" within which the actor "must put himself" to avoid distraction "from his playing" and "from which he cannot step as long as he is acting" (Stanislavsky in Wegner, 1976: 88).

William Wegner argues a more complex understanding of Stanislavsky's circles of attention, insofar as they not only protect the actor from being distracted by the audience, but they also provide "soundness of physical, mental and spiritual health" (1976: 88), which are "psychic virtues" shielding against "worldly distractions and undesirable influences" (Evans-Wentz, 1965: 177). Stanislavsky's use of circles is very similar with the circles used in Tibetan yoga. As stated by Wegner:

The association of *prana* with withdrawal (*abhisheka*) into a protective circle as preliminary to meditation practice seems to be unique to Tantric yoga as practiced in Tibet. And a particular feature of this practice, both in the preliminary phase of the 'protective circle' and in the full visualization rites known as *sadhanas*, bears a striking resemblance to Stanislavski's characteristic way of getting into his 'circle' through imagined 'given circumstances'. (1976: 88)

Stanislavsky could have learned about Tibetan yoga through Demidov who, as noted in Chapter 1, recommended to him Ramacharaka's books, and who had extensive knowledge of both Buddhist and Tibetan medicine and practices. Moreover, the books themselves provided information regarding the power of concentration, attention and will, as revealed through the wisdom of Raja Yoga. Consequently, it can be inferred that this use of imaginary circles of concentrated attention had also a spiritual functionality.

For this reason, neither the circles nor the trinity of concentration-attention-will can be addressed in a superficial manner, for it might be indeed that their more profound spiritual understanding was what compelled Stanislavsky to experiment at length with them. As Norris Houghton explains, "the metaphor of the circle had evolved from one of Stanislavski's 'passions' in 1906 to a central practice of the company itself"

(Houghton, 1962: 58). Furthermore, by converting yogic practices into acting exercises, Stanislavsky considers the art of the theatre very much compatible with the yogic path.

This view is also shared by Selvarajan Yesudian, who deems “every occupation that involves concentration” a possible “pathway of Yoga” (1980: 39). In Yesudian’s opinion, “every artist travels the Yoga path, for inspiration is a message from the OVERSELF”. Whenever “the artist concentrates his entire attention on his work” by becoming “more and more deeply engrossed in it”, he is “enabled to bridge the gulf between his personal ego and higher spiritual planes” (Emphasis in the original, Yesudian and Haich, 1980: 39).

To continue the argument, while giving an example of an action that the actor might perform on the stage, such as holding “a knife” in hand, “with which, according to the plot of the play” he will end up killing a rival, Stanislavsky highlights the actor’s attention (1967: 145). He explains that, most likely, the actor’s focus is “divided between the weapon (knife), and the action (murder)”, a division that cannot allow the forging of “that unity of action out of” his “body and energy which should have for the audience the stamp of the truth” (Stanislavsky, 1967: 145).

Such a division has to be corrected, by concentrating firstly on a single physical action, which, for the example noted above, should be that of examining the knife. Thus, instead of thinking of the murder that might happen sometime in the future, the actor should strive to remain in the present time, while simply working with the object at hand. With this purpose in mind, Stanislavsky urges the actor to “look at it closely, test its edge”, or to “find out whether its handle is firm or not” (1967: 145).

This concentrated attention on the details of the knife equates the attention of a clear and focused mind, essential both for the practitioner of yoga/Buddhism, and the actor. Moreover, as argued by Austin, because “*attention* is awareness stretched toward something”, it means that “it has executive, motoric implications” (1999: 69). To

translate this into Stanislavsky's words, "concentrating on an object produces a natural need to do something with it" as, for example, to examine the knife in relation to the future act of stabbing the rival. Thus, attention enables the execution of the action, while "action concentrates the attention even more closely on the object. So, concentration plus action creates a close bond with the object" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 92).

Only after the actor has "gathered all the powers of" his mind, this circle of concentrated attention on the knife can be widened to include another object of attention, such as the person of "the rival" (Ibid, 1967: 145). As Stanislavsky advises, "do not change the circle. Widen it. Let your thought sink deep into your memories [of this rival]" (1967: 145). By constantly widening the circle, the actor also learns how to maintain her mind as uninvolved; that is to say with no desire to comment upon, control, or direct the creative processes, but only to observe. If the conscious mind of the actor opens up to whatever comes into her field of perception or, to use Stanislavsky's terminology, into her immediate "*circle of attention*" (2010: 98), then the mere performing can be transmuted into a condition of being the character.

5.2 Testing the Concentration, Attention and Will of the Actors

For Stanislavsky, as stated by Gordon, "the development of the actor's ability to focus or concentrate on a single sensation or object is the first step necessary in producing the Creative State of Mind" (1987: 60). In light of Gordon's argument, as featured in the first video clip attached to this thesis (00.17.16), a number of Stanislavskian preparatory exercises using the concept of 'circles' and designed for learning concentration, attention and will were constantly employed during this practice as research.

For example, such exercises addressing self-observation were initially directed towards a careful study of "the physical make up of" the actor's fingers, "the smallest details" of their hands, "the nails, the hair, the texture of the skin, each finger's length

and circumference”, and so on and so forth (Gordon, 1987: 60). Gradually, this observation was shifted from fingers to the arms, the torso, the feet, or the legs, until it was enlarged to comprise the whole of their own physical apparatus.

In order to expand their attention, after becoming accustomed with different details of their bodies, the actors were further guided to change their focus from themselves towards the surrounding world, by shifting the circle to include certain details, such as the floor or the windows of the studio, the walls, a chair, or their partners’ outfits and complexions. By so doing, the actors were enabled to learn how to observe different objects while “paying attention to all aspects” of them (Whyman, 2013: 30). More precisely, all these details were constantly inscribed in various circles of attention that could be shifted, expanded, or contracted, as needed.

The testing of concentration-attention-will was further employed through specific acting exercises such as ‘the Mirror’; according to Gordon, this exercise is attributed to the early work of Evgeny Vakhtangov (Gordon, 1987: 103). Benedetti, however, ascribes the Mirror to the final acting lessons taught by Stanislavsky, listing it under the umbrella of ‘Focus with Each of the Five Senses’ (Benedetti, 2008: 33). Considering that, later on, Michael Chekhov also worked with ‘the Mirror’, it is safe to assume that this exercise originated from Stanislavsky’s early practical research, and it continued to be widely used after 1928. Clearly, ‘the Mirror’ appears to be one of the most famous acting exercises that makes use of the trinity of concentration-attention-will.

As previously explained, initially all the actors involved in this research seemed to struggle to engage in motion and actions without losing the concentrated awareness achieved while meditating on the floor. By means of ‘the Mirror’ exercise, however, they learned that concentration in motion is also possible. As it can be seen from the first video clip (00.27.54), ‘the Mirror’ is usually performed in pairs, as follows: “two students

stand opposite one another. One performs a series of movements. The other acts as his 'mirror', reflecting back what he does" (Benedetti, 2008: 34).

During the exercise, the actors make use of concentration, attention and will that, as previously explained, are also observed in meditation. Nonetheless, instead of focusing on the breath or on their own inner core (as they were taught when meditating), the actors had to shift and expand their circles of attention to concentrate instead on each other. When this synchronous awareness reaches its heights, the actors may end up by concomitantly experiencing a brief soul-to-soul communion with the disappearance of the usual perception of being two completely separate entities.

The exercise itself can become an act of meditation in motion. However, this cannot happen without the actor including in her immediate circle of attention the eyes of the partner. That is to say, as opposed to a tendency of focusing on, recognizing, and following the score of the motion/physical actions controlled by the actor who initiates the movement, this type of communion can only be enabled by a continuous eye-to-eye contact, utterly necessary for establishing subtle communication.

To give an example, when first exploring 'the Mirror', Maria and her partner (Video Clip 1: 00.26.59) were not communicating with each other because, instead of maintaining this crucial eye-to-eye contact, their attention was directed towards their hands. Interesting to note is the fact that, in an attempt to see and follow the exact motion, although they were highly concentrated on each other's hands, the two actresses did not achieve synchronicity. Instead of communing in the act of doing, they only ended up by performing a series of meaningless physical actions.

In opposition, at a later stage of the research, when Maria and Ella correctly approached the same exercise (Ibid: 00.28.03), although they were not looking at all at each other's hands or feet, due to the subtle communication established through their continuous and unwavering eye-to-eye contact, they reached synchronicity without any

effort. These opposed results led to the conclusion that, when the actor who performs the mirror stops worrying about correctly following the physical actions and concentrates instead on her partner's eyes—that is to say, her circle of attention is no bigger than those eyes—a more subtle way of feeling each other becomes available.

Similarly, when the actor in charge of the movement ceases to think about generating the motion and also concentrates solely on the eyes in front, a flow of energy seems to embrace both actors. To use Stanislavsky's own term, they end up by experiencing that "inner bonding" translated by Benedetti as "the iron grip", or that "inner link, which is forged between actors when they are in communication with or without words" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 251). Whenever this grip is manifested, the notions of leading or following seem to disappear and the actors simply exist together in motion.

In order to enhance this reciprocated grasp and to enable a stronger communication between actors, one of Michael Chekhov's variations, as described by David Zinder (2009: 114), was used later on (Video Clip 1: 00.28.47). A third actor was instructed to maintain concentrated attention on the two performing the initial version of the exercise. She was then required to place herself at the back of the mirror actor, step in as a second mirror, and focus her attention on the eyes of the actor in charge of the motion. When a new connection was thus established, the initial mirror actor was directed to walk away, while the second one took over.

This process of replacement was repeated every now and again, for both the mirror and the performer of the action. As a consequence of the constant replacements, a gradual physical distancing between the actors occurred. However, instead of the expected decrease in the subtle communication, as thought to be natural due to the distance gained, on the contrary, communication became even stronger. This phenomenon looked to be the direct result of the necessary higher concentration

employed by the actors. Moreover, they all acknowledged that the distance created a tunnel-like vision which enabled them to feel connected and as one with their partners.

'The Mirror' exercise proved to be highly valuable, not only for shifting and maintaining the meditational awareness during movement, but for learning how to establish and enhance inner silent communication as well. Alongside an active awareness of the movement and of the subtle energies that are exchanged between the two actors, the exercise requires a highly concentrated attention in motion, while also developing an enhanced peripheral vision. It also teaches the artist to trust her partner and herself, and to let go of any instinctive and ego-based tendencies of over-intellectualising, judging, or controlling everything.

As a way of experimenting further with 'the Mirror' exercise, instead of constantly replacing either the performer of the movement or the mirror one, the actors were directed to join in, one by one, until the involvement of the entire group was complete. More precisely, the exercise started as usual, with two actors placed in the middle of the room (Ibid: 00.29.36). After a while, a third one joined in as a second mirror.

However, instead of leaving the exercise, the first mirror remained in place. The same happened with the action performer. Thus, the exercise was concluded with all the actors involved in a process of being a mirror that reflects another mirror, and another, and another, with the purpose of obtaining an ensemble of actors that achieved perfect simultaneity of movement and breathing.

Interesting to note was the fact that, when concentration reached its highest peaks, the notions of who was leading or who was following seemed to disappear completely, as if all the actors were no longer separate entities but behaved as integral parts of one single living, breathing, organism. To the best of my knowledge, the development of 'the Mirror' has not been explored in this manner before. The idea might be original insofar as it resulted from constantly testing an extension of this subtle inner

communication or iron grip with the whole group of actors working together. This newly discovered version of the exercise was named the 'Ensemble Mirror'.

In order to broaden the area of the elements observed, at a later stage of the research, 'the Mirror' was gradually transformed into a more complex exercise, known in the Romanian drama schools as 'the Cross' (Video Clip 1: 00.35.51). After months of working in silence, by introducing the actors to the idea of an improvised speech for the first time, 'the Cross' became a critical milestone in their artistic development.

Different variations of this acting exercise are clearly attributed to Stanislavsky, such as, for example, the one known as 'Action Corners', which is presented by Oxford, Cambridge and RSA in the 'Topic Exploration Pack (Stanislavsky)' for A Level Drama and Theatre (Latto et al, 2015: 13-4). The specific version used during this practice as research starts with two actors performing the classic 'Mirror' noted above.

When the concentration is deep and continuous, a second component is added. Another actor steps in, places herself on the right side of the mirror, and initiates a series of simple life questions such as: 'What is your name?' or 'What is the colour of your eyes?' The actor who mirrors has to answer these questions while continuing to concentrate on the movement. In a short while, a third element is further introduced. In a similar manner as the second actor, a third one positions herself on the left side, and starts asking simple mathematical questions. The fourth element completes the cross-like structure, when another actor takes the position at the back of the mirror and initiates the narration of a simple story that needs to be improvised on the spot.

It is highly important to note that, as previously explained, this simple change from silent work to the use of basic sound and, later on, to the introduction of the improvised speech, caused similar gaps to the ones experienced between seated meditation and motion/action. Once again, the actors exhibited a lack of concentrated attention, as well as incapacity to work in flow, when they had to add verbal

improvisation. Through a reminder of the previously employed meditational triggers (the rhythmic breathing from the seated meditation and the eye-to-eye contact from ‘the Mirror’), this gap completely disappeared, and ‘the Cross’ reached the desired outcome.

The exercise explores multiple types and levels of attention and concentration: a visual one, through mirroring the movement; concentration on the sound, by listening to the questions and the story; grasp, by understanding their meaning and by simultaneously giving an appropriate answer; and memory, in the sense in which the central actor has to remember and reproduce the story in the end. Moreover, while shifting their inner focus from one spot to another, the actors get to work with different circles of attention. To give an example, the central actor starts by using the circle of attention in front, directly containing her partner’s eyes, and indirectly, the actions to be mirrored. With the introduction of the questions, other circles are added to her right and left hands; the actor needs to concentrate on each one at a time.

In addition, all the individual circles are connected with, and contained into, the larger circle of the exercise. For the actors to function in perfect coordination—that is to say, in order for them to be able to address the questions and to leave enough room for the answers, in a coordinated sequence, without stepping on each other’s words—they have to be highly concentrated, while putting themselves simultaneously in the centre of the larger circle, as well as of each of the smaller ones at a time.

With the purpose of bringing back that sense of an ensemble communion reached during the last stage of ‘the Mirror’ exercise, later on, after practicing the classic ‘Cross’ for a while, not only the mirror performer, but all the actors involved in the exercise were further required to establish eye-to-eye contact with the partner directly in front, and to engage in a synchronised mirrored motion (Video Clip 1: 00.36.51). This way of further testing ‘the Cross’ emerged because, once in a while, the actors in charge of the questions or the narrator experienced increased moments of

lack of concentration that resulted in not being able to coordinate their questions properly or to maintain a constant and flowing rhythm.

Apparently, being all of a sudden faced with the task of using improvised speech caused their consciousness to engage in thinking about what questions to address or in searching for the ideas and words to be uttered in order to deliver the story. This had the exactly opposite result from the one desired, in the sense that the actors were no longer able to maintain clear minds that could allow their unconscious creativity to surface. Consequently, the consciousness was blocked with thoughts that were impeding the access to the unconscious and the superconscious creative flow, or to what, as noted in the previous chapter, Feldshuh calls the Zen mind.

The inner subtle communication or iron grip between the actors was severed, causing a negative impact on their ability of maintaining the correct rhythm and pace of the questions and the story. Once they locked their eyes on each other, however, while engaging in the common motion, the actors immediately appeared to remember that feeling of being silent-minded and concentrated. As such, they started to address the questions and to deliver the story in a flow-like manner, effortlessly, and without any hiatus, reaching a similar wholeness as the one during the 'Ensemble Mirror'.

To conclude, both 'the Mirror' and 'the Cross' are two of the most effective acting exercises for training concentration, attention and will. They also can be successfully employed to adapt and make use of various meditational techniques. On the one hand, as noted above, both exercises test how different and simultaneous circles of attention can be employed, while, on the other hand, they also explore imagination, communion, communication and memory. During 'the Cross', the central actor mostly tries to understand the story and memorise it. Nonetheless, there are such times when, in order to remember the exact words, she uses imagination by connecting these words with projected mental images picturing the narration.

Because her story needs to be freshly improvised, the storyteller also uses imagination while inventing words and sentences on the spot. Furthermore, both exercises explore action, coordination, grasp, and 'I am', by teaching the actor to exist in the middle of a score of multiple inner and outer actions and unconsciously to react to them, while gaining awareness of space, tempo-rhythm, as well as energy flow.

When correctly employed, with utter concentration, attention and will, both exercises can reach a meditational level that expands to the entire group of actors. Moreover, as subsequently explained in Chapter 7, later on, during the second stage of the research, 'An Actor's Work on Her Role' (which introduces the given text and the characters), 'the Mirror' also proved to be the perfect way of eliminating another gap experienced between the shift from making use of an improvised speech towards delivering the exact given lines, necessary when rehearsing with Active Analysis.

In order to help the actors in their struggle of transitioning from improvisation to the fixed lines of the text in a natural manner, 'the Mirror' was further developed by adding to the initial inner communication and movement a monologue from the play (Video Clip 2: 32.27). More precisely, the actor in charge of the mirror had also to communicate with her partner by means of the given lines, both silently and verbally.

For example, at some point during the final weeks of the second stage of the work, due to the introduction of the fixed text, the actors appeared to struggle more and more when creating the lives of their characters. Once again, grappling with various inner blockages, they developed a slight tendency to utter the given lines in a slightly mechanical manner. Thus, their creations took an artificial and schematic note, while the concentration was less and less profound.

After several weeks of struggle, one evening, daunted by the fact that nothing seemed to work, I decided to take a break from the text and the characters, and I urged the actors to return to 'the Mirror' exercise and the meditation. Surprisingly, while doing

so, their attention and concentration, their mood and willingness to work, as well as their imagination, registered a sudden highly significant boost.

Of note was Ella's performance, during one such uninspired day when, in order to stimulate the general morale, meditation and 'the Mirror' were visited again. With Maria as her partner, Ella was directed to experiment with both verbal and silent communication of the given text, while engaged in 'the Mirror' exercise (Ibid: 33.28). The levels of the deep inner communication reached by both actresses were remarkable, while the text opened up to new and more profound dimensions. After this event, 'the Mirror' was constantly used before and during the rest of the rehearsals. Due to its increased and never-failing contribution in creating the proper atmosphere and supporting the processes of experiencing, later on, 'the Mirror' was introduced in one of the symbolic scenes of the final performance (Video Clip 3: 01.00.43).

5.3 Pranic Communication—Energy Rays or Prana

In one of his writings, Stanislavsky interrogates his readers about the natural human feeling of "mutual communication":

Haven't you felt in real life or on the stage, in the course of mutual communion with your partner that something streamed out of your partner; that something streamed out of you, some current from your eyes, from the ends of your fingers? [...] What name can we give to these invisible currents which we use to communicate with one another? Someday this phenomenon will be the subject of scientific research. Meantime let us call them *rays*. (1990: 39)

This idea of natural human exchange, mirroring the artistic one, seems to echo Tolstoy's concept of artistic transmission and communication as a process of infection (Emerson in Tussing, 2002: 238). According to Tolstoy, "a true artist can experience, fix in signs, and infect others with a whole range of feelings" from the noblest ones of spiritual love, devotion and sacrifice, to the most trivial ones of hate, fury or lust. "The

stronger the infection, the better the art is as art”, irrespective of whether the feelings conveyed are noble or ignoble. (Emerson in Tussing, 2002: 241).

In other words, the power of the superconscious creation is not conditioned by the lower feelings of the character, as experienced by the actor, for it is not the creation that infects the audience, but the creator herself. Tolstoy’s infection is viewed by Stanislavsky as a process of “*irradiation*”, which, as Magarshack explains, is a combination of “*ray-emission and ray-absorption*” that pertains to the inner nature of the human being (Magarshack in Stanislavsky, 1967: 60). In Magarshack’s words, when commenting on Stanislavsky:

In a calm state of mind, he [Stanislavsky] explains, a person’s ray-emission and ray-absorptions are almost imperceptible, but in moments of emotional stress, ecstasy, or heightened feelings, the ray-emission and ray-absorptions grow more definite and perceptible both to those who are emitting them and those who are absorbing them. (Ibid, 1967: 60)

Although his later use of the terms ‘rays’ and ‘energy’ substitutes the earlier ‘prana’, which, as Whyman points out, “became less ideologically acceptable” (2008: 84), there can be no doubt that Stanislavsky equates the sense of one with the other. Carnicke argues that, as a consequence of the Soviet censorship’s demands, Stanislavsky replaced the yogic ‘prana’ with seemingly more concrete versions such as the “physical energy of radiation” that “moves through the body like ‘mercury’” (Carnicke, 2009: 99), and which can be experienced “like a snake” that circulates “from your hands to your fingertips, from your thighs to your toes” (Ibid, 2009: 178).

Yet, as subsequently explained, this idea of energy associated with mercury and envisioned in a snake-like shape, mirrors the yogic notion of ‘prana’, whilst its snake-like movement can be a reminder of the kundalini (Kundalini Yoga), “represented in the form of a serpent coiled around the spine that lies sleeping in *Muladhara*, the lowest chakra” (Jung, 1999: xxiv). As Gordon asserts, Stanislavsky “believed that invisible rays of prana could be produced” not only “in the hands” and “fingertips”, but also through the

“eyes of the performer” and which, “coming from the soul, ultimately [...] could be felt in the audience” (Gordon, 1988: 70).

As noted by Vaidya Atreya Smith, prana is pure energy—that is to say, “the vital energy of the universe” (1996: 3). The term itself derives from a combination of the Sanskrit words ‘pra’ meaning before, and ‘ana’ meaning breath. Due to its close connection to the breathing processes, and regardless of being entirely different from the breath, prana is generally wrongly associated with it. However, the breath appears to be but one of the vehicles used for the transmission of prana within the body.

According to the yogi masters, prana is simply energy in its pure state, with no particular qualities, except the ones taken in different conditions, without losing its initial purity. In Stanislavsky’s vision, the actors can communicate with each other and with the spectators through these invisible rays, by consciously concentrating their minds to transmit emotions or thoughts (1990: 39). His acting exercises involving prana seem to be designed and used with the purpose of developing and enhancing the actors’ conscious awareness of this innate flow of pure energy.

This technique might sound idealistic and impossible. Nonetheless, it could be supported by some new scientific discoveries made in the field of neurology. Amongst such discoveries, ‘blindsight’ appears to be one of the most relevant, and it is recognised in neurological terms as a function that allows brain-damaged blind people to feel and respond to stimuli such as images, objects, facial expressions or emotional body language, without consciously seeing (De Gelder, 2010: 62).

With the purpose of explaining blindsight, Beatrice De Gelder presents one of her research subjects known as TN. While suffering from complete blindness due to a stroke in his childhood, TN astonishingly manages to avoid all the obstacles placed in his walking path, with no previous knowledge of their presence there. He exhibits this extraordinary ability of reacting to exterior stimuli that his eyes or, more precisely, his

brain can detect without actually seeing. “TN may be blind, but he has blindsight” (De Gelder, 2010: 63). Could this mean that the brain or the body, in certain special circumstances, can ‘see’ or feel without actually using the eyes?

If that is the case, then De Gelder’s research may be taken as one of those scientific discoveries to which Stanislavsky refers when expressing his personal hope that, “in the near future”, science will prove the existence of “this invisible [...] current emanating from the actor’s will, flowing through the actor’s eyes, her fingertips, or through her skin” (2010: 246). TN’s amazing ability tends to support Stanislavsky’s thought, insofar as it proves the hidden capacity of a human being to send and receive information without making use of any of the five senses. Moreover, could it be possible that this way of communication, which, as a consequence of his impairment, TN’s body developed naturally, in normal circumstances remains dormant? And if that is true, then could this hidden capacity be awakened and enhanced through training?

In Stanislavsky’s terms, this translates into the human being’s natural ability for “emitting and receiving rays, signals” or, in other words, into the actor’s inborn capability of “radiating out and radiating in” (2010: 246). It appears that, for Stanislavsky, not only that this type of inner subtle ‘communication’ is very much possible, but it can be harnessed for the purposes of enhancing artistic creativity.

In 2009, while further researching blindsight, De Gelder and her team also explored what is known in neuroscience as emotional contagion: the humans’ unconscious tendency to copy facial expressions from people placed near them. The emotional contagion is measurable by means of facial electromyography, a medical procedure through which the signals transmitted from the brain to the facial muscles, controlling frowning and smiling, can be monitored with the help of certain electrodes placed on a subject’s face.

To use De Gelder's words:

All the stimuli triggered emotional reactions as measured by electromyography, irrespective of whether the image was on the patient's sighted side or his blind side. In fact, surprisingly, the unseen images produced a faster response than those seen consciously. We also monitored pupil dilations, a measure of physiological arousal. The unseen fearful images produced the strongest effect—seemingly the more we are consciously aware of an emotional signal, the slower and weaker is our reaction. (2010: 63)

In view of such scientific discoveries (that might bring evidence regarding an innate natural capacity of the human being to perceive the environment and herself beyond the known and generally recognised five senses), Stanislavsky's idea of a creative state, reachable through the processes of experiencing the soul of a living character, born out of the depths of her own soul or creative 'I', ceases to be such an unreachable goal. In addition, this special creative state becomes tangible, easily recognisable, and contagious insofar as it will infect the entire cast, as well as the spectators. Furthermore, from a practical point of view, all the elements also have the clear purpose of enabling and enhancing communication and grasp between actors.

Whenever they are present in the creative act, by means of deep concentration, the actors can experience a feeling of being directly connected with each other in this world of the stage, and indirectly with the audience. This may also be related to what is called the actor's presence or charisma as a "dialectical and productive synthesis of strength/vulnerability and magnetism/radiance" (Senior and Kelly, 2016: 2).

According to Adele Senior and Simon Kelly, in the field of the actor training, there are many "attempts to pin down charisma as 'stage presence, vitality, magnetism, charm, appeal, allure, confidence, virility, sexiness, danger'". However, "there is also an assumption that charisma is paradoxically undefinable (Ibid, 2016: 5). This indefinability could be related to the idea of inner energy (prana) that a Stanislavskian actor learns to harness and to use for the purpose of communicating on the stage. In addition to exercises on relaxation, concentration, and attention, or muscle release, Stanislavsky

used various acting exercises for developing communication, by means of transmitting and receiving rays of prana. As Soloviova remembers:

We imagined a circle around us and sent 'prana' rays of communion into the space and to each other. Stanislavski said "send the prana there—I want to reach through the tip of my finger—to God—the sky—or, later on, my partner. I believe in my inner energy and I give it out—I spread it." This exercise involved no words, but we gave whatever we had inside us. And you have to have something inside you to give; if you don't, that is where 'dead forms' come from. (Soloviova in Gray, 1964: 137)

For Stanislavsky, the main condition consciously to establish deep communication on the stage might be connected with the actor's sense of believing in the existence of this innate energy (prana). By means of the imagination, the actors were expected to practice with it and to make it universal while offering it either to a higher power (God, Nature, macrocosm) or to the smaller being (microcosm) of the partner.

5.4 Practicing Communication

Once more, following in Stanislavsky's footsteps, similar specific exercises designed to develop awareness of this inner presence were employed throughout this practice as research, starting during the initial stages by simply playing with imaginary spheres and rays of light, and ending in more complex forms based on the clear intention to transmit feelings or thoughts by means of the will. For example, one of the first acting exercises used was the 'Mercury Drop' (Video Clip 1: 00.40.42), introduced by Stanislavsky in the second part of *An Actor's Work*, 'Embodiment'.

This famous exercise provides another good example of change in terminology, due to communist censorship. However, once more, by replacing the earlier no longer politically correct term 'prana' with the word 'mercury', Stanislavsky may, in fact, intentionally leave other clear clues towards a hidden spiritual symbolism of the work.

In his own words, during a class in Dalcroze eurhythmics, taught by Xenia Sonova:

Now I'll pour the mercury on the crown of your head [...]. And you let it pass over the neck down the spinal column to the pelvis; let the mercury go further down the left leg to the big toe and back again up to the pelvis. Then up the spine to the neck and finally over the neck to the crown of your head [...]. (Stanislavsky, 2010: 366)

By using clear anatomical terms such as 'spinal column' and 'pelvis' in the quotation above, Stanislavsky appears to adopt a more scientific tone. Yet, he also uses 'the crown' and 'mercury' that can be a direct reminder of yogic ideas. For example, the seventh chakra, Sahasrara is also known as "the crown chakra" and is located "slightly above the vertex" and "connects the individual to absolute reality – the Tao, or ultimate void, which both permeates and transcends duality" (Greenwood, 2006: 27).

In addition, when exploring this exercise (with its proposed element imagined to be travelling through the body in a concentrated and very controlled manner), considering the speed of mercury and its ways of separating into multiple and various drops, what becomes obvious is the fact that it might be highly unlikely for this particular metal to provide a realistic support for a successful outcome of the exercise. Assuming that Stanislavsky had nothing symbolic in mind, one should ask why he specifically chose the word 'mercury', as opposed to other possible ones that would depict a movable, fluid element, such as 'water' or even 'honey'.

An explanation could be hidden in the symbolism of the exercise, establishing the element imagined as something more than just a material thing. Stanislavsky might not at all refer to the actual ordinary metal, but to what it symbolises—as in "the mercury of the philosophers" that is non-existent in a natural form, "but must be prepared by art" (Lapidus and Skinner, 1976: 137), and which is acknowledged by yogis as universal energy and life force. The importance of symbolic mercury in tantric practices is highlighted by Eliade, who argues that, "in certain tantras, mercury is regarded as the 'generating principle' for all creatures" (1978: 133), eternally transforming the world.

To continue the exposition of the practice, after working with imagined drops of mercury and spheres of light for a while, the next step in testing the transmission of rays was taken through Michael Chekhov's 'Staccato-Legato', in Gordon's description (1987: 139). To start with, the actors had to perform a fixed set of movements, from one complete series to the next, in a specific order and with increased speed.

Always beginning from a centred position, with legs spread to match the width of the shoulders, a straight back, the chin slightly pushed in (to create the feeling of being pulled up from the top of the head), hands relaxed, knees unlocked and slightly bent, the actors were directed to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths. Whenever ready, they were guided to open their eyes, turn towards their right hand, take a step forward with the right leg, and reach out by bringing both hands in front. After returning each time to their initial centred position, sequentially, the actors were required to repeat the exact same movements towards, left, up, down, front, and back.

As shown in the first video clip (00.20.43), this exercise was initially used as a basis for warm-up, to train coordination in movement, and for rhythm exploration purposes. However, later on, Michael Chekhov's version was modified to accommodate Stanislavsky's idea of sending prana into the space. Further, 'Staccato-Legato' was developed by means of combining the physical motion, inscribed in different circles of attention, with meditation (Video Clip 1: 00.21.44).

This was done by directing the actors to start with the drawing of an imaginary circle in front of them, and to step into it. A sonorous type of breathing during movement was also introduced, and the actors were directed to focus their attention on the sound of their own breath. In addition, each direction that the actor followed (towards the wall in front, on the right or left hand, the floor, or the ceiling) became circles of attention.

In order to bring the actors to a point in which their consciousness could accept the possibility of sending prana into the space and thus to believe in what they were

doing, initially the actors were encouraged to start by imagining that their arms were growing long enough to touch certain spots around the room. At a later time, when comfortable with this envisioned elongation, they were further directed to send rays through their palms, eyes, or the tips of their fingers towards these fixed spots.

Lastly, by expanding their circles of attention for as long as their own imagination allowed them, while using what was learned during the sessions of imagined travels by means of meditation (Ibid: 00.12.44), the actors were guided to take further steps. They had to imagine that their whole being was moving towards the established directions, going beyond the specific spots, outside the building, into the city, traveling higher into the atmosphere, further away from the Earth, into the vast space of the universe.

Another acting exercise (specifically designed both to train as well as to observe communication by means of subtle energy) involves the entire group and, to my best knowledge, has no specific name. For the purposes of clarity, however, we called this exercise 'Mind Control'. As featured in the first video clip (00.47.26), placed in the middle of the stage, Ella had the task of concentrating and transmitting the mental command 'to stay put' to a single person. While sitting down, front stage, and facing the auditorium, Claire, Aphrodite and I shared a common task, insofar as we had to concentrate on practicing self-observation in a meditational-like state of mind. Without being able to see Ella (who was standing somewhere behind us), we also had the shared task to leave the space of the exercise whenever we were confident that we felt nothing specific, such as heat, tingling sensations or, as the actual need to stay put.

Interesting to note is the fact that, right at the beginning of the exercise, due to her initial lack of decisiveness in choosing one of us in particular, Ella kept shifting her concentration from one to the other. Consequently, all of us experienced slight physical sensations that were somehow confusing. However, soon enough, when Ella finally decided to settle her focused attention solely upon Aphrodite, these physical sensations

stopped. After a while, feeling nothing specific coming from Ella, I decided to leave the stage. Thus, able to observe from the side, I could clearly tell that there was a strong connection already established between her and Aphrodite.

Unlike my decision to leave the space of the exercise, Claire exhibited no such intention. When enquired about her reasons to remain on the stage until the end, she explained that, although feeling nothing specific, she continued simply because she was not sure how long she was supposed to wait before leaving. Unfortunately, at this stage of the research, Claire was not yet ready to believe either in the power of her own mind or in the possibility of a subtle mind-to-mind communication. As such, she was unable to respond correctly to the tasks given. Claire who, at the time was struggling with self-confidence, appeared unable to concentrate fully during the 'Mind Control'.

This could have been so because she was allowing her ego to take over. Thus, she was not able to maintain inner silence and stillness while simply believing in the tasks given. Worrying about rules and fearing that she might do something wrong, such as leaving the exercise too soon, for example, Claire's ego caused her conscious mind to chatter constantly. As learned through meditation, a mind that is occupied by random thoughts cannot concentrate properly. In light of this knowledge, it can be assumed that Claire's mind was too busy, and she could not open up towards either the possibility of discovering sensations that might have been caused by Ella's transmission or, on the contrary, towards acknowledging a total lack of any such sensations.

This type of training in subtle communication can be strenuous and complicated, in the sense that it necessitates unwavering faith in both oneself and the team, as well as a conscious acceptance that the exercise is possible. Most importantly, it requires a complete control of the ego that, if left to its own devices, will immediately start worrying and constantly sending distress signals towards the actor's mind. Ella's strongly focused attention and relentless will to keep her chosen partner on the stage for as long

as was needed, by mentally asking her to stay put, combined with Aphrodite's open mindedness, proved that such strong inner communication is real.

As explained afterwards, Aphrodite could tell, without a doubt, that she was the centre of Ella's attention, for she kept feeling these waves of energy coming from Ella, while experiencing an unexplained need to move closer to her. However, Aphrodite also felt uncertainty when becoming aware of Claire, who remained on the stage, in what appeared to be a highly concentrated stillness. As Aphrodite explained later, this caused her to question and consequently to doubt briefly her own feelings.

Yet, as opposed to Claire, Aphrodite made the conscious choice to let go of these doubts and to trust herself instead. By doing so, she was finally capable of silencing her ego, and this automatically allowed for the successful completion of an exercise that involved none of her five senses. In the end, both Ella's task (to hold her chosen partner on the stage by only using her mind), and Aphrodite's one (to stay put if she felt compelled to do so, without being able to see or hear Ella), proved to be not only possible but very much achievable.

Chapter 6

Introducing the Second Stage: 'An Actor's Work on Her Role'

All the elements as observed so far were primarily used for discovering, understanding, and shaping the actor's self. That is to say, up until this point, the work was conducted only on self-observation, self-mastery, and self-development. However, once learning meditation on the breath and the inner self that helped them to become aware of how a controlled mind and concentrated awareness feel like, the actors were ready to move on. Thus, they were further guided slowly to start shifting from being their own selves towards acquiring an embodied understanding of what becoming something or someone else might mean, and how this can be done without any effort.

Due to the fact that the actors were not yet introduced to the chosen text, this shift in consciousness remained a part of the training stage. Nevertheless, by slowly moving from self towards something that is no longer perceived as such, they initiated their first small steps towards entering the second stage, the actors' work on their roles, while the exploration of the inner self still remained central.

To highlight this shift, it is crucial to remember that it would be impossible to know oneself without something else to relate to, or without some kind of comparison to be made. Although most of the human beings tend to perceive themselves through their bodies or minds, they do not refer to these as something they *are* but as something that *belongs to them*. Humans refer to the body as 'my body', and not as 'I'—the body. The same happens with the mind. So, the question here is: To whom does this body and mind belong? If they belong to the 'I' then who or what might this 'I' be?

Unfortunately, there are no straight and clear answers to such questions. According to the Raja Yoga teacher, Selvarajan Yesudian, generally speaking, humans can "feel the presence of life" and can experience existence in their own consciousness, by expressing "this feeling in the first person" while simply declaring: "I am" (Yesudian

and Haich, 1980: 17). Thinking in Buddhist terms, the 'I' is related to the Higher Self; it is that which is infinite, and cannot be defined because, once named, it is automatically reduced to something finite that becomes separated from the whole. From the perspective of some quantum physics theories (noted in Chapter 3), it is the "the *quantum monad*" (Goswami, 2001: xi).

Religiously speaking, the 'I' might represent the soul (spirit) as in the divine essence and given the condition that one accepts the underlying meaning of life as God, and acknowledges that "life, in the consciousness of" a human being, "appears as a feeling of his SELF"—that is, a feeling of his unique being as 'I am'—then, as argued by Yesudian, the 'I' could be rendered as the inner God-like image, the "God within us" (Emphasis in original, 1980: 17). Thus, the 'I am' draws correspondence from God's response to Moses, as stated in the biblical book of Exodus. In Yesudian's citation, "when Moses asked what God's name was, God replied 'EHEJE', signifying 'I am that I AM'" (Emphasis in original, 1980: 17). This biblical 'I AM' defines the uniqueness of God, insofar as God cannot be something or someone. God can only be.

In a similar manner, the soul (higher self) of a human being cannot be something or someone in particular. The soul can only exist, beyond the limited notions of personality, time, or space. Moreover, a human can be described as being a body, a mind, and a soul. Yet, at the same time, the human is a person—as defined in terms of being a sister or brother, a mother or father; she can be a friend or a lover; or she can become a doctor, a teacher, an artist, or anything that the particular human might choose to experience. Nonetheless, these definitions are only aspects of the person as a whole. Although limitless in potential, such aspects cannot fully define the individual human, for her soul might incorporate them all at once, and much more. Following the same reasoning, it can be concluded that the soul of a person may take any aspect that the particular person chooses to experience. Similarly, the soul of the actor can become

whatever character she sees fit to create, and by simply declaring 'I am', the actor symbolically recognises the infinite potential of her soul that contains the buds of all the possible aspects of the human being-actor, and those of any chosen character.

6.1 'I am' - From Concentrating to Being

As one of the most critical factors not only for creating "the human life of the spirit of the role" (Carnicke, 2009: 87) on the stage, but also for experiencing its very existence within the universe of each performance, 'I am' can be observed as the principal spiritual element of the 'system'; an element that enables the actor to access a higher state of mind during rehearsals or in performance. Benedetti translates this term as "I am being" (2008: 6). According to him:

This is the case of Stanislavski inventing or rather reviving a lost word. The verb to be now only exists in Russian in the infinitive 'est'. Stanislavski uses the first personal singular, '*la esm*', which no one would normally use. 'I am being' is a way of conveying this usual usage. (Benedetti, 2008: 6)

As explained by Carnicke however, this form, no longer in use in the modern Russian, in fact belongs to the "church Slavonic, the language used in Russian Orthodox liturgy since The Middle Ages" (Carnicke in Whyman, 2008: 78). Thus, Stanislavsky's employment of this ancient form might represent another hint to its spiritual connotation, rather than a psychological one. Benedetti's intention to highlight a revival of this presumed lost '*la esm*' could have been clarifying if he would have noted its religious origin, and hence, its spiritual connection.

Since he does not refer to such link in any way, this translation of 'I am' as 'I am being', cannot but increase the confusion regarding its intended meaning. On an initial level, Stanislavsky's 'I am' could be seen as a simple mental tool used to help the imagination: I am such and such person in such and such situation or given circumstances, combined with the magic 'if' expressed by the question: 'what would I do

if [...]?' However, in order to reach experiencing and, consequently, to tap into the creative state, this first level needs to be transcended. As Stanislavsky puts it:

In our vocabulary, 'I am' refers to the fact that I have put myself in the centre of a situation I have invented, that I feel I am really inside it, that I really exist at its very heart, in a world of imaginary objects, and that I am beginning to act as me, with full responsibility for myself. (2010: 70)

Once more, the relevant question here is: What could Stanislavsky's meaning be in using the words 'me' and 'myself' in the above context? Could this 'me' be related to the inner 'I' of the actor? Moreover, what is his meaning of the 'I'? Would it be only 'I' in the sense of the actor's person performing a physical action or a particular task? Or could it be much more, such as the 'I' from yoga, that represents the very essence of a human being, the divine self, or such as the Judeo-Christian notion of the 'I' noted above?

To answer these questions, it would be wise to remember that, similarly with the other elements of the 'system', 'I am' also might hold a profound spiritual meaning. In addition, it is imperative to stress that Stanislavsky's 'I am' has nothing in common with the superficial meaning of "being in the moment", as in that "bodily and/or experientially saturated" (Zarrilli, 1995: 15) approach observed by some American Method practitioners who only manage to emphasize the 'Cartesian dualism' by re-inscribing it "in the form of an overly simplistic and monolithic subjectivity often [wrongly] described as [...] as an 'organic' or 'natural' state of being" (Ibid, 1995: 15).

Stanislavsky's idea of being in the moment or, more precisely, his concept of 'I am' is far removed from a mere superficial existence of the actor in her mundane state of being for it implies inner concentrated attention and grasp, most likely rooted in her own awareness of the higher self (creative 'I'). Clearly his meaning of the 'I' surpasses the superficial notion of 'I': the person of the actor; Stanislavsky advises the artist to see with his "mind's eye whether... [his] consciousness is as free as" his own body, and whether his entire "attention has been transferred to" his "higher 'I'" (1967: 209).

Indeed, he seems to hint at an 'I' which is supposed to be a higher one, as referred to in the Hindu, yogic, and Buddhist ways of thinking. For example, according to the Yogi Masters, awakening a consciousness of the "Real Self" or higher 'I' has two degrees. The first one is acquiring a "Consciousness of the 'I'" (Ramacharaka, 1906: 16), which allows the initiate to feel his real existence as a master of his own self, instead of being a slave of the body or the mind. The second degree, known as "the Consciousness of the 'I AM'", is the awareness of "one's identity with the Universal Life [...], his relationship to, and 'in-touchiness' with all life, expressed and unexpressed" (Emphasis in original, Ramacharaka, 1906: 10). As Ramacharaka further expounds:

When the candidate becomes Initiate – when he passes from the purely Mental Plane on to the Spiritual Plane – he realizes that the "I", the Real Self – is something greater than either the body or mind, and that both of the latter may be used as tools or instruments by the [...] "I." This knowledge is not reached by purely intellectual reasoning [...]. The real knowledge, however, comes as a special form of consciousness. (1906: 16)

In other words, the yogic idea of 'I am' reflects a consciousness of 'being' or, more precisely, "a condition of being" (Yesudian and Haich, 1980: 52) as a crucial experience, and not only an intellectual concept. In order to highlight the tremendous difference between "being something" as opposed to "thinking about something" Yesudian uses the example of the two ways in which a person can relate to water, in comparison to the feeling of 'being' the water (Ibid, 1980: 52).

As he explains, when seated on a lake shore, Yesudian can look at the water and concentrate upon it, while his consciousness brings about much information in relation to the lake. Obviously, he knows that the principal component would be the water, which is a liquid, is transparent, and has a certain temperature. Nevertheless, as Yesudian makes clear, this knowledge is achieved through a process that is intellectual in its essence, and far removed from actually 'being' the water. Furthermore, he can contemplate the elemental composition of the two combined gasses or the symbolic

chemical formulae of the water, H₂O. And yet, all these details are equally no more than his own “*thoughts* about the water” (Ibid, 1980: 52).

In order to move forward with this personal exploration, Yesudian’s second step consists in attempting to experience “the feeling of water” by using the rest of his senses while diving into the lake (1980: 52). This time he can feel the sensation of the liquid on the skin and tongue: its density, its warmth or coolness, its taste. Although he experiences the physical sensation of interacting with the water, once again, this only conveys a feeling of it, and is still not the state of ‘being’ the water. As Yesudian concludes: “if finally, I would cease to be separated from the water, if I were to melt into the water, that is, if I myself were to become water, then I could say ‘*I am water*’—that would be a condition of being” (1980: 52).

One might ask how this example can be of any practical use for the actor? From a conscious point of view, of course, it would be impossible to know exactly what it means to be water. Nevertheless, considering that around sixty per cent of the human body is water, and that the information concerning all the bodily fluids is stocked in the subconscious, it follows that, knowing how to become water might be accessible outside consciousness. Therefore, although consciously this feels impossible, the thought that their own bodies are made of water may help actors symbolically to accept the idea. When they do so, their conscious mind abates any argument against it, thus allowing their own imagination to create a believable feeling of being the water.

Extrapolating from Yesudian’s example, the actor can further make the conscious choice of believing in the possibility of becoming not only something else (such as the water), but also *someone* else (as in the character), because all the data, as in the “given circumstances” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 49) concerning this character can fit one of the infinite possible versions of her own person, contained in the soul. The information on how to become that person may be available via the unconscious or the

superconscious mind. But how can the actor do this? How can she 'become' another person without pretending to be someone else, or without being a pathological liar?

Stanislavsky provides a solution to this problem by introducing the magic 'if' (2010: 49). As he explains, "the secret of 'if', as a stimulus, lies in the fact that it doesn't speak about actual facts, of what is, but of what might be ... "if" ... This word is not a statement, it's a question to be answered. The actor must try to answer it" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 50-1). In other words, by asking herself what she would do 'if' confronted with either this or that situation, the actor is consciously working on the role, using 'if' as "a device, a creative idea which, through the operation of nature itself, produces" real actions that are essential "to achieve the goal" of creating the life of this character (Ibid, 2010: 50), step by step.

In Stanislavsky's thought, if the actor concentrates on the given circumstances, starting to leave them, "then the *truth of passions* will arise of itself" (2010: 54). Using her own mind and body towards grasping a feeling of the character, the actor is putting herself in its situation, thus starting to become familiar with and understand it. Through this process, the character begins to take shape in the consciousness of its creator and, at the same time, ceases to be a completely unknown entity.

Considering that the ego or, as Jung defines it, "the conscious personality", is the subject of all personal acts of consciousness" and thus can only extend to what it previously learned and experienced, "it always finds its limit when it comes up against the unknown" (Jung, 1978: 3). Thus, in the situation in which the information that touches upon the conscious field is generating anxiety and fear of not knowing what to do, the ego will "force attention to be diverted to undesirable objects", causing an energy that "becomes unwieldy and ineffective" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008: 36).

In the light of these thoughts, it results that anything that might fall under such category may also trigger distress signals in the conscious mind of the actor.

Nonetheless, by means of the magic 'if', the actor starts to become increasingly familiar with her character that, as noted above, gradually ceases to be perceived as something unknown by her conscious mind, and beyond the ego's reach. Due to this conscious understanding, also generating acceptance, the distress signals are no longer necessary, while the actor can easily identify with this other entity of her chosen role.

Yet, identifying with someone does not equate to becoming them. On the contrary, a third level remains to be reached, and that, according to Stanislavsky, implies a natural merging of the actor's soul with the soul of the character or, more precisely, a "metamorphosis" (2008b: 12). This is possible only when the actor stops *thinking* the role and thus ceases to position herself separately from it. By consciously silencing her mind through the power of the will, or by other means such as maintaining rhythmic breathing while concentrating on each and every action, the actor starts tapping into the deeper layers of the unconscious or even the superconscious. Only then is her soul free to express itself in the artistic creation as 'I am', via the character.

Instead of consciously doing the role (in the sense that she only imitates the behaviour of her character), the actor steps up her ladder of artistic creativity, and reaches a level in which she experiences the split in awareness analysed in Chapter 3. That is to say, she—the creator—simultaneously becomes aware of herself—the creation. Without losing her own consciousness of self, the actor's creative 'I' (soul) might start this metamorphosis into a brand-new persona, that can grow unconsciously with every rehearsal, and which should no longer be the actor wearing her character's identity. Whenever the artist reaches the creative state, she becomes this new living and breathing persona, surfacing from the deepest superconscious layers of her mind.

However, speaking from experience, the actor cannot become the character or, more precisely, this new persona cannot surface, if the consciousness is occupied with the thoughts of the actor trying to remember what to do, either projecting future actions

or entertaining desires to repeat past accomplishments. In such case, there is no room left for the thoughts and feelings of the character. By sharing a soul with the actor, this newly metamorphosed being, can only exist in the present moment, in the now.

This idea of maintaining a constantly present existence by keeping a silent mind is not at all left unnoticed by Stanislavsky, in whose opinion, “if you give a man a magic mirror in which he could see his own thoughts, he would realise that he was walking about on a heap of broken pieces of his begun, unfinished, and abandoned thoughts. Just like a shipwrecked vessel” (Stanislavsky, 1967: 164).

By concentrating on the task at hand that unravels in the present moment, a silencing of the mind can be reached and, in this silence, past and future disintegrate, allowing a sense of present awareness to take over. Through this present awareness one can become ‘conscious of being conscious’—a quality of the mind reachable in a fourth existential dimension in which the opportunity to experience life as a miracle becomes available. This state of *I am aware of being aware* is an act of meditation in itself, during which a transformational process occurs that, if relentlessly pursued, may conclude in a qualitative enhancement and (ultimately) in a process of awakening: Buddha’s “I am awake” (Fowler, 2005: 6).

In his conversations with the Moscow Art Theatre’s senior actors dating from April 1936, Stanislavsky explains that “an actor cannot be merely someone, somewhere, at some time or other”. He has to be only “I, here, today” (2008b: 76). Elsewhere, he argues that, “the most terrible thing that can happen to the creative powers of a man is for him to live in the past. [...] In the life of every man, of course, there only exists his ephemeral ‘now’, his ‘today’, and not his yesterday” (1967: 236).

To conclude, there is no doubt that Stanislavsky’s ‘I am’ is crucial for the art of experiencing the soul of the character in an elevated artistic form. Therefore, it is highly important always to remember that his notion of ‘I am’ should never be limited neither to

a mundane existence on the stage nor to the small egotistic 'I' of the actor insofar as its hidden power may reside in the conscious act of acknowledging the creative 'I' (soul) of the actor as being the real artist and creator.

6.2 Practising the 'I am'

As presented in the first video clip (00.52.26), one of the most powerful acting exercises that can facilitate an embodied understanding of the 'I am' element, and which starts with a self-exploration, is known in the Romanian drama schools as 'Ages'. This exercise appears to be inspired by Stanislavsky's work with people on different ages, as described in 'Physical Characteristics, Year Two: Embodiment' of *An Actor's Work* (2010: 529-32). The idea behind the particular version used for the present practice as research was based on the actor incarnating a series of different human ages, starting with her real one, at the moment in which the exercise was performed.

To be more precise, whilst assuming a comfortable position, the actor was directed to close her eyes, take a deep breath, and concentrate on her heart centre. She was also encouraged to observe herself, while silently stating 'I am' in connection with her real age. This was done with the clear purpose of introducing the actor to the truthfulness of the 'I am' statement. Because she was only stating her own real age, the actor's declaration was true to her and thus it generated a certain feeling of which she became conscious. Whenever ready, upon opening her eyes, the actor had to answer questions from the group while paying attention to how she was feeling in that particular moment, physically and mentally, in relation to her real age.

When she appeared to be at ease with the questions, the actor was required to close her eyes again, take another deep breath, and begin to imagine herself at a younger age, while using the 'I am' statement. The key to the successful outcome of the 'Ages' resides in the 'I am' affirmation. By beginning to state the obvious, this affirmation

generates in the consciousness of the actor a feeling of knowing that this is the truth. Later on, when the 'I am' addresses a situation that is no longer real, this feeling of truth, already experienced consciously, can be recreated by the declaration itself. Remembering and using that feeling, the actor teaches her own conscious mind to believe in and accept the new situation as truthful. As a result, any argumentative thoughts are silenced, thus leaving room for the imagination to take over.

The reason why the exercise explores younger ages first instead of older ones is related to maintaining this feeling. The actor's ego will accept it as a possibility, because it already happened in the past. For example, after silently declaring: 'I am twelve years old', in order to recall feelings, mental states, and behaviour experienced in the past, Ella was directed to use both emotional memory and imagination (Video Clip 1: 00.55.48). Although the statement no longer represented the truth, by accessing sensory and emotional memory Ella could easily relate to her own past experiences.

The same combination seemed to work well for all the actors. Interesting to note, however, is the fact that, in order to relate to the later much younger age required (three years old), Claire exhibited an initial slight tendency to use exterior means, such as a forced girlish facial expression (Ibid: 00.53.51). Consequently, she had to be made aware that the exercise was intended to explore the age from within. The moment she understood this Claire was able successfully to complete this stage of the 'Ages'.

The general tendency of using clichés (changing the voice and adopting a more childish behaviour) when acting a younger character or assuming the usual physical poses (a bent back or knees) when playing the part of an older person was stopped right from the beginning. Instead, as opposed to making use of exterior means in order to show the age explored, the actors were constantly encouraged to find ways of becoming either younger or older. In other words, they were gradually guided towards allowing the chosen age to surface from within.

This guidance is utterly necessary for the actor to be able to grasp the importance of correctly using the 'I am' element during 'Ages'. Tested with every actor individually, the combination between the 'I am' affirmation, memory, and imagination proved to be very helpful and led to a successful outcome of the exercise. To start with, by means of concentrating on the breath, the actor silences her ego and allows the soul (creative 'I') to take over the reins of creation. By the power of its will, and due to its agelessness, the soul may, in fact, borrow any age desired. Whenever the conscious mind of the actor is controlled, it makes room for whatever surfaces from the depths of the soul—which, in the case of this exercise, is a creation of an age, totally different from the real one, and which is experienced by the actor in body, mind, and soul.

As noted above, the exercise was initiated with the exploration of as many different younger ages as possible. At a later stage, after the actors completed this process of moving backwards through all the chosen younger ages, the exercise was brought to a more complex level in which they could no longer use their past experiences but had to rely instead purely on their own imagination. First of all, the actors were brought back to the centre—that is to say, to the reality of their present age.

From that point on, they were guided towards imagining themselves progressively slightly older. In a similar manner with the younger ages, they also experienced gradually as many older ages as possible. When this shift between the various ages explored was complete, all the actors were further encouraged to attempt higher jumps, from a very young to a much older age and vice versa.

Highly noticeable was how Aphrodite made the connection between her real age and the given one of seventy years old (Video Clip 1: 00.57.26). Taking her time with the silent 'I am' statement as directed, through an amazing process of transformation, she started gradually to change from inside out. Her body appeared to collapse slowly

onto itself without using any of the exterior artifices. When Aphrodite finally opened her eyes, we could clearly see a totally transformed, much older person.

The most important thing to be grasped while working with 'Ages' is that, in fact, the word 'I' from the 'I am' statement relates to, and is utterly connected with, the actor's soul. As such, by understanding and acknowledging this connection, while consciously using a higher meaning of the 'I am' (as in 'I am my soul and my soul simply is'), the task of changing the age during the exercise can be easily completed since this soul has no age at all, but may adopt any characteristics as desired.

In order to continue testing the 'I am' element, another relevant acting exercise was further explored. Known as 'the Tree' (in the Romanian drama schools), this exercise no longer directly relates to the self of the actor but moves on from exploring the self towards the idea of becoming something else, thus marking the beginning of the transition from the first stage of the work to the second one. As noted in the Introduction, the version of 'the Tree' exercise used during this practice stems from Stanislavsky but was further developed to accommodate a better grasp of the 'I am'.

Stanislavsky devised 'the Tree' to train the actor's imagination. In Chapter 4 of *An Actor's Work*, as a means of enhancing the imagination of his students, Tortsov proposes the creation of a mental film. When asking Pasha to "live the life of a tree with deep roots in the earth", he chooses "the least active theme" possible (Stanislavsky, 2010: 77). Using Tortsov's voice, Stanislavsky explains this choice as the best way to force the student's imagination, for "a subject with little action in it necessitates hard preparatory work by the imagination" (2010: 77).

As described above, 'the Tree' is indeed mostly designed to enhance the imagination of the actor. However, when explored in practice, it becomes obvious that the exercise also uses concentration, attention, will, emotional memory, as well as the 'I am' state. Because the actor needs to picture herself as a living tree—she has to

imagine her surroundings, sounds, time, and has to tell a story of this chosen tree—the primary element at work is, indeed, the imagination.

Nonetheless, the actor also uses her sensorial as well as her emotional memory, for, most of the time, the mental creation surfacing during this exercise is inspired by the remembered images and feelings generated while previously interacting with a specific, cherished, real tree. Such remembrance may appear as a sequence of images that come together to create a mental film of the event. The semi-visualization of this mental film during ‘the Tree’ exercise calls for a highly concentrated attentive mind, whilst the actor has to adopt the life of either a remembered or an imagined tree as her own, by making herself believe that she can become a tree. Yet, how to do this without sounding crazy? How can the actor find within herself that sense of truthfulness, while attempting to become not someone else (another human being), but something else (a plant)?

In terms of practice, viable answers to such questions may be found by means of using the ‘I am’ element, as inspired by its more profound spiritual connotations. In similar fashion to Yesudian’s example of the two ways in which a person can relate to water, there are as well at least two ways in which a human being can interact with a tree. In light of this thought, as a manner of preparation, and in order to explore such possible ways, the actors were given the foregoing tasks of locating and studying a real tree. Adopting a child-like curiosity, they had to concentrate in detail upon each element of this tree, such as the trunk, the branches, or the roots.

According to Stanislavsky, as opposed to children who “love contemplation” and who “are nearer to nature, from which they came not so long ago”, an adult thinks that “he understands the mystery of the universe” when, “in reality, he knows very little” insofar as “the most important things are hidden from man” who lives “absorbed in material blessings, getting farther and farther from spiritual, contemplative life” (Stanislavsky in Senelick, 2008: 226). In view of Stanislavsky’s words, like children, who

often “enter into the life of an ant, a birch tree, a little dog, or a kitten” (Ibid, 2008: 226), the adult actors were encouraged to enter the life of a tree.

After taking in as much as possible, including the sound of the wind through the leaves or any other surrounding sounds, they had to explore further the specific tree by using their other senses, such as the tactile or the olfactory ones, in order to feel it. The next task was to close their eyes and, with the purpose of relaxing their minds and bodies, to take a few deep breaths, while making the clear mental statement: ‘I am this tree’. During the ‘I am’ affirmation they had to attempt to *become* the tree, by imagining that there was no separation between themselves as subjects and the tree as the object of contemplation. Moreover, the actors had to make the life of this tree their own. That is to say, they had to imagine their legs growing, deeply implanted into the earth, as if they were roots; had to listen, from the tree’s perspective, to any present sound; and had to search the visual field, as if their own eyes belonged to this tree.

From a spiritual point of view, highly noticeable was Ella’s experience during her personal research with the real tree of choice. While studying it, she reached a deep concentrated awareness, in which the sense of separation between subject and object disappears completely whilst a conscious unity takes over. As featured in the second video clip (04.45), Ella explained that, while contemplating the tree, she had this strange feeling of ‘morphing’ with it, of being suddenly ‘sucked into it’.

These unexpected sensations had a slightly frightening effect on her, causing Ella abruptly to put an end to the experience. As previously noted, according to the yogi masters, this sensation of morphing with the surroundings is actually a tiny glimpse beyond the illusory maya. However, if the practitioner is not mentally ready for it, the powerful experience can be slightly frightening. It can be argued that, due to lack of information regarding what was going on, Ella’s ego started to signal a danger where there was none. If, instead of ending the experience, she would have chosen to silence

her ego and to continue the exploration of herself becoming the tree, she might have reached the state of *zanmai* that, as shown in Chapter 3, is a brief moment of enlightenment experienced outside the sessions of meditation, very similar with how Stanislavsky's creative state is described.

To resume, 'the Tree' exercise was explored later on in three stages. During the first one, it followed Stanislavsky's version in which the actor had to stand in front of the team and imagine herself as a tree, while describing the experience, as it happened in the moment. However, in order to test memory, the actors were directed to use first the specific tree that they previously studied. For example, Ella began the exercise with her eyes closed. After taking a few deep breaths and silently repeating the 'I am' statement, she opened her eyes and started to answer questions addressed by the group, as if she was the tree (Video Clip 2: 01.19). These questions varied from what kind of a tree she was, questions regarding her envisioned surroundings, the time of the day, what season, as well as many other enquires on her possible senses or feelings, Ella made use of both her sensory memory and imagination insofar as her mind was concentrated on the memories acquired during research, while imagining the present situation.

The second stage of the exercise was conducted in a similar manner, the only difference being the particular tree in question. Instead of using a real tree for reference, the actors were called on to envision a totally unrealistic one, as in something that they never actually experienced before, and which was utterly based on their own imagination. Interesting to note is that, for this stage, Aphrodite chose to become an immortal silver tree that existed on a magical land (Ibid: 07.37).

In order to complete the third stage of this exercise, the actors were further required to imagine themselves as either the created or the real tree, from the moment it sprang into existence, in a continuous and imperceptible growing movement, until reaching maturity. Thus, while seated on a chair and with their eyes closed (or opened),

the actors had to imagine themselves growing like a tree (Video Clip 2: 09.39). The inner imagination was also accompanied by the actual slow movement of the body, from the seated position to the standing one.

Due to the necessary shift in the centre of gravity, the last phase of the Tree is very demanding, physically, mentally, and spiritually. This shift usually takes a tremendous physical effort that automatically informs the ego about the impossibility of performing the task required. In the situation in which the actor allows herself to be dominated by her ego, she will never be able to stand up. However, if, on the contrary, the actor learns to ignore her ego's signals and strives towards stillness of mind (learned through meditation) while totally concentrating on the 'I am' statement, her strength tends to increase exponentially. As such, most of the physical and psychological issues that would normally impede the constant maintenance of the slow growing motion are, in the end, overcome.

Clearly, in its first stage, the exercise tests both inner and outer concentration and attention. During the personal research, in which the actor familiarises herself with the actual tree, the focused attention addresses exterior aspects in so far as the actor uses her own senses to gather as much information as possible. Later on, by trying to repeat the experience, she is introduced to inner attention through a combined use of memory and imagination. Yet, the actor's conscious mind also opens up to the surrounding world, for she communicates the experience while answering questions.

To that end, she uses her own words while describing a live mental film of her combined real and imagined sensations, as if she is the tree. As stated by Knebel, and as subsequently explained in the next chapter, Stanislavsky often employed this way of creating and using an inner mental film, especially during the later years of his work, when rehearsing with Active Analysis. According to Knebel:

As an actor, Stanislavsky considered internal vision as a powerful means for preserving the life of a role. The 'film' of images, which Stanislavsky also called

the 'illustrated subtext' gives the text the force of picturization and the force of a live impact on the partner as well as the viewer. (Knebel in Thomas, 2016: 129-30)

Resuming the analysis of this exercise, it is crucial to note that, during 'the Tree', all the elements—concentration, attention, will, imagination, memory, given circumstances, and action—can function together only through the constant experiencing of the 'I am'—the state of mind induced by the affirmation: 'I am this tree'. It is this personal statement, the one that allows the processes of becoming the tree to unfold and to be experienced by the actor, physically, mentally, as well as spiritually. The 'I am' affirmation helps the actor's ego to remain silent, to accept and, implicitly, to believe in the probability of a tree-like existence while witnessing the unfolding of the unconscious and, possibly, of a further superconscious creation.

Based on my own experience of this exercise, as well as on observing over the years many students and actors engaged in it, I can say that, as opposed to the first two stages, the attention, in the course of the last one, is mostly directed within. The effort and amount of energy necessary to complete the task (gradually and imperceptibly to rise from a seated position towards the standing one) are so great that the actor tends to lose sensorial contact with the exterior and is utterly concentrated on the inner aspects of her body and on dealing with the physical effort.

However, as expressed by Maria (after successfully experiencing all the stages of the exercise), the idea of being a growing tree provided her conscious mind with exactly what she needed in order to cope with the physically overwhelming task of maintaining constant slow movement. While imagining herself becoming a tree, by means of the 'I am' affirmation, Maria was enabled to eliminate all her doubts and to believe in the possibility of succeeding. Moreover, by constantly reminding herself that it was not her own body growing, but the tree's, she was able to silence all distracting ego-signals, and this might have helped her to fulfil her task and finish the exercise.

Prior to starting this final stage, all the actors were advised to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths to recall the meditational awareness. In order to unite their mind with the self and to acknowledge its existence and supremacy over the ego, the actors were also instructed to concentrate on their heart centre, and to make use of the 'I am' statement, while taking as much time as they needed before launching into performing any movement. In addition, they were advised to make sure that they were beginning this last phase of 'the Tree' from the best physical position in which the shift in the gravitational centre almost disappears.

As evidenced in the second video clip, once more, all four actresses were successful in completing this final stage of the exercise. Again, speaking from my personal experience as a teacher, this third stage tends to be only forty percent successful, on average. Sixty percent of the actors or students who attempt it are usually incapable of standing up. The fact that, against my lowest expectations, all the actresses were successful was yet another confirmation of the validity of a spiritual type of training. Both Maria and Ella completed this third stage in approximately twenty-five minutes of continuous deep concentration.

Whilst Maria's body expressed a tree-like person, serene and strong, we could see her growing, without perceiving any actual movement (Video Clip 2: 09.57). Her face was reaching towards the sky and her arms were widespread, reminiscent of branches. Highly interesting to note was the position of her body which appeared to follow a very clear and recognisable Christ-on-the-Cross-like shape. In light of Jung's theory of the archetypal self (noted in Chapter 2), this was totally unexpected from someone who completely rejects any form of religious thought. It may be that, due to her highly concentrated mind, the living archetype of her inner self (shaped like Christ-on-the-Cross) surfaced unconsciously. This could have been triggered by Maria's former Catholic upbringing, still present in the subconscious layers of her mind.

Of course, it can be easily argued that the cross-like spreading of her arms had no spiritual connotation whatsoever, and that it was only borne out of her own act of imagining the branches. However, it might be worth remembering that, in order to help with the shift of the body, the first instinct when performing this exercise, is to keep the arms locked on the knees for balance. As clearly visible from the footage, none of the other actresses (also impersonating a tree with branches) felt the desire to adopt Maria's position, who spread her arms before shifting her body. On the contrary, all of them had their hands firmly placed on their knees for as long as it was possible.

Another phenomenon worth noting is the fact that, after completing the last stage of this exercise, both Ella and Maria acknowledged a double awareness, very similar to Michael Chekhov's concept of 'double consciousness' experienced by the actor, as well as with Stanislavsky's notion of a split awareness while in the creative state. As Maria asserted, on the one hand, she was aware of her actor's personality struggling with the movement, while, on the other hand, she was equally mindful of another version of herself, emerging from the inner depths and taking the form of a tree character, powerful and more than capable. For Ella, the second awareness belonged to the embracing tree, a loving mentor, guiding her throughout this journey of painful growth, while keeping her calm, focused, and willing to continue (Video Clip 2: 14.22).

In conclusion, it is very important to highlight that, in a similar manner with all the rest of the exercises used for this research, the two analysed above were also intentionally designed to include meditational processes in their make-up. Firstly, they both started in meditation. Secondly, when working with the 'Ages', every step from one age to the next was taken through meditation. And thirdly, during 'the Tree', the passage from one stage to the next started and concluded in the same meditational mind-state. In addition, by experiencing a combination of spiritual and physical actions - exploring, remembering, imagining, growing - it equally tested meditation in action.

In the end, this particular exercise proved to be essential to this practice as research. Neither developed further than the three stages noted above, nor used later on, during rehearsals or in the performance, nonetheless, 'the Tree' remains one of the most significant. Not only that it helped the actors to move on naturally from being themselves towards becoming something else but it also provided the perfect conditions for reaching and understanding the creative state.

6.3 Action in Meditation and Meditation in Action

Although probably one of the most famous elements of the 'system', Stanislavsky's concept of 'action' still appears to remain the least understood. It is usually viewed only from a physical perspective, being also associated with Stanislavsky's change of heart in his approach to acting. According to Merlin, because "the Soviet regime [...] rejected personal emotion and championed rock-solid action", Stanislavsky, forced by the Soviet censors and the new Russian political climate, had to "veer away from his own early fascination with emotion and turn his attention towards that all-important action" (Merlin, 2007: 7). Yet, it might be wise to remember that Stanislavsky made use of action very early in his research, long before the Soviets.

After 1917, as opposed to emotion, "which was hard to define and had *spiritual* connotations", action "was seen as more concrete and scientific" (Whyman, 2013: 14). As such, it was heavily emphasized. Nonetheless, according to Whyman, action "had been always the lynch pin of the *system*", alongside emotion. Moreover, "Stanislavsky strongly denied [...] in private correspondence" the Soviets' declarations stating that he "had moved away from his ideas about affective memory, including emotion memory", as well as the relentless emphasis on "the importance of action rather than emotion in the system" (Ibid, 2013: 14).

As a short parenthesis, it might be useful here to start by drawing a line between Stanislavsky's idea of 'action' and what is known in the British contemporary actor training as 'actioning' in the sense of using "an 'action verb' which expresses the underlying intention of the line" (Moseley, 2016: vii). Nick Moseley clearly explains that "contrary to popular belief, Actioning is not a Stanislavskian technique, and is in fact little used outside of the UK". This concept was developed sometimes "in the late 1970s under the direction of Bill Gaskill and Max Stafford-Clark" with the purpose of empowering "the actor to serve the play and the production by making clear and simple choices on each line of the text". Becoming very popular, Actioning "has since found its way into the arsenal of the majority of UK actors and directors" (Ibid, 2016: vii).

As opposed to the 'action verb' noted above, although mostly associated with concreteness and palpability, Stanislavsky's concept of 'action' appears to be way more complex. Moreover, it might also have a deeper spiritual connotation, being probably related not only to the immediate needs of the character but also to their soul's desires, to their higher ideals and purposes, alongside the ones of the actor who creates them.

Similar connotations can be found in many ancient spiritual paths, including the Orthodox Faith, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Within the mystical strand of the Orthodox denomination, for example, alongside the idea of contemplation, action is deemed to be paramount for the ascending journey towards deification (theosis). As highlighted by Vladimir Lossky, in Orthodox thought there are two stages to the ascending processes or, more accurately, "the ascent [...] is achieved simultaneously on two different but closely interrelated levels: that of action and that of contemplation" (1973: 202).

In addition, action is utterly linked to the ideas of love, beauty, and gnosis, for, as Kornblatt explains, "all Russian religious philosophy insists on the role of action, a task, or *zadacha*, whose accomplishment will mean the reunion of God and creation"

(Kornblatt in Rosenthal, 1997: 86). As stated in St Maximus's *Capita Theologica et Economica*, the actions of the believer should reflect her religious feelings and thoughts.

On the one hand, "contemplation without action" or, in other words, theory without practice, "differs in no way [...] from fantasy without any real substance. On the other hand, action which is not inspired by contemplation is as sterile, and rigid as a statue" (Lossky V, 1973: 202-3). To express it differently, knowing the dogma without living it is not enough for pursuing theosis. Moreover, the outer actions of the body should follow the inner impulses stemming from the mind as well as the heart. This Orthodox appreciation of the strict connection between inner and outer actions is very similar with Stanislavsky's highlighted importance of the inner or spiritual versus the external physical action.

As noted in Chapter 1, by opposing Stanislavsky's presumed realist 'task' and 'throughaction' to Motokio's mystical Noh terms, 'seeds' and 'flowering', Wylie-Marques considers the Stanislavskian notion of action to be totally incompatible with any spiritual concept (Wylie-Marques, 2003: 136). Thus, she fails to take into the account Stanislavsky's idea of action as "*a spiritual activity*", as well as his 'scenic' concept translated into "action in the spiritual sense of the word" (2008b: 49).

This spiritual sense might be similar to the Orthodox meaning noted above, as well as the yogic or Hindu ones. To give a few examples of Orthodox spiritual references to the utter connection between 'inner' and 'outer action': According to Saint Isaac, as cited by Saint Nilus, "bodily action in the absence of spiritual action may be compared to barren loins and [a] dry breast, for God's wisdom is inaccessible to it" (Nilus in Fedotov, 1950: 95). For Saint Nilus, as well as Saint Agathon, "bodily action is like a leaf; interior action—that is, spiritual labour—is the fruit" (Fedotov, 1950: 94). In Barsanuphius's words, "if interior action does not fortify a man with the help of God, his exterior action labours will have been in vain" (Nilus in Fedotov, 1950: 94).

Furthermore, the concept of 'action' is also fundamental to all the Oriental practices, being directly associated with the principle of 'karma'. At "the core of Indian spirituality", as Eliade points out, there are "four basic and interdependent concepts" or "kinetic ideas" and these are: "*karma, maya, nirvana, and yoga*". The karmic law is "the law of universal causality" connecting the humankind with the cosmos (Eliade, 1973: 3).

But how can a simple action inform this critical law? An answer to such question is to be found in the very root of the term itself. Marie Schultz endeavours to elucidate the deep meaning of 'action' by her insight into the Hindu etymology of the word. Thus, according to her, the term 'karma' comes from Sanskrit and signifies an action that "contains in it the idea of '*cause*' and '*effect*' at the same time" (Schultz, 1978: 38). Additionally, in Hindu thought, action (or "Kriya") appears to be one of the three aspects of Brahman (the Primordial Trinity of the first One), alongside "Iccha (Will)" and "Jnanam (Wisdom, Science)" (Ibid, 1978: 20).

Moreover, the Atma, or Self, in its essence, is constituted from the actions that the body performs. The Self is connected to these "actions of its created form" through the expanding "Consciousness of the Self" (Hopkins 1971: 42). Although this higher Self can never be shaped and modified by actions, it will impact the performance and the aim of each and every action. As such, the rebirth of a person is a direct consequence of her actions, whilst actions are born from her desire (Ibid, 1971: 42).

Similarly, Buddhism holds the concept of action in high regard. Suzuki argues that because any activity can become a way to reveal a person's true nature, the very secret of enlightenment is hidden in a simple physical action (1970: 53). The simplest act involving a clear, concentrated mind can be made an expression of the higher self. For example, if a person chooses to express herself and her sincerity in the activities performed in the kitchen, Master Dogen, would advise that, for such a person, cooking

becomes an act of selfless love; it becomes Zen practice. “It is not preparation for practice or relaxation after practice; it is part of practice” (Dogen in Suzuki, 1970: 53).

Possibly aware of such spiritual connotations, Stanislavsky seems to disagree with the Soviet transmission of his ‘system’, supposedly based on ‘physical action’ and with no spiritual connections whatsoever. In a letter written to thank Maxim Gorky for his good wishes transmitted on the occasion of Stanislavsky’s seventieth birthday, he still appears to be concerned about writing a necessary “Grammar of Acting”. In Stanislavsky’s words: “Such a book is needed if only to put an end to all the twisted interpretations put on my so-called ‘system’ which, in the way it is presently being taught, can put young actors on quite the wrong path” (Benedetti, 1991: 206).

As can be deduced from the original version of the draft preface of *An Actor’s Work*, it appears that, by giving strong warnings against what he calls “false disciples”, Stanislavsky was unsympathetic to this interpretation of his legacy. He believed that, these so-called disciples, with their “obtuseness in understanding the human soul and one of the most complex processes of its inner life”, will only “approach the system superficially, as form” (Stanislavsky, 2010: xxvi). As he further warns his readers, these false disciples and their “extraordinarily simplistic understanding of the system” are dangerous and should be avoided “like the plague”, because such “simplistic thinking” can only spring “from narrowness of mind” (Ibid, 2010: xxvii).

Towards the end of his life, he shows concerns regarding possible negative effects when applying a distorted ‘system’ for, instead of helping, the incorrect use of the elements may have many detrimental effects on the artistic development of the student-actor. As proved by Kamotskaya’s artistic struggles, Stanislavsky’s fears seem to be more than justified. While training in the late 1980s, in the official Method of Physical Actions, during her studentship at Vakhtangov’s Shchukin Theatre Institute in Moscow, Kamotskaya experienced such harmful effects first-hand.

As she remembers, after her “third year at the Institute”, she felt “very inhibited”. Although she “desperately wanted to be an actress”, whenever on the stage, Kamotskaya felt “empty and frightened”. This happened “because they used components of Stanislavsky’s System separately”; consequently, “every exercise inhibited” her “more and more” (Kamotskaya in Merlin, 2001: 101). Additionally, as further explained by Kamotskaya, the teachers’ constant demand for forced spontaneity (without creating the proper atmosphere in which the students could naturally relax, thus allowing their imagination to reach unconscious/superconscious levels), the relaxation classes (conducted in an unrelaxed compulsory manner), as well as the use of the concept of ‘physical action’ (divorced from its inner spiritual aspects) led to the constant and progressive development of stronger inhibitions (Ibid, 2001: 101).

Stanislavsky’s warnings of how an incorrect interpretation of the ‘system’ and its superficial use might negatively affect young actors proved to be well founded for, decades later, trainees such as Kamotskaya still appeared to suffer the consequences of this superficial approach. As she further asserts, Kamotskaya finally found her artistic spirituality and creative salvation by attending a twenty-four-hour class held at Grotowski’s Teatr Laboratorium, in Poland (Kamotskaya in Merlin, 2001:101).

There are clearly crucial interconnections between inner-spiritual action and the exterior-physical one; as it appears, for Stanislavsky, the spiritual action is predominant. Therefore, it is vital not to reduce this Stanislavskian concept of ‘action’ (that exceeds a mere physical act) by underestimating its real value as a spiritual instrument for the creative ‘I’ (soul) of the actor. The notion of ‘action’ should be used not only as a means to form the life of the body, but also to deepen this life until it reaches the soul of the created persona. One of the ways to touch upon the hypothetical souls of both the actor and the character is through concentration on the simplest physical action. This leads to

a process of silencing the mind that can transform the mere execution of the physical gesture into a powerful act of meditation in action.

6.4 Testing the Spiritual Action

As noted by Carnicke, for Stanislavsky, action becomes a language. The actors should “speak through their actions”, and this is at least “as important as what they say” (Carnicke, 2009: 186). Furthermore, “‘the life of the human spirit of the role’ is continuous with ‘the life of the human body’ on the stage. In short, inner content (emotion) is inextricably linked to outer form (action)” (Carnicke, 2009: 186).

In order to avoid severing the two, action was not only observed by means of exercises or études during this practice as research, but also through the three ways of meditating, including the seated meditation. While settled on the floor with an erect body and “with legs crossed”, the meditator “is enjoined to become mindfully aware of an action which we, of necessity, do all the time—breathing in and breathing out” (Fowler, 2005: 112). Consequently, the static meditational act itself is, in fact, orchestrated through a series of both inner physical actions and spiritual ones.

For example, concentration of attention in meditation is achieved through a chain of actions of the mind, such as focusing awareness directly on all the sounds produced while breathing. However, as explained in Chapter 5, according to the yogi masters, the deliberate and conscious use of the will that focuses attention is no less than an action controlled by the inner ‘I’ (higher self), which means that it has spiritual powers in itself. In the light of this thought, it was only logical to conclude that the spiritual aspect of the action element was, in fact, subtly present during all the sessions of meditation, as well as in the exercises described so far. The element of action was further tested through a series of études developed to support the transition from the first stage of the work

(training with the 'magic if' and improvised speech) to the second one (creating the character through Active Analysis).

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, this transition was initiated in the early stages of the research, with the exploration of 'the Tree' exercise, and continued by means of working initially with études that used given circumstances inspired both by Anton Chekhov's play and the adaptation. During the practice conducted with the initial group, we employed 'Burning Money', an étude developed by Stanislavsky and described in *An Actor's Work* (2010: 87-8). Yet, unhappy with the results obtained at the time, when we started anew, I made the decision no longer to use Stanislavsky's études, but to create new ones instead. Because at that stage I was still working on the adaptation of the text, I created such études by using the given circumstances found in scenes taken from Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*.

One of these études - 'A Silent Battle' (Video Clip 2: 27.13) - was inspired by the scene featuring Irina, who is waiting for Tuzenbach to visit, and Natasha, who expects news from her former fiancée, Protopopov, and who hides this from her husband's family. Both women are trying to ignore each other, while hoping that the other one will lose patience and leave. When Irina shows no intentions of retiring for the evening, Natasha tries to get her out of the living-room. Pretending to be concerned with her health, Natasha advises Irina to go to bed and rest.

While working on the étude, the actors had to answer the six fundamental Stanislavskian questions: "who, when, where, why, for what reason, how" (Stanislavsky, 2010: 83). However, although I created the étude starting from Anton Chekhov's play, it is important to note that the actors were not aware of this. They were only told the given circumstances without being informed of how the étude was devised. Considering that at this stage of the research the actors were still concentrating on themselves, the idea of the character was not yet present in the processes of learning. As such, they were

not improvising the *étude* as Irina and Natasha, but as themselves in the described given circumstances, only working with the magic 'if' that, as earlier explained, concentrates on the person of the actor and not on a character.

More precisely, by asking themselves: 'What would I do if facing this or that situation?' the actors were simply exploring conditions similar to those of the characters, without thinking yet about a given text. When first approaching the 'Silent Battle' *étude*, the actors were given the space (a living-room), and the inner action (waiting), combined with a task for Claire to try and make Ella to go to bed. In other words, they were given answers for two of Stanislavsky's questions—the 'where' and the 'for what reason'—while leaving the rest (the 'who,' 'when,' 'why,' and 'how') to the actors' improvisation. Once the *étude* was completed in this manner, the actors continued to explore different variations of it by constantly changing their given circumstances.

Instead of being a living-room, the space was transformed into a kitchen, Ella's bedroom, or a garden. Thus, the actors were given the 'who,' as in who they were, as well as the 'where'. Also, they were directed to perform the same tasks as before while improvising the 'how' or the 'when'. In one of its multiple versions, the *étude* started with an empty living-room in which Ella entered, thinking that a friend whom she was expecting had arrived. However, upon discovering that the friend was not yet there, she decided to wait. After a few moments, Claire entered the room.

She was also expecting someone with a note from a secret lover. Determined to hide this from Ella, Claire had to convince her to leave the room on the pretence that she might be very tired and could use some rest. As featured in the second video clip (30.55), in order to get her house mate out of the room, by inventing a growth on the back of Ella's neck, Claire decided to scare her off and urged Ella to go to her own room and check it in the mirror. When a much earlier version of this *étude* was explored, Ella

made her first entrance and, while showing that she was searching for someone, she was, in fact, pretending to look around the room.

Consequently, Ella had to be stopped and directed every little step. For example, she was questioned about why she was looking around, as if the guest might be hiding somewhere in the room, when she could clearly see that the person was not yet there. Thus, Ella was informed about the necessity of finding and following the logic of her actions in order for the artistic creation to become truthful and real. Entering a second time, she no longer pretended to search for her friend; however, she still felt an unjustified need to look around the room. Ella was stopped again and reminded that she was in her own living-room and, unless she had a reason to do so, the space should have been familiar enough not to search around.

How does this psychological analysis of the given circumstances relate to a spiritual type of acting training? To answer this question, it is important to explain that the initial problems experienced by Ella might have stemmed directly from her own incapacity to control her ego and clear her mind to allow unconscious/superconscious creativity to surface. Moreover, she was not even aware that her lack of ease in improvising the situation required by the given circumstances was a direct result of her own wrong attitude towards work, and which was manifesting in various blockages that could only encumber the outflow of her inner natural creativeness.

This incorrect attitude could have been caused by her fear of making mistakes, or by her desire to do well. Generally speaking, both these feelings are generated by an uncontrolled ego and not at all by the inner creative 'I' (soul) of the actor. Practically, a solution could be found in silencing the first in order to make room for the second. Ella needed to understand why she was experiencing blockages. Furthermore, she had to accept that, by allowing her ego to take over, she was in fact losing control over her own body and mind, and that she herself was the one generating this lack of ease.

To be more precise, because Ella could not fully concentrate on the tasks at hand, she was not present in time and space. Because her ego was probably bringing into her mind thoughts about how to 'do' the étude, as opposed of being silent and allowing herself simply to exist in it, the actions she needed to perform did not come naturally. To start with, Ella had to be made aware of the real root of her blockages. Once this was accomplished, she had to be guided towards silencing her ego by means of clearing her mind of any unwanted residual thoughts.

In order to do so and enter meditational awareness, Ella was reminded to close her eyes and to take a few deep breaths. Additionally, she was advised to take all the time she needed, without recklessly rushing into the études. Instead of struggling to do something that does not come naturally out of something else, Ella was encouraged to anchor herself in the reality of the space by means of concentrating on a specific circle of attention of her own choice and to shift it according to her real needs, only following impulses. By taking these basic steps, Ella immediately appeared calm and ready.

All of a sudden, she found her ease within the working space. As such, she entered to greet her friend, realised that the room was empty, stopped for a few seconds to think of what she should do next and, after checking the time by looking at a real clock (that happened to hang on the wall of the studio), she decided to sit down and wait. Later on, using the same étude, both actors were directed to voice their inner thoughts by means of Stanislavsky's head-heart communication, as presented in Chapter 2. In other words, they had to concentrate on the heart, when communicating inner thoughts, as opposed to a head-centred awareness during the actual speech.

Starting the étude again, the actors were also directed to decrease the sound when uttering thoughts, until their verbalisation ceased completely. As a result of practising this conscious differentiation between inner and outer actions, highlighting the utter importance of the inner ones, the actors started to exhibit an increased sense of

trust in their own creations, whilst their concentration became exponentially deeper. Unfortunately, due to technical issues, this session was not recorded. As such, there is no video evidence to be provided. However, the same exercise was employed when rehearsing with Active Analysis, and it will be detailed in the next chapter.

Another important variation of this *étude* was done with imaginary objects and in complete silence. The two actresses were not allowed to use any words at all. This time, the chosen space was a garden, in which both Ella and Claire had to be together while acting as if they could not stand each other. Ella settled on the physical action of gardening. Claire, by contrast, entered the space determined to enjoy a private outdoor session of yoga. Because Ella exhibited no intention to go inside, Claire abandoned the session and decided to lie down in the sun instead.

Initially, the imposed lack of speech proved to be very difficult to maintain and both actresses found the incorrect easy way around this problem by starting to mime at each other (Video Clip 2: 26.12). Once again, Ella and Claire had to be made aware that, firstly, there was no logical reason for their miming and, secondly, the very purpose of the *étude* resided not in finding easy exterior solutions, but inner, stronger ones. By learning to allow their actions, thoughts, and feelings to become expressive, they had the chance of discovering how communication beyond words can be made possible.

This silent work is very important for a spiritual type of training insofar as it enables the student to explore deep concentration on a series of exterior actions, combined with inner ease while silently communicating with a partner. With many interruptions to correct the actions that were either forced or against the natural logic of a living creation, all the versions of this *étude* improved substantially, whilst a deeper sense of communion slowly started to surface only to become increasingly powerful.

Gradually, the actors were more engrossed in their tasks and the use of imagination seemed to increase noticeably. However, although they already had the

chance of reaching some basic levels of the creative state individually (during the last stage of the Tree exercise), these early accomplishments represented only tiny steps towards beginning to grasp the subtle differences between *doing* something as opposed to Stanislavsky's "I am in action" (2008b: 31), as a form of *existing* in this act of *doing*.

Chapter 7

From the Second to the Third Stage of Practice (Introducing 'Performing as a State of Being')

After successfully testing the 'I am' element (through the 'Ages' and the 'Tree' exercises), as well as by starting to grasp the importance of the inner spiritual action, the actors experienced a subtle transition from being themselves to becoming something or someone else. However, at this point in their training, they were not yet working with a scripted text, but were relying mostly on their own feelings, thoughts, words, actions and emotions to create a situation in which an imagined character was involved. Thus, the second stage of the work started to take shape.

Once the transition from working with oneself towards embracing the possibility of being someone else was done, and once the element of action was tested and explained in all its possible forms, the actors finally appeared to be ready for their first encounter with the text. This allowed them to enter the magical world of the character whose life is contained in the description of the author, in the words of other characters, or in the events of the play. Before moving on with more details, it might be illuminating to introduce briefly the method tested during the second stage of practice (Active Analysis), how and why it was employed, as well as its creative outcomes.

7.1 The Method of Active Analysis

In his quest for uncovering the mysteries of what Stanislavsky defines as "the art of experiencing" (2010: 16), clearly, he often shifted his focus. In his youth, he started by using exterior resources, such as costume, make-up, or by simply studying exterior behaviour. For example, while engaged in researching *Othello* for The Moscow Society of Art and Literature, when meeting "an Arab in an open-air restaurant", in Paris, for the

chance of studying the national costume the man was wearing, Stanislavsky became highly interested in making his acquaintance (2008a: 144). As he further remembers:

Within half an hour I was dining with my new friend in a private dining room. When he learned that I was interested in his costume, he removed his outer garment so that I could get its measure. Then I studied some of his poses, which seemed typical to me. Then I studied his movement. Back in my hotel room I spent half the night standing in front of the mirror draped in sheets and towels, to turn myself into an elegant Moor with swift turns of the head, movement of the hands and body [...], an imperious walk, slender arms with palms turned towards anyone speaking to me. (Stanislavsky, 2008a: 144)

Over the years, he relentlessly looked for ways towards creating the life of the character as a living, breathing persona. And he did so by thoroughly dissecting every artistic creation pursued, while constantly considering his own life experiences. Later on, these ways seemed to include recalling personal sensations and emotions, as well as following the logic of concrete physical actions. In Vasily Toporkov's opinion, "this shift from the search for inner feelings to the fulfilment of tasks is one of Stanislavsky's greatest discoveries and solves one of the major problems we actors have" (Toporkov, 2008: 28). However, due to the Soviet influence, this change in his approach tends also to be inaccurately associated with a complete dismissal of his earlier spiritual quest in favour of a later realist, scientific vision. Yet, as Demidov states:

I worked with him side-by-side for some 30 years (mostly on theory and the practical techniques of an actor's creative state onstage), lived directly next to him for a long time, and I can bear witness: in his essence, Stanislavsky never changed. He always strived for one thing (for one thing only!): he tried to find a way to truly live onstage—as the world's greatest actors did in their finest moments. (2016: 141)

For example, also probably related to his earlier work, Wylie-Marques quotes Stanislavsky's words from *An Actor Prepares*: "Never lose yourself on the stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist". And she further argues that, by giving this advice, Stanislavsky only "strengthens the actor's focus on himself, away from the discovery of any larger, ego-less conception of being in the world" (Wylie-Marques, 2003: 151).

This interpretation might be yet another proof of misunderstanding Stanislavsky's words. The advice for the actor is 'to act in his own person', and not 'to act as his own person'. Furthermore, Stanislavsky also refers to this person of the actor as an artist. It is this quality that should never be lost. What he may suggest is that, in fact, the actor has to be very careful not to lose control over the ego, and also not to lose herself in the character. In addition, as an artist, the actor cannot lose her higher ideals and her love and passion for art, as well as her humility. As Carnicke explains:

Stanislavsky has written that because the System makes the actor consciously aware of the unconscious underpinnings of artistic creation, it fosters 'a sense of self' (*samočuvstvie*). 'You can never lose yourself on stage'. [...] To do so would mean falling into unconsciousness'. (2009: 165)

In other words, losing oneself on the stage can be dangerous for an actor insofar as it can lead to losing control. As argued in the previous chapters of this thesis, most of the time, losing control over the ego equals losing control of both the body and the mind. Moreover, if faced with extreme emotion or violence, by losing control, the actor can actually become a danger both for herself and for her partners.

In the above context, Wylie-Marques also hints at Stanislavsky's presumed unrestrained use of personal 'affective memory' during training or while rehearsing, arguing that this reinforces the straightening of the focus of the actor on her mundane self. Yet, this incorrect understanding of the notion of truthfulness on the stage is mostly common to certain Method practitioners, who (as explained in the previous chapter) confuse it with Stanislavsky's idea of being natural on the stage.

According to Carnicke, on the contrary, Stanislavsky was highly concerned by the danger that, instead of focusing on their acting and the play, the actors might start to act as themselves in all their roles. As such, Stanislavsky did not actually use affective memory "liberally, as assumed by most theatre practitioners" (Carnicke, 2009: 166). Moreover, these obvious misinterpretations seem to apply equally to his choice of exploring the element of action in depth. Nevertheless, this choice does not necessarily

show a total dismissal of either his own sense of spirituality or of the yogic wisdom. In fact, the later use of such words as 'prana', 'soul', or 'spiritual', in his private letters and conversations can be taken as clear proof that Stanislavsky never truly dismissed them and their utmost importance for the theatre as art.

As stated by both Merlin and Carnicke, his legacy was posthumously mainly shaped by two of his last assistants – Maria Knebel and Mikhail Kedrov – thus taking two slightly different forms. The first one, known as the Method of Physical Actions (as Stanislavsky called it) was promoted by Kedrov who, following the norms established by the communist ideology, presented a 'system' that, due to the constant censorship, was drained of any spiritual meaning, being almost entirely reduced to its realistic layers. The second form, known as the Method of Active Analysis, was preserved and taught by Knebel, who strived to consider also Stanislavsky's earlier work (Carnicke, 2016: 1).

David Jackson argues that the Method of Physical Actions "is familiar in the English-speaking world as the product of Stanislavsky's final studio, the Opera-Dramatic", whilst "Active Analysis is an alternative account of the work, less familiar in the West, but arguably a more comprehensive interpretation of Stanislavsky's legacy with a greater impact on twenty-first century practice" (Jackson, 2011: 167). Yet, in their structure, these two forms seem to be more or less one and the same.

Carnicke explains that "Active Analysis was created in secret, hemmed in by censorship, distorted by propaganda, and remained virtually unknown until the 1960s when Stalin's tyranny was publicly exposed". By teaching "Active Analysis in secret, only to trusted colleagues and students" after Stanislavsky's death, "for two decades", Knebel "kept his last experiments alive" (Carnicke, 2016: 1). According to Carnicke, "in the 1960s", when Knebel "could finally speak the truth, she wrote six books about Stanislavsky and made Active Analysis the cornerstone of Russia's most influential directing program at the State Institute of Theatrical Arts" (Ibid, 2016: 1).

In Jackson's thought, the Method of Active Analysis is based on "the construction of an unbroken, logical sequence of physical activities with a psychological dimension". This method appears to be "a holistic process that draws on all the actors' resources, emotional, physical, mental and spiritual, using improvisation to investigate the dramatic content of a play" (Jackson, 2011: 170). In other words, as Carnicke further asserts, "Active Analysis turns the usual way that actors rehearse inside out" in the sense that "instead of first memorizing lines", they "explore the interactive dynamics of a story by means of improvisations, called etudes" (2016: 1).

In Merlin's opinion, "the joy of Active Analysis, as described by Stanislavsky, is that [it is] carried out simultaneously by all the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical forces of our nature" (Merlin, 2001: 151). Carnicke appears to share both Jackson and Merlin's visions regarding this holism, for she argues that the constant improvisation with études can help the actors to "activate all aspects of themselves simultaneously—mind, body, and spirit". She also asserts that, paradoxically "Active Analysis steps away from a text in order to learn it" (Carnicke, 2016: 1). For the purposes of eliminating the increased "risk of mechanical delivery" propelled by "learning lines too early", Stanislavsky was relentless in stressing "that, initially, actors need the playwright's text only to identify the thoughts, facts and events stored in the play" (Knebel in Jackson, 2011: 170). According to Jackson:

Knebel [...] specifies the three main aims of Active Analysis: to counteract the passivity engendered by 'round the table' analysis; to link the psychological and the physical; and to produce 'scenic speech', i.e. audible words rooted in thoughts, objectives and actions. Of the three aims, Stanislavski attributed the greatest importance to the use of words: To struggle against a mechanical delivery of the text, to bring on stage an authentic thought process, that's an objective which must always be of the utmost importance in the work of a theatre company. (2011: 170)

Quoting Stanislavsky, Merlin argues that "the search for physical actions" begins by "looking 'in our own natural life'". As she further explains, "Stanislavsky insisted that the

actors started with *themselves* and their own justifications of any chosen action” (Merlin, 2007: 19). He seemed to believe “that if they drew on their personal perspective of life, habits, artistic sense, intuition, or whatever was needed to help them execute their actions”, the actors would find that their own nature could and should “guide them towards the first stages of characterization” (Ibid, 2007: 19).

According to Merlin, the actors were no longer sitting “at a table with their heads in the script and a pencil in their hands” or, later on, acting out “the director’s predetermined choreography”. Instead, they were encouraged to remain “on the stage” (2007: 19). Moreover, “during the early rehearsals, the author’s exact text wasn’t required [...]. What was important for Stanislavsky was that the actors found their own journey towards those words, rather than learning them rote” (Merlin, 2007: 19).

It may be concluded that the actor’s journey from self to creating the character was taken by means of improvisation with *études*, scene after scene, until the words of the author were starting to coincide with those of the actor. Yet, considering that the characters did not come from nothing and nowhere when the play started, or at the beginning of every scene, nor did they disappear into nothingness at the end, this constant work could not be limited only to the written events and words of the text.

In order to create a life-like unbroken line of the role, as explained by Knebel, Stanislavsky equally worked with *études* of the events that happened before and after the actual written scene. In addition, as Knebel further asserts, “the actor on [the] stage, like anyone in life, always has unspoken words inside him”. These words, forming the inner life of the character, became known as “the internal monologue”, and without it, according to Knebel, “an *etude* is impossible” (Knebel in Thomas, 2016: 129).

Whenever unaware of this crucial internal life of the character, most of the actors tend to develop either bad physical habits or incorrect states of mind, both conducting to expressing unnatural, forced feelings. On the contrary, while working with improvised

études, they are enabled to become conscious of this line of inner thoughts, and thus, to enhance “the process of communication”. Secondly, the improvisation makes it impossible for them to know “what will come from the partner and what words will expressly stand out” (Ibid, 2016: 129). Thirdly, the presence of inner thoughts creates in the conscious mind clear images of the subject to which they relate, and this generates truthfulness and infuses life into their artistic creation.

A particular thought about something previously seen or experienced will trigger an image of it, while this image can be associated with a certain feeling. Stanislavsky calls this associative inner thought or image presence “the internal vision”, considering it to be “a powerful means for preserving the life of a role” (Knebel in Thomas, 2016: 129). Put together, all the separate inner frames will develop into a “film of images” which, according to Knebel, was also defined by Stanislavsky as “the illustrated subtext” (Ibid, 2016: 130). If the actor is able to see in her own mind a clear image of what she talks about (a process possibly inspired by the Doukhobors’ practices of meditation noted in Chapter 1), then she ends up believing in her own words.

Most likely, this belief triggers genuine powerful feelings that may infect both her partners and the spectator, thus creating a strong impact on anyone witnessing the event. By starting from herself in the given circumstances of the play, the actor’s words and actions begin to be perceived as truthful and real. Scene by scene, using her own words initiated by inner thoughts and images, and expressed in genuine actions, the actor moves closer and closer to the character until, without even noticing, a natural merging between self and this character becomes available. Moreover, during this transition, the exact words of the text/play are also naturally incorporated into the final artistic make-up. Thus, using her own thoughts, words, feelings and actions, slowly but steadily, the actor undergoes a process of becoming a new persona that also generates

brand-new inner thoughts, feelings, and personal life. This new someone, who happens to talk in the words given by the author, thinks, acts, and feels on her own.

Knebel calls this process “characterization”, and she argues that, for Stanislavsky, it did not imply “only an outer form but also an integral part of the contents of the character”. According to her, “characterization develops from how this person acts and thinks in these particular given circumstances. And how a person acts and thinks in the given circumstances is precisely what is analysed in an étude” (Knebel in Thomas, 2016: 131). Merlin promotes Active Analysis “as one of the most exciting and provocative means of embodying a role and engaging with other actors” (2007: 196-7).

While finding the process “remarkably straightforward” and not dissimilar to the Method of Physical Actions, she establishes a five-step sequence: (1) “you read the scene”; (2) “you discuss the scene”; (3) “you improvise the scene without further reference to the script”; (4) “you discuss the improvisation before returning to the script”; (5) “you compare whatever happened in your improvisation with the words and incidents of the actual text”. This sequence is repeated again and again for every scene, “until the entire play is staged, and the lines are learned” (Merlin, 2007: 197).

Yet, in *Konstantin Stanislavsky*, Merlin gives a slightly different structure: “reading, discussing, improvising and discussing”. As she further explains, during the second round of discussions the actors had to note “which facts were retained, and which were forgotten”, and whether any “inciting event took place” (Merlin, 2003: 34-5). These four stages were repeated anew for as long as necessary. Additionally, “with each new improvisation, the actors strove to add more details of events, language and images”, until they were ready for “the fifth and final stage” that “involved memorising the scene” (Ibid, 2003: 35). According to Merlin, “once the heart of an encounter had been unpacked, the actors could then go away and learn the lines” (2003: 35).

As attested by Knebel, however, this transition from improvised études “to rehearsals with the author’s text continued to remain experimental for Stanislavsky up to his final days”. She clearly remembers that: “He did not give us exact instructions in this respect. Therefore, this question remains experimental right up to the present”. Based on her own practice, Knebel finds constructing “an artificial boundary between études and rehearsals with the author’s text” unnecessary (Knebel in Thomas, 2016: 141).

Such transition comes naturally and it “usually occurs gradually, during the process of assimilation”. While “one scene can still be under development with études, another one might be ready to go forward with the author’s text”. Yet, this readiness is not agreed upon at one moment or another, but it is marked by the appearance of similarities between the actor’s improvised speech and the given lines. “And the more actively the étude approaches the play, the more direct coincidences will begin to appear between the actor’s improvisations and the author’s text” (Ibid, 2016: 142).

7.2 Introducing the Text

After the first group of actors (initially participating in this research) was dismantled and the practice with the second group began, a complete rethinking of the entire project, as well as finding a more suitable text to be used during the second and third stages, became a necessity. Because there were both male and female actors involved in the first group, the initial text chosen was *The Seagull*, by Anton Chekhov. However, this choice was no longer appropriate for the second group, formed only of female actors. Therefore, in the beginning, the plan was to use a modern American play, by Jane Martin, called *Anton in Show Business*, and written specifically for women.

This particular text featured three actresses and a producer, struggling to stage *Three Sisters* in a small town, somewhere near the American border with Mexico. Although the number of the main characters was perfect for the group, the quality of the

text proved to be unsuitable for this research. Soon after the planning began, we realised that, even though it used parts of Anton Chekhov's original play, this text was far from being a work of art, while its characters were quite superficial, failing to offer the strong base needed for a conscious preparation towards experiencing the creative state. Finding such a text, written for four actresses, proved to be a real problem. The American play, however, gave us the idea of exploring *Three Sisters*.

Nonetheless, considering that this play was written for around fourteen actors, both male and female, to work with the entire text would have been impossible. Consequently, instead of using random separate scenes, it was decided that the best course of action for the practice, would be to create a completely new adaptation of the Anton Chekhov's play. The text of *Three Sisters and a Sister-in-Law* was developed by ways of eliminating most of the male characters, while highlighting the three sisters and Natasha, their brother's new wife. In order to create this adaptation, unable to read Russian, I turned to the Romanian versions first. While working with the Romanian text, all the scenes selected were compiled together to preserve the original story line.

Later on, the new text was translated into English. However, this was further revised by Ella who, as a Russian native, was able to make major corrections based on her own readings of the original play. Additionally, the adapted text evolved constantly insofar as various new lines, born out of the improvised speech of the actors (as generated by the études explored with Active Analysis), were also gradually inserted.

7.3 Practising Active Analysis

When this new and original adaptation was finalised, the actors had a first group reading (each one exploring her own role), followed by a short talk about the possible meaning of the play, the major events, the beginning and the end, as well as about each and every character. This primary reading and conversation happened in a single

day. Being advised to read the text again (for as many times as possible), without attempting to learn the lines mechanically, the actors were sent home.

Until the following session, they were also given the task of creating a biography of their character, based on the information contained within the text—as described by the words of the author, the other characters in the play, and by what may be deduced from their reactions to the given circumstances. In addition, although the final production was placed in a time that was not specifically determined, in order to understand the atmospheres and to grasp the symbolism of the text (as well as a possible more profound meaning of the author's words), the actors were advised to conduct independent research. They had to look for relevant information regarding the Russian social, cultural, political, and religious climate in the nineteenth century.

As a short parenthesis, it is important to remember that the rehearsals for the performance were initiated prior to approaching the text (during the first stage of practice), with the progressive development of the opening scene featuring the 'A Mourning Ritual' étude (Video Clip 1: 00.58.46) as presented in Chapter 4. Because it was based on engaging with all the major meditational practices learned during training, this étude was constantly explored. Designed as a quasi-Orthodox ritual for the performance (a ritual that, as subsequently explained, symbolised a celebration of both death and life), the étude gradually became a daily ritual of the practice itself and was used to create and maintain the required liturgical atmosphere, during every rehearsal.

Moreover, although this first day in which the actors encountered the text, was part of the second stage of the work, as noted in the Introduction, the first stage was not abandoned. The only difference was in the structure of the session, with each day being split in two. The first half was still dedicated for the continuation of the first stage (individual warm-up, short sessions of meditation, performing certain acting exercises), followed after a short break by rehearsals (second stage).

Without reading the entire text again, during the second rehearsing day, the beginning of the play was thoroughly analysed. To do so, the actors had to use Stanislavsky's questions (as explained in the previous chapters of this thesis). At this point, they were looking at their roles from the outside-in, meaning that they were trying to understand intellectually who these characters were and what their feelings or actions might be. However, in order to provide only a primary understanding of the text, such conversations were also reduced to a minimum necessary.

Once this basic level of work was completed, the actors were further directed to look at their given characters from the inside-out. More precisely, they were required to put themselves into the situation of these characters (by means of the 'magic if'). Leaving the text behind, they had to find clues straight on the stage-floor while actively analysing ways of personal behaviour in the circumstances described by the author.

One of the first études tested during the second stage explored the opening scene of the adaptation. According to the text, gathered in their living room, the sisters are waiting to start the celebration of Irina's name day. The festive atmosphere is overshadowed by Olga's recollection of the funeral of their father, who was a Brigade General in the Russian army. His death happened on exactly the same day one year before the events of this scene. From their own conversation, it can be deduced that, although a powerful member of the society, at the same time, he was not much loved nor respected. Olga remembers "that there was music at the funeral, and they fired a volley in the cemetery. He was a general in command of a brigade but there were few people present" (Chekhov A, 2009: 2). The small number of people gathered to pay their respects might suggest that their father was not a popular man.

Clearly, the text starts with two kinds of loss. On the one hand, the sisters lost the only parent left to them; their mother is said to have died more than eleven years ago, before the family left Moscow to move to this small town. On the other hand, although

inheriting enough money, by losing their father, the sisters and their brother, Andrei, lost not only the attention and help normally provided by such a military rank, but also the position of the family in the social circle that powered the life of the town.

A highly important clue for this scene is hidden behind Olga's opening speech that establishes the time of the event (exactly one year after this death). It is critical to note that this day also symbolises the end of the mourning period established by the Orthodox Church for the death of a parent, a husband or wife, a sister or a brother, a son or a daughter. In the Orthodox tradition, during this year, the mourners are not allowed to wear anything but black attire. Not being permitted to dance or to listen to music, they cannot attend any parties or celebrations. In short, they are not free to enjoy a normal, happy, and comfortable life. Instead, they are expected to follow certain clearly established church rituals, as well as to spend most of their time in prayers for the soul of the dead. Therefore, in the context of the play, this very day symbolises both life and death. Although it is the commemoration of a death, at the same time, being the very day of the end of mourning, it also signifies the beginning of a new life.

In addition, it is "May the fifth" (Chekhov A, 2009: 1), the day in which, according to the Orthodox calendar, Saint Irina (the patron saint of the youngest sister) is celebrated. With the mourning period at an end, the family finally can resume their lives, while Irina's name day can be properly observed. Considering that, for one year, they were not part of the town's social life, it was decided that probably they had not had many visitors to pay respects for their father's passing away. As such, the atmosphere of this scene was established to be one of tense expectations because the whole day could be ruined by having no visitors at all to celebrate Irina.

Another important Orthodox custom regarding the name day is that people are not invited to attend the party, as they may be when celebrating a birthday, for example. On the contrary, for the name day, the household is supposed to be opened to anyone

who decides to pay a visit. The volume of spontaneous attendance is taken as a measure of respect, appreciation, and love; the more people to visit, the more important and highly esteemed the person to be celebrated is perceived.

With all these circumstances in mind, the whole scene was read again. After this reading, the scene was split in manageable sections (bits) with each and every one treated as a separate smaller étude. The actors were directed to work on these études by engaging immediately in improvising their actions and speech, in relation to the freshly understood context of the whole scene. Establishing that they were supposed to be in the living room of their own house, the actors were advised to take their time.

To help them concentrate better, before starting each étude, the actors were instructed to close their eyes, take a few deep breaths and concentrate on the silent space between the breathing cycles (as analysed in Chapter 4). In addition, in order to remember the feeling of “public solitude” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 99), they were advised to draw imaginary circles around themselves. When ready, they had to open their eyes and only follow the natural impulses brought about by their simple existence in the space of the étude, while observing and reacting to each other’s actions.

7.4 The Étude of the Scene before the Scene

As explained above, another important aspect of the method of Active Analysis is to develop études intended to clarify missing moments in the timeline of the events. To maintain the unbroken line of each character’s life, such moments—not written in the play—needed to be explored. The mere intellectual understanding coming from discussions while analysing these moments was found to be rather limited. Therefore, the actors were required to explore them by means of études, directly on the stage.

As featured in the second video clip (35.46), one of the such études concentrated upon the events that might have happened before the opening conversation between

the three sisters took place. In order to clarify the situation and to establish new given circumstances for this étude, before starting to improvise, another short discussion was needed. During this talk, it was decided that, eager to be the centre of attention and to enjoy her new dress, instead of waiting in her own room to be called upon when the guests were starting to arrive, Irina was determined to go to the living room and make sure that everything was perfect and ready for the expected guests.

It was also discovered that Masha could have been the second one to arrive. The reason why she was present at the house this early was established as resulting from her own intention to surprise Irina with a special gift. Because one of the props available on that day was what looked like a very expensive diamond necklace, the improvisation started to build up around the idea that Masha brought Irina her old wedding necklace.

Concerned with the probability that Olga might not agree to such an expensive gift, Masha sneaked into the house early, hoping to be able to hand it over without her older sister's awareness. The work on this particular étude proved to be so successful that a choice of introducing it into the final structure of the performance, was made. Moreover, the improvised speech, as created by Maria and Ella, was added to the text of the adaptation, while the étude became the second scene of *Three Sisters and a Sister-in-Law*, immediately following the opening religious ritual.

7.5 Experiencing the Creative State in Rehearsals

In spite of this fortunate beginning, later on, when the actors were starting to put together all the études developed for the first scene of the adaptation, the rehearsals were no longer going very well. After successfully working with each separate smaller étude, we spent months in trying to bring them together, and to use what was previously created by means of improvisation. Although each and every étude explored individually, improved constantly, whenever we made the attempt to link these separate

moments and to unite them into a single *étude* of the entire scene, its overall performance seemed to be constantly hindered by gaps in the natural lines of thought, as well as in the capacity of the actors to establish a smooth line of actions.

Somehow, they could not yet make the connection from one *étude* to the next. For example, the first section of the scene begins with Olga's entrance, and ends just before she starts talking about the funeral of their father. This first *étude* was building up better and better with every rehearsal. However, when moving on to the second one, initiated by Olga's words describing the atmosphere of the funeral, the bad weather, and the fact that not many people were present, Maria, who was playing Olga, seemed to engage in the description without having a real reason to do so.

In other words, Maria's exterior actions and improvised speech were not based on her inner thoughts, feelings, and actions. The main reason for Olga to remember the funeral, should have been related directly to her environment. In the setting of the living room there was a special place dedicated to the memory of the father. Instead of naturally discovering this little shrine, a discovery that might have created the correct impulses for Maria to remember and to engage in the speech describing the funeral, she was mechanically looking at it because she had been directed previously to do so. Her actions were not in the least truthful and borne out in the moment.

This type of severing the creative through-line-of-action seemed to repeat itself over and over, whenever one separate *étude* of the scene ended and the other one began. In order to help the actors to find a natural link between these separate smaller *études* and to connect each different line of action into one single line of the scene, all possible methods were employed. To start with, we talked about each action and the logic of the sequence. On the one hand, the actors were asked to improvise each *étude*, more than once, with different given circumstances and no interruptions. On the

other hand, in order to correct what was wrong, the actors were constantly interrupted to analyse every little step they took, and so on and so forth.

For all our efforts, although with some improvement, nothing seemed to continue smoothly. The actors were far from having a chance to be anywhere near experiencing even the lowest levels of the creative state. We spent several months struggling to build up this scene, and I remember that, as a director and a researcher, I almost lost hope that we would ever get it right. One day, however, after the usual short warm-up, the meditational session, and the performing of the ritual, it came to me that the problem the actors seemed to encounter might have had something to do with their own incapacity of connecting inner thoughts with the direct speech and the line of actions.

With this in mind, I decided to repeat the experiment of using Stanislavsky's head-heart communication, as described in the previous chapters. As shown in the second video clip (41.10), instead of continuing to build it up, bit by bit, I encouraged all the actors to improvise the entire scene, as a whole, while adding the characters' inner thoughts, out loud, alongside their improvised words. Important to note is the fact that, at this stage of the rehearsals, the actors were so familiar with the scene that their improvised speech almost matched the written lines of the text.

Before starting this experiment, the actors' morale was low at the prospect of yet another unsuccessful attempt to solve the issue. Nonetheless, once the *étude* began, I was completely surprised by the sudden boost in the energy of the scene, a boost brought about by the fact that the actors were discovering the secret lives of their given roles while expressing out loud the inner thoughts of their characters. The low morale was suddenly replaced by excitement and a burning desire to express fully these inner thoughts that, up until this moment, seemed to have been totally missing.

During the first round of the scene explored in this manner, the actors started to speak all at once. However, strangely enough, this simultaneous improvised speech did

not create confusion. On the contrary, it seemed that, by being able to express inner hidden thoughts out loud, the actors moved on from an intellectual and limited understanding of their characters towards a more profound way of feeling them within their own 'hearts'. It can be said that this simple exercise propelled the actors to the point where they were finally enabled to start the processes of that inner merging between self and the character's soul, so highly cherished by Stanislavsky.

Consequently, in order to help them further towards this accomplishment, I urged the actors to start the scene again, only, this time, to suppress the vocal expression of the inner thoughts and to think them instead. As by magic, the scene started to build up naturally, by itself, without any visible effort and with none of the former gaps between each separate smaller *étude*, as experienced previously.

In my view, this can be described as the precise moment when a first strong level of the superconscious creative state surfaced during rehearsals. In an instant, the actors' performance was enriched and brought to life by all sorts of small actions that were not present before, and which brought their acting to the level of a truthful living and breathing artistic creation. All their words, actions, and feelings were unfolding naturally and effortlessly. In that moment, the actors stopped *doing* their roles, and were living the lives of their own characters instead. For the first time in what felt like ages of struggling, this scene became all at once alive and very interesting to watch.

When it was all over, I recognised immediately the experience for what it was: a form of profound creative state shared by all the actors engaged in the scene. However, while questioning my own emotional involvement (that could have influenced me to perceive the event from a subjective position), I was not immediately willing to accept the obvious. As such, I kept telling myself that what I witnessed on that day was no more than an inspired moment of artistic creation. The confirmation that my first instinct

was correct, however, came later when, with each and every rehearsal, étude by étude and scene by scene, the play seemed to continue to build up by itself.

Clearly, for the actors, that very event was much more than just a fleeting moment of inspiration, insofar as its effects continued again and again, for a very long time afterwards. It can be stated that, in a similar manner with the spiritual growth caused by a religious form of revelation, once experienced, this deep (superconscious) level of the creative state opened up their minds towards the free expression of their souls and this changed them, exponentially increasing their artistic intelligence, abilities, and passion to give life to their own artistic creations.

7.6 The Performance: Artistic and Technical Challenges

Considering that the project allocated for this thesis was not a research by performance, for the purposes of clarity, it is important to explain why it was absolutely necessary to develop *Three Sisters and a Sister-in-Law* as a whole production. First of all, the states of mind tested during rehearsals differ completely from the ones borne out of the necessity to create in front of an audience. Secondly, to have a chance of experiencing the creative state, the actor needs time to develop and grow; she needs a space to exist in, a strong and profound text as support, as well as a journey through which to grow and evolve, to merge with the role. And thirdly, the created character also follows its own journey of becoming. Both the actors and their characters were in need of the canvas of an entire performance to evolve and reach deeper levels of creativity.

As noted in Chapter 4, intended as a complex act of artistic meditation, the performance itself became the testing ground for the first two stages of this research. Not only did the show represent a culmination of the practice, but it also explored ways in which the actors were able to hold on to that highly concentrated awareness and creative freedom under the pressure of dealing with the fixed cues for their given lines,

the lights, or the sound. Also, *Three Sisters and a Sister-in-Law* tested how the actors followed the same structure again and again, without falling into the trap of merely mechanically repeating something previously done. In addition, maintaining the state of highly concentrated awareness backstage, while changing costumes between scenes, was put to test. On top of all this, the actors' capacity to deal with possible unpredicted accidents, was further observed. For this very purpose, five minutes before the beginning of the second representation, when the actors were making the last preparations, I deliberately hid one of the black veils used during the opening ritual.

The event created some considerable panic amongst the actors. Thinking that the experiment was failing, just when I was about to give in and bring back the veil, Maria surprised us all with a solution. Running to the dressing room and back, she brought a huge black scarf to replace the missing veil. Moreover, although the veil in question was not the one that Maria was using, without further ado, she altruistically decided to hand her own veil to Aphrodite and wear the scarf instead during the show.

That is to say, in that precise moment, Maria made a conscious act of sacrifice. When confronted with a situation that could negatively affect the whole performance, without second thought, she gave up her own inner calm and comfort to help a partner in distress. With this successful outcome of the test, the only thing to be done was to let it continue until the end, without bringing back the intentionally hidden veil.

After the performance, a few members of the audience were asked about the scarf. All declared that they were totally unaware of any costume problem. On the contrary, because the actress wearing a different veil was also the one that was leading the ritual, the members of the audience questioned were convinced that this was how the costumes were designed in the first place. Maria's calm and spontaneous reaction also showed that, in strenuous conditions, when confronted with accidents, a highly

concentrated awareness and control of the ego can generate some of the best ideas to deal with such challenges, while finding clever and ingenious solutions to the problem.

To continue with the analysis of the practice, after learning to cope with each issue at a time, the first and second stages of the work seemed to grow constantly, while the actors appeared to reach (more often than not) highly successful peaks. During this time, all of them experienced many undeniable moments of artistic revelation that appear positively to influence their ways of thinking, behaving and creating on the stage. Yet, this practical journey was far from being smooth and straightforward insofar as there were significant and ongoing challenges: the inappropriate physical environment, the atmosphere surrounding the work, the lack of professional technical support from the department, as well as lack of funds.

To start with, from an artistic perspective, because I never considered myself to be a stage director, I had initially planned to invite a professional to direct the final performance. With this in mind, I contacted a promising young Romanian director, with whom I previously worked on some projects. In order to be able to familiarise herself with the spiritual approach of the 'system' and to learn the method of Active Analysis, the director was required to participate during all the stages of the work (including the training). Unfortunately, in this situation, the director proved to be completely unreliable; despite daily promises of attendance, she constantly failed to appear.

Since this behaviour was totally counter to the type of work explored by this practice as research, I had no other choice but to look for a replacement. Yet, finding a director who was ready fully to commit—not only to direct the final performance, but also to learn alongside us while participating in the training sessions—proved to be impossible. By the time we reached the initiation of the second stage, the only option left was to direct the performance myself while also acting in it.

Other issues appeared along the way, such as various environmental factors that created difficulties for us in maintaining the constant liturgical-like atmosphere required. More than once, during the meditational sessions or rehearsals, many students from the college interrupted us in order to bring props, costumes, or equipment into the theatre. Most of the time, to our surprise, such students seemed to behave as if thoughtlessly interrupting someone else's work was absolutely normal.

For example, there were days when, while working on an *étude*, we were shocked to realise that such students were crossing our space, without even thinking to wait until the end of the particular *étude*. This general lack of respect for our creative efforts and hard work constantly generated unwanted tension. Additionally, not being properly soundproofed, both the theatre and the studios seemed to be unable always to provide the silence required for the type of work we were exploring, and the noise intruding from outside became a persistent nuisance.

Moreover, due to a room situated near the stage being used by the Music department, our meditational sessions and most rehearsals were repeatedly interrupted by live music practice. Despite attempting to resolve this distraction, the school did not provide an alternative solution, and we were forced to contend with it. Nonetheless, regardless of all these issues, through deep meditation, slowly but steadily, the actors managed to learn how to block the noise, and that was a significant accomplishment which probably only increased their chances of experiencing the creative state.

During the second stage of the work, with each new rehearsal day, their results seemed to become better and better, with many brief moments of experiencing different incipient levels of the creative state. Sadly, this changed when the final stage was initiated. As a result, the performance itself may not have reached the high quality intended. From a technical perspective, however, such problems started long before the production was concluded and continued until the very end.

As previously explained, *Three Sisters and a Sister-in-Law* was planned only as a testing ground for the transition from the constant state of improvisation during rehearsals towards following the fixed structures while performing, without losing the creative awareness and the freedom gained in the first two stages of the work. Considering that the entire practice used Stanislavsky's 'system' of acting and was based on rehearsing by means of Active Analysis, the performance was found to be more suitable for a classic theatrical space. Therefore, right from the beginning, it was planned for the stage available in the George Wood Theatre.

Yet, due to the fact that the theatre was most of the time impossible to book, we had to work in various studios, some with no lighting and sound equipment. Moreover, for the entire duration of the second stage (directly influencing the last one), we were not offered any professional technical support, and this became a major issue. I found a partial solution by recruiting an untrained member from the school staff to provide some voluntary assistance with lighting but was further hampered by stringent restrictions on access to the theatre. Apart from one three-hour session to design lighting and test the sound, there was no opportunity for any final rehearsals (neither general, technical, nor dress rehearsals). The only allocated time we were allowed in the theatre was for the culminating performance, which had a three-day run.

Furthermore, on the first of these days, the theatre had been accidentally double booked for both our project and for routine maintenance. We were promised the use of the entire space (all day long), while the opening night was scheduled at 7pm. Arriving early on that day, I was shocked to encounter a space occupied by maintenance workers, painting the ceiling. The entire stage was dirty, covered in plastic, and full of painting materials, equipment, various ladders, platforms, buckets of paint or other substances and tools. Thus, instead of preparing the set and having a warm-up or a

much-needed general rehearsal, we had to work for hours in order to clear the stage and to clean up the mess left behind by this accidental maintenance work.

From this point of view (given the conditions in which the three performances were done), it can be stated that, although not smooth and straightforward, the spiritually orientated odyssey of the actor (as observed by this practice as research), produced some remarkable results. Yet, due to the complete lack of proper final rehearsals, many mistakes in terms of lights and sound were unavoidable. Regrettably, not only that these mistakes completely changed the dynamic of the showings, but also affected the concentration of the actors. Consequently, they had to struggle to maintain the sacred atmosphere and higher awareness crucial for the creative state.

To give an example, during the third representation, because the music for the opening ritual was not correctly cued in the computer, the sound of church bells used at the beginning of the performance was much shorter than it should have been. As a result, the actors had to find ways of modifying the choreography of the entire scene, via improvisation, without losing its ritualistic structure. Interesting to note, however, is the fact that, without being able to talk to each other or to see their partners' faces because of the mask, they all moved in perfect coordination.

Half blinded by wearing the veils and by the stage lights, the actors simultaneously responded to the need of 'editing' their performance, by eliminating a series of precise motions with their candles. As one single entity, they redacted the entire set of movements, and continued instead with the next set. From the outside, it looked as if this was the rehearsed choreography, and no accident ever happened. The only way for the actors to be able to do this (without the benefit of using all of their senses), was if they were highly concentrated and in deep communication with each other; a type of inner communion that appears to manifest during the creative state.

This observation prompts the conclusion that they were experiencing it right then and there. In spite of all these constant mistakes, in the end, not only did the actors manage to hold it together, but they appeared to experience other moments of the creative state during all the three performances allocated for this project. This can only suggest that—against all the odds—the work itself was highly successful.

7.7 The Last Element of the ‘System’—The Supertask

As Stanislavsky strives to illuminate the sense of the supertask, he explains that, because “all his life Dostoievski looked for God and the Devil in people”, this constant search is what “drove him to produce *The Brother Karamazov*. That is why the search for God is the Supertask of this work” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 307). In a similar manner, as Stanislavsky continues, “Tolstoy strove for self-perfection” and Anton Chekhov “fought against vulgarity and petty-mindedness”, while constantly dreaming “of a better life”. All “this struggle, this striving” was reflected in their works, thus becoming the supertask for many of their writings (Ibid, 2010: 307). This ‘supertask’ (sometimes translated as ‘the super-objective’) is mostly considered to be related to the play and it is defined by Stanislavsky as “the Supertask of the writer” (Stanislavsky, 2010: 313) insofar as it depicts what the play is about in the way in which it was created by its author.

Yet, according to Gillett, “the *Super-objective* [supertask] of the play, also referred to as the *Ruling idea*” needs to be “distinguished from the actor’s own super-objective for a character”. Whilst the first one reflects “the basic purpose of the play”, the second sums up all the “smaller objectives linked in a through line of action by which they help to communicate the play’s Super-objective” (Gillett, 2007: 169-70).

However, it is important to remember that, like all the rest of the elements and principles used by Stanislavsky, there might be also a deeper spiritual and more complex sense attached to the idea of the supertask. He constantly warns the reader

that, without knowledge and proper understanding of the “Supertask” and the “Throughaction”, the actor cannot form “the life of the human spirit” of the role. “There is no ‘system’ without them” (2010: 313).

Merlin, who, although analyses it in detail, admits that she has “ambivalent feelings” regarding this “SUPER-OBJECTIVE” (emphasis in the original, 2014: 220-1). “In my experience as an actor and director, I’ve never found it’s something we’ve touched on in rehearsals”, she reveals (Merlin, 2014: 220-1). Moreover, Merlin seems frustrated by the lack of clarity for its intended meaning: the supertask is “specific and it’s universal. It’s the writer’s and the actor’s simultaneously. It’s confusing” (Merlin, 2003: 75). As Stanislavsky explains, this element, is “the inborn vital purpose and aspiration rooted in our being, in our mysterious ‘I’” (1989: 79) and which remain unknowable and undefinable in a conscious manner.

This seems to echo Aristotelian theories that teach about natural forms with no direct and conscious access to them in so far as “they are certainly not immediately intelligible by us; our only access to them is through the sensible qualities of the things that have them” (Des Chene, 2005: 3). In other words, acquiring direct knowledge of, or understanding the soul (microcosm), as well as the unlimited divine (Macrocosm), in a logical manner and in their entirety, would be an impossible task. Limited to what it knows, sees, and experiences, all the human mind can grasp is drastically reduced to observing and analysing only tangible aspects.

Everything that falls beyond reality might only be accessible via the unconscious-superconscious. Therefore, as opposed to the higher levels of awareness, the conscious mind might not be capable of understanding such an “archetype of wholeness” as the inner ‘I’ (higher self) that, as noted in Chapter 2, is the supreme authority, being both personal and universal, and which manifests in recurrent patterns

of ideas present throughout all the myths, various folklore creations, as well as in the religious stories of the world (Edinger, 1992: 3).

In a similar manner, because the supertask might emerge from the inner 'I' (soul), it may not be discovered easily, and probably it could not be understood through one aspect of the artistic act. Although 'specific' either to the author or to each of the characters, at the same time, this supertask might become 'universal' by taking the form and meaning of an archetype. In Edward Edinger's view, "a deeply moving experience [...] something meaningful [...] does not convey abstract meaning [...] but rather living meaning which, laden with affect, relates us organically to life as a whole" (1992: 108).

Stanislavsky was a master of uncovering such meaning, especially when the art of the stage was concerned, for he appreciated the theatrical creation as a living art that can transform mere signs into powerful universal symbols and archetypes. This living meaning of an artistic creation is reflected by, and contained in, the elusive 'supertask'. In his drawing of a plan for the 'system' (as presented by Whyman) Stanislavsky establishes this element (at the beginning of working with the text) "as yet ghostly, not fully defined" (Whyman, 2008: 42). Therefore, it cannot be expressed in an immediate and concrete manner. Considering that, for Stanislavsky, all the elements of the 'system' converge into this final one, placed at the very top of the plan, such a definition might be, if not impossible, very difficult to frame. As Stanislavsky argues:

The superobjective [supertask] contains the meaning, the inner sense, of all the subordinate objectives of the play. In carrying out this one superobjective you have arrived at something more important, superconscious, [and] ineffable. [...] Only artists of genius are capable of the emotional experience of a superobjective, the complete absorption into themselves of the soul of the play. [...] The great objectives comprise in themselves a quantity of live emotions and concepts, filled with profound content, spiritual insight, and vital force. (Stanislavsky, 1989: 77-8)

Clearly, the supertask should not be limited only to the one of the play or that of the author, the actor, the character, or the director, in so far as it might be *one* supertask

that reflects and contains within it all of the others combined. It may be 'elusive' and 'ghostly' because it cannot be finite in itself but it evolves constantly to reflect a higher purpose; it is 'progressive', as it can be endlessly transformed into yet another even higher supertask, which lies hidden within the core of the actor's being, waiting to unfold in her consciousness during every second of the artistic creation.

In *Creating a Role*, for example, the supertask is rendered as the "innermost centre" or the "core of the role", in which "all the remaining objectives of the score converge" (Stanislavsky, 2008b: 78). Thus, it can be compared with the centre of a mandala, and it may only be grasped by the superconscious. It is universally expandable, and it is powered by the archetype of the innate soul (higher self) of all the artists-human beings sharing or witnessing the artistic creation.

As previously explained, Stanislavsky's ideal artist constantly strives to become also an ideal human being that has a single, most powerful supertask — one which should become the "super-supertask" of his life: to inspire, to bring joy, and to enlighten people (2010: 314). This understanding of the super-supertask encompasses the highest motivations and goals that guide humankind towards the most profound levels of existence; it is what makes scientists strive towards discoveries, artists to create, and philosophers to question everything. It represents the ultimate goal in a person's life, her *raison d'être*, and an actor should look for it in her own heart, soul, and mind.

The higher her ideals to pursue, the deeper the meaning of the supertask becomes; the deeper its meaning, the higher the quality of the artistic creation, which can only lead to stronger, more contagious, and highly compelling powers to touch upon the souls of the spectators. In addition, the discovery of the supertask should unravel continuously, in the moment, and it can only spring forth from the superconscious mind through the inner higher self (creative 'I'), providing the artist with constant new higher purposes and meaning. For Stanislavsky, the supertask and the super-supertask are

the last steps on the ladder towards the final goal of the artist — the incarnation of the soul of the character into her body and mind, and resulting in experiencing the creative state, during which the ego (egotistic 'I') becomes aware of the self (creative 'I') that contemplates itself, whilst simply living the life of this newly born soul of the character.

This awareness of the self-that-contemplates-itself is very similar to what Eliade describes as the ineffable moment of revelation or “awakening” in which the “object completely identifies itself with [the] subject” (1973: 29). In terms of acting, such revelation can be acknowledged by the actor as the creative state – the moment of utter concentration, in which she finally allows that part of her superconscious, governed by the soul (higher 'I'), as in the real inner controller, to be set free and take the lead.

7.8 Bringing the Supertask to Light

During this practice as research, the supertasks of the actors were constantly guided towards spiritual growth by means of hard work, many sacrifices, and by learning how to let go of egocentric desires. From the point of view of the researcher, the supertask was to discover and offer this guidance, for the purposes of experiencing the creative state. In addition, all the characters had their own supertasks: either provisional ones, adopted according to the text and the given circumstances, or final ones, as discovered during rehearsals or in performance. For example, because she constantly dreams about Moscow, Irina's provisional supertask was to go there. However, Ella noticed that, as Irina, she was in fact dreaming and hoping to find true love.

Masha's supertask was to yearn for freedom when, in fact, she was also looking for true love. While Natasha was apparently striving for power, in the end, she was thirsty for acceptance. The provisional supertask of the performance was established as 'loss'. All the characters were losing something precious to them. Natasha lost her engagement with Protopopov. The sisters lost their father, their position in the society,

their money, their relationship with their brother, their nanny, their house, and their hopes to move back to Moscow. Masha lost her chance to love and be loved by Vershinin. Olga lost her freedom to stay home all day, have a husband, and build a family of her own. Irina lost the true love that was always there but to which she was blind for years. The text of the adaptation speaks about a constant feeling of loss.

However, in the course of the final rehearsals, we had the revelation that the actual supertask might not be about what they lost, but about how they were dealing with it. In the end, forgiveness, as a mechanism of cleansing the negative feelings generated by this loss, proved to be the missing clue. According to the adapted text, all the characters appear to be incapable of forgiving. Both Olga and Masha cannot forgive their father and each other. Masha does not forgive the fact that she had to marry young to an older man with whom she had little in common.

Although Olga tries to respect her father's decisions, she also seems incapable to forgive her father for allowing Masha, the younger sister, to marry first, thus reducing her own chances of a marriage proposal. When encouraging Irina to marry the Barron, by disclosing that she would marry anyone (Chekhov A, 2009: 53), Olga shows her own desperation. She also appears not to cope well with Masha's indiscretions regarding her affair with Vershinin. Irina cannot forgive their brother, Andrei, for ruining his perfect life and the expected academic future in Moscow by marrying Natasha. Later on, Irina cannot forgive herself for causing her fiancée's untimely death and for not realising sooner that the Baron was in fact the love of her life.

Yet, in spite of all this sorrow, the text ends on a positive note: "Oh, dear sisters", Olga exclaims, "our life is not yet at an end. Let us live. The music is so gay, so joyful" (Chekhov A, 2009: 76). Although devastated by the recent events, the sisters show acceptance and wisdom. They finally start to demonstrate a spiritual growth that, up to the end of the performance, had seemed to elude them all. Such growth and wisdom

could only be made possible through a selfless act of forgiveness and through sacrifice. By forgiving each other, both actors and characters were capable of forgiving themselves and this proved to be the only way for letting go of a long forgotten and idealised past, while learning to look forward towards a future that might not happen in Moscow (or in the spotlight), but which could be a good future nonetheless.

In the context of the original play, the author's supertask may also be the search for perfection — the Orthodox theosis. As Smeliansky expresses it, for the sisters, Moscow is not just a place, but it represents a metaphor of a dream to strive towards. For Anton Chekhov it might symbolise the need for redemption, for spiritual growth, and the relentless search for the truth (Bolus, 1998: 47). For Stanislavsky it can be the metaphor of the 'system' itself - the very top of the Orthodox symbolic ladder.

According to Smeliansky, "this is a real, living system". Stanislavsky never finished it, "and he would not have finished it if he had lived another hundred years", simply "because this is a system about searching [...] for the creative nature. It is temporary, ever-changing". Moreover, "it is like searching for the truth of life" (Smeliansky in Bolus, 1998: 47). As Smeliansky further asserts:

Some people will say, "I got it." But you can't get it. The same thing is true in Art. The important thing is the search. Just like you will never get to Moscow in *Three Sisters*. It is the same metaphor. You are trying, you are wandering, you are looking, you are searching for Moscow, but you will never get there. It is the same thing in art. (Ibid, 1998: 47)

It is an endless search for spiritual and artistic growth, as well as for universal truths. In the end, this relentless search (that can be taken as both Stanislavsky's and Chekhov's super-supertasks) also underlines the present practice as research as a whole.

Conclusion

To summarise, this practice as research was centered on rediscovering and testing possible spiritual ways of preparation towards readiness for experiencing the creative state. Questioning a Cartesian way of training only the body and mind of the actor, this practice looked upon the crucial importance of the concept of the 'soul' that seems to be eliminated from some translations, and without which it might be impossible to comprehend fully Stanislavsky's theatrical legacy and its ways of application.

In order to fulfil the main goal expressed above, the work allocated for the present thesis could not have been conducted only from a single aspect of an actor's journey (such as the training), but had to be explored in all its stages, including the creation of the role (rehearsing) and the ephemeral existence of this created character on the stage (performing). During the practice, these three stages were more or less linear, with the first one completely overlapping the remaining two.

Yet, reaching the creative state only through this horizontal (linear) progression appeared to be insufficient in so far as a vertical observance of the practice proved to be also crucial. Thus, the three stages were developed with a whole examination of three more levels - 1. Creating the atmosphere; 2. Meditation as an underlying principle of breath; and 3. Observing/testing the elements. Inspired by Stanislavsky's sense of spirituality and his constant advice for the actor to follow specific ways of moral behaviour in order to grow artistically, these levels proved to be more spiritually orientated and became crucial for a successful experiencing of the creative state.

The Orthodox Influence

The first book I chose to research (in English) was Benedetti's translation, *An Actor's Work*, and I remember that, while reading, it spoke in clear spiritual terms to me. Thus, at the time—not being able to put the book down—I was completely amazed and kept

asking myself how it is possible that other readers, in general, cannot see how profoundly spiritual Stanislavsky's ideas are. Later on, when looking for relevant evidence to support my incipient writing, I was baffled to discover that I could find none. Moreover, there was no specific explanation regarding a possible spiritual intention.

Intrigued, I initiated a search for the exact words: 'soul' and 'spiritual', only to find that in Benedetti's translation these were not used at all. At that point I had to question my own objectivity in understanding Stanislavsky's words and, consequently, I proceeded to read the book again. This second time, its effect on me was very similar to the first; despite the missing terms, once more I found the book very spiritual in its teachings. Yet, I could not ignore the fact that, regardless of what I was feeling, there was no direct evidence to be found in Benedetti's translation. In the end, it was this struggle what enabled me to uncover a gap in the literature, concerning the possible Orthodox influence on Stanislavsky's 'system'.

After reflecting for a while on this strange situation, it occurred to me that the reason I was perceiving a spiritual message where none was apparent might have had something to do with my own upbringing. Like Stanislavsky, I was born, baptised, and raised as a Christian Orthodox. In addition, as a citizen of a former communist country (Romania), I suffered (under Ceausescu) the same consequences of living in a society controlled by a censorship that was not so different from the Russian Stalinist one.

On the one hand, being familiar (from an Orthodox perspective) with terms and principles that Stanislavsky appears to use in his writings, it was only natural for me to relate to a spiritual perspective. On the other hand, due to the twenty years of dealing with writings restrained by the communist censorship, Carnicke's way of reading Stanislavsky's works (while grasping the meaning hidden between the lines) (Carnicke, 2009: 106) was second nature to me. These similarities opened up my mind to the idea that some missing links towards experiencing the creative state might be of Orthodox

origins. Later on, while approaching various works, my theory was strengthened by the discovery that all Stanislavsky's letters, and other writings (*Creating a Role* or *An Actor's Handbook*), contain plenty of the spiritual words missing from Benedetti.

Because there are no direct references given by Stanislavsky in relation to any possible religiously inspired ideas, I had to look at the similarities between some of his key concepts and Orthodox notions. It is highly probable that the absence of such explanation is a consequence of the communist censorship/self-censorship noted in Chapter 2. However, at the same time, considering that, in the nineteenth century, most of the Russian theatre practitioners were also born and raised in the Orthodox Faith, it might be that, back then, an explanation would have been either redundant inasmuch as such principles were simply common knowledge, or no longer of interest.

Nevertheless, taking into the account these possible connections, due to the fact that today, in Britain, the Orthodox Faith is not a widely practiced, well known, or understood denomination, such knowledge is no longer common, and an explanation becomes critical. Although this spiritual dimension of Stanislavsky's work was clear to me, in order to be able to translate it in practice, I had to find ways not only of explaining it (while bringing forward evidence to support these explanations), but also of making it accessible and acceptable for the actors participating in my practice as research. Clearly, they were there to explore acting and not to learn theology. In fact, this might have been one of the reasons why I lost almost all the actors from the initial group.

Challenges and Definitions

At the outset of my practice as research, most of the ideas to be explored were not yet fully defined, and this led to some challenges in the first iteration of my research. On the one hand, I was not yet crystal clear in my practical approach. At the beginning, driven by my childish desire to prove that there is indeed a spiritual dimension to

Stanislavsky's 'system', I had this tendency of accentuating the importance of the spiritual approach to the detriment of the realist aspects.

To some extent, I was looking at both, as if they were two completely separate ways. And this proved to be a huge mistake, with no major breakthrough in the practice. Only later on, when grasping that, for Stanislavsky, there might not be such a separation between the practical and the spiritual aspects of the work, things completely changed. The moment we began to consider these aspects together, with none more important than the other, finally we started to achieve some very good results.

On the other hand, a second possible mistake was to initiate the introduction of the theory in lectures, and it may have been that the actors from the first group did not find this appealing. To clarify this, it is important to explain that, due to possible ethical issues, I was only allowed to conduct the practice with professional actors instead of students, and this was a double impediment. Firstly, the theoretical aspects of learning were less welcomed by actors (who might find the idea of returning to school unnecessary) as compared to students (who accept this learning as part of their academic life). Secondly, because a major section of my practice was dealing with training, working with students would have been more appropriate than working with already-trained professional actors. This proved to be challenging because I had to deal first with eliminating habits and ideas strongly established by their former training.

In terms of delivering the theory, learning from the mistakes made with the initial group, I decided to eliminate the lectures for the second group and, instead, to share the theory both during the sessions of seated meditation (as explained in the Introduction) and in small informal talks, as appropriate throughout the process. Considering that this group continued to participate for years—until the very end of the project—I would say that the second approach proved to be much more effective. Also,

this time I focused my (initially) very broad ideas only on how to reach the creative state on the stage, and this gave a clearer structure to my practical explorations.

Starting anew with the second group, I had the opportunity not only to test the elements in practical exercises and études, but also to introduce another vertical level (that was not tested before) – the atmosphere - thus being able to notice the profound differences while becoming aware of the impact this spiritual mood and the meditational sessions had on the entire practice. The best example of such difference was provided by ‘the Mirror’ exercise. As noted in the Introduction, after learning and testing all the principles of the seated meditation, the actors had to make the transition from stillness to motion. This was attempted by testing concentration and attention by means of ‘the Mirror’. Nevertheless, when first introduced to this exercise (without being reminded of using any meditational principles), the actors appeared to engage only superficially in exploring it. Instead of working together, they exhibited a general tendency to compete with each other; their movements were too fast, uncoordinated, and lacking in flow.

At the time, this felt like a success to me, in the sense that it proved the inefficiency of conducting the exercise with no spiritual implications. However, when we approached ‘the Mirror’ thinking only in terms of a spiritual connection by means of uninterrupted eye-to-eye contact, with no thoughts for the physicality of the exercise, although the results were better than before, the exercise was still not fully functional.

Only when we started to consider both the spiritual and the physical aspects working together, by making use of the meditational state, alongside controlling the rhythm of the motion, the exercise changed considerably. The former work—meaningless, involving unnecessary effort, and lacking in concentration, coordination and communication—was suddenly transformed into a beautiful, improvised work of art, alive and breath-taking, in which all the bits of the puzzle seemed to fit perfectly.

The Creative State—Outcomes: Impact and Evidence

To return to the main questions addressed by this practice as research regarding how the creative state might be made more accessible to the actor, over the years, it became clear that acquiring skills only through a realist-psychological acting technique that moves away from any possible spiritual perspective, might remain insufficient. My personal experience of losing the ability to enter the creative state after being professionally trained in this manner, as well as Kamotskaya's experience with a similar way of training (Kamotskaya in Merlin, 2001: 101), can be taken as evidence that, in order to open up consciously to the conditions in which experiencing the creative state becomes available, adopting a spiritual perspective during the work can be very helpful.

It also became very clear, both to me and the actors participating in this project, that, no matter how opposed they might seem, realism and spirituality can in fact work very well hand in hand, with some unexpectedly good results when interconnected. It is extremely important to note that, while guided to follow this combined path, in the course of nearly five years of practice, all the actors involved in this research were capable of accessing, more than once, different levels of the creative state, from the most superficial ones (flow), to the deepest, highly transformational ones of experiencing flashes of superconscious artistic enlightenment. Such precious highly creative moments happened not only during both the second and third stages of the work, but also very early in their training (while exploring the self—mostly when engaged in the later stages of 'the Mirror' exercise, as well as 'the Tree').

However, one of the first clear experiences of the creative state was registered when the actors from the first group performed 'the Cross' exercise, with Maria as the central 'mirror' (Video Clip 1: 00.37.30). It might be that this very early achievement happened by accident, or that the novelty of the exercise propelled the actors fully to open up to it and thus to function as one. Intentionally, without explaining the rules

beforehand, the actors were gradually introduced into the exercise while being given their tasks on the spot, with not much room left for questions or debate.

Taken by surprise, and not being able to think about what they needed to do and why, they had no other choice but to jump in and automatically to let go of any residual fears or insecurities. The result was remarkable, in the sense that the actors started to function in perfect coordination, while the overall atmosphere was one of a naturally created chorus of five people, working in collaboration and constantly supporting each other. A clear indication that the actors were experiencing a very basic level of the creative state was visible in the reaction of the group when the exercise was concluded: they all burst into laughter, and the general atmosphere, for a while, became one of creative merriment and joy for the good work accomplished. Although far from the much deeper levels of the transformative creative state experienced during the work with the second group, this achievement was quite unexpected and very welcomed at that early stage, when the actors were barely learning to concentrate properly.

Other noticeable examples of reaching the creative state during training were both Ella and Maria's individual experiences in the course of the first, as well as third stages of 'the Tree' exercise, as detailed in the previous chapter. For example, while exploring the first stage, by silently repeating the 'I am' affirmation as in 'I am this tree', Ella slipped into a deep, concentrated awareness. When she finally opened her eyes to answer questions, her gaze was completely changed. Someone else seemed to be watching us through her eyes, a much older being that appeared to be emanating some sort of an ancient wisdom (Video Clip 2: 03.43).

When Maria was exploring the same stage of 'the Tree', the changes were obvious both in her body and her eyes. She started to sway slightly, as if moved by the wind; her face grew older and gaunt, while her eyes were huge, expressing constant wonder at being able to communicate through words (Ibid: 03.14). Moreover, as

explained in the previous chapter, after completing the last stage of 'the Tree', both actresses recalled experiencing a split in their consciousness.

On the one hand, they could feel themselves as actors, struggling with the physical effort of the slow motion while, on the other hand, they perceived a second presence in the character of the tree. Furthermore, both Ella and Maria experienced a distorted perception of time, and afterwards they were not able to estimate for how long they had been involved in the slow motion of the tree growing.

Due to the fact that Aphrodite chose to concentrate within while keeping her eyes opened (during the same stage of 'the Tree'), she experienced a similar distortion in relation to the space. As she explained later, although in an unfocused manner, during the preparations to start the slow motion, while meditating on the 'I am' formula, Aphrodite was aware of the room and the rest of the actors. Yet, looking back at the experience, she also acknowledged a complete loss of visual contact with her surroundings, when she engaged in movement.

Another clear moment of creative state happened during 'the Mind-Control' exercise. The obvious subliminal-like communication between Ella and Aphrodite appeared to be profound and powerful. As noted in Chapter 5, not only did Aphrodite remain until the end of the exercise, but she continuously experienced the desire to move closer and closer to Ella, whose strong will and determination to 'hold on' to Aphrodite was visible in the shape adopted by Ella's hands (Video Clip 1: 00.51.09).

Although hampered by many technical mistakes and by the lack of suitable preparation time, during the three performances, all the actors exhibited high levels of concentration, with short moments of entering the creative state, while their artistic creations reached some very good levels of both emotional creativity and artistic intelligence. All of them seemed to be able and willing to make as many sacrifices as necessary. Moreover, for all those involved, the performances unravelled as constant

and uninterrupted acts of artistic and creative meditation on the stage. I remember the liturgical-like atmosphere for the whole duration of the three showings, backstage. With the exception of costume changing (that was also done in a quasi-ritualistic manner), all the actors were waiting in silence and stillness, concentrating and meditating on the sounds coming from the stage.

Solutions for Better Outcomes

If all these remarkable accomplishments of the actors involved in this practice as research are taken into the account, the work itself can be considered a success. In spite of all the problems and challenges described in the previous chapter, the work progressed steadily and constantly. It might be true that in order to compress and reduce the time allocated for the work, ideally, the practice could have been conducted on a daily basis rather than in weekly sessions; also, a proper professional environment, while able to work in complete silence and with none of the disturbances also noted in the previous chapter, could and would have been more helpful.

In addition, it can be argued that if the performance would have benefitted from all the technical support required for a successful professional endeavour, as well as of at least the minimum preparation time usually allocated for general rehearsals, the results might have been even stronger. However, at the same time, there are no guarantees that ideal circumstances would have generated any better results.

It might be that, in fact, having to deal with all these problems was exactly what was needed to mobilise the group constantly to strive for more. Because all of the challenges encountered during this journey had a significant impact and influence on the entire work, it can be stated that they became part of the gradual process of learning and growing. It is also highly important to note that, due to the subjective nature of this type of work, at least from a practical point of view, there might be much

room left for interpretation. Some of the accomplishments brought forward throughout this thesis could be viewed as debatable from a concrete and palpable perspective.

Yet, I choose to base my observations not on arguing how real or tangible these can be considered in isolation, but on the obvious ways in which such accomplishments affected the participating actors, their artistic intelligence and their spiritual development. After all this practical struggle, I no longer doubt that, without its spiritual perspective and with no consideration for the higher ideals pursued by Stanislavsky, understanding his theatrical legacy, including its realist and technical aspects, might be problematic. Without such comprehension, the proper conditions for experiencing the creative state may be a lot more difficult to reach. Moreover, in order for this spiritual perspective to generate visible results, a long period of preparation time is needed; time that seems not to be much considered in terms of the modern industry.

Solutions for Future Learning and the Necessary Mindset

From my experience (as a former student and now a lecturer in acting), due to time limits and financial restrictions, most of the courses that feature the actor's training tend to encourage a much faster pace. Although it is true that it might take a long time to reach the levels of maturity necessary for a Stanislavskian type of artistic creativity, this practice as research taught me that, given the proper conditions, and with a constant clear explanation to the student in terms of what to look for during each exercise, the maturation might happen much faster than assumed, with possible moments of instant transformative results.

With this in mind, as a module leader, I already started to teach (with a good measure of success) a shorter and more concentrated version of the research for both BA and MA acting courses, as presented in the table below:

Table1: From Self-Discovery to Becoming the Character

Levels of Work	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating the proper atmosphere 2. Meditation—The Underlying Principle of Breath 3. Exploring the Elements 	
Stages of Practice	
Stage One: An Actor’s Work on Her Self	
Seated Meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieving silence of the mind/ego • Learning inner concentration and attention by means of the breath • Exploring the yogic breathing • Gaining awareness of the self/soul by experiencing the silence between the breathing cycles • Discovering the ‘I am’ state
Walking Meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing combined inner and outer concentration of attention in movement • Learning inner and outer rhythm in meditation • Coordination and subtle communication in movement—the first ensemble work • Ensemble running and walking in meditation • Exploring imagined spaces in meditation
Meditation in Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrating on an action with a real object • Discovering the imaginary object • Self-observation by means of circles of attention • Discovering the partner in motion • Communication in movement by means of eye-to-eye contact—the Mirror

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple circles of attention—'the Cross', 'Staccato-legato'
Communication by means of prana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding inner energy • Emitting and receiving rays, feelings, images, thoughts • 'The Mind-Control' exercise
Stage Two: An Actor's Work on Her Role	
The first steps towards approaching a character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting from self • Exploring the 'I am' through different ages (sensorial memory, the 'magic if', imagination) • Introducing verbal improvisation • Departing from self towards something else by becoming a tree • Exploring memory, imagination, concentration, and will in the 'I am' state • The inner film—inner visual meditation • Improvisation with silent etudes • Etudes with improvised speech and given circumstances
Using the 'magic if'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the text • Starting from self in the given circumstances • Active Analysis by means of etudes • Step by step through the scenes
The journey from self to the role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing the through-line-of-action • Becoming the character • The provisional supertask
Stage Three: Performing as a State of Being	
From improvisation to the fixed structure of the performance	
Technical Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lights • Costumes • Sound
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing the life and the soul of the character - here, today, now • Performing as a sacrificial act in which the actor sacrifices her body, mind/ego, her identity, desires, and feelings, to merge with the character • Acting becomes meditation (mindfulness)

- | | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discovering the final supertask• Experiencing various levels of the creative state on the stage |
|--|--|

Additionally, a certain type of student-actor is required for this spiritually-orientated way of working, one who can understand the difference between chasing fame and success while superficially preparing for an easy role, as opposed to becoming conscious of the hard work to be done, while being ready and totally willing to sacrifice almost everything in order to build a life in art, with no shortcuts whatsoever—and, possibly, in the end, with none of the perks of becoming famous and perpetually living in the spotlight.

This was visible in how the two groups related to the training experience. Whilst most of the actors from the initial group, being focused on the performance element, found the necessary preparation time too long and, not worth the effort, the actors from the second one clearly understood and proved to be more than willing to accept that this journey might be much more significant than the destination itself. This gave me hope that with constant proper guidance to inspire higher ideals and values, some young minds might be easily influenced towards this Stanislavskian life in art.

Final Remarks

Even though planned from the beginning, this research was never intended only as a way of creating the final performance. On the contrary, it was about a deep exploration of a profound, living and breathing artistic creation, with a constant striving to delineate paths to be followed by the actor-artist along her own personal odyssey of self-discovery. Therefore, in the end, it became clear to me that, from its practical perspective, this type of work, based on such ineffable and untouchable goals, can neither be taken as an intention to prove something concrete, nor as a pursuit of any form of quantifiable results. Moreover, because the practical work itself was never about a specific destination, I was able to observe in depth this never-ending journey that

started with the exploration of the actor's self and evolved to the point of living the soul of a character in front of an audience. As such, this practice as research was and continues to be a "journey in search of the lost spirit" (Vassiliev, 2014: 1).

Although a fair practitioner of meditation, as researcher I found this journey long, demanding, and across unexplored territory. However, in spite of all the challenges encountered, due to the unplanned experience of being a director-teacher-researcher, as well as a student-actor, I was blessed with this profound insight that allowed me to grow as an integral part of the whole group. Instead of only watching and judging the work done from the outside, I was enabled to become both its object and subject. In a metaphorical sense, I can say that I grew into experiencing Michael Chekhov and Stanislavsky's notion of a 'double consciousness' both ways.

Not only that this spiritual quest helped, successfully to find my lost way back to the creative state, as an actor, but it also offered the unique opportunity of exploring it in front of the stage, as a director. There is no doubt in my mind that such journey can only be a personal one. Using Vassiliev's words, I may assert that, this practice as research was "my own journey, my own path, which began from Stanislavsky", but that evolved in my own way: a never-ending journey "in search of this lost spirit" (Ibid, 2014: 1).

Appendix

Table 2: Content and Time Frames of the Video Evidence

Footage	Time Codes
Video Clip 1 — An Actor's Work on Her Self	
Yogic Meditation/Breathing	00.01.08
Learning Seated Meditation	00.02.35
Concentration-Attention-Will in Meditation	00.04.03
From Stillness to Walking in Meditation	00.05.04
Testing Different Rhythms	00.06.44
Changing Rhythms in Meditation	00.08.19
Meditation in Action with Real/Imaginary objects	00.09.43
Learning Awareness of the 'Self'	00.12.01
Imaginary Journey in Meditation	00.12.45
Introducing Circles of Attention	00.17.04
'Staccato-Legato' Exercise	00.20.43
'Staccato-Legato' with Circles in Meditation (Different Rhythms)	00.21.42
'The Mirror' in Pairs (Stanislavsky)	00.27.00
'The Mirror' in Threes (Michael Chekhov)	00.28.56
The 'Ensemble Mirror' (Gabriela Curpan)	00.29.41
From Silence to the Sound – Basic Sound in Meditation	00.32.29
Introducing the Improvised Speech – 'The Cross' Exercise (Comments)	00.35.51
Learning to Work with 'Prana'/Energy	00.39.53
'The Mercury Drop' Exercise	00.40.42
Transmitting and Receiving 'Prana' (Comments)	00.42.29
'The Mind Control' Exercise (Comments)	00.47.26
Introducing the 'I am' Element (as related to the 'self') – 'The Ages'	00.52.09
'Ages' – Stage 1 (Exploring the real age)	00.52.37

'Ages' – Stage 2 (Exploring younger ages – emotional memory)	00.53.10
'Ages' – Stage 3 (Exploring older ages – imagination)	00.57.27
Introducing the Etude in Meditation – 'A Mourning Ritual'	00.58.46
Video Clip 2 — An Actor's Work on Her Role	
From Self to the Character — 'The Tree' Exercise	01.01
'The Tree' – Stage 1 (Using a real tree + Comments)	01.16
'The Tree' – Stage 2 (Using an imaginary tree + Comments)	07.01
'The Tree' – Stage 3 (Growing as a tree + Comments)	09.38
Introducing the Silent Etude	25.01
'A Silent Battle' Etude	27.11
The 'Magic If' in Etudes - 'A Silent Battle' etude with improvised speech (variations with different given circumstances)	28.49
Introducing the Given Line in Meditation	32.26
Etude - The Silent Communication of the Given Line	33.28
Active Analysis — Introducing the Text (Comments)	34.36
Etude of the Scene Before the Scene	35.46
Scene 2 — Etudes (Creating the inner film)	38.59
Testing Stanislavsky's 'Head-Heart Communication' (Expressed thoughts)	41.01
'Head-Heart Communication' (Contained inner thoughts + comments)	42.49
Etude (symbolic scene, Masha - Vershinin)	45.02
Etude (Olga – Natasha) — From Improvised Speech to the Fixed Lines	47.08
Etude (Final Scene) — The Provisional Supertask (Loss)	51.16
Sound and Lights Technical Rehearsal	52.27
Etude (Final Scene) - Discovering the Actual Supertask (Forgiveness)	53.25
The Closing Ritual (Final corrections)	54.10
Video Clip 3 — Performing as a State of Being	
The Performance - <i>Three Sisters and a Sister-in-Law</i>	00.00.00– 01.21.53

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